

FEMALE PROTAGONISTS IN SHAKESPEARE'S *TWELFTH NIGHT* AND KALIDASA'S *ABHIJNANA SHAKUNTALAM*: AN ECOFEMINIST READING

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Abstract

The undertaken work is an attempt to evaluate the position of women in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1600) with a Western backdrop and Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* (composed in the span of 3rd to 4th cent AD) mirroring an ancient monarchical Indian social milieu, with an ecofeminist approach. The study of both masterpieces has underscored how the characteristics, temperament, roles and duties of woman and Nature philosophically and phenomenally resemble each other. It has equally projected how the identity, status and destiny of woman remain intertwined with those of Nature globally as far as their impoverishment, exploitation, marginalization, abrogation, depletion, commoditization and subjugation are concerned. These pictures not only represent silent mutiny against man's hierarchical injustice and monopoly towards woman and Nature but also emphasize upon the eradication of the same by establishing harmonic, inter-coordinative, cooperative, deferential, consistent and unbiased relationship with the woman-Nature entity essential for the integral betterment of the society.

The cultural heritage of the West and the East dissent from each other vividly but the fundamental perspectives remain the same regarding the eco-antagonistic belief that the prime reason behind women's confined sphere of activity and dependence is rooted in their biological traits, reproductive functions and in a small and feeble body. Man began propounding and justifying theories on the inferiority of women by stating that they are intellectually and otherwise, always inferior. The oriental civilization just like its occidental counterpart also considered disloyalty, fraudulence, jealousy, dearth of proficiency and sanctity as innate feminine flaws. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*) Aristotle defined women as less complete, less courageous, weak and impulsive creatures. He opined that a woman's virtue rests in obeying the master/man. The preponderant universal feminine paradigm is the chaste, patient, self-denying, gentle, generous, selfless prudent, tender, polite, adaptable, modest, elegant and passive female. Archaic philosophy never allowed women to have an existence independent of her husband, household or family. Women had been either worshipped as goddesses or excoriated as a witch and wench by the anthropocentric society, but her voice has been throttled forever to prevent her from speaking out her dread and woe. They have been defined as a constituent that has evolved

from male brains, ribs and dexterity. (Gilbert & Gubar, p.12) Hence they ought to be subordinated. Male-texts have eco-uncongenially discouraged the qualities of being bold, enterprising and assertive in a woman, since these traits have been derogated as demonic blemishes, which distract and distort the male-defined solemn female image. “The patriarchal contrivances allege that the conventional images of the enchanting mythological female characters like Sphinx, Medusa, Circe, Kali, Delilah and Salome are deceitful captivators who artfully reduce and steal male creative energy.” (Gilbert & Gubar, p. 12) Women have confronted constant victimization, criticism and humiliation in diverse manners within the society maneuvered by ecologically hostile patriarchs and their arbitrary perceptions.

Both oriental and occidental societies perceived women as the property of others. The silent suffering, continued goodwill towards the family, dedicated self-sacrifice for the happiness and benefits of the others under all exploitative circumstances were the qualifications of woman working under the banners like motherhood, wifehood, daughterhood and sisterhood. The highly venerated woman is the self-abnegating nurturer who should submissively and philanthropically allow her contribution to get marginalized and eclipsed by the over-inflated sublimity of fabled hierarchy and philosophy inherited from the paternal bequest. Every element of her desired world unavoidably clashes with patriarchal norms and definitions of womanhood. Her rebellious approach or her spirit of defiance against the patriarchal monopoly results into a confrontation that gives her tremendous misery and also places her with other noxious, insane and abnormal entities.

Ecofeminism is the origination of a new awareness of redefining the intertwined status and role of woman and Nature, a phenomenal humanitarian-discovery. “Ecofeminism describes movements and philosophies that link feminism with ecology. The term is believed to have been coined by the French writer, Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book, *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*. Ecofeminism connects the exploitation and domination of women with that of the environment, and argues that there is a connection between women and nature that comes from their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal Western society. Vandana Shiva claims that women have a special connection to the environment through their daily interactions with it that has been ignored. She says that women in subsistence economies who produce "wealth in partnership with nature, have been experts in their own right of holistic and ecological knowledge of nature's processes." However she makes the point that "these alternative modes of knowing, which are oriented to the social benefits and sustenance needs are not recognized by the capitalist reductionist paradigm, because it fails to perceive the interconnectedness of nature, or the connection of women's lives, work and knowledge with the creation of wealth.” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecofeminism>) Ecofeminism is not just a way of analyzing Nature and women together in literature but it extends human excogitation of worldwide community and recommends simultaneously for cultural transcendence by examining the limitations of cultural suppositions about women and Nature/ nonhuman entities. Karen Warren accentuates not only the significant connections between women and non-human natural world but also the fact that one should understand the twin domination of women and Nature. Ecofeminism documents protest/contempt against mindless and callous annihilation of Nature and women strongly.

