

## Beyond Anthropocentric Interests: Moving towards Ecological Sustainability in Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* through Deep Ecology, Biocentric equality and Ecotopia

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### Abstract

*This paper employs Arne Naess' deep ecology paradigm to explore the profound ecological consciousness present in Kalidasa's Shakuntala. The enchanted world of ashram surrounded by the beauty of trees and plants, emerges as a manifestation of deep ecological principles. Shakuntala's reverent interactions with each element of her surroundings encapsulate the essence of deep ecology, which critiques anthropocentric ideologies by asserting the intrinsic value and interconnectedness of all living beings, irrespective of their utility to humans. This is exemplified when King Dushyanta is restrained by the hermits from hunting deer for sport, a clear denouncement of recreational exploitation and a reinforcement of the principle that all life forms possess inherent worth. Shakuntala's deep connection with the natural world, as demonstrated by her treatment of trees as her sisters, reinforces the biocentric equality championed by Naess, which demands moral consideration for all organisms beyond human interests. Naess' advocacy for decentralization and localization is mirrored in the play's depiction of the ashram, where a smaller, more ecologically attuned community exists harmoniously within its ecosystem. This aligns with the concept of ecotopia, which reimagines societal structures to prioritize ecological sustainability and resilience. This research posits that the ecological consciousness in Shakuntala amplifies the principles of deep ecology, advocating for a fundamental shift towards a peaceful and sustainable coexistence with the Earth's ecosystems. Shakuntala has an enduring relevance in contemporary ecological discourse, inviting a re-evaluation of our relationship with the natural world.*

**Keywords:** Deep ecology, anthropocentrism, biocentric equality, ecotopia

### Introduction

Kalidasa is an esteemed poet and writer from ancient India recognized for his intimate connection with nature and his unique ability to depict nature's splendour in his works. His writings, including *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, *Raghuvamsa*, and *Meghaduta*, eloquently demonstrate the relationship between humans and the natural world, with an emphasis on environmental balance. Kalidasa's lyrical talent extends to his depictions of serene hermitages, lovely gardens, stately castles, and nature's vivid life, which includes singing birds, buzzing bees, and musical cuckoos. Kalidasa's literary brilliance and essential contributions to environmental poetry have solidified his legacy making his works a source of motivation for appreciating and protecting nature's holiness.

*Shakuntala* is an acclaimed work of Kalidasa that depicts a deep and nuanced link between individuals and their surroundings. The plot centers around Shakuntala, the epitome of righteousness who is inextricably linked to nature. Nature acts as a backdrop as well as a

character in the play, emphasizing the necessity of environmental conservation. The story portrays how love emerges from the natural world. In the hermitage, King Dushyanta meets Shakuntala, the sage's daughter, and their mutual passion led to a secret marriage and Pregnancy. Shakuntala, however, is cursed, and nature's intervention symbolized by the sight of a signet ring eliminates the spell. As their reunion is disturbed, the story emphasizes the frailty of their relationship. Kalidasa's work depicts a loving interaction between mankind and animals, advocating for the preservation of life and environmental conservation. The author promotes calm hermitages as tranquil havens, emphasizing the critical requirement for balanced collaboration with nature. Shakuntala is a timeless tribute to the inextricable bond that exists between humans and their natural environment, emphasizing the need for ecological consciousness and harmony.

Ecocriticism is a discipline of literary studies that investigates the interaction between humans and the natural world. It focuses on how environmental problems, cultural issues relating to the environment, and attitudes toward nature are represented and analysed in literature. One of the fundamental goals of ecocriticism is to investigate how humans interact with and respond to nature and ecological aspects in society. Due to the increased emphasis on environmental deterioration and expanding technology, this form of criticism has received a lot of attention in recent years. Consequently, it is a distinct and original method of analyzing and interpreting literary works that add new aspects to the area of literary and theoretical studies.

