



Oneness And The Universe: Connecting 'Ecosophy' With The Natural Self Of Sakuntala In The Loom Oftime By Kalidasa.

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ABSTRACT: We are now under the spell of Technology, the so called 'Robotic Life' without any pulse of nature. Being trapped in the matrix of instrumentalism and mechanism, we have forgotten our natural past and the Indigenous Environment which is the prime root of universe. As a result, the maintenance of natural environment is becoming more complex being too much absorbed in the 'Materialistic' desire as shaped by Arthur Sopenauer. To face the crisis, we need to establish a symbiotic, reciprocal relationship between the nature and the culture. We should also understand the core of Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose's famous dictum "plants too have life." Mahakabi Kalidasa's 'Abhigyanam Shakuntalam' or 'The Loom of Time' best represents the genre of Indian classical literature and stands apart for its matchless beauty, love for nature, tenderness and the spiritual world of biosphere. My present paper seeks to find out a 'Ecosophical' connection of the natural environment with the 'Ecological Self' of Sakuntala. Kalidasa understood in the 5th century what Europe did not learn until the 19th century, and even now comprehends only imperfectly, that the world is not made for man, that man reaches his full stature only as he realises the dignity and worth of life that is not human. Later this very theme is echoed by William Wordsworth's poem 'The World is too Much with Us', O'Henry's short story 'The Last Leaf', and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's Bengali short story 'Mahesh'.

KEY WORDS: Deep Ecology, Ecosophy, Pancha Mahabhutas, Mother Nature and Tree Time, Ecological Indian.

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I. INTRODUCTION

India, with all its traditional past and natural phenomena, best represents the Ecological diversity within the context. Down the ages, Sanskrit Literature always has been the prime source of celebrating the 'Indianization', in the pragmatic field of nature, culture and religion-where Divine meets the Human. Mahakabi Kalidasa, known as the "Shakespeare of India" beautifully colours the natural biosphere of Indian life. His masterpiece, 'Abhigyanam Shakuntalam' deals with the symbiotic relationship of nature and literature which signals out 'Deep Ecology', the bio-centric treatment of universe. 'Deep Ecology' believes that human must radically change their relationship with nature. It is called sometime an 'Ecosophy' that offers a definition of the self ; i.e. 'The Ecological Self' that differs from the traditional self. In Hindu religious context 'Tulsi Plant' is regarded to be the Devine manifestation of 'Mother Nature' and we worship her to be connected within the rhythm of Universe. Like Tulsi herself Sakuntala also embodies the very soul of 'Mother Nature' through Jasmine and Madhavi flowers. She not only looks rather gazes at these flowers and connects her 'Ecological Self' and she can feel this eternal bonding by saying- "I love them like a sister." (kalidasa,p.175) American director James Cameron has deliberately designed this kind of 'Ecosophical' relationship in his famous movie 'Avatar' where the indigenous natives of 'Pandora' connect their soul with the plant – the Mother Tree. The Movie 'Avatar' uses the image of the navi – homogenized Indigenous people and their relationship with the nature to put forward a message of environmentalism. Cameron utilizes the concept of 'ecological Indian' trope in his portrayal of the navi through the essentialization, homogenization, and naturalization of indigenous people. Anthropologist Shepard krech published a book in 1999 titled, 'The Ecological Indian : Myth and History' that explores the foundation of the image of 'ecological Indian'. The 'ecological indian' is not only in harmony with nature but 'understands the systemic consequences of his actions, feels deep sympathy with all living forms, and takes steps to conserve so that earth's harmonies are never imbalanced and resources never in doubt. "(Krech, p. 21) Pandora symbolizes the land of 'Cultures of Habitat' an indigenous native land,

unaffected by the touch of colonization and still celebrates the glory of primitivism, and represents the reciprocal, mutual relationship with the native of Pandora.

Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess coined the term 'Deep Ecology'. He first understood that anthropocentric, instrumentalist view of nature and humanity as the subject of nature, has led to the deforestation, destruction of primordial life. This is termed as 'maldevelopment' by Vandana Shiva, which is based on some powerful binary relationships such as - Culture/Nature, Dominator/Dominated, Colonizer/Colonized, Objective/Subjective, Mind/Body, Rational/Emotional and Public/Private etc. Kalidasa beautifully framed the concept of 'Deep Ecology' in his play 'Abhigyanam Shakuntalam', which is incomparable for its beauty, charm, tenderness and fidelity to nature. He understood the dichotomy of 'human/nature' relationship should be emotional and responsible, not merely a rational-intellectual one. He painted Sakuntala as a Jasmine flower, blossomed in garden of Kanva. In the play, Sakuntala is the representative soul of 'Mother Nature' who emotionally treats the nature 'with heart not head'. Though her physical parent Vishwamitra and damsel Menaka left her alone under a tree and rejected, but the nature never betrayed rather lifted her up in lap and provided shelter. Here we should sense the unselfishness of nature with which they give freely of themselves. Nature always helps the mind which worship it. In the words of William Wordsworth – "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her." (Tintern Abbey) "Wordsworth's "Pan-en-theistic" attitude to nature defines the equation of universe that "all is in God and God is in all." He worships the trees, rivers, brooks, flowers, hills -the natural environment, more than his life. He could have also sensed that plants too have life like Sakuntala. Nature-mysticism is characterized by a sense of the immanence of the One or God or Soul in Nature. In a very typical form it is expressed in Wordsworth's lines:

A motion and a spirit, that impels

All thinking things, all objects of all thought, And rolls through all things.