Shakespeare under the impact of progressive Elizabethan society has endeavoured sincerely to invest his female characters with elegance, intelligence and beauty. But despite his relatively liberal outlook, he remained from dismantling integrally the prejudiced, smothering and sickening concepts surrounding femininity. Kalidasa, the great Indian poet has portrayed an age and society when monarchy and polygamy were prevalent practices. The beautiful

characterizations of the maidens by Kalidasa are unique and diverse, yet the fundamental properties and deficiencies upon which he has drawn the graph of womanhood intersect frequently with in the female images drawn by Shakespeare. Persisting impact of stereotype eco-heinous notions about women is vivid in Kalidasa's masterpieces like *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, and *Kumar Sambhavam*. His orthodox depreciation of women's independence and his repeated stringent comments on women's strict adherence to the principle of chastity are evident in his works. His emphasis upon the virtues of the Indian women as the glory of the ancient race is vividly reflected. Also as a sensitive creator, he projects the deplorable and deteriorating plight of the Indian woman. Both Shakespeare and Kalidasa have restrained themselves to their respective era and social milieu and have given convincing pictures of the status and condition of women, which are also the foci of their plays. There is no historical connection between Shakespeare's and Kalidasa's imaginative creations, yet the ecocidal practices aggravating the predicament of women remain the same ubiquitously. This work focuses upon the assessment of women in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* with an ecofeminist approach.

In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* Viola stays back in Illyria irrespective of multiple inconveniences in accomplishing her mission of searching her brother Sebastian, accidentally isolated from her in a shipwreck. This move reflects her compassionate and harmonic temperament towards others, the essence of eco-sensitiveness. During this period, Viola presents herself as a eunuch (Orsino's page boy named Cesario) in order to veil her feminine identity intentionally for protecting herself from the dread of humiliation and dilapidation in the hands of hypocritical civilization. She adopts from Nature's magnanimous school this camouflaging technique which numerous bio/zoocentric entities devise for protecting themselves from their enemies. "O!...not be delivered ... estate is." (1.2.40-44) (*William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*) "Conceal me ... disguise ... I'll serve this duke.... Thou ... present me as an eunuch to him." (1.2.53-56) Ecocritically, this not only records derision of civilized places as perfect and unassailable place, but also, reveals them as a minacious space thoroughly. Thus the bio-centric elements are more advantaged than inorganic human-innovations. During her service as Duke Orsino's love messenger to Olivia, Viola falls in love with Orsino. Despite her intense maidenly love and liking for Orsino, she restrains her emotions from interfering into her duty. Extracts from her conversation with the Duke, "My father ... daughter" (2.4. 106) "She never told her love, / ... She pin'd... / ...with...melancholy...like Patience... / Smiling at grief... Was not this love...." (2.4.109-114) "I'll do my best / To woo your lady – [Aside] Yet, a barful strife" (1.4.39-40) ecocritically attest her successful struggle against being possessed by envy, which in its utmost becomes ecologically catastrophic. Instead, she sacrifices her identity and submits herself with utmost devotion, responsibility, sincerity, docility and tactfulness to the assigned duty of a messenger carrying tokens and proposals of love for Olivia on behalf of Orsino. Under the burden of anthropocentric commitments, she silently digests all quandaries, but in the process she is also found strangulating her natural feelings and instincts against Nature's principle. However, her benevolence towards others, avoiding conflicting situations for serene co-existence, forbearance, stability, optimism, adaptability, eco-sensibility, consistency, selfless and non-corrupt disposition establish her as an icon of eco-progressiveness. Viola's sense of dutifulness and responsibility illustrates her cognizance of her dependence upon the environment and indebtedness towards her environment. Moreover, Viola's beauty is emblematically associated with Nature's by the Duke in his depiction of her beauty: "...thou...Diana's lip/Is ...rubious...thy small pipe/ Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound, / And all is semblative a