Deep ecology, which is founded on Naess' philosophical views, provides a distinctive perspective on the portrayal of both humans and nature in *Shakuntala*. The play, set in magnificent forest habitat, provides an avenue to delve deeply into its ecological concerns, mirroring Naess's demand for a stronger relationship with nature. As *Shakuntala* progresses, it serves as a narrative canvas for demonstrating the influence of human acts on the environment, forcing a reconsideration of the anthropocentric aspirations that seek to control nature.

Arne Naess emphasized the importance of a fundamental reorientation of human engagement with the environment in deep ecology. Deep ecology is a spiritual movement that emphasizes the value of nonhuman existence and relationships between humans and the natural world. It underscores the significance of ecological integrity to provide a comprehensive perspective to foster peace. Naess created this strategy in opposition to the shallow environmentalism that relies on human anthropocentrism to control the environment for selfish reasons. The fundamental tenets of Naess' deep ecology place an emphasis on the interdependence and interaction of people and the natural world. The diversity and integrity of ecosystems must be protected and preserved leading to a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world.

From deep ecology's standpoint, the interdependence of all living organisms erases traditional barriers between the self and the other, giving birth to the notion of an ecological self. The ecological self, according to Naess, is the notion that people are a vital component of the natural environment, contributing to its unity rather than existing in isolation from it. "The self is expanded and extended to include the biosphere or all of nature, and the human being becomes a link in the great chain of being" (Naess 1989, 62). The ecological self is characterized by an understanding of how one's participation in the natural environment contributes to the creation of a whole entity of living things and fosters a strong sense of connectedness and ecological identity.

The core principle of Naess's deep ecology is biocentric equality allowing all living beings to reach their full potential. "Biocentric equality means that all living beings have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization" (Naess 1989, 68). It is morally right to take into account the happiness and flourishing of all life on earth, whether it be human or nonhuman. Recognizing and fostering the link with other living and non-living things is essential in the quest for self-realization. Naess defines self-realization as the process of "developing one's own abilities, talents, and potentialities as fully as possible in harmony with the entire biosphere" (Naess, 2008, 78). Deep ecology criticizes contemporary industrial lifestyles, which are the main contributors to environmental damage and degradation, which in turn undermines human well-being. Naess contends that in order to protect natural life and foster a love of nature, a reaction against consumerism and materialism is required.

In *Shakuntala*, Kalidasa pictures biocentric equality that culminates in ecotopia: "Anusuya. Oh, Shakuntala! Here is the jasmine-vine that you named Light of the Grove. She has chosen the mango-tree as her husband.... The jasmine shows her youth in her fresh flowers, and the mango-tree shows his strength in his ripening fruit" (Kalidasa 10). *Shakuntala* cherishes a strengthened human-nature relationship to promote a healthy ecosystem.

## Review of Literature

Swetlana Nasrawi Schmidt's thesis, "Deep Ecology and Self-Realization in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," argues for an ecocritical reading of Shakespeare's work, emphasising the need to rethink human connections with the natural world through the lens of deep ecology. Schmidt claims that deep ecology involves a fundamental transformation in our self-perception, urging us to perceive ourselves not as superior creatures, but as vital members of the Earth's intricate ecological systems "Deep ecology requires a shift in how we identify with the land as part of its many integrated, ecological systems. Simply put, deep ecology is radical because it requires us to develop a wider sense of self as part of the earth's ecosystem rather than as a superior species. It requires strong identification with nonhuman living beings" (Schmidt 14). She emphasises that deep ecology's radical nature stems from its desire for a deeper identification with nonhuman life forms, encouraging a rethinking of human self-concept concerning the larger biosphere. This viewpoint is consistent with the notion that genuine self-realization requires recognising our interdependence with the natural world rather than maintaining an anthropocentric worldview. Schmidt's argument emphasises the transformational power of deep ecology in literature, arguing that Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may be taken as a call for greater ecological awareness and harmony, reflecting a more profound knowledge of our role in the Earth's ecosystem.

