
Portrayal of Role Model for Women's Empowerment in *Abhijnanashakuntalam* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*

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Abstract:

Both Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam* and Shakespeare's *King Lear* feature female characters who, through their agency, courage, and moral fortitude, stand as symbols of empowerment and virtue in their respective narratives. These works reflect diverse cultural understandings of women's roles, but both convey that these women are capable of significant influence, challenging societal norms and expectations. Through examining the roles of Shakuntala in *Abhijnanasakuntalam* and Cordelia and Goneril in *King Lear*, we can explore how each text presents women as dynamic, powerful characters who challenge the conventions of their time. The characters, Regan, Goneril, and Cordelia, of Shakespeare's play, *King Lear*, must play their own role for the women's empowerment of women in society. The main character, Shakuntala, tends to be the model of women's empowerment in Kalidas's *Abhijnanashakuntalam* society. It has been found that the model of women's empowerment has similarities and differences in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Kalidas's *Abhijnanahsakuntalam*, respectively. The primary texts have been adopted as the primary data, and the articles published in various journals related to the texts have been taken as the secondary data for the analysis of the issues.

Keywords: empowerment, differences, resemblances, role model, Sanskrit

Introduction

Kalidasa is regarded as a great scholar in Hindu literature. He has left seven works: three dramas, two epics, one elegiac poem, and one descriptive poem. Among them, *Abhijnanashakuntalam* is the masterpiece of Sanskrit literature. And the Portrayal of Woman is widely presented throughout his masterpiece. He has focused on the role of women in his great works of art, and he deals with the empowerment of women in almost all his works. Women's empowerment is displayed through Sanskrit literature and epics. Kalidas's *Shakuntalam* is also written in Sanskrit, in which women's empowerment is portrayed well. Sanskrit epic literature contains comparatively large numbers of descriptions of heroes and

heroines who participate in the main plot of the epics or in the tales which form independent sub-stories and episodes. It reveals that Eastern literature has provided the paths for women to be empowered. It narrates:

Abhijnanasakuntalam also observes women's active and independent roles. The personality of Sakuntala is shown as a simple hermit girl who strove hard to attain her goal. This play consists of Seven Acts, based on the love story of King Dushyanta and the maiden Sakuntala, as given in the ancient Indian epic, the Mahabharata. (Khanal 87)

The female characters of Shakuntalum draw the attention of modern readers in the context of the women's empowerment trend. This drama is based on the principle of The Mahabharata. As per etymology, the word Shakuntala is formed with the union of two- i.e., Shakunta, the bird, and la, nourishment. The whole meaning of it is the child who is nourished by the birds. This is the literal meaning of the title, but the inner meaning is quite different. It seems as if the poet Kalidasa wants to indicate his views about beauty. "The appearance of which gives new feelings at every moment is the true definition of beauty." (Shastri, 2015). p. 43) So, as the multi-colored birds attract one's mind towards them, accordingly, the skillfully created Shakuntala's beauty, simplicity, mildness, honeyed tongue, etc., qualities make her an unparalleled beauty queen. This research will attempt to interpret the roles of women in the play Abhijnanashakuntalam. It will also analyze the social norms of the contemporary Nepalese society that dominate women and the role of female characters as reformers through struggle, patience, and devotion towards their duties. It will also oversee the way Kalidasa has portrayed the forms of his female character in the play.

Kalidas's *Shakuntalum* is a drama of Eastern literature in which the principal character, Shankuntala, plays a significant and inspiring role in women's empowerment. The principles aspiring for female sovereignty, specifically in his characterization of Maria, reveal the women's awareness for other women, and Maria manifests, reasonably, an elucidated awareness that can specify the function, identity, and position of women in a respectable manner. Shakuntala does not miss the necessity of this cognizance for the emancipation of women. Though Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* is not equipped with such a figure as Maria, yet in his vivid description of Shakuntala's virtues and distress, we find an element of sympathy for women in him. We also find in both the dramatists an inclination to protest against injustice done to women. Mere apprehension of losing flimsy power and male chauvinism renders the already authoritarian mind more ominous, thereby obliterating and entombing the organic and spiritual wisdom of women. Maria outwits every male entity around her confidently and elusively.

