**Paper- CC13**

**Teacher- Yasmin Chaudhuri**

**Topic-What elements of Indian womanhood do you find in Shakuntala's character**

Shakuntala is an immortal play which is considered as the greatest work of Kalidasa, a great poet and dramatist of ancient India.The play narrates the love story of a beautiful girl named Shakuntala is the heroine of the play . She was the daughter of the sage Viswamitra and the the heavenly numph 'Menaka'.But as she was abandoned by her parents in a forest, She was fed by birds for sometime after which she was brought up by Kanwa as his daughter.

Due to her close association with the hermitage environment and with the men leading ascetic lives, She too had imbibed the spirit of that life.As she was the daughter of Menaka,She had inherited heavenly beauty from her mother. She was a youthful maiden with full development of her limbs .There was nothing artificial in her beauty ;it was essential nature. Her heart too, was equally natural and beautiful.

**CHARACTER OF SHAKUNTALA**

Shakuntala stands for all that is beautiful in Indian womanhood . She would risk her honour as a woman for the love of man,and yet she would not take one harsh word that goes against her dignity from that man. She has the softness of the softest flower and yet she is as fierce as fire itself . She is strength that knows how to bend . She is the courage to trust. She is silence that knows how to be eloquent when the need arises.

Womenhood Shakuntala

Shakuntala

Shakuntala is the gracious ashram hostess who receives the honoured visitor Dushyanta who has just entered sage Kanwa's hermitage. King Dushyanta was the on a hunting trip and had reached the banks of the Malini where numerous hermitage were situated . The most famous among them was that of sage Kanwa and it was to pay his respect to Kanwa that Dushyanta had gone to the hermitage.

Dushyanta is surprised to see the beautiful young maiden in the hermitage . Her beauty takes his breath away. Desire for her is instantly born in him. On inquiry , he comes to know that Shakuntala is the adopted daughter of sage Kanwa who is away from the hermitage. Shakuntala and Dushyanta fall in love with each other. Dushyanta asks her to marry him by the 'gandharva' ceremony , a from of marriage by mutual consent, without waiting for the approval of parents and elders, without priests and rituals. The wedding is consummated immediately in the presence of only the friends of Shakuntala. Without waiting for the return of Kanwa, Dushyanta decides to depart immediately , telling Shakuntala that his men would soon come to escort her to his palace.

Shakuntala waits for Dushyanta's people to come and take her to his palace .But nobody comes to fetch her. Her father sends her to Dushyanta as she is pregnant with Dushyanta's child.Under the spell of curse , Dushyanta fails to acknowledge Shakuntala as his wife. He refuses her saying that he has never met Shakuntala and has no relation with her. He throws insulting remarks at Shakuntala . Shakuntala becomes heartbroken at his words. Because, It is the man she had chosen for herself . This is the man to whom she had surrendered her heart and her body . This is the man who had begotten a child in her and lrft, promising to sends his people to fetch her and then forgotten all about it. And now he is insulting her in the middle of an assembly in the presence of his ministers and nobelmen- insulting her in such crude, merciless words.

The Young women who grew up in a hermitage does not know what treachery is , What falsehood is.She has received the best possible upbringing : in an atmosphere of love, kindness, truth and courtesy. She talks to him in the only language she knows : the language of truth. She has much loyalty to Dushyanta : Even after be cannot recognize her, Shakuntala does not seek the comfort of another man .She is completely devoted to him and when she is hurt by his inability to recognize her, She tends to her son and remains on her own, maintaining her high sense of virtue and loyalty to her one and true love. In this light , She suffers for her love, Which makes her representative of much of the feminine tradition in Indian literature .

She teies to remind him of the true story and events of their marriage. Shakuntala knows that a wife is not a man's plaything -she is an equal half of his being, his best friend in the journey of life,the root of the virtue, wealth and pleasures. Shakuntala's speech suggests that she has not come for the kings charity - She does not need any of it. What she demands is justice - what is hers by right. She does not care for the comforts of the palace -such things do not tempt her.She needs just one thing, that is,justice .Still Dushyanta does not acknowledge her .Instead, he insults her,calls her a harlot. He also calls all women liars.

The moment Dushyanta saw Shakuntala in the hermitage ,he was smitten by her . He expressed his desire for her and asked her to marry him. He offered her everything that came to his mind that might interest a women according to his understanding of women -precious ornaments ,beautiful clothes, jewels snd even own kingdom . Shakuntala was a women any man could fall in love with instantly . She was desirable in every imagination way as far as a man is concerned. She was untouched by passion till she saw the king. Even her modesty was so great that she felt delicate to reveal to her friends her inextinguishable love for the king. She represents the true picture of womanly modesty. She manifested a full sence of female honour .When Dushyanta tries to bring her back, she politely asks him to maintain his dignity and decorum.

DAUGHTER OF NATURE

Shakuntala is a daughter of nature. Nature, strictly speaking, is her foster - mother .She has, therefore, affection for every tree ,for every creeper and for every sprout. She will not drink water without herself watering the trees. She can forget herself but not the trees in the hermitage . She dares not pluck even a tender sprout despite her fondness for ornaments.The flowering season of nature is a great festival to her. The deer are her own children. She applies oil to the mouth of a young deer ,which is wounded slightly while eating grass. In her own hands, She holds out the wild rice for the deer to eat . Just before her departure from the hermitage , She embraces the creeper and leaves it under the care of her maters. Shr requests her father to intimate her the news of the pregnant deer. But Shakuntala's love of nature, is not one sided. Nature too in her turn has the same deep affection for Shakuntala. The foliage of tree invites Shakuntala . The young deer, pulling her garment stops her from leaving the hermitage . At her departure , the female deer drop down their half eaten morsels of grass ;the peacocks give up their dancing ; and the creepers ,with their yellow leaves falling off, seem as if they are shedding tears. The deer drinks water only from the hands of Shakuntala. The affection between nature and Shakuntala is so profound that Kanea, on the eve of Shakuntala's departure to her husbands palace, requests nature to permit Shakuntala to go to her husband's house. Then, nature too, on her part ,indicates her acceptance through the sweet note of a cuckoo.Thud Shakuntala's character id harmoniouslly delienated as the dearest daughter of natural.

At the end of the play ,one feels sad at the sufferings of Shakuntala. In the last act , we see Shakuntala wrapped in a very ordinary sari,but she id a picture of grace and dignity . Through young in age. She speaks but few words in a profound sense.

Hermit Girl

She is a real hermit - girl . One may wonder at the manner in which she has transformed herself from a pleasure - seeking young girl into a young woman imbued with a sense of total renunciation and service. Through portraying scenes of Shakuntala's friends teasing her,sage Kanwa's far - sightedness ,the king's paining for Shakuntala's love when she is away, Shakuntala's unsullied sense of love, the divine grace which brought about the happy reunion, the playwright presents before us a large canvas on which all the vicissitudes of life are touched upon. From the light of above discussion it can be concluded that Shakuntala represents an ideal womanhood. She represents all the qualities of an ideal Indian woman .