



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Magic Realism In Kalidasa's 'Abhigyana Shakuntalam'

¹Malvika Kshirsagar, Assistant Professor of English

²Vibha Kshirsagar, Retired Associate Professor of Sanskrit

Abstract: This research paper brings out instances of magical realism in one of the most famous Sanskrit dramas of Kalidasa, 'Abhigyana Shakuntalam'. Magical realism is a genre of literature which fuses magical elements and realistic elements in an earthly, everyday mundane setting. The significance of this paper is that even though magical realism, as a genre was developed in the 1940s at the hands of American writers, yet the instances of magical realism can be seen in the plays of Kalidasa, who was a great dramatist of the 5th century ancient India. His 'Abhigyana Shakuntalam' is considered as a masterpiece of Sanskrit drama and was among the first works translated into English. It has been adapted into movies in various languages like English, Telugu, Hindi, Marathi and Tamil. The drama has many mythical, supernatural and magical realistic elements which the research paper attempts to bring out in detail.

Keywords : Magical Realism, myth, supernaturalism

I. INTRODUCTION

Magical realism and supernaturalism are very popular forms of literary genres. Even though magical realism has been fully exploited in 1960s by American writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, it has been observed that the works of the ancient and greatest Indian dramatist too contains instances of magical realism and supernaturalism. Magical realism is a wonderful form of genre under whose shelter supernaturalism and mythology live. This paper studies the most admired drama of Sanskrit literature in a magical realistic point of view. Before going further, it is first necessary to state the characteristics of magic realism, so that the instances can be easily categorized. The most common characteristic of magical realism is supernaturalism, which means some extra-terrestrial, unearthly or divine power is at work on the earth and on human beings. Curses and prediction appear supernatural as it is very rare that curses turn out true; but if they turn out true, we assume that some supernatural force is at play, making the life of the victims a hell due to the effect of these evil curses. Mythology is another characteristic of magical realism. The legends of gods and goddesses belong to the category of mythology. The interaction of the divine and human beings is something magical, as it an interaction of the mortal and the immortal on the earth, something which sounds very unearthly.

'Abhigyana Shakuntalam' holds a central place in Sanskrit literature as it is studied most widely by researchers from very different points of view. This paper studies the play from magical realistic point of view. To begin with, the heroine of the drama, Shakuntala is a daughter of a celestial nymph (Menaka) and sage Vishwamitra, the union of a celestial entity 2 and earthly being. This union is unique and rare, and is considered that the offspring is very special.

II. THE HEROINE AND THE HERO WHO ARE EXTRAORDINARY:

Shakuntala is a precious woman who is required to change India's history. This may be a well-thought plan of the gods residing in the heaven, to change the turn of events in India's history of humans on the earth. The heroine is exceedingly beautiful, a reincarnation of Shri Lakshmi. She is abandoned by her celestial mother, who after performing a task assigned to her by Indra, the king of gods, returns to heaven. When king Dushyanta enters in the mystical garden of sage Kanva, he sees Shakuntala. The king, a connoisseur of beauty, is completely enchanted by Shakuntala, a mystical beauty and falls in love with her. She is viewed as an apsara (celestial nymph) by him and describes her beauty in the following lines:

v/kj% fdly;jkx% dkseyfoVikuqdkfj.kkS ckgwA

dqlqefeo yksHkuh;a ;kSoue³xs”kq IUUk)e~ AA (1.20)

Her red lips look like the buds of a creeper, both her arms look like soft branches, the new youth blossoming in her body looks like a captivating flower.

He compares her to a lotus and the moon:

ljflteuqfo)a ‘kSoysukfi jE;a

efyuefi fgeka’kksyZ{e y{eha ruksfr A

b;ef/kdeuksKk oYdyksukfo rUoh

fdfeo fg e/kqjk.kka e.Mua ukd`rhuke~ AA (1.19)

The lotus looks beautiful even when surrounded by weeds. Even stains on the moon enhances its beauty, similarly this beautiful lady looks beautiful even wearing bark clothes. Thus, the heroine is a kind of extra-ordinary woman who doesn't seem to belong to this world, but a kind of divine incarnation as she's perfect.

The hero of the play too, is also not an ordinary human being. He is a king of Hastinapura, a magnificent and royal power who has helped lord Indra win the war against the demons. Indra sends his charioteer Matali to Dushyanta to seek his help in defeating the demons.

ekrfy & jktu~!

d`rk% ‘kjO;a gfj.kk roklqjk% ‘kjklua rs”kq fodq”;rkfena A

izlknkSE;kfu lrka lqâTtus irfUr p{kawf”k u nk#.kk% ‘kjk% AA (6.29)

Matali says, “O King! Lord Indra has assigned you the task of killing the demons. Now you only throw the arrows on the demons, because good people don't throw arrows on their friends, they shower benevolence on them.