In the article, "Naess's Deep Ecology: Implications for the Human Prospect and Challenges for the Future," Harold Glasser explores Arne Naess' deep ecology philosophy and its underlying principles of connectivity and interdependence among all forms of life. Glasser emphasises that deep ecology is fundamentally a holistic philosophy of life that encourages a broad vision of reason, "at its most basic level, deep ecology is an outline of a philosophy of life, which draws on an expansive conception of rationality to support and develop our capacities to identify with all living beings. It calls for individuals to embrace wide-identifying ultimate norms...—, —ecologically inspired total

views or ecosophies” (Glasser 60) urging humans to develop genuine empathy for all sentient species. This philosophy advocates for a change towards wide-identifying ultimate norms, often known as ecosophies, which are environmentally inspired worldviews that promote a comprehensive understanding of human connections with nature. Deep ecology encourages people to break free from anthropocentric standards and embrace a more integrated way of life by pushing for a greater identification with the environment. Glasser's discussion emphasises the transformational power of deep ecology to modify human consciousness and behaviour, encouraging a rethinking of our role within the ecological system and emphasising the critical need for a more inclusive and harmonious interaction with the natural world.

In "Romantic Sublime in Kalidas' Works: An Ecocritical Approach to the Study of Abhijnanashakuntalam," Chandra Shekhar Dubey examines the Romantic sublime as it appears in Kalidasa's writings, with an emphasis on Abhijnanashakuntalam. According to Dubey, “Kalidasa seeks sublime in nature aesthetically and romantically by locating Sakuntala in the lap of nature, and her kinship with the flora and fauna” (Dubey 148), Kalidasa examines the sublime through a romantic and aesthetic perspective by situating Sakuntala in the natural world, highlighting her strong connection to flora and fauna. This perspective emphasises how Kalidasa aims to elicit a sense of the sublime not through enormous or overwhelming natural events, but through an intimate and harmonious interaction between the protagonist and her natural environment. Dubey's research highlights how the Romantic sublime in Kalidasa's work reflects a strong relationship with nature, emphasising that Sakuntala's integration into the natural environment enhances both her character and the narrative's thematic profundity. This method sheds light on how Kalidasa's representation of nature supports a sublime experience that combines human emotions with the beauty and complexity of the natural world, helping to broaden our knowledge of ecocritical issues in classical literature.

In her article, "Images of Women in Abhijnanashakuntalam as Role Model for Women Empowerment," Shyama Khanal investigates the portrayal of women in Kalidasa's play, focusing on their artistic representation and sociological standing. “Shakuntala is not the suffering victim rather she overcomes challenging circumstances empowered within her strength...who is proud of her self-identity and patiently waiting for a recognition of her virtues” (Khanal 5). Khanal disrupts traditional perceptions by portraying Shakuntala as an empowered person who navigates and overcomes hardship through her inherent strength. According to Khanal, Shakuntala exhibits a proud self-identity and is patient while waiting for her qualities to be recognized, making her a role model for women's emancipation. This research emphasises Kalidasa's portrayal of Shakuntala, which displays a sophisticated knowledge of female resilience and agency and provides insights into how the character's power and self-worth are important to her narrative. Khanal's research provides a better understanding of the feminist components of classical literature by demonstrating how Shakuntala's empowered position opposes established gender norms and pushes for a more progressive perspective of women's capacities and self-assertion.

### **Methods and Methodology**

This research deploys Arne Naess' Deep Ecology that projects biocentric equality culminating in ecotopia in the context of *Shakuntala's*. The primary method is close textual analysis combined with theoretical engagement, cultural contextualization, and an

interdisciplinary approach to illuminate the ecological components infused in *Shakuntala* through the lens of Arne Naess' deep ecology.

### Data Analysis

The play *Shakuntala* explores the intricate interaction between mankind and the natural environment, as well as the implications of ecological changes. In *Shakuntala*, the chief character, Shakuntala, embraces deep ecological principles and lives in a feeling of peace with the forest and its inhabitants, expressing deep ecology's belief in the interconnectedness of all living species. The play projects nature as a source of spiritual enlightenment, seeking knowledge and calm in nature. However, Shakuntala's tragic curse serves as a warning of the environmental effect on human actions.

