

WHY SHOULD VYASA AND KALIDASA BRING THEIR SHAKUNTHALAS TOGETHER?

ANAGHA BABU

Abstract: An overview on the relationship between women, environment and their portrayal as cultural ambassadors and potential tools of soft power. A woman, though fond of ornaments, would not pick buds out of affection for you for whom the occasion of the first awakening of your flowers was a festival, that Shakuntala leaves for her husband's house, given permission by all of you.

Introduction: The two Shakuntalas referred to in the title are the ones from Mahabharata and Abhijana Shakunthalam respectively. The former capable of destruction and chaos if she is denied her rights and recognition and the latter calm, composed and willingly reluctant to demand what is rightfully hers at the cost of bringing dishonour to her near and dear ones. Indian classical literature has always tried projecting the association between humans and nature or if to be more precise, between women and nature. Abhijana Shakunthalam of Kalidasa is the most suited accomplishment in this regard. It shows how Shakuntala fostered a deep relationship with the environment. Trees and plants were her siblings. The scene where, Shakuntala is going to her husband's house is very intense and profound. The agony of her departure is also reflected aesthetically in the environment. Trees are shown to be shedding tears in the form of leaves. Shakuntala too feels the same agony in leaving her home and the inmates of the Tapovan. One cannot find a better example than Shakunthala, vis-à-vis the feminine influence on environment and vice versa. The culture of India has always embraced and professed the benign relationship between nature and hominins. When the specification was made towards the bond between women and environment the picture was more profound- images of loving daughter, doting sister, caring mother all melted and moulded into an idol that overtook all other images associated with nature and human race. Conservation is an enormous process as it includes and deals with all the organisms and their relationships with one another. To analyse it better, along with the scientific perception; the understanding of traditional knowledge should also be combined. Swami Vivekananda has summarised this unseen bond brilliantly, 'Love everyone as your own self, because the whole universe is one. In injuring another, I am injuring myself; in loving another, I am loving myself.' He says, 'In the lowest worm, as well as in the highest human being, the same divine nature is present' The native Americans too feel the same for the environment. The speech of the Chief of Seattle is an excellent example for this.

Women ,Nature and Soft Power: Environment has various characteristics found in women. This piecing

together of environment and femininity better called - Eco-feminism connecting feminism with ecology, relates the exploitation of women with that of the environment. The connection of nature and women in ancient India is often described as 'spiritual eco-feminism' where the environment is presented in the feminine gender and termed as sacred and divine. Eco feminism is one of the youngest additions to the family of Political Science. It takes two definite and important stands on the relation between women and nature. One- linked with feminist holiness, with what "cultural" feminism, has vowed on rescuing the association as, a symbol of women's greater compassion towards and the ability to care for nature. Some, assert this using the women's capacity of establishing a biological tie with nature's life-giving processes. Thus the fact that women have for so long been allied with nature gives them a matchless opportunity to outline the relationship for the empowerment of both. Some find the association with nature more allegorical ("Mother" Nature, "mother earth") and hence see it their moral duty to protect it. Secondly, is the regeneration effort infected ideals dangerous to women and to nature, subsequently claiming a "superior" female relationship with nature can only imitate the very masculine instructions it challenges to resist. As Catherine Roach argues in, "Loving Your Mother: On the Woman-Nature Relation," it is ecologically unsound to argue that women or men are "closer to" or "farther from" nature: there is nowhere else to go. When we consider the Indian perspective on environment it is not easy to ignore the fact that most of the environment are symbolised in the feminine gender. The environment is called 'Prakriti', - a feminine term. Natural elements are described as mother, sister, young maiden, and daughter. As women are expected to play various roles in a family, the environment also follows suit. Earth, described as mother, is the originator of living beings. 'Prithivi Sukta' enumerates this ideal. The concept of the motherhood of earth aims at not at region or nation in particular but it has a global call. It clearly states that all are equally responsible to protect and conserve it. Arthashastra points at environmental governance when a need for a post of the

superintendent of forest produce is mentioned. The Matsya Purana states 'One tree is equal to ten sons' The real question is how well are we caring for the Earth? Men and women are to be equal partners in this crime. Over the years the liaison between women and environment has turned to be highly exploitative. The delightful picture that was bright is now dim. . Philosopher Karen J. Warren stated "The challenge to feminists, environmentalists, and environmental ethicists ... is to overcome metaphors and models which feminize nature and naturalize women to the mutual detriment of both." She adds as both- women and nature as victims of domination, should try together and resist it. "Gaia" is the theory, named after an ancient Greek earth goddess that states earth and all of its creatures constitute a living organism, which still creates and influences own atmosphere to suit its needs. The earth, as per Gaia, is capable of maintaining the equilibrium it requires to withstand life, adding that all creatures have acted as a group, if, "to make the global environment favourable for the biosphere". When Gaia is analysed it is nothing much different from human cultural diversity, as, it is a process of adapting and altering to problems of survival in particular environments, thus human multiculturalism is obligatory for species survival. Helen Zweifel in "The Gendered Nature of Biodiversity Conservation," conditions the position played by women, especially, in developing nations in promoting the sustainable use of natural resources. The market economy, which values high production yields over sustainability; and the following migration of men to cities to find work, which increases the value of women's knowledge, also isolates women and burdens them with more commitments towards their rural natural surroundings and the society within. This male migration syndrome has made certain families completely dependent on women for sustenance. Women have taken to agriculture and the lack of alternatives for household provisioning has allowed a temporary economy to develop. Environmental degradation and lack of resources cause terrible misery. Household errands, expected of the women, along with the Herculean task to keep their family flourishing, no matter the teething troubles and technical difficulties. The portrayal of women as the wounded wanting compassionate exterior assistance rawhides that they are principally unarmed troops. As Chicu Lokgariwar points out in Women and Environment Conservation "the villager fighting for water to feed her family, the sparrow protecting her young from a hawk – are primal, blind, intuitive protests". Rather than projecting them as evolved and knowledge oriented agents, it is baseless when women are portrayed as agents needing aid and assistance and primarily as victims of the social order. Women are intelligent enough to analyse and cope