Maria's vigilance is evinced in her correct judgment of the characters around her, for instance, Malvolio as an opportunist and pseudo-Puritan and Andrew Aucecheek as a discrepant and improper match for Olivia. Her opinions and actions demonstrate her courage and candidness. Thus, she is an activist-prototype rebutting and dismantling the ignominiously biased perceptions about women as dumb appendages. Her explanations are strong enough to convince people. She endeavors to demolish Malvolio's inexorable attitude toward others by defying his tendency to manipulate and monopolize things around him. She

is well-versed in her environment, rights, responsibilities, and abilities. This self-awareness renders her ecologically dauntless, non-subservient, independent, and tactful. She has created for herself a plenteous space to translate her thoughts into action. She holds herself from being consumed by the most abominable handicaps, which hinder her way to enfranchisement. She emerges as an invincible ecofeminist entity opposed to the stereotypical domestic image of women. Jana Bandyopadhyay has written how Shakuntala is a model for women's empowerment:

Abhijñānaśākuntalam reflects various social values of women which are beneficial to human society. Kālidāsa's Śakuntalā is a representative instance of women who, though brought up and nurtured in a domestic setup of patriarchal exclusion and total surrender and subservience to authority, fight for their social and moral rights.

Kālidāsa portrays Śakuntalā as a meek and loving woman in the first four Acts of his drama. But in the rest of the three Acts, Śakuntalā is capable enough to challenge the patriarchy. At first, despite being unrecognized, she never utters any word against Duṣanta until the fifth Act of the drama. M.R. Kale observes, "Śakuntalā's patience is skillfully delineated here. She does not lose her courage at the King's repudiation. Controlling her feelings, she politely and patiently tries her best to remind Duṣanta of the earlier incidents. She blames her misfortune for her failure and never utters a word against her husband." (Kale, 2017 xii)

In the fifth Act of the play, the drama steeps to climax, as Śakuntalā reveals herself as a determined and revolting personality. Duṣanta insults her when she fails to prove herself as his wife: "Intuitive cleverness is observed amongst females other than human. What, then, in the case of those who are gifted with intelligence? The female cuckoos, as is well known, cause their own young ones to be reared by other birds before soaring in the sky." (5.22) (trans. Bose 1978, 492, p. 3)

This extract shows how Shankuntala has acted as a role model for the empowerment of women for their rights and identity. She is bold enough to react against male domination, and she acts against the will and rules of the patriarchy. She establishes herself as the woman who refuses the demand of Duṣanta.

Shakespeare's King Lear depicted the role of women characters as the empowerment of other women. The role of women in "King Lear" Introduction King Lear is deservedly considered to be one of the greatest works by William Shakespeare. A representation of the attractive and strong personalities of the main heroes is so bright that no reader stays indifferent after reading the play. The play makes us think about the deepness of people's inner world. The difficult temper of King Lear is depicted along with the true and deep feelings of love. Love is a feeling that is brightly expressed by the most emotional creatures of the world – women. Women can feel deeply and like to express their emotions brightly. Women's souls reflect all humans' feelings. In the play King Lear, women help the King

realize what true love really is. The given paper will prove that the role of women in the play is really great.

Women are usually emotional, and many of them are guided by their emotions. They can feel love and, in contrast to men, do not usually deny their feelings. This is what we can see in the play *King Lear*. However, women can also be cruel and self-seeking. In the play, we can really see different types of female characters: two elder daughters, who are guided by the desire to become rich and influential, and the youngest, Cordelia, who is guided by her real love for her father. She is among the characters who can really feel true love together with Kent and Edgar. Cordelia is a beautiful personification of real love, and her character disproves her father's understanding of this concept. He lived his life but was not able to understand what love is. Thus, he rejects the feelings of his daughter because they contradict his own concept of love:

Better thou,

Hadst not been born than not to have pleased me better (*Lear*, 1.1.234-5).

A true love for her younger daughter lives in her soul and does not need to be specially expressed. Kent's also loves King, but his love is expressed by what he says:

To shield thee from the disease of the world;

And on the sixth to turn thy hated back

Upon our kingdom... (*Lear*, 1.1.174-77)

Being a woman, Cordelia shows her true love to her father openly and does not demand anything from him. Only female characters can express such feelings. The girl lacks cold interest in her father's money in contrast to her sisters, who represent another type of human soul. They reflect humans' desire to make a profit, but this reflection is much deeper than, for example, the depiction of King's cold calculations. They represent the personification of other feelings of humans – the desire to get an advantage and the love for wealth and power. This is another side of the human soul which was not understood by the King from the beginning. Such motives make daughters lie to their fathers at the same time, as Cordelia refuses to pretend and explains that her love is simply the love between the father and the daughter.

Female characters helped the King and the readers understand what true love is. Cordelia demonstrates the constancy of true love by not rejecting it even when her father implements cruel actions against her. He was misled by his inability to realize which of his daughters really loves him. The King, who had many good traits, appeared to be a victim of the wrong development of his own soul. His power over other people made him cruel and heartbreaking, unable to feel. He is confused, stating:

This hideous rashness. Answer my life, my judgment.

Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least;

Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sounds

Reverb, no hollowness. (*Lear*, 1.1.151-4)

King Lear is a character that arouses sorrow in readers. He is confused, thinking that he would still be loved and respected without his kingdom. He trusts his daughters and thus decides to make them rule the kingdom. But they – three women- open his eyes to the realities of life and to the secrets of the human soul. It is women who made the King make the greatest mistake in his life. And they are the ones who made him realize this mistake. It seems ridiculous as he is a father who lived his life; he is a king who appeared to be deceived by very young women. The role of women is great; they are a personification of the great wisdom that became known to *King Lear*, but unfortunately, it is too late.

The excessive cruelty and beastliness that Goneril and Regan display are set in sharp contrast to Cordelia's stubborn refusal to be anything but a woman true to ideal Renaissance concepts of the feminine as established by the conduct manual of the time (Alfar 16; Sacks 90). Lear creates the circumstances that lead to his own deception, giving Goneril and Regan all that he possesses while casting Cordelia aside, making his most precious daughter "nothing ."AH of these women's bodies, whether good or not, whether worth something or worth nothing, perish in the course of the play.

The play provides an antidote to the villainous Goneril and Regan: Cordelia. Cordelia alone stands for the ideal woman and is restored because of the existence of such a woman. Never once does she appear, even at the height of Lear's anger, dehumanized as a fearsome creature like Goneril or Regan. This is because Goneril and Regan's transformations reflect their greediness and base pursuits. Cordelia's loftier notions of duty, love, and devotion are apparent in the tendency to elevate her to such heights that characters (such as Kent and Lear) fully expect that Cordelia can perform wonders and that she will be able to restore the kingdom. Cordelia's command of silence immediately sets her apart from her sisters. She is a virtuous woman, inside and out: Throughout the play, Cordelia's speech, figured as emanating directly, though with great difficulty, from the insides of her body, is portrayed in stark contrast to the empty words and 'professed blossoms' (1.1.271) of her sisters ... this inseparability of language and the interior body that Lear cannot bear. (Hillman 127)

The characters of King Lear act like males, and they are the role models for women's empowerment. Goneril and Regan are representations of the type of woman who talks and acts like a man. Their actions against their father are an assault on Renaissance sensibilities. This is especially the case when the father is also the King. (Cherif, 37) Even Cordelia decides on marriage herself, and she does not need the support of any family members, though she is true to her words to express her love to her father. As Henry VIII reminded his daughter Mary, " ... although sons and daughters were bound to sore obedience towards their mothers, their chief duty was to their fathers, and [the princess] must submit to his pleasure" (Hull, *Women According to Men* 135), so Lear believes likewise. Therefore, Goneril and Regan's refusal to submit to their father's pleasure and acting like a man make them monstrosities for their time. As Goneril and Regan's actions transform them from women and daughters to bestial fiends, the language of the play adapts to their shape-shifting. Of the two sisters, Goneril "is the more self-possessed and the craftier, while Regan is more emotional and takes great delight in physical cruelty" (Coe 90). Goneril might be called the

brain, while Regan tends to be the muscle. The crimes that Goneril commits are 38 falsehood, emasculation, and murder. The consequences of these actions, as we shall see, cause and inform her beastly metamorphosis. Goneril demonstrates her linguistic expertise when she affects the transformation of her husband into a woman. Behind his back, she refers to Albany as "our mi Id husband" (4.2.1). She uses the connection between woman and breast milk to emasculate Albany when she sneers at his "milky gentleness" (1.4.340) and calls him a "milk-livered man" (4.2.50). Furthermore, she attacks his military prowess when she says: France spreads his banners in our noiseless land, With plumed helm thy state begins to threat, Whist thou, a moral fool, sits still and cries, "Alack, why does he so?" (4.2.56-59)

Aristotle defined women as less complete, less courageous, weak, and impulsive creatures. He defined that a woman's virtue rests in obeying the master of their man. The existing universal feminine paradigm is the chaste, patient, self-denying, gentle, generous, selfless, prudent, tender, polite, adaptable, modest, elegant, and passive female. Archaic philosophy never allowed women to exist independently of their husbands, household, or family. Women had been either worshipped as goddesses or excoriated as a witch and wench by the anthropocentric society, but her voice has been throttled forever to prevent her from speaking out her dread and woe. They have been defined as constituents that have evolved from male brains, ribs, and dexterity. (Gilbert & Guber, p.12) Taking women as weak, submissive, others, and part of women is the conventional trend, and it has continued on and on from age to age. But both works try to suggest that women should be adored as sacred grooves. A man's domination over Nature is related to his subordination of women. A reintegrated, reciprocal, non-exploitative communication with women must be established without a change in their relationship with Nature. It advocates a resolution to work for their twin upliftment, welfare, and conservation instead of destroying them for the sake of self-centered profit.