These conversations show that the immortals have to seek help from the mortal in the war. This means there must be something grand and extraordinary about the mortal. There's something superhuman and divine in the mortal human being, which hints towards some magical realistic element.

In Act VII of the play, sage Maricha, in admiration for King Dushyanta says:

iq=L; rs j.kf'kjL;exz;k;h nq";Ur bR;fHkfgRks HkqouL; HkrkZ A

pkisu ;L; fofuofrZrdEkZ tkra rRdksfVeRdqfy'kekHkj.ka e?kksu% AA (7.26)

He is the king Dushyanta, who is always in the forefront in Indra's war and whose bow has killed many enemies, that it has become an ornament to Indra's mighty weapon 'Vajra', and added its strength.

III. MYTHOLOGY (THE INTERACTION OF THE IMMORTAL AND THE MORTAL):

This instance of the immortal seeking favour from a mortal human being is another case of magical realism. There is something grand about him that he's considered worthy enough and has a significant place amongst the gods.

The garden of sage Kanva is described as highly beautiful and mystical. The garden can be compared to the beautiful garden of Eden. The flora is highly sensuous and aesthetic. The king is drawn by an antelope and follows it into this magical paradise of delights and divine beauty. The mystical deer leads the king to sage Kanva's hermitage, which is an enchanted world. The complete imagery of the garden seems magical and a model of poet's fantasy. Thus the setting appears exotic and magical.

IV. CURSES AND PROPHECIES TURNING TRUE :

The third instance of magical realism is the ascetical power of sages which is described in the play. In Act II, the king describes the power of sages in the following lines :

'keiz/kkus"q rik/skus"q xw<a fg nkgkRedefLr rst% A

Li'kkZuqdwyk bo lw;ZdkUrLrnU;rstks·fHkHkok}efUr AA (2.7)

Just like a gemstone 'Suryakanta' is cold when touched, but if the harsh rays of sun fall on it, it boils like hot water. In the same way, even if sages are calm by nature, but if anyone incurs their wrath, they have the capacity to destroy the source of their wrath as the words that emerge from their mouth in that moment of anger have the power to come true. Mere words from an ordinary person have no meaning, but if the same emerge from a sage who has the strength of penance to his credit, those words turn out true, such is the power of words by sages. In this play, this point is proved true when sage Durvasa happens to visit the hermitage of sage Kanva. It is at this time moment that Shakuntala is busy thinking about the king, Shakuntala's failures to notice the sage results in the sage giving her curse:

fopfURk;Urh ;euU;ekulk rik/skua osfRl ekeqifLFkre~ A

Lefj";fr Roka u l cksf/krks·fi lu~ dFkka izeRr% izFke% d'rkfeo AA (4.1)

The sage says that whoever Shakuntala is remembering, that person will not even recognize her, in the same way as a mad man forgets whatever he says. The curse slowly takes its form when Shakuntala goes to meet the king in an advanced state of her pregnancy and reminds the king of her marriage to her; the king fails to recognize her and instead accuses her of being a promiscuous woman compelling him to accept another man's child. In Durvasa's curse, the rage comes out as a result of his 'tapa' (penance). It is the power of his penance that he's gained this 'vachasiddhi', the words uttered by his mouth will come true. There's one instance in the play where it is shown that sage Kanva uses his

divine power (ascetic power) to know the events that happened with Shakuntala. It is on account of his divine power that sage Kanva gets to know about the events that befell on Shakuntala, the events that led to her pregnancy. In act 4, Kanva hears a divine voice from the sky informing him of Shakuntala's pregnancy.

vfXrlj.ka izfo"VL; 'kjhja fouk NUnkse;~;k ok.;k
nq";Ursukfgra rstks n/kkuka Hkwr;s Hkqo% A
vosfg ru;ka czãUufXuxHkkZa 'kehfeo AA

The divine voice says:

Know, Brahmin,
that your daughter bears the seed of Dushyanta for the world's well-being,
as the Shamitree bears the seeds of fire.

The prophecy comes true as Shakuntala after being rejected by Dushyanta, leaves the palace in tears and after a period of time, gives birth to a son named Bharat.