In *Shakuntala*, Kalidasa promotes a style of living that allows man to reach the most harmonious relationship with his environment or surroundings. The play begins with the following supplication for the audience: "Eight forms has Shiva, Lord of all and king; And these are water, first created thing; And fire, which speeds the sacrifice begun... The earth, wherein all seeds of life are found; And air, the breath of life: may draw near, Revealed in these, and bless those gathered" (Kalidasa 3). Water, fire, ether, moon, sun, earth, and air are invoked, referenced in this invocation, representing the globe, we live on the cosmic and universal energies surrounding it. The priest, arguably the most intelligent member of the race, is also among them. Furthermore, the earth contains all of life's diverse forms and expressions. All of these elements are eight manifestations of one deity, Shiva, which means good. It is a complete description of deep ecology. If the sun and the moon are interpreted with some latitude, as representing the many stars, planets, and interstellar spaces, creates a holistic view of deep ecology. These eight lines effectively encapsulate the underlying premise of deep ecology. Because they are forms of the same entity, they are naturally interwoven and related rather than mechanically put together. The issue of hostility or disparities between them does not emerge. There are no conflicts, and they operate in complete harmony. It is only by their coexistence and cooperation that universal well-being can be ensured.

Naess emphasizes the connection between individuals and nature, as well as the significance of realizing the fundamental interdependence between all living beings. He contends that seeing ourselves in others and others in us fosters a feeling of togetherness and shared experience with the world around us. It promotes the idea that individual development is inextricably linked to the development of others, as the self is expanded to reach beyond his own self for development. Naess stresses, "We increasingly see ourselves in others, and others in ourselves. The self is extended and deepened as a natural process of the realization of its potentialities in others" (Naess 59). The protagonist in *Shakuntala* extends herself to realize the natural world within herself. Nature is not used here as a setting or background, or to add local colour. Those who see nature as peripheral have clearly been bewildered by their acquaintance with other types of writing.

The relevance of fauna and flora as crucial participants in *Shakuntala*'s narrative is emphasised by Kalidasa. Even before the king and charioteer arrive, the dramatist has the director and actress recite words to calm the audience and help them connect with nature. The director celebrates the simple joys of life, such as jumping into the river on a hot summer day, breathing in the wind's floral scent, taking a nap in the shade, and enjoying the beauty of the twilight hours. The latter (actor) introduces the floral theme. Maidens are said to carefully pick the lovely siris-

blossoms, which are rich in pollen, to decorate their hair. Clearly, Kalidasa organizes everything in order to highlight what he deems their most appealing feature—their spontaneous oneness with existence at its most receptive to, “First friend: It seems to me, dear, that Father Kanva cares more for the hermitage trees than he does for you. You are delicate as a jasmine blossom, yet he tells you to fill the trenches about the trees. Shakuntala: Oh, it is not Father's bidding so much. I feel like a real sister to them” (Kalidasa 8). In *Shakuntala*, King

Dushyanta's character represents man's dominion over nature since he wishes to control nature. He hunts animals for leisure and regards it as a sport; such acts demonstrate a blatant disrespect for the fundamental value of all living creatures. This type of behavior contradicts the principles of deep ecology, according to Naess, and is immoral and unsustainable. Shakuntala, on the other hand, has a close relationship with nature. She represents humanity's interconnectedness with the natural environment, she says: "Shakuntala. (looking ahead). Oh, girls, that mango tree is trying to tell me something with his branches that move in the wind like fingers." (Kalidasa 9) Shakuntala connects and talks with plants and animals while living in a forest hermitage. According to Naess, "the well-being and flourishing of nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves" (Naess, 22). Shakuntala is the embodiment of deep ecology ideas; she recognizes the intrinsic worth of nonhumans and appreciates the forest and its inhabitants. Although King Dushyanta first appeared to be completely estranged from the natural world, his interaction with Shakuntala awakens his ecological consciousness. His experience with Shakuntala enabled him to gain a greater awareness of the natural world, develop respect for nature, and recognize the intrinsic value of all life forms. Following the lifting of the curse, his sorrow for prior actions and recognition of the value of living in peace with the environment are revealed. His withdrawal from the spring celebration demonstrates a shift in his priorities towards an ecologically conscious attitude, emphasizing King Dushyanta's newfound ecological consciousness.