within their environment, to determine the and manage the necessary steps to battle the consequential environmental ruin along with shielding their harmony. Gandhi after identifying the strength of women in social movements and political participation, demanded their presence in the national struggle. It is said that men then brought in Kalidasa's Shakuntala and Sita as the potential role models- the ones who do rebel but meekly. Indian women followed suit willingly, taking charge only when men were put behind bars or under the British restriction. They went picketing liquor shops, promoted swadeshi movement and at times acted as messengers for the revolutionaries. It had to take an Aruna Asif Ali, Kanaklata Baruah, Matangini Hazra, Bhogeshwari Phuknani- and many more to prove the real mettle of women and how influential they can be in shaping relations between nations. The world took the Indian National Movement with a sympathetic wave attached to it due to the women participation and the international pressure kept mounting on Britain to emancipate India from her clutches Vandana Shiva, Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha all have studied and glorified the role of women in production and resource management, though the latter two do not promote the concept of eco feminism. Wood fuel, a major source of cooking fuel is to be collected by women, along with the task of ensuring drinking water for the family. Hence women naturally tend to be more careful and judicious regarding the productivity and regenerative capacity of natural resources. Their concerns on sustainability and managing resources within micro level institutions should be utilised at macro level institutions. Whenever women have campaigned for a cause, it has had immense consequence on the society and livelihood patterns. An occasion when a woman raises her voice for demanding her rights has always ended in the progression of the country. Now, when women campaigns for environmental causes, it has a greater appeal, even resulting in an increased positive attitude and affinity towards a country. Recently when the Prime Minister visited an African nation, he was welcomed and hosted by Solar Mamas- who were trained in using and generating solar power apart from receiving knowledge in traditional craft practices. The compassionate tone of Angela Merkel graciously rejecting further immigrants into her fatherland by personally meeting some of them in a camp, not only proved that women perceive and react differently to issues but also called for a collective European action towards this regard. Nothing can be a better easier soft power model than the environment and biodiversity promoted and defended by women. Wangari Mathai is just one of the many examples. The former Prime Minister of Indira Gandhi received praises for her oratory skills

and the national attitude of India at the 1972 Stockholm Conference and the questions she raised linking poverty and environmental degradation are still very much relevant especially in the backdrop of the recently ended COP 21 Paris Summit. The Stockholm Conference thus gave birth to the idea of global environmental cooperation. Though the end result of all these efforts are yet to be markedly seen, we have indeed come a long way. The recognition received by the women further brought cultures and nations closer, infact, influencing one another. This is why women can be rightfully claimed to be forerunners of cultural diplomacy. Women should be effectively put to use at determining consumption patterns, developing an affinity towards developments at unit level and campaigning for their rights. When environmental issues gets involved, along with conserving and demanding for better treatment of natural resources and the biodiversity, women seldom realise that they are moving a step closer to their empowerment. Empowering women to be cultural ambassadors would definitely enhance the soft power of a nation. The personalities mentioned above stand as authentication for this statement. Within the given social structure, women are discouraged from making any demands for womanly assistances or capabilities. In politics, what is perceived correct and effective is the male dominion synonymous with the talent to perform, to dictate, enact tough decisions and not be abstracted by emotion. The hard power was shown to be the real power gainer, but these women have turned it around. The international scenario has changed a lot with the onset of soft power politics and women have shown themselves to be the most efficient torch bearers of not only soft power but also smart power.

The world will eventually turn to be the Utopia that Thomas Moore had dreamt of if women are allowed to execute their gift of governance.

Conclusion: We find women entering political, economic and social ventures and coming out in flying colours. We need women to enter into and ponder on the various aspects of environment. Involvement of women at local organisational level is gaining momentum. This should be used much effectively and should be untampered with influences of male counterparts on a very frequent scale. As pointed out in the article Empowering Women for Gender Equity by Gil Harper and Debra Roberts, we should form own local power base to make an environmental impact at local level and to interact with environmental policy-making bodies. Shakuntala was the only person who could best understand and interact with the environment at the Tapovan. Had the Shakuntala from Mahabharatha been by her side, she would never had to face the trauma of bidding adieu to the Tapovan. When she leaves, both [the Tapovan and her] has to endure great difficulties. Acceptance of the environment as part of self can awaken the Shakuntala in everyone and then nothing can halt the empowerment of both women and environment. Afterall, Shakuntala was content and happy only at the Tapovan, she had enhanced and prospered as a woman there. But then, not all women are nurtured so to adapt and accommodate both the Shakuntalas. The amalgamation of these two beautiful concepts of compassion and grit can definitely prove to be the silver lining. Educate, empower and emancipate the women for a better society, country and international order. Let Shakuntala not only adore and nurture her Tapovan but also those in the neighbourhood.

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Anagha Babu, Research Scholar, Central University of Kerala, Kasaragod.