Statement of Problem

Kalidas's *Abhijnana Shakuntalum* has been found to be some research regarding female empowerment. Likewise, Shakespeare's *King Lear* has found abundant research on women's empowerment. However, the resemblances and differences between these two texts have not been found or analyzed yet. So, to do the research in this comparative field is an academic problem.

Research Questions

The research has been guided by three main questions:

- A). How are Regan, Goneril, and Cordelia the models of women's empowerment for other women in Shakespeare's *King Lear*?
- B). How does Shakuntala tend to be the model of women's empowerment in Kalidas's *Abhijnana Shakuntalum* society?
- C). What are the resemblances and differences in the model of women's empowerment in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Kalidas's *Abhijnana Shakuntalum*?

Objectives

The objectives of the research are the search for the policies of women's empowerment in the practical life in society in general, but the specific objectives aim at:

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- A). To investigate the models of Regan, Goneril, and Cordelia as the women's empowerment for other women in Shakespeare's *King Lear*.
- B). To sketch Maria and Shakuntala tend to be the models of women's empowerment in the society in Kalidas's *Abhijnana Shakuntalum*.
- C). To trace the resemblances and differences in the model of women's empowerment in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Kalidas's *Abhijnana Shakuntalum*.

Significance of the study

The research is significant because it inspires women to be empowered in their societies. It makes them aware of the fact that the suppressed and oppressed women know their rights through the principle of opening their eyes. Comparison and contrast can help humans wipe out wrong concepts about other cultures and religions by suppressing and oppressing women unnecessarily. Thus, the study opines up a new dimension to the perception of women's empowerment and their role, which can help in the construction of the psychology of the exploited, maltreated, mistreated, misbehaved, and misused women in various societies and cultures.

Other than this, the work can be an added asset to the feminists to be more responsible and conscious about the blunders that perpetuate social prejudices. The upcoming researchers of the Eastern and the Western texts on the basis of women's empowerment and others relevant to this field get a guideline to view how such texts encourage women to be empowered in societies and to play their significant role for the betterment of both male and female's harmonious life to the system of social structure smoothly. As women's empowerment is the most discussed issue these days, the work can become a step ahead in creating awareness that women are also one of the major parts of constructing ideology and a harmonious society. It not only boosts the energy of academicians but also helps to prove itself useful to the general public, following equal value for both males and females to establish an ideal and conflictless society. Finally, any research, if done appropriately, will benefit society.

Delimitations

The researcher has selected only two texts, *Abhijnanashakuntalum* and *King Lear* of Kalidas and Shakespeare respectively. And only the women's empowerment which is found in the characters, Gertrude, Goneril and Ophelia, in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and, Shakuntala, in Kalidas's *Abhijnanashakuntalum* has been investigated as they have played for women's empowerment in both of the texts.

Research Methodology

This research is based on the qualitative analysis of the characters Regan, Goneril, and Cordelia of Shakespeare's drama *King Lear* as the role models through feminism and the character's analysis of Shakuntala of Kalidas of the drama *Shakuntalum*. The texts *King Lear* and *Shakuntalum* have been adopted as the primary data. The study follows the textual interpretation, literary reviews, and female aspects being based on textual analysis and discourse analysis. The secondary sources have been taken from writings of various authors and wave materials found apt for the findings of the research objectives. Both texts' character analysis has been carried out on the foundation of the feminist theory. The methodology is based on the analysis of the primary and secondary data found in various journals and waves

regarding the exploration of women's empowerment as role models. It has the similar method as Adhikari (2020& 2024) and Adhikari et al (2020 &2022) and Adhikari (<https://doi.org/10.3126/kv.v5i1.70884> & <https://doi.org/10.3126/taj.v3i1.71972> & DOI: <http://doi.org/10.25058/179400x.1709> &). www.ijtell.com. & www.ijoes.in.) have been employed in qualitative research. Likewise, Adhikari et al. (2024 [http:// dx.doi.org/10-15294/paramita. V34i. 47901](http://dx.doi.org/10-15294/paramita.V34i.47901). &2024 [http://dx.doi.org/10-15294/paramita. V34i.50309](http://dx.doi.org/10-15294/paramita.V34i.50309)) and Guragain, et al. (2024 DOI: 10.59324/ejtas.2024.2(5).07 & 2024www.tijer.org., &2024 DOI: 10.59324/ejtas.2024.2(4).20, &2024 WWW.GRPUBLISHING.ORG, &2024<https://doi.org/10.18535/sshj.v8i09.1295>, & 2024 doi:10.29121/granthaalayah.v12.i7.2024.5687, &2024www.journal-ems.com DOI: 10.59573/emsj.8(2).2024.35, Guragain & Adhikari in www.journal-ems.com. DOI: 10.59573/emsj.8(2).2024.35 and Adhikari www.ijoes.in and click on Vol-7, ISSUE-1) have applied a similar research methodology in their qualitative research as this paper has used for the detailed analysis of the data for investigating the role model of women's empowerment. At the same time, this research has investigated the detailed research that has already been carried out but without addressing the issues that this research has reflected.

Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is one of the vital components. As per the research questions, objectives, and methodology of this study, this attempts to focus mainly on critical discourse analysis of both texts' characters of Regan, Goneril, and Cordelia of Shakespeare's drama *King Lear* and Shakuntala of Kalidas's drama *Shakuntalum* respectively. Present literature reveals the fact that a lot has been written on and about both the texts and the writers of these texts, but none has attempted to make a comparative study focusing on the issue of women characters as the role models of women's empowerment so far. So, the researcher has filled the gap by investigating the issues raised.

There are both similarities and differences of the women's role models displayed in both texts through the struggles, and hard work by the women characters. The similar as well as the different ideas of the different authors and critics are discussed in detail in exploring the facts. The comment of various commentators of *King Lear* and of *Shakuntalum* is presented so as to reveal the differences and similarities respectively.

The critic, Sumana Biswas, has researched Kalidas's drama *Shankuntalum* and Shakespeare's play *The Twelfth Night* as ecofeminist criticism and gradual change in the character of *Shankuntala*'s 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 slenderer; her shoulders are very much drooping; her complexion is wan." (Tewari 238) Her plight is similar to that of Nature, which loses luster and nutrients for having been ravenously ransacked. She conceals in her bosom strangulating personal worries and turmoil mixed with dreams of future prospects just like the earth hides in its core the mines of treasure and volcanic lava together. The only error committed was being unmindful under the pressure of the circumstances, but Biswas did not do the research about the women's role models' characters for women's empowerment as this research has aimed to do. The concept of women's empowerment in Kalidas's *Shakuntalum* has provided a complete view as in:

The term empowerment is widely used in the context of women's development. It is the state of mind and attitude of an individual. Kalidasa's Shakuntala, Urvashi, Uma, and Sita are all empowered women in this sense. They exhibited a great ability to overcome restrictions and constraints imposed by social customs, beliefs, and practices. Kalidasa considered women as the power incarnated, the strength that makes a man act in the right way and direction. Dharini rules with love and justice. She is the savior of the King. Urvashi is a well-educated and cultured lady. Shakuntala is not the suffering victim. Rather, she overcomes challenging circumstances and is empowered with inner strength. In the patiently suffering, Shakuntala is an empowered woman who is proud of her self-identity and patiently waiting for recognition of her virtues. Her empowerment lies in facing and overcoming an oppressive environment. Hari Dutt Sharma traces the strength and empowerment needed for the modern-day women in Kalidasa's Heroines. He has identified Sita, Parvati, and Shakuntala with their courage, confidence, and stability, as role models for the present generation. Kalidasa has achieved great success in the presentation of female characters; they experience more troubles and undergo greater suffering. They are alive to the tradition that love is for order and harmony. (Pokhrel, 91)

This extract demonstrates merely the role model of Shakuntala in the drama of Kalidas but it has not been compared and contrasted with the role of Shakespeare's characters, Gertrude, Gonorrheal and Ophelia in The King Lear. Hence, it has got the lapses for the further research for the empowerment of women as the role model for the other women in the societies in the comparative forms of the both texts.

William Jones' Works of Kalidas, Translated from Original Sanskrit into English (1901), is the basic text for the review of the drama. Abijnashakuntalam, a fine play in seven acts, is the most famous of the works of Kalidasa and the best among the poetic works. This is based on the love story of King Dusyanta and Shakuntala, parents of Bharata, the famous and founder father of the Bharata dynasty. The first meeting of the King with Shakuntala in the hermitage of Kanva, who was on a pilgrimage to avoid the misfortune in the life of Shakuntala, is dealt with in the first Act. In the second Act, the King pretended to protect the hermitage, though demanded by his mother, and sent vidusaka to the capital. In the third, Shakuntala conveyed her love through a letter and got married under the Gandharva system. Dusyanta returned to the capital, promising to take her within three days. Durvasa cursed Shakuntala for not receiving him as she immersed herself in the thought of Dusyanta. Her female maids managed the situation and secured concessions. Act IV describes the departure of Shakuntala to the capital accompanied by ascetics and the loss of token rings. Act V details Dusyanta's refusal, her rescue by her mother, Menaka, etc. Act VI is the story of a childless fisherman who brought the ring by which Dusyanta.