woman's part." (1.4.30-33) Viola being well aware of her biological femininity delivers her best to discourage and dismantle absolutely the advancements of Olivia's inclination towards her (Cesario, Viola in disguise), thus proving her refutation of the anomalous and grotesque factor like lesbianism. Viola's demeanour conforms to eco-amicable ideologies for an eco-friendly existence on a terrain, Viola possesses profound compassion and wisdom with which, she tries to resolve the complex problems of that specific environment in which she stays. Her activities, vigour and versatility phenomenally render her an eco-centric paragon. Viola, an embodiment of virtues, is radically parallel to Nature with its resources. Yet, all her services incessantly remain from being righteously acknowledged, for instance, she is frequently subjected to a series of ignominy, problems, and complications, yet neglected. Failures have been made to impede her course to trivialize her worthiness/abilities. Her helplessness surrounding allegiance to her task cumulated with her overall goodness has been ravaged. Her feelings remain ignored, her right to freedom remains unheard, hence non-existent. Instead, she is translated into a mechanical messenger. Her plight resembles that of the recklessly undermined organic world forcefully converted into processed product/commodity for civilization's materialistic gratification. Thus, her status as a maintenance worker remains intertwined with Nature's, and, whatever satisfies needs or ensures sustenance is usurped and devalued in general anthropocentrically. Ecocritically, Viola's ascending distress and impoverishment is not due to insufficient involution in the process of development but due to societal gender prejudices which victimizes and dwarfs her state to that of desiccated entities. The whole plot has been woven with diplomatic disingenuousness so as to give an impression that Viola's bruises have been mended genially and bounteously. But factually, this demonstration of protecting and compensating Nature and woman is an adulterated eco-antagonistic endeavour of men to conceal their harnessing, authoritative and repugnant attitude towards them. Ecocritically, Viola is a victim of anarchical eco-aversive society trying to establish/justify their indispensability and supremacy by overruling the ecological reality of Nature's indomitability and the strength/power or competence of women alike. Viola's reconciliation with her brother and union with the Duke have materialized only under Nature's strong forces of conservation. She is honoured and remunerated by Nature in the form of destiny. Viola adheres to her constructive roles of nurturer and preserver in spite of being frequently scourged like Nature, thereby proving her kinship with Nature.

Olivia's radiance can be equated with the splendour of Nature. Orsino through the device of marriage desires to colonize and possess Olivia. The following excerpts testify the preceding statement: "Tis beauty... truly blent, whose red and white/ Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on" (1.5.223-225); "Why so O, when mine eyes did see Olive first. Me ... purged ... pestilence. That instant ... hart ... my desires ... pursue me."(1.1.18-23). Duke's passion for Olivia and her beauty, at first sight, along with his restless desire to marry her portrays the intertwined relationship of Olivia and Nature as victims of the patriarchal capitalistic consumerism. Thus all ways have been adopted for promoting and justifying colonization as an ineluctable policy in the name of security and preservation. Olivia's unusual declaration that she will remain veiled like a nun and grieve for seven long years in order to isolate herself from the substantial-world because of her father's and brother's death. But it is soon witnessed that as soon as a handsome young man Viola/Cesario appears before her, she instantly falls in love with him and tries to persuade him to enter into matrimonial bonds, casting aside her mourning. These two successive events indicate that primarily, Olivia is already enduring a situation gestated with insecurity due to the fulminant loss of her father and brother in a terrain haunted with hardships, injustice and constraints against women, and secondarily, due to her intense disinclination

