

Similarity between Shakespeare's Depiction of Desdemona to Kalidasa's Shakuntala

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Abstract

Just as Kalidasa has shown true honour for women by presenting character of Shakuntala, similarly Shakespeare also depicted true respects and regards for women by portraying the character of Desdemona. Desdemona is the heroine and central character in Shakespeare's drama Othello. Just as Shakuntala, a central character of Shākuntalam, a well-known Sanskrit play by Kālidāsa, was a simple and most beautiful lady. Her voice was sweet and her manners were sober and graceful. She radiated youth and elegance in cotton garments and flowers for ornaments. She was so gentle and soft-spoken that even birds and animals residing in the forests were drawn to her. Similarly Desdemona is a lady of exceptional physical beauty. Born in a rich family and well brought up, she has all those graces and refinements which capture the heart of men. Even Storms and hidden rocks in the sea are captivated by the beauty of the divine Desdemona. She is a perfect house-wife, obedient to her husband and self-effacing. Her husband mentions her as the gentle Desdemona. She regards Othello as her lord. She has totally surrendered herself to him and has no life of her own. She loves him even when he is harsh and brute to her.

Key Words: Women, a source of inspiration, dedication, elegance and motivation

Introduction:

Desdemona is a true wife. Othello's unkindness may destroy her but it cannot kill her love.

She is embodiment of gentleness. She suffers passively all the indignities and brutalities heaped upon her by her husband. He strikes her in public and she has not a word to say in her defense. Whatsoever charges her husband brings upon her, she accepts all without uttering a single word. She has no personality of her own. She is too helpless, too pathetic, and too weak to be the heroine of a tragedy. It is her passiveness that sends her to her doom. She is innocent like a child. She admits herself that she is a

child to chiding and easily to be corrected. She is not only ignorant of the wickedness of the world but also does not believe that any wickedness exists in the world. Due to her childlike innocence she fails to understand the motives of Iago. She is incapable to resist due to her perfect love for her husband. She has also child like nature. The play depicts Desdemona as a self-effacing, faithful wife and as a bold independent personality. She is murdered, smothered by a pillow in a bed covered in her wedding sheets. Tragically, Desdemona is apparently aware of her imminent death. She asks Emilia to put her wedding sheets

on the bed and asks Emilia to bury her in these sheets. She is guiltless and forgives her husband.

Desdemona is a lady of spirit and intelligence. She is the most direct and honest speaker in the play. In Cyprus, in charge of her own household, Desdemona continues to fulfill her duties. Her marriage has brought her position and happiness so much that she finds it unbearable to think that her husband has turned against her. This numbness lasts until she sees that he actually intends to kill her. She puts up a brave and spirited defense insisting on her innocence.

Like Desdemona, Shakuntala is the sweetest, most graceful, most innocent and the most pathetic of the heroines of Kalidasa. Shakuntala too is very innocent and pure in love with Dushyanta. She is known for her qualities of mind and heart, capacity for love, sincerity, purity, sacrifice, determination and courage. Shakuntalam is Kalidasa's greatest literary masterpiece.

Dushyanta on a gaming expedition arrives at the hermitage of Sage Kanva. The sage Kanva was away and his adopted daughter Shakuntala looked after the distinguished guest's needs. Dushyanta immediately on seeing her, is struck by her beauty and offers to marry her. Shakuntala is also impressed by the sight of the royal dignitary. Shakuntala lays down a condition that the king should promise to hand over the kingdom to the son born to her and Dushyanta agrees. They marry and spend some happy days after which the king returns to the capital. After the king returns, sage Durvasa comes to call on sage Kanva. Kanva was away and Shakuntala was so lost

in her thoughts of king Dushyanta that the sage's words fell on her deaf years. The sage is enraged and always quick to anger, curses her: "May the person about whom you are thinking forget you." Later, he relents and says: "when he sees an object, which he has given you, recognizes it and he will remember you" Six years pass and Dushyanta does not return to meet Shakuntala and her son. The sage Kanva voluntarily decides to send Shakuntala to the palace. When she arrives at Dushyanta's abode, he does not recognize her. He even thinks it improper to eye a damsel who is stranger to him. He could not believe that this woman is his wife. The ring is lost on the way and Shakuntala, overcome with grief after being rejected by Dushyanta, collapses and is then carried away by divine light. After a few days, the ring is found in the stomach of a fish and Dushyanta, upon seeing it, remembers everything. He feels sad that he rejected Shakuntala. Shakuntala is grief-stricken. Then amidst her lament a heavenly voice commands Dushyanta: "He is your son, accept him". The king then accepts him. The boy later comes to be renowned as Bharata. Dushyanta and his son are happily united. Kalidasa weaves a great play basing on Mahabharata theme. The first meeting of Dushyanta and Shakuntala is a lively and colourful sequence of the play.

Conclusion:

Both Desdemona and Shakuntala are unfortunate. They know only a few moments of happiness and then suffer terribly. Both are the sweetest and the most pathetic of the heroines of Shakespeare and Kalidasa, as innocent as Miranda, and as

loving as viola, yet suffering more deeply than Cordelia. They die but their lovely, innocent, graceful, polite and noble nature is remembered. They show less quickness of

intellect and less tendency to reflection than most of Shakespeare's and Kalidasa's other heroines.

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