Or in the lines:

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe, That Beauty in which all things work and move. of Shelley." (Happold, p.43)

We should live to the "TreeTime", a philosophical concept which defines the 'Ultra-Slow Motion' or 'Simple Living'. A Time which is against clockwise time, rather indicates a perpetual or eternal time. It defines the good qualities of Tress- the green world of spirituality. Sumana Roy, a well-known contemporary Bengali writer, in her book 'How I Became a Tree' sketches the necessity of this bonding-with plants, with trees-is so acute that like Sakuntala she wishes to morph into one. She says – "I was tired of speed. I want to live to tree time." 'How I Became a Tree' is the story of that transformation – from 'Ecosophical' to 'Spiritual' one. She wants to live to "Tree Time" because trees do not run with the clock time. They have their own time zone, unabashed. They are not in hurry to reach any where; they stand at one place and grow taller and higher, wider and bigger. New branches, new leaves come and old ones left the place for new ones. They talk to the wind and never complain of non-movement and loneliness. It brings out a certain simplicity and sensitivity that is there in all of us. In this memoir that recounts moments that formed the author's longing to become a tree emerges as a book laden with inspiration for every individual, because:

- Trees are against speed, not in a hurry.
- They are non-violent being.
- Their friendly connection with the Earth.
- Their ability to cope with the loneliness.
- Unselfishness of Trees, simplicity of life.
- Trees connect us to Others and also the past or future.
- Trees provide to all of us the basic necessities of survival-oxygen, food, clothes and medicine etc.
- They highlight the importance of being happy in their own skin.
- They spark the realization that there is nothing like an 'uneventful life.'
- Trees provide us a mirror to life and its ways.

Another famous Bengali poet, music director, lyricist and singer Anupam Roy voices the same 'Ecosophical' connection with trees, with nature and he beautifully tunes it in his song – "Ebar Morley Gachh Hawbo Ami", which means 'After death I shall become a tree'. The first stanza of the song –

"Ebar morle gachh hawbo ami

Shobuj shara gaaye,

Ebar morle gachh hawbo ami

Dariye Khali paaye." – these lines define the core meaning of living to the 'Tree Time' and 'Deep Ecology'. After death he wants to become a tree, with all the green in his body and standing alone on bare feet. Thus he tries to connect himself 'ecosophically' with the nature and chooses the simple way of living. Another stanza of the song – "Maatir khabar shekor chene Shokto kore rakhe Ek thikanay bochor bochor Opeksha te thake."

– introduces us to some of the core issues – 'Waiting', 'Patience', 'Will-to-survive', and 'Determined' existence of trees. The relationship between root and soil is organic, reciprocal and cyclical one; how they are symbiotically living-and-helping one another and how they are 'waiting' eternally year after year standing on the same place.

Kalidasa paints Sakuntala as a 'Mother Nature' with all the colours of Hinduism. According to Hinduism, mother goddess is the personification of nature, motherhood, fertility, creation-and-destruction, or One who is regarded to be the co-soul of nature. All created forms (animated and inanimate) emerge from the womb of the cosmic mother, thus the natural world is the direct reflection of the divine. Hinduism has always been an 'environmentally-sensitive' philosophy. The Mahabharata, Ramayana, Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Puranas and Smriti contain the earliest messages for preservation of environment and ecological balance. The diverse theologies of Hinduism suggest that : the nature can be seen as a manifestation of the goddess, and must be treated with respect. Kalidasa has deeply revered the natural environment with all its ecological aspects. In the following words of Ascetic we can see the devotion towards Nature-

“(A voice off-stage): Hi there! Stop, hold, O King! This deer belonging to the Hermitage ought not to be struck down...aha!... do not kill him, O King.” And the Ascetic repeats the same – Ascetic (holding up his hand): This deer is of the Hermitage, O King! He should not be killed ...no...no...do not strike him down.” (Kalidasa, p.173).