The play, *Shakuntala*, depicts the interconnectedness of humanity and the natural world using breathtaking scenery as the play's backdrop. The play demonstrates the profound effect of nature on King Dushyanta, which compliments the portrayal of great regard for nature throughout the entire play. He is captivated by the natural beauty around Shakuntala and her treatment of flora and fauna. He is enamoured with Shakuntala as she stands in a perfect idyll “King. Her arms are tender shoots; her lips are tender and warm; bewitching youth begins to flower in beauty on her form.”(Kalidasa 9-10). The play's combination of human and natural elements emphasizes the fragile balance between human impulses and environmental equilibrium. *Shakuntala* emphasizes the inherent connection between humans and the environment, which interconnects with deep ecology ideals.

Deep ecology rejects anthropocentrism and prioritizes non-hierarchical ecological consciousness. Deep ecology defines the notion of self, nature, and union. “The self is extended and deepened as a natural process of the realization of its potentialities in others” (Naess 59). Realizing one in all and all in one becomes desirable. It also aids in the development of the habit of remaining environmentally sensitive. The concept of honor for both human self and nature is manifested through fusion - the process of merging two or more things into a single entity. It stresses the importance of combining the human ego with the biological completeness of nature in order to achieve the idea of deep ecology. In the play, the complex web of relationships between humans and the biosphere highlights their mutual dependence. This fusion helps to emphasize the synthesis of the two entities.

The forest undergoes a massive metamorphosis, symbolizing Shakuntala's inner turmoil, followed by the sage's curse. Trees began to drop their leaves, flowers began to wilt and wither, and birds stopped singing their sweet songs. They sadly bid farewell to Shakuntala, "The trees are answering your prayer/In cooing cuckoo-song/Bidding Shakuntala farewell, their sister for so long" (Kalidasa 46) Shakuntala was their sister, but she was raised by birds (Shakuntas), which gave her the name. This striking relationship between Shakuntala's emotional condition and the shifting forest emphasizes the fundamental tie between humans and their surroundings.

*Shakuntala* implies that the well-being of the natural world is inextricably tied to humans' emotional and spiritual well-being. The allusions to the non-human world converge in the most poignant scene of the goodbye. There are so many loved ones gathered here, and time is running short. Everyone there wishes to be the center of her attention. How committed this girl must be to the creeper, the doe, and the fawn to be so concerned about them that her two closest friends got sad, and screamed out in sobs, "But who will care for poor us...Shakuntala: (approaches the vine and embraces it.) Vine sister, embrace. me too with your arms, these branches. Father, you must care for her as you did for me.... Kanva: I will give the vine a lover true, This handsome mango tree"(Kalidasa 46).

*Shakuntala* examines the manner in which other entities, other than humans, think and make decisions. It also challenges the notion that humans are more significant than other beings and dives into the intricate link between awareness and the environment. The play provides a new viewpoint on agency and self-awareness within a larger ecological and philosophical setting. In the play, for example, a bee approaches Shakuntala to sting her and then flies away "Clown; She seems frightened...here is a bold bad bee. He steals honey so he flies to her lotus-face. King: sting that lip, O bee, with cruel power\ And you shall be imprisoned in a flower"(pg 73). This instance represents non-humans' ability to respond to human acts since it is depicted as an intentional act of revenge by the natural world. It implies that all living things have the potential ability and agency to affect humans if necessary. This viewpoint corresponds with the profound ecological potential of the ecocentric worldview, in which Naess fights for and recognizes the fundamental worth of all living beings.