In the first Act, sage Vaikhanas blesses King Dushyanta that he'll have a child who'll be as brave as him:

tUe ;L; iqjksoZa"ks ;qDr:ifena ro A
iq=esoaxq.kksisra pdzofrZuekIuqfg AA (1.12)

This prophecy comes true as the son of King Dushyanta who's named Bharat turns out as brave as his father. He rides on a lion, opens the jaw of the lion widely. Prophecies turning out true are a major aspect of magic realism. There's an evidence of the child's bravery and courage as the child commands the lion to open its mouth and he counts the lion's teeth :

cky% & ftaHk fla?k! narkba ns x.kbLla A
(t'EHkLo flag! nUrLrs x.kf;"s) (7.1)

As mentioned earlier, Shakuntala is cursed by sage Durvasa that her husband will forget her. Upon the requests of her friends Priyamvada and Anusaya, the sage offers a remedy to alleviate the effect of this curse, that if her husband is shown any symbol or possession, he will recognize her. Shakuntala is in possession of the ring with Dushyanta had given her. On her journey to the king, the ring accidentally falls off from her finger and falls in a river. A huge fish swallows the ring. This fish gets caught by a fisherman while doing his daily job of catching fish on the riverbank. When he's about to cut the fish, the golden ring pops out from the mouth of the fish and falls in the palm of the fisherman. The honest fisherman goes to the king and hands over the ring to him. Upon seeing the ring, the king, the king remembers about his beloved Shakuntala and his moments with him, including his marriage with him.

All these events seem like a fairy tale. It seems magical to readers who have already felt the freshness of the magical hermitage from the very beginning.

IV. THE PERSONIFICATION OF NATURE:

The garden of sage Kanva is full of life and is shown to respond to human feelings. When Shakuntala is preparing to leave to go to the King in Hastinapura, the plants, flowers, trees and animals become sorrowful. The creepers are shown to cling to Shakuntala as they are mourning for her departure:

vkfy³~xUrho yrk% izlwuS%
'kksdkdqyk ckyo/kwfeo Roke~ A

**fuLlkj;UR;Jwf.k okfj o`{kk%
u iq"io`f"Va fo)fr Hkwfe% A (4.11)**

The trees are shedding tears and the earth is not showering flowers. Nature is not cheerful today; instead it is grieving for Shakuntala's loss. As Shakuntala is leaving the garden, a deer follows her sorrowfully:

vuqoztUR;JqifjqIyqrk{kk e`X;% fLFkrk nwjeuqoztfUr A

The deer has tears in her eyes, she follows Shakuntala for some distance and then stand still, gazing sadly.

u xh;rs fdafpfngk| Hk³xS% A
ekSua xra 'kksdo'ksu loZe~ AA

The bees and birds are not singing today, all have fallen silent due to grief. Sage Kanva utters the following lines:

vfi LoHkkokn~ fojra u 'kksP;a
;=kJeks;a ounsorkfHk% A

The trees, creepers, animals and birds are sorrowful, proving that Shakuntala was very dear to them and was the source of living joy for them.

V. THE SACRED MAGICAL THREAD:

In Act 6 of the play, sage Marichi ties a protective thread (Rakshasutra), which is a magical amulet to safeguard the child. Sage Marichi declares that if the thread falls on the ground, then apart from the child's parents, nobody can pick it up, else it will transform into a snake and bite the one who has picked it up.

,"kk·ijkftrk ukekS"kf/kjL; tkrdeZle;s Hkxork ekjhpsj nRrk A

,rka fdy ekrkfirjkkokRekuia p otZf;Rok·ijks Hkwfeifrrka u x`ákfr A

;fn x`g~.kkfr rrLra likz HkwRok n`kfr AA (6.1)

The sacred thread transforming into a snake is a clear example of magical realism. When Dushyanta picks up the amulet, it doesn't get transformed into a snake, proving that he's the father of the child. The thread was meant not only to protect the child but also to identify the father of the child. This may be a well thought plan of sage Marichi, who has the ascetic power to his credit.

VI. CONCLUSION :

To conclude, the world famous play of Kalidasa, 'Abhigyanam Shakuntalam' is a fine example of magical realism work as it seamlessly blends the supernaturalism with mortal human life. From the very beginning to the end, there are numerous elements of magical realism that mesmerise the readers, like the exceedingly beautiful garden of the sage, the heroine whose beauty is like that of a celestial nymph, and the fact that she's a daughter of the celestial nymph and the hero of the play, who is a friend of the king of the gods, are all examples of magical realism. There are curses and prophecies which turn out true and prove their effect on the victims. Nature is shown as a living force who sympathizes with human emotions. Mythology is prevalent in the entire play as the playwright has shown the interaction of the mortal with the immortal. The miracles occur quietly with the lead characters, like the discovery of the magical ring from nowhere. Kalidasa has shown the world where the divine, natural and human realms co-exist effortlessly. The play is popular because of the magical elements which add a delightful flavour to the play.

VII. REFERENCES:

1. Shastri, Pandit Ramteji. & Bramhanand, Tripathi. (2015). Kalidas Granthavali. Chaukhamba Surbharti Prakashan.
2. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakuntala_\(play\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakuntala_(play))
3. https://www.yorku.ca/inpar/shakuntala_ryder.pdf
4. Goodwin, R. E. (1998). The Playworld of Sanskrit drama. Motilal Banarsidass Publishing House.

