

SOCIAL VALUES OF WOMEN IN 2ND - 4TH CENTURY B.C WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO 'ABHIGYAN SHAKUNTALAM' BY KALIDASA.

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Abstract: The present study will try to throw light on the various social values i.e., emotions, behavior, attitude, feelings and experiences, mental states, the degree of patience, the quality of forgiveness, reaction to social situations, modesty and decency etc. of Women in 2nd – 4th century B.C. Social values form an important part of the culture of the society. 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; arrange their priorities and choosing between alternative courses of action. Values are expected to be followed for judging and evaluating social interactions, goals, means, ideas, feelings and the expected conduct. Values are standards of social behavior derived from social interaction and accepted as constituent facts of social structure.

Keywords:

Values, Emotion, Attitude, Culture Interaction, Modesty, Decency Feeling, Dignity, Rationality, Social.

Objectives:

- i) To study how women were valued in the 2nd – 4th century BC.
- ii) To find out the social condition of women in the age of Kalidas.
- iii) To study the social behavior and attitude of the women in 2nd to 4th century.

Introduction: Out of three plays of Kalidasa, Abhigyan-shakuntalam is generally regarded as a masterpiece. The word 'Abhigyan' 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 the culture of the society. 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 behaviour in many ways. Values are the criteria people use in assessing their daily lives; arrange their priorities and choosing between alternative courses of action. There are Seven Acts in abhigyan- shakuntalam. Each Act of abhigyan shakuntalam reflects various social values of women which are more beneficial to human society and the present day worl The roots of Hindu religion are in the Aryan society of the patriarchal system. The family unit was regarded as the significant one. In the ancient times, there was prevalence of the joint family system. Joint family system is referred to as the family system in which two or more nuclear families are residing under the common roof. This family system comprises of grandparents, parents, children, grandchildren, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins. In the Aryan family, the birth of the son was welcomed to a major extent. The individuals possessed this viewpoint that male children would render an effective contribution in promoting well-being of the family and community. On the other hand, women were provided freedom. In the Hindu Dharma, there is prevalence of the viewpoint that man and woman represent the two aspects of one person. Scriptures say that Lord Shiva consists of the body in two halves, one is of the male and the other is of the female. Woman is considered to be more powerful and is regarded as Goddess of Shakti (power). The society was governed by certain established norms and customs.

The dependence of women upon their fathers, husbands and sons was primarily due to the reason that they did not have the right to property. They were no longer independent and became dependent upon the male-dominated society. In this manner, the social, cultural and religious backbone of the Indian society is based on the patriarchal structure. The patriarchal structure provided secondary status to women. The women were supposed to obey the instructions and follow the rules of the male members of the family. The philosophy of the patriarchal family is based on the principle that the family tree grows up with the male only. This enables him to acquire significance and protection within the family. Another important aspect in this philosophy is marriage, in which women are given a subordinate status. In their subordinate status, women are required to experience number of negativities. They are not allowed to say anything regarding their rights and there have also been prevalence of practices of female foeticide and female infanticide. : Abhigyan-shakuntalam is a beautiful tale of love and romance, the name literally meaning 'of Sakuntala who is recognized by a token'. Written by one of the greatest poets of India, Sakuntalam is synonymous with its author, Kalidasa. Abhigyan-shakuntalam has an iconic status in the history of Indian literature and within the ideologies of nationalism and domesticity of nineteenth century elite Indian societies that drew from brahmanical social values and still continue to dominate lives and politics in contemporary India. Abhigyan-shakuntalam is one of the best not only in Sanskrit literature, but in the literature of the world. The story was already in Mahabharata in the form of a dull narrative; but, Kalidasa turned the same into an elegant work of art with a lot of innovations. Love in union and love in separation are both depicted in this drama with a greater degree of perfection. The dramatic power and poetic beauty of this unique work have elicited the highest praise and admiration from the scholars all over the world. The play, Abhigyan -shakuntalam, has been widely acclaimed as Kalidasa's masterpiece. He is the brightest luminary in the firmament of Sanskrit literature. His 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. The various social values i.e., emotions, behaviour, attitude, feelings and experiences, mental states, the degree of patience, the quality of forgiveness, reaction to social situations, modesty and decency etc. of Women are reflected in the play Abhigyan-shakuntalam. Act Wise Analysis of Social Values of Women in Abhigyan-shakuntalam: In the First Act, we see Dushyanta, the hero of the play once went out on a haunting expedition, accompanied by a large army. He became exhausted and came to the penance grove of Kanva in pursuit of some wild deer. He is then invited to receive such hospitalities as the Ashrama could offer.