Prophecies and curses play an important role in the plot throughout the play, *Shakuntala*. These supernatural components might be viewed as warnings concerning the environmental implications of human behavior. When Durvasa curses Shakuntala for her inattention to the entrance of the sage, it serves as a cautionary tale on the need to respect and harmonising with the natural world. The relational perspective of deep ecology reminds us that our activities have far-reaching consequences on the interwoven web of life. Durvasa, the sage in Hindu mythology renowned for his fiery temperament, presents a fascinating counterpoint to the play, Shakuntala's ecological concern. Durvasa's conduct contradicts his authority; despite his vast knowledge and power, his acts and behavior demonstrate a lack of empathy and disrespect for humanity's interdependence with the natural world. Durvasa plays an important part in the play when he interrupts the hermitage's tranquillity by cursing Shakuntala. When Shakuntala fails to give hospitality and attention upon his arrival, his irritation and fury set off the curse. Durvasa invokes the curse rashly without understanding the ramifications for both Shakuntala and her surroundings, resulting in the separation of the king and Shakuntala. The curse upsets the natural order by breaking Shakuntala's connection to the natural world; it creates a schism between

Shakuntala's peaceful relationship with nature. Shakuntala's inner struggle is mirrored in the natural surroundings of the hermitage, and the entire forest mourns her loss.

The play, *Shakuntala* emphasizes the need to recognize the implications of human activities on the ecosystem by depicting the character of Durvasa as a figure deficient in ecological consciousness. It represents the interconnection of humanity and nature, as well as the repercussions of ignoring this interdependence and the importance of the environment. Durvasa serves as a cautionary illustration of the potential harm that can result from a lack of empathy and awareness of how humans and the environment are intertwined. The play encourages the audience to recognize the need to maintain a delicate balance between the human and natural worlds, as well as the importance of empathy and respect for peaceful cooperation in order to prevent unexpected consequences for the environment.

Deep ecology advocates a nonviolent approach to all living organisms; "From Gandhi (as well as Spinoza), Naess reinforced his intuitions about the equal right of all species to flourish on the planet (eco-centric egalitarianism) together with the eastern doctrine of ahimsa. Naess likes to tell the story about Gandhi refusing to let people at the ashram to kill poisonous snakes or other creatures" (Naess 60). Deep ecologists emphasize an enlightened manner of being in nature, of being a part of it. When Shakuntala is abandoned pregnant and ostracized by her beloved Dushyanta, Shakuntala addresses a comparable method of the protagonist presenting the inner path of ahimsa ---- an approach of nonviolence.

Kalidasa's play *Shakuntala* delves deeply into the concept of ahimsa, which implies nonviolence, from an ecological perspective. Ahimsa is a basic principle of deep ecology, which emphasizes the connection and intrinsic value of all living organisms and ecosystems. Respect for all living forms, not just humans, is an important part of deep ecology. Shakuntala and the hermitage community practice ahimsa in *Shakuntala*, treating all animals and plants with compassion and respect: "Charioteer; Your Majesty, here are two hermits, come to save the deer at the moment when your arrow was about to fall. King; stop the chariot. Hermit: O King this deer belongs to the hermitage. Why should his tender form expire,/ As blossom perish in the fire?" (Kalidasa 6). This is an example of profound principles in action, in which nature is appreciated for its own sake, independent of its utility to humans.

Ahimsa in *Shakuntala* goes beyond avoiding physical harm to living in harmony with nature. The hermitage signifies a sustainable style of existence in which humans live in harmony with nature. This is consistent with deep ecology's emphasis on living in ecological balance and considering individuals as a part of nature rather than apart from it. Deep ecology emphasizes the interdependence of all living forms and ecosystems. In *Shakuntala*, the characters' actions reflect this connection since their well-being is related to the environment: "Anusuya. Oh Shakuntala, here is the jasmine-vine that you named as the Light of the Grove. Shakuntala... The jasmine shows her youth in her fresh flowers, and the mango tree shows his strength in ripening fruit" (Kalidasa 10). The play emphasizes that causing harm to nature ultimately causes injury to oneself, confirming the play's deep ecological perspective.