towards Duke Orsino's amative advances. Having been chased by such graveling conditions, she possibly seeks an entrusting sanctuary in Viola disguised as Cesario. Olivia's sovereign proclamation of 'seclusion from the material world in search of tranquility' implies that she confides in Nature's camouflaging aid to avert Orsino's proposition. Her salience of selecting partner independently substantiates the ecological process of pairing through natural selection, thus overthrowing the anthropocentric code of selection. But, when Olivia encounters the reality of mistaken identity, she withdraws and simultaneously consents to marry Sebastian, Viola's twin brother. Helpless Olivia adopts certain non-conventional methods for self-conservation, and consequently she has been misconstrued as a discrepant entity by the anthropocentric society, which derogates Nature's inexplicable ways alike. Moreover, Olivia's placid, discerning, harmonious and skillful household-management ecologically idealizes her. Olivia has sustained her household not with a homogeneous and rigid approach, but with versatility and understanding, thereby confirming that it is not through supremacy and manipulation that we can enjoy the universe but by maintaining an aesthetic distance and by granting freedom to all entities. Hence, Olivia epitomizes the entire class of women who are innately associated with Nature in their adhesion to the morals of conservation, though it leads to their subsequent subjugation. Behind the disguise of his feigned concern for Olivia, Sir Toby possessing a feudal attitude seeks a suitor to her in unsuitable Sir Andrew Aguecheek, with an intention of substantiating his selfish aspirations. Sir Toby's use of Olivia as bait to tempt and puppeteer Aguecheek gets reflected recurrently. Malvolio's motif of bogging Olivia into a nuptial bond to elevate his social status behind the mask of his servitude and adoration towards her defines Olivia as a resource in the hands of Malvolio in the same way as the organic world gets reduced to commercial objects in the hands of progressive civilization. Squandering of Olivia's opinions and sentiments equals man's inordinate undermining the realms of Nature without any sympathy. Olivia's beingness remains confined to that of an organic domain seized as man's proprietary estate. Amidst all these adversities Olivia's candid confession of her love for Cesario, "By maidenhood ... I love thee ... is better." (3.1.147-153) and her non-conformation to Duke's proposal, "Your lord does know my mind; I can not love him/ / He... answer long ago." (1.5.241-247) reflect her path-breaking enterprise to assert her identity and independence. Since Olivia typifies the enlaced fate, agony and identity of woman and Nature, her activities manifest her rebellion against exploitation of women and the non-human others as a single unit, thus equating her with untamable orphic Nature.

Maria's dynamism emblematically identifies her with vibrant and glorious facet of Nature. Her contribution in her own way to shield Olivia from all odds mark her as a protector and in the process, her adjustability and heterogeneity have been attested several times. Some of her endeavours conform to the eco-centric ethics pertaining to functions and responsibilities of women and Nature. Her stand for Olivia infers woman's proceeding towards not only the dismantlement of unwarranted invasion, callous colonization and unjust commoditization of woman but also the substitution of hierarchical subjugation of women by their emancipation and empowerment equally. Maria outwits every male entity around her confidently and elusively. Maria's vigilance gets evinced in her correct judgment of the characters around her, for instance, Malvolio as an opportunist and pseudo-Puritan and Andrew Augecheek as a discrepant and improper match for Olivia. Her opinions and actions demonstrate her courage and candidness. Thus she is an activist-prototype rebutting and dismantling the ignominiously biased perceptions about women as dumb appendages. Her explanations are strong enough to convince people. She endeavours to demolish Malvolio's inexorable attitude towards others by defying his tendency of

manipulating and monopolizing things around. She is well conversant with her environment, her rights, her responsibilities and her abilities. This self-awareness renders her ecologically dauntless, non-subservient, independent and tactful. She has created for herself plenteous space to translate her thoughts into action. She holds herself from being consumed by the most abominable handicaps, which hinder her way to enfranchisement. She emerges as an invincible eco-feminist entity opposed to the stereotype domestic image of woman.