Remembered Shakuntala and regretted it. In Act VII, Dusyanta accompanied Matali to fight against a demon on Indra's demand. The visit of Dusyanta to the hermitage of sage Marica on his return journey is detailed in the last chapter. There, he met his sons, Sarvadamana and Shakuntala, and got united with the blessing of Marica and Aditi. Kalidasa recreates Shakuntala in the play as an obedient and virtuous woman who is steadfast in her love -unlike apsaras- even after being abandoned. Thus, Kalidasa creates an image of the dutiful wife who, even in the face of injustice, does not abandon her responsibilities.

In this respect, the women's character in the drama *Abhijnanashakuntalam* has been analyzed as the source of women's empowerment. The major concern of the search is navigating the forms and images of women in the play *Abhijnanashakuntalam*. The researcher has closely analyzed and studied the status of women in the play *Kalidasa*, where they were depicted as role models for women's empowerment despite their suffering and negligence in the patriarchal society. One Particular quality of women that assigns them the status of acting as role models to contemporary global women is their underlying strength, as evidenced by their capacity to make reasonably sound decisions. *Shakuntala's* quiet suffering and her refusal to beg for kindness from the King lend her an aura of victorious strength when she appears in the last Act. She is the ideal role model for the girls of that section of our society. (Pokhrel, 95). Nepalese women still today experience subordination daily in the form of discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, and violence due to the patriarchal ideology which has spread the notion of male superiority through the religious stories of Ram-Sita, Shiva-Parvati that gives a lesson that a woman's heaven is in her husband's feet (Khanal, S. 2072). In the same way, *Kalidasa* wrote with a purpose that every character he portrayed and every incident he represented had a message to convey the main purpose of being the woman she was and to remind the man that he should not trespass on the rights of his counterpart. *Kalidasa's* women characters are empowered a lot, and they deserve respect, love, reverence, and wonder for their role in empowering the women in society. *Kalidasa* has presented the theme connected with cultural and social norms based on the ideals of the Hindu religion. He has emphasized that love cannot be put before our duties. If there are lapses on our duty front, we have to repay it adversely. This has been the case with *Shakuntala* when she had unknowingly lapsed in performing her duties by not welcoming *Rishi Durvasa*. *Kalidasa's* motive was to depict that neglect of duty is punishable. However, *Shakuntala* is an empowered woman with a positive self-image and self-confidence and is able to keep up her dignity in an oppressive environment. In *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, *Kalidasa* used his pen to sing the praises of pure, truthful love, the innocent soul, and the legitimate aspirations of humans in the life that is love and criticized the teachings that stifled the fluttering heart of humans. In his work, *Kalidasa* let his characters act and express their personalities in these relationships to talk about the issues of love and caste. This has made the success of the play *Shakuntalam* and has raised the thought of *Kalidasa* over his contemporaries and authors of later centuries. *Kalidasa* used the beauty of nature to compare it with the beauty of humans and to provide background for the girl's beauty. Empowerment is a term widely used in the context of women's development.

Abhijnanasakuntalam has been analyzed from the point of view of women's social values. It has depicted the concept of women's role in society as follows:

The *Abhijnanasakuntalam* is a marvelous work of the great poet and playwright *Kalidasa*, the brightest star in the firmament of Indian poetry. *Kalidasa's* imagination holds in perfect fusion the two elements of natural beauty and human feelings. Out of three plays of *Kalidasa*, *Abhijnanasakuntalam* is generally regarded as a masterpiece. The word '*Abhijnana*' in the title signifies 'a token of recognition' (here, a ring), which is instrumental in bringing about the final recognition of *Sakuntala* by the King. It is a *Nataka* in Seven Acts,

based on the love story of King Dushyanta and the maiden Sakuntala. Social values form an important part of society's culture. Values account for the stability of social order. They provide the general guidelines for social conduct. Values such as fundamental rights, patriotism, respect for human dignity, rationality, sacrifice, individuality, equality, democracy, etc., guide our behavior in many ways. Values are the criteria people use in assessing their daily lives, arranging their priorities, and choosing between alternative courses of action. There are Seven Acts in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. Each Act of *Abhijnanasakuntalam* reflects various social values of women, which are more beneficial to human society and the present-day world. (Swain, 1)

It has displayed how the woman's role has brought social change and how women are the source of social order and stability. The significance of women's roles is the primary focus of Eastern society. Class division in the case of marriage is explained by how women are regarded in Eastern society. The value of women has been explained:

We see that a man of a higher class was allowed to marry, besides a girl of his own class who alone could join him in the performance of religious duties, a girl of lower class or classes -of course, at the risk of being degraded in the estimation of society. If she were of Brahmin origin, on both sides, he could not marry her; marriage with a woman of the higher class is strictly forbidden. It means the caste system was theirs. Women can't have independence of action under any circumstances. They are not freely or independently allowed to do anything as they wish. There are certain social and religious taboos that operate as social sanctions. To abide entirely by the wishes of her husband and to be devoted to his well-being alone is considered to be the highest duty of 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. One deserving punishment in the matter of another's wife (i.e., one having a willful connection with her) is an adulterer, and the custom of restricting the women to their inner apartments is also found. The widow could not inherit her husband's property in those days; she was simply entitled to maintenance. It shows that women were no longer important at the time of Kalidasa. Women are strictly restricted in every sphere to breathe an independent life. They are recognized as the oppressed class of society and merely puppets in the hands of a male-dominated society. (Swain, 69) However, it has not said anything regarding the role model of the female character in the play of Kalidasa's *Abhijanashakuntalam* as this research has focused.

The role models of Shakespeare's female characters in the drama *King Lear* are explained by various authors. The role of female empowerment in *King Lear* during the Elizabethan Era reflected that women were oppressed by men and had no authority and power to make their own decisions. This ideal view of gender is defied in William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, for female empowerment is central to the play. Firstly, the bold characteristics of the woman contribute greatly to enhancing the plot. Furthermore, women play a major role in developing the theme of power. Moreover, when power is given to the female characters, they reveal their true character, thus aiding with their character development.

Regan is one of the strongest female characters who displays a great deal of character transformation throughout the course of the play. Regan shows her strong and powerful characteristics when she does not hesitate to tell her father, "This house is little: the old man and it is people / cannot be well bestowed" (II, iv, 285-286). This exemplifies how Regan's character has changed due to the fact that she has now become so powerful that she no longer needs to flatter the King. Regan's behavior towards Lear shows how she never loved him and just used him to get power over the kingdom. This demonstrates her character development because she no longer has to worry about acting loving and caring towards her father since she has nothing that she wants from him, and he has become nothing to her. Another action that exhibits Regan's character change is when she yells, "Give me thy sword. A peasant stands up thus!" (III, vii, 77). This action of killing the servant signifies that Regan has fully transformed into a powerful person because, during the Shakespearean era, women did not hold swords or commit murders. However, when Regan kills the servant, it shows that she has now taken the role of a dominant and powerful male. This comparison between Regan and the man shows that Shakespeare is trying to illustrate her total transformation from being a 'weak, oppressed' woman to a strong, powerful woman. Therefore, in conclusion, Shakespeare uses women to show their character development, which is influenced by the female characters.

The character analysis of Cordelia is well explained, but it says nothing about the role of female empowerment. As lofty as these notions of salvation and redemption might be, they rely heavily on the body. The survivors react with sadness and dismay to Cordelia's death and treat her body with reverence. Critics such as Hamilton have claimed that the difference between the treatment of Goneril and Regan's bodies, in contrast to Cordelia's, is that "we watching this bloody spectacle are, like Albany, moved to awe but not pity" (Hamilton 124). This is because they are portrayed as vicious, according to the standards of their time, and therefore do not deserve to be mourned as Cordelia does. This refusal to mourn their bodies supports the argument that Goneril and Regan have become inhuman and solidifies the image of Cordelia as an ideal woman. Only Cordelia's position and her role are discussed, and women's empowerment is left to discuss as this research has done. The explanation goes:

In the scholarship connecting Cordelia with the Fool in King Lear, none are cited more often than Lear's lines on the Fool's "houseless poverty" (Act III, scene iv, lines 26-27), spoken as Lear and the Fool endure a torrential storm during their exile, and "my poor Fool is hanged" (Act V, scene iii, line 304), spoken as Lear cradles the body of his 31 youngest daughters. In addition, the latter line indicates a direct line to Cordelia and the Fool through double-casting, highlighting a layered relationship between Cordelia, the Fool, and Lear. But it also reflects a relationship between Lear, the actor/actress who plays both parts and the audience itself, shattering the fourth wall and signaling an ironic return to lucidity for Lear with the death of Cordelia/the Fool. In playing the role of Lear, Sir Ian McKellen referred to these moments as Lear's "actual understanding of the world for the first time.... he sees clearly in the end" (The Economist, 2007). While some scholars have noted that the text of Lear allows for double-casting Cordelia and The Fool, I argue that double-casting the

roles is, in fact, vital for the play, citing evidence within the text itself, qualities shared by Cordelia and The Fool and the words of Lear himself as evidence. (Boody, 300)