Analysis:

The story is quite straight. From this act we get some idea of the law of inheritance prevailing in the days of Kalidasa. The Prime Minister, the noble Pisuna, sends the following report of a case which he refers to the king for decision:—A sea-faring merchant named Dhanamitra has been lost in ship-wreck. He dies childless, and his immense property becomes by law forfeited to the king. Now the king's reply is —As he had great riches, he must have several wives. Let inquiry be made. There may be a wife who is with child. And when he is told that one of his wives – the daughter of a merchant from Saketa is soon to become a mother, the king decides that the child shall receive the inheritance. The unborn child has a title to his father's property. From this it seems that the widow could not inherit her husband's property in those days; she was simply entitled to maintenance.

is the heroine of the play and she is also the representative woman of the society. King goes to the jungle on a hunting expedition, gets lost. Is enamored by an enchanting woman from a hermitage, seduces her and leaves, never to return. The nubile young thing gets pregnant and gives birth to a male child. There's a face-off between forest girl and lusty king after six years with the king's initial rejection, and their reconciliation in the end.

In Kalidasa's version, the king's veritable debauchery and abandonment is masked by a curse. King Dushyant forgets all about SAKUNTALA and fails to recognize her because of a sage's curse on a loved-up SAKUNTALA.

Patel revisits this story with a very strong feminist streak, adds some new dimensions and gives us a fresh new retelling. What's interesting is the humanization of divine characters like Menaka, and the introduction of a few ancillary myths to drive home the point of women's exploitation.

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In the meanwhile Sakuntala is also struck at the king's appearance and readily falls in love with him. The king thinks of the possibility of his being a suitable husband for Sakuntala because 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 be of Brahmana origin, on both the sides, he could not marry her, marriage with a woman of the higher class being strictly forbidden.

কথমিদং নাম ? ভবন্তঃ এব স্তরাং লোকব্রতাস্ত-নিষ্ণতাঃ ॥

সতীমপি জ্ঞাতি-কুলৈক-সংশয়াং জনোহন্যথা ভর্তৃমতীং বিশঙ্কতে ।

অতঃ সমীপে পরিণেতুরিচ্ছতে তদপ্রিয়াপি প্রমদা স্ববন্ধুভিঃ

she is openly discarded by the king as he does not remember having married her. Only once and that too when Dushyanta passes a remark about her morals, and the morals of her family—she loses her tempers and calls her husband ‘Anarya’. Here, we see, she is endowed with a high sense of self-respect, courage to suffer, heart to forgive etc. The use of the word ‘*avarodhastirodhane rajadareshu tadgruhe*’ in this act shows that the custom of restricting the women to their inner apartments at that time. The mention of the veil is instructive from a historical point of view. It shows that women, at least high-caste ladies and women of the royal house-hold(cf. *asUryampashya rAjadArAh*), were in those days in the habit of wearing a veil (perhaps the upper garment serving as a veil being drawn over the head so as to conceal the face) when going to public places.

In the Second Act, at the time of her departure with her friends SAKUNTALA Sakuntala manifest her feelings towards the king, though with modesty. Having gone only a few steps, the slender one suddenly stopped, alleging that her foot was pricked by a blade of darbha, and she stood with her face turned towards me, pretending to disentangle her bark-garments, though it was not caught in the branches of trees. Here we can see that Sakuntala is so shameful, cultured, decent, sober and moderate that she can't express his inner feelings to her beloved directly. In this context, we find that by answering the questions of king Dushyanta —is she always remain celibacy or until marriage? Priyamvada answers —*arya dharma caranepi paravasoyam janah*. It means even in the discharge of religious duties she is dependent upon another; what then in a matter of such great moment as leading a married life. Manu also declares that women can't have independence of action under any circumstances. A woman has no liberty of action at any time. They are not freely or independently allowed to do anything as she wishes. There are certain social, religious taboos which operated as social sanctions.