We now turn to the character of legendary Shakuntala of *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, “the loveliest of poetic creations” of Kalidasa. She is the biological daughter of Sage Vishwamitra and Menka, the celestial court dancer. She has been reared and fostered by Sage Kanva and Gautami in their hermitage. Kalidasa has described her natural virgin beauty in its most intoxicating form and it has been contrasted with the artificial and courtly beauty. Besides, she possesses ‘shobha’ (beauty), ‘kanti’ (charm), ‘madhurya’ (delicacy), ‘dipti’ (radiance), ‘dhairya’ (patience) and ‘audarya’ (dignity), the qualities of stereotyped Indian womanhood. Her virtues and magnificence can be equated with Nature’s resourcefulness. Shakuntala’s foster father, Sage Kanva says that ritually she would only feed herself after the plants and the creepers of the hermitage are watered. Though fond of floral decorations, she would not pluck even a flower because of her tender concern for them and she would celebrate the first efflorescence among them as a festival. Thus Shakuntala represents the women, who, besides being indigenous custodians of seed and biodiversity believe with reverence that the essence of seed followed by the entire vegetation is the continuity of life. Her tender care towards the domesticated deer and cattle along with the plants evince that women’s work and knowledge in dairy farming and agriculture uniquely maintains ecological stability, sustainability and productivity. Dushyanta, the representative of the patriarchal capitalistic authoritative domain of the civilization remarks about Shakuntala that she is grown as another fawn among the fawns of the forest. The timid, yet restless fawn portrays the harmony, innocence and charm of the hermitage in the peaceful realms of the forest. Shakuntala is a symbolic representative of the entire scenario. Dushyanta’s description of her immaculate beauty as a flower not yet smelt, a delicate shoot not yet torn with nails, an unpolished diamond, or fresh honey whose sweetness is yet to be tasted, associates her with Nature’s bewitching freshness and sanctity, which, whenever noticed by the materialistic section of the society, unquestionably becomes a prey to brutal consumption. Dushyanta’s such romanticization of Shakuntala’s beauty conceals within it his greedy desire of colonizing and consuming the same. He as a king is hierarchically in charge of protecting the forest and hermitages under his jurisdiction on one hand, and on the other hand, his hunting expedition disrupts the order of the forest, a microcosm of the vast Nature. It is equivalent to an invasion of Shakuntala’s body and soul, which is also disgracefully carried out by the King. Thus his exploitation of both, behind the pretentious act of conservation gets evinced. Dushyanta employs his weapons of impressive personality and wistful gaze as baits to arrest Shakuntala. In a similar manner a hunter entraps innocent animals and birds. Dushyanta’s secret union with her by the rites of Gandharva marriage, not favored by society, is a male-created contractual policy to maneuver woman as his private property. Here, her destiny resembles a segment of the earth fenced and controlled by man. The signet ring embossed with the words ‘Abhijnana Shakuntalam’, put on her finger by the king epitomizes a stamp on the property for recognition. Like Nature, her status gets restricted to that of an object. Dushyanta’s sexual intercourse with Shakuntala not only emblemizes his total colonization and domination over her but also is a process in which the former ploughs the latter to harvest fruits in the form of sexual pleasure and successors to rule the territory or functionaries for the anarchical bureaucracy. Here her condition

again resembles Nature that often undergoes ravaging conversion into industrial product and agricultural yield.

A gradual change in her body due to her pregnancy becomes visible: “her face has its cheeks excessively emaciated, her bosom has lost the firmness of her breasts; her waist is more slender; her shoulders are very much drooping; her complexion is wan.” (Tewari, p. 238) Her plight is similar to that of Nature, which loses luster and nutrients for having been ravenously ransacked. She conceals in her bosom strangulating personal worries and turmoil mixed with dreams of future prospect just like the earth hides in its core the mines of treasure and volcanic lava together. The only error committed by her unmindfully under the ascending pressure of such crucial circumstances is not conforming to her duty of hospitality and reverence towards her guest Maharshi Durvasa who in turn misconceives the situation and irrationally hurls curses upon her. The sage personifies male chauvinism and destructive male entity. His curse symbolizes a weapon that destroys the life of Shakuntala by deactivating the memory of the king about her. The later distress of Shakuntala has been justified as a punishment, for having neglected the duty of maintaining the indigenous characteristic of woman and Nature. Dushyanta’s unhesitating denial of recognizing her, his brutal abrogation and indifference towards her plea, his spiteful insinuations upon her failure to produce the token of evidence, the signet ring and cruel rejection of her, marginalizes her as an abandoned object. She becomes a prey to his irresponsibility, suspicion and indifference. Here again, her position is similar to a piece of land that is deliberately dumped by commercially inclined men after undermining it to the verge of barrenness and then perceiving it as a useless alien to their declared province. The shame that comes by such misbehavior of the king overshadows her unborn child along with her. Shakuntala’s womb is the environment for her infant Sarvadamana (Bharat) who turns out to be brave and radiant. The fact that mother’s health and psyche cardinaly affect the infant’s well being cannot be denied. These infer that her sense of dutifulness and responsibility towards her infant in the womb amazingly makes her stronger, more matured, stable, courageous, adaptable and tolerant despite her bitter confrontation with societal injustice coupled with a series of afflictions. Sanctified seclusion of Sage Maricha’s hermitage where she finds shelter during her ripe periods of pregnancy also plays an important role in protecting her womb from being inflicted by any more tortures and injuries. Similar is the relation of the Nature with its fellow creatures, proposes ecofeminist ideology. Her fortitude and acceptance of all injustice as her misfortune without any protest against her husband Dushyanta, returns her to the traditional characteristics of woman that is, self-annihilation and surrender to the male-built whirlpool of tradition and conservatism. Thus motherhood, propagandized as a great condition of a woman illustrates the intertwined self-effacing position of woman an innate productive and sustenance worker/toiler. What is eulogized, as glory is actually a handicap for their emancipation. Shakuntala’s keenness to take her father’s consent as a part of her moral duty, her foster mother Gautami’s remorse at Shakuntala’s independent decision pertaining to a serious institution like marriage imply that it is the father who has the right to exercise his authority upon his unmarried daughter and decide her future. Sage Kanva’s initiation in sending Shakuntala to her husband’s place when no escort from the palace arrives to impart the honour she is entitled to indicates her position as property, the custody of which gets automatically transferred from her paternal family to the husband after marriage. Shakuntala is treated as a commodity. Dushyanta’s recollection of all the past events surrounding Shakuntala at the sight of the lost ring has been justified as an effect of curse, yet the possibility of viewing a lifeless object (ring) as a reliable and valuable signifier to nullify the authentic version of woman (Shakuntala) candidly reveals the status of