Here they are doing the 'duty' to protect the animal and the environment , and they named the forest as "Groves of Righteousness", where everything is scaled equally with the most fundamental law of universe, and this is called "Dharma" while protecting the 'Subaltern' i.e. the tress, the animals, and the environment because they can neither speak out, nor protest. Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay who is worldwide famous for his classic 'Devdas', has shown a deep sympathy towards the cow, named Mahesh in his tragic short story 'Mahesh'. The author treats and loves the cow(Mahesh) like a son. Similar instance of devotion towards non-human is exposed clearly during the watering of the trees by Sakuntala and her friends –

"Sakuntala: Dear Anasuya, it is not merely a matter of Father's injunction; I love them like a sister'. (she mimes watering the trees)

Second: Friend Sakuntala, the trees of the Hermitage that bloom in summer have all been watered. Shall we now sprinkle those that are past flowering? That would be an act of devotion, not looking for a reward."(Kalidasa, p.176).

Dharma in Hindu context, often described as, 'duty', can be interpreted as a responsibility to take care for the earth and the natural environment. Our treatment of nature directly affects our 'Karma'. According to 'Mahabharata', "Pancha Mahabhutas" (The Five great elements-Space, Air, Fire, Water and Earth) create a web of life that is shown forth in the structure and the interconnectedness of the cosmos and the human body. Hinduism recognizes that the human body is composed of and related to these five elements, and connects each of the elements to one of the five senses. The human nose is related to earth, tongue to water, eyes to fire, skin to air, and ears to space. This bond between our senses and the elements is the foundation of our human relationship with natural world.

Lord Shri Krishna introduces the concept of 'Yajna' in the 'Gita', meaning 'Sacrifice'. He speaks of many more types of 'Yajna' such as 'Wealth-sacrifice', 'Austerity-sacrifice', 'Yogic-sacrifice', and 'Knowledge-sacrifice'. He says that one must sacrifice for the welfare of society. The implication is that the whole world of things, animals and humans beings are interwoven in such a splendid harmony that it will be impossible for any being to survive in isolation without depending upon the rest. We must adopt a policy of mutual 'give-and-take'. "The individual is a movement of the supreme, a focus of the one great life. The self is the nucleus which can enlarge itself and embrace the whole world, with heart and mind, in an intimate communion. God's image in man is the bridge between heaven and earth. Each individual has eternal significance in the cosmos."(Radhakrishnan,p.388)

Kalidasa has drawn another significant aspect of 'Mother Nature' by giving it human qualities. He does not see nature apart from human. The marriage of Jasmine Flower and Mango Tree is the human substitution of Sakuntala and Dushyanta.

"Sakuntala: O Anasuya, what a charming sight, this marriage of vine and tree. See, the Jasmine has this very moment entered into her budding youth. And the mango tree is laden with young fruit indicating he is ready for enjoyment.(she stands gazing at them)" (Kalidasa,p.177).

Both nature and human abide by one cosmic law. This marriage of trees in Hinduism is another spiritual way of divine manifestation. This marriage is a metaphor of 'Gandharva Bibaho' that is going to take place between Sakuntala and Dushyanta. At the end of the play, Sakuntala experiences a sense of emotional and psychological loss-a loss of self and cultural alienation when she leaves the forest(Nature) of Kanwa to meet Dushyanta in the city(Culture). But Dushyanta fails to identify Sakuntala, he has forgotten her. Here we can realize that Dushyanta the embodiment of Culture can never understand the true aspect of Nature(Sakuntala). He misbehaves with her.

To conclude, 'Mother Nature' does her work unselfishly, uninterruptedly and without expectation of any reward. A great mysterious cosmic 'Yajna' is going on in nature without any sort of discontinuity. The earth revolves around of the day and night and all the days of the year without the slightest respite. The wind has been blowing and will continue to do so for all time to come. Similarly fresh water keeps constantly flowing into the river, vegetables and fruits grow afresh in plants and trees; planets and stars keep moving in their orbits at high speed without the slightest rest. Kalidasa , a poet of nature has deliberately sketches the character of Sakuntala as a paragon of Mother Nature. He also has been able to draw a symbiotic relationship between Human and Non-human. Our treatment with nature should be an act of devotion, not looking for a reward.

"The Mahabharata's understanding of the nature of humanity would be incomplete without some reference to the of the divinity of the self within. In the teachings of the Upanishads perpetuated in the Vedanta system of philosophy, emphasis is laid on the oneness of the individual atman with the supreme Brahman".(Sutton,p.343)

This relationship between the supreme being (Brahman) and the human soul (Atman) talks definitely about the 'Oneness' of the Universe. A Oneness that transcends the concept of 'equality of many'. The objective realm or world of environment, and the subjective self or life, are separate aspects of same entity. Sakuntala's connection with the natural environment is intrinsic one and foregrounded with the concept of 'Oneness'. To quote the Words of Swami Vivekananda –

"The Background, the Reality, of everyone is that same Eternal, Ever Blessed, Ever Pure, and Ever Perfect one. It is the Atman, the Soul, in the saint and the sinner, in the happy and the miserable, in the beautiful and the ugly, in men and in animals; it is the same throughout, it is shining One". (Vedanta Keshari, p.534)

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