This extract has shown the role of women but from different perspectives, as this research has done. It is no longer compared with Eastern and Western literature. Another research has analyzed from different perspectives of characters, including Shakespeare's King Lear, but not of Shakuntala and King Lear's characters as:

King Lear is one play that has faced severe reprimand from feminist critics. Feminist critics like Coppelia Kahn, Kate Macluskie Carmen Rodríguez, Catherine S. Cox, and Peter Rudnytsky have taken up Shakespeare to be patriarchal and have found faults with the play on the grounds ranging from "absence of a mother figure" to creating stereotypical female characters. The present paper tries to understand the faults and virtues, positioning and juxtaposing of female characters in Shakespeare's King Lear as whole humans and tries to advocate a stance opposite to feminist criticism. (Sharma, 135)

All the above-mentioned research done by various researchers have portrayed the female characters of the play, King Lear as the role model of the women's empowerment and this research has mirrored the Eastern and the Western literary bridge and it has encouraged the women for their empowerment as it is the burning trend and the demand of the present-day gap between the male and female.

Shakuntala as a Symbol of Virtue and Patience in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*

Shakuntala, the heroine of Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, embodies both beauty and strength of character. She is portrayed not just as a passive figure but as one who embodies patience, virtue, and dignity. Shakuntala's strength lies in her unwavering faith in love and justice, even in the face of hardship. Her journey, which includes the loss of her husband Dushyanta's recognition of their marriage and her subsequent trials, demonstrates a resilience that empowers her as a role model for women.

One of the key moments that highlights Shakuntala's empowerment is her handling of the curse placed upon her by the sage Durvasa, which causes Dushyanta to forget her. Despite the injustice she suffers, she remains dignified and steadfast in her belief in the eventual reunion with her husband, reflecting her internal strength. The line "My heart, although it has been troubled, remains undisturbed" (Act 2) reflects Shakuntala's emotional resilience and ability to maintain composure in difficult circumstances. Her eventual reunion with Dushyanta and the birth of her son symbolize the triumph of virtue and the power of inner strength in overcoming adversity.

Cordelia's Role as the Moral Compass in *King Lear*

In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Cordelia is one of the most poignant examples of female empowerment. Unlike her sisters, Goneril and Regan, who embody treachery and manipulation, Cordelia represents honesty, integrity, and loyalty. Her refusal to flatter her father, Lear, with exaggerated words of love, speaks to her strong sense of self and moral clarity: "I love your majesty / According to my bond, no more, nor less" (Act 1, Scene 1).

Cordelia's words and actions challenge the patriarchal expectations of women, showing that true love cannot be quantified by empty words or material gain.

Cordelia's strength is most evident when she continues to act out of devotion to Lear, even after he has banished her. In her return to rescue Lear, she demonstrates not just a filial duty but a willingness to fight for justice, even at great personal cost. Though her tragic death is a sorrowful moment in the play, Cordelia's role as a morally upright and empowered woman leaves a lasting legacy on the play's moral framework. Her actions elevate her from a passive daughter into a powerful agent of redemption and compassion.

Goneril's and Regan's Power and Ambition in *King Lear*

While Cordelia represents the virtuous side of female empowerment, Goneril and Regan embody a more complex form of power—one rooted in ambition and the ruthless pursuit of control. They challenge the traditional roles prescribed for women in their society by actively seeking to usurp authority from their fathers and manipulate those around them to maintain power. Goneril's declaration, "How does my royal lord / I know not what to say" (Act 1, Scene 1), reveals her willingness to use flattery and deceit to secure her own interests, manipulating Lear into dividing his kingdom.

Despite their villainous actions, both Goneril and Regan demonstrate a form of empowerment through their political and personal agency, wielding power in a male-dominated world. Their actions complicate the notion of female empowerment—while they act out of self-interest, they also embody a form of agency that challenges the passive roles often assigned to women in their society. Their eventual downfall, however, suggests a tragic limitation to this empowerment, illustrating the dangerous consequences of unchecked ambition.

Conclusion

Both *Abhijnanasakuntalam* and *King Lear* present women who, in their respective contexts, defy traditional gender roles and assert their agency. Shakuntala's patience and virtue make her a role model of emotional strength and resilience, while Cordelia's moral clarity and loyalty to her father position her as a symbol of ethical empowerment. On the other hand, Goneril and Regan's manipulation and ambition challenge the expectations of women, showing a darker side to the concept of female power. Through these characters, both Kalidasa and Shakespeare explore the complex dimensions of female empowerment, illustrating that women can be both models of virtue and sources of political and emotional power, capable of shaping the fates of those around them. By examining these texts, we gain insight into the ways women have historically been portrayed as both empowered and complicated figures whose actions, virtues, and flaws continue to shape their roles in literature and society.

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