woman in the patriarchal regime. Gautami's humble pleadings before Dushyanta to accept Shakuntala reflects her natural flair of trying to resist and nullify the conflicts in order to preserve Shakuntala's existence. Even Anusuya and Priyamvada had begged mercy for Shakuntala from Durvasa out of the same attitude of conservation. They desperately request him to deactivate the curse because they want to prevent any adversity that would devastate the life of their dear friend and which would be unbearable and unpleasant experiences for them too. Sage Kashyap's advice to Shakuntala at the time of her departure after being reunited with Dushyanta, strictly manifest the doctrines of ideal 'Grihini' (wifehood). Kalidasa has subtly highlighted the remarkable contribution and painstaking sacrifices of Shakuntala as a woman whose participation and endeavours in general are deprived of remuneration and recognition like that of Nature. He has focused upon her mental strength and power which enables her to face all adversities but an important feature related to the reawakening of her consciousness has been neglected. All measures oriented towards her restoration pushes her into more complicated bailiwicks of ascending impoverishment and subjugation instead of emancipation of her in real sense. Nature too undergoes similar crises. Thus in all phases Shakuntala and the eco-domain are both symbolically and materially associated with each other. (Text referred from "Abhijnana Shakuntalam" [The Recognition of Shakuntala] In *Sanskrit Sahitya Sambhar*, 1980, pp 51- 131)

Our adventure into both Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* therefore makes us experience that irrespective of their widely dissimilar socio-historical background, they reflect in common, not only similar perceptions about the set of mannerisms, responsibilities and duties women must conform to, but also how their role, destiny, status and identity are affiliated with Nature in multifarious aspects. Viola and Olivia with the Elizabethan (Western) society as their milieu and Shakuntala belonging to ancient monarchical Indian civilization are interlinked with each other as far as their victimization by the self-centered practices of the patriarchal capitalism is concerned. Duke's illustration of Olivia's magnificence, his admiration of disguised Viola's biological features and Dushyanta's romanticization of Shakuntala's virgin and enchanting beauty enshroud their depletion in man's eco-antagonistic ostentatious art of embellishing them. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* portray Viola, Olivia and Shakuntala respectively as a bundle of conventional feminine virtues and emotions that have been equated with Nature's assets to be undermined and gleaned mindlessly. Anarchical gender-biased hierarchy and bureaucracy on their mission to demonstrate power has dilapidated these women eco-antipathetically from living entities into mere commodities worth conquest and consumption. They have been treated with undue constrictions; hence their multifariousness, which is an integral part of their female rectitude, has been reduced as their limitations and obstacles on their way to liberalization. The concerned masterpieces have also acquainted us with how in these women's positions are commensurate with that of Nature primarily as maintenance workers. Their contribution has been always viewed with indifference since their work is parallel to Nature's regular process which is invariably taken for granted. Thus, particularly Viola's and Shakuntala's quandary symbolically equals/ corresponds to ravaged ecological terrains. Their rehabilitation, for instance, Viola's refurbishment to her brother Sebastian and Duke Orsino, Olivia's betrothal to Sebastian and Shakuntala's reconciliation with Dushyanta conceal man's selfish interests and his destructive instincts of reducing them to sheer objects that need to be delivered/rescued and steered by men. Such compensation indicates eco-parallelism between Viola, Olivia and Shakuntala, and Nature, which is viewed as a resource used for extracting corporal profit in the name of progress and preservation of heritage. Their indigence and distress is not due to their