In The Third Act- we see SAKUNTALA looking at Priyamvada speaks *-hala kimantahpuravirahaparyutsukakasya rajarseruparodhena* means friend, why do you detain the royal sage, who is pining on account of his separation from the ladies of his harem? This proves that SAKUNTALA in spite of her coyness is capable of looking after her own interests Her modesty was so great that ever since the time when she felt herself invaded by a feeling which was strange to her in her hermit-life. (Act -I. *kim nu khalvimam janam prekhya tapovanavirodhino vikarasya gamaniyasmi samvrta*). So far she presents an illusion of the Aryan female modesty. Though trouble by the arrows of cupid she showed a full sense of female honour. Her words —*pauraba raksa vinayam madanasamtaptapi na khalvatmanah prabhavami*” prove her lively sense of feminine dignity and respect for her elders. This raises her character immensely in our eyes. Here we see the Kalidasa’s wonderful insight into human nature. She has a sensitive kind of devotion to her welfare and an almost feverish desire to avoid causing her friend any unnecessary worry, either mental or physical.

Now all are preparing to send SAKUNTALA to her lawful husband. Normally what happens? A friend presents a presentation to his friend at his marriage. Here we also see the two friends of SAKUNTALA; although they are not endowed with so many wealth still their friendship forced them to give some presentations at her friend’s marriage ceremony. Her two friends deposited a wreath of bakula flowers capable of lasting for a period of time retaining its dour in the casket of palm-leaves, hanging from the branch of the mango tree, cosmetics, such as mrigarochana (yellow orpiment), holy dust and tender durva grass. As we see the friendship or even sisterly affection between them is finely delineated.

In the Fourth Act –SAKUNTALA’S affection for her father was also unbounded. Her heart is heavy with sorrow. She says to her friend that though I am eager to see my husband, my feet move onwards with great difficulty, as I am leaving the hermitage. As she is brought up amidst hermitage environments and her kinsmen are the foresters, so it is very difficult for her part to depart these relations.

Another most remarkable point is the Kanva's practical wisdom in the counsel he gives to SAKUNTALA on the duties of a house-wife and a daughter-in-law.

যাতোকতোহস্তশিখরং পতিরৌষধীনাং আবিপ্লতোহরণপুরঃসর একতোহর্কঃ ।

ভেজোদ্বয়স্ত যুগপদ্ব্যসনোদয়াভ্যাং লোকো নিয়মাত ইবাহ্নদশাস্তুরেষু ॥

From her parent’s perspective, the daughter is only a deposit guarded by the father to be made over to her husband at the proper time. Having sent SAKUNTALA to her husband’s house Kanva says my inward soul is now intensely serene as it is when a deposit is returned to its owner (*pratyarpitanyasa ivantaratma*).When wedded to the king by the legal form of marriage, SAKUNTALA presents another interesting side of Hindu womanhood.

SAKUNTALA is the daughter of Sage Vishvamitra and the apsara Menaka, but she is abandoned at birth and raised by Sage Kanva in his ashrama. The celestial nymph is ordered to return to Indralok after having

successfully seduced the sage. But in this book, she is no cold-hearted being with a mission; she becomes almost human, having played the roles of a wife and mother.

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Menaka drifts in and out of the plot, a mother in absentia, ever watchful of her daughter. Additional players like Anasuya and Priyamvada, who are SAKUNTALA'S friends, are introduced as foils to flesh out the protagonist's character.

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In the Seventh Act, the king backs again in Indra's car, his unexpected meeting with a refractory boy in the hermitage of Maricha, the search for the amulet by which the boy is proved to be his son, the meeting with

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Conclusion: During this period, women had comparatively less power than their male counterparts, but they still lived very diverse lives. Based on information gleaned from primary and secondary sources, we know that women exercised varying degrees of freedom and independence in the private and public world due to different belief systems, family relations, political contexts, and social classes. Belief systems, philosophies, and religions may seem to exist simply in the world of ideas, but they have considerable effects on people's daily lives. Over time, concepts become parts of institutions that include rules and expectations for how people relate to one another—particularly the way women live in relation to their male counterparts and to society in general.

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