Ahimsa is an ethical principle in *Shakuntala* that underscores our duty to all life forms and the environment. Similarly, deep ecology calls for a transformation in human values and behaviors that prioritize ecological sustainability and the well-being of the earth. In the ecological network, animals are thought to be our closest relatives. However, human treatment of them is frequently detrimental and exploitative, leading to the extinction of numerous species "Every



being, whether human, animal or vegetable, has an equal right to live and to blossom”(Naess 1989, 164-65). Those of us who are concerned about suitable animal care and wildlife preservation may find *Shakuntala* fascinating, as it emphasizes the necessity of understanding and compassion for animals, as well as their relationship to the human mind. While Kalidasa's work is based on the epic Mahabharata, he omits the gruesome details of Dushyant and his army slaughtering thousands of wild creatures before approaching Kanva's ashram. The king's willingness to let a hunted deer go reflects his genuine nature. It is impossible not to feel love and compassion for the deer when observing its every movement: “The path he takes is strewed/ With blades of grass half-chewed/ From jaws wide with the stress/ Of fevered weariness. He leaps so often and so high, / He does not seem to run, but fly” (Kalidasa 5).

The play *Shakuntala* emphasizes humanity's profound connection and compassion for their natural environment. Kalidasa's ecological worldview encompasses heavenly entities such as the sun and moon and animals and plants. *Shakuntala*'s connection to her surroundings is unwavering since she has adopted it as her own. When she bids her goodbyes, she requests Kanva to notify her of the safe delivery of a pregnant doe. Even as she walks away, a deer attempts to stop her by tugging at her garment, which *Shakuntala* has always loved “It is the fawn whose lips, when torn/ By Kusha-grass, you soothed with oil/ The Fawn who gladly nibbled corn.” (Kalidasa 47). *Shakuntala* nurtured the fawn after his mother died, and she leaves him in Kanva's care, bidding farewell to all living beings with whom she had a profound link. *Shakuntala*'s departure is mourned by the animals and plants, with the feeding doe dropping her grass, as *Shakuntala* walks, plants cling to her and drop leaves like tears; the pea-hen pauses her dance.

Arne Naess' concept of a relational, total-field image emphasises the interconnection of organisms in the biosphere. The protagonist of the play *Shakuntala* is eternally linked to her forest home and its inhabitants, establishing her identity beyond human ties: “The deep ecology movement rejects the human-in-environment image in favor the relational, total-field image: organisms as knots in the biospherical net” (Naess 95-100). *Shakuntala*'s return to the forest might be seen as a moral commitment to safeguard and preserve the ecosystem, balancing human aspirations with the natural world's ecological demand. We have an ethical obligation to protect the environment for future generations. The primary conflict of the play *Shakuntala* is between *Shakuntala*'s responsibility as King Dushyanta's bride and her love for him, illustrating the tension between human desires and natural world demands. Her departure from the forest upsets its balance, but her return represents her awareness of her responsibility to both her spouse and her natural environment. Deep ecology reminds us of our responsibilities to ecological interactions, not just human ones, to ensure the survival of life.

### Conclusion

In Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, the exploration of deep ecology ideals is vividly depicted through its rich portrayal of flora and fauna. The play reflects deep ecology's core principle of recognizing the inherent worth of all living species, exemplified in *Shakuntala*'s reverent treatment of other creatures. She bestows distinct names upon plants and trees, addressing them with reverence. King Dushyanta's journey toward self-realization unfolds amidst his natural surroundings, gradually awakening him to their intrinsic significance. Initially indulging in hunting for sport, Dushyanta's encounter with *Shakuntala* amidst the tranquil embrace of nature prompts a profound transformation. By the play's conclusion, he becomes acutely attuned to the natural environment.

Central to deep ecology is the concept of biocentric equality, asserting that all life possesses inherent value regardless of its utility to humans. This principle finds embodiment in the ashram depicted in *Shakuntala*, where all species are accorded equal respect.

When Dushyanta attempts to hunt a deer, the hermits of the ashram intervene, prohibiting him from harming the creature, as it belongs to the sacred sanctuary where no harm may befall any animal. *Shakuntala* showcases a significant theme of environmental responsibility, a desire for peaceful cohabitation between humans and nature, and a strive for equality among all living species. This study emphasizes the necessity of developing a profound ecological perspective and fostering biocentric equality to build a more sustainable and correlated society.

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