insufficient involvement in the process of development but due to biased discrimination practiced against them where they have endured all the pain but have been denied the recognition and pleasure. Shakuntala has provisions and facilities, enough for survival, as a boon from Nature amidst which she has grown up; Viola and Olivia are materialistically independent beings within the anthropocentric world of Illyria; yet, Shakuntala experiences desecration just like the naïve non-human entities in the hands of Dushyanta and Viola confronts exploitation as an employee while Olivia's ownership of huge materialistic wealth through natural inheritance becomes the chief cause behind her commoditization. So, mere self-adequacy is not enough for the liberation of women or Nature. Shakespeare's women have received traditional formal education while Shakuntala has been tutored and trained by Nature. But both forms of education fail to contribute to their enfranchisement. Though Shakespeare's works have been largely regulated by prevalent eco-aversive patriarchal whimsies about women, yet we come across his endorsing of eco-feminist principles aspiring for female sovereignty specifically in his characterization of Maria. Maria manifests, reasonably, an elucidated awareness that can specify the function, identity and position of women in an eco-affable manner. Viola, Olivia and Shakuntala miss this cognizance mandatory for the emancipation of women. Though Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* is not equipped with such a figure like Maria, yet in his vivid description of Shakuntala's virtues and distress we find an element of sympathy for women in him. We also find in both the dramatists, an inclination to protest against injustice done to women and Nature as one body. Both works try to suggest that women should be adored as sacred grooves. A man's domination over Nature is related to his subordination of women. A reintegrated, reciprocal non-exploitative communication with women must be established without a change in their relationship with Nature. It advocates a resolution to work for their twin upliftment, welfare and conservation instead of destroying them for the sake of self-centered profit.

In both the plays Nature's vigour and amplitude have been recurrently referred to illustrate feminine beauty. The eventual pining of a woman's temporal youth and beauty has been associated with that of a rose blossom under the effect of time and nature's law according to which everything mortal has to wither and die in due course to maintain the balance in the ecosystem; woman's garments has been addressed as 'weeds of women'. Furthermore, several traits of animals and birds have been anthropocentrically paralleled with human-discrepancies and frailties, for example, Malvolio's vanity and arbitrariness are related with the biological characteristics and roles of naïve non-human creatures: "woodcock near the gin" (2.5.77), "turkey-cock" with "advanc'd plumes", "ass", "dog". Such comparisons witness frequent distortion of the bio/zoo-centric world in man's biased paralleling it with the repugnant images of the materialistic civilization. Thus, all human weaknesses and limitations have been unfairly associated with images of Nature and women alike. Thus woman and Nature hold twin status in the opinion of biased male-dominated civilization as far as vulnerability is concerned. Ecocritically, mere apprehension of losing flimsy power and male chauvinism renders already authoritarian mind more ominous, thereby obliterating and entombing the organic and spiritual wisdom of women and Nature alike under the rubble of somatic philosophy.

The ecofeminist analysis of both the plays underlines how woman as an embodiment of virtues is emblematically similar to copious Nature susceptible/open to all ecocidal activities conducted by man in the name of progress and culture. Eco-centrally, they highlight and protest against hostile and deplorable colonization upon woman. The intertwined position of women and Nature as productive and working machines solely and fundamentally has been illustrated here. The eco-feminist study of the undertaken plays has shown how congenial

munificence, fertility and regenerative capacity turn out to be the most atrocious hindrances on the way to woman's emancipation. Adaptability and flexibility, which are inherent components of the female personae, have been trivialized as their shortcomings and excuses hiding their helplessness. This ecocritical analysis also discloses how callously the rebellious/ unyielding demeanour of woman and hostile eco/biosphere are attempted to be yoked and sterilized alike many a time according to the conveniences of the opportunistic autocrats of human civilization. The plays ecologically manifest and oppose as well strongly the following anthropocentric practices: the totalitarian exploitation, marginalization, derogation and oppression of woman; callous degradation of woman and Nature/earth from their natural status of living entities to that of commercial goods to be possessed and consumed despite their sacred significance and generous serviceability towards the society; ascending manipulations, hypocrisy and injustice practiced against them without any fellow-feeling for their replenishment or conservation. Thus both the plays eco-critically voice for extirpating such anthropocentric tyrannous acts and inequity against woman and propose eco-rational evaluation of their contributive endeavours, which are equally significant as those of men, and at the same time resist against the nullification of this fact.

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