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An Ecofeminist Evaluation of Kalidasa Abhijana Shakuntalam , Meghadutam and Ritusamharam

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Abstract:- Since time immemorial ,poets, dramatist and writers have sung praises of Wild expanse, Forests, rivers, mountains, birds and the whole of majestic Nature. Pristine environment has been one of the major sources of inspiration. When Kalidasa wrote Abhijana Shakuntalam, he placed the lovely heroine of the play in the lap of mother nature. Shakuntala is an integral part of the Flora and Fauna. To betrue, Dushyant just did not fall in love with lovely lady alone, he is enchanted by the whole idea of an innocent, natural beauty in the forest. If we place Shakuntala in concrete setting detached from the beauty of nature, she would not be that appealing. Shakuntala can only be conceived in our mental eye or aethetic sense with flowers adorned on her body, and with deer and birds surrounding her. She is as innocent, as pure and as natural as the other creatures of the forest. She does not put on gold or diamond jewels. Flowers of different colours are her earrings, bangles and necklaces. This is how Kalidasaa has used Nature in his works. Nature is instrumental in the development of the story.

Key words:-Upanishads, Sanskrit Literature, Sri Ram CharitManas, Paryavaran, Vedas, Cultural Substratum, Ecocriticism, Indian Culture.

1.1 Introduction

Ecofeminism, as a critical framework, examines the interconnected oppression of women and nature under patriarchal and hierarchical systems, emphasizing harmony, care, and mutual sustenance between the human and natural worlds. Classical Sanskrit literature, though composed in a vastly different socio-historical context, often reveals a profound ecological consciousness that resonates strongly with ecofeminist thought. The works of Kalidasa—particularly *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, *Meghadūtam*, and *Ritusamhāram*—offer fertile ground for an ecofeminist evaluation due to their intimate portrayal of nature and its symbolic alignment with feminine experience.

In *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, the forest hermitage functions not merely as a setting but as a nurturing maternal space that shapes Shakuntala's identity, reflecting the ecofeminist idea of woman–nature kinship. *Meghadūtam* personifies the cloud as a compassionate messenger, embedding emotional suffering within a living landscape that responds empathetically to human longing. Similarly,



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Rtusamhāram celebrates the cyclical rhythms of seasons, foregrounding fertility, regeneration, and sensuality—qualities traditionally associated with the feminine principle and ecological balance.

An ecofeminist reading of these texts reveals Kalidasa's nuanced vision of nature as an active, sentient force rather than a passive backdrop. By foregrounding emotional continuity between women and the environment, these works challenge anthropocentric dominance and affirm a worldview rooted in coexistence, care, and ecological harmony.

“May peace radiate there in the whole sky as well as in the vast Ethereal space everywhere.

May peace reign all over this earth, in water and in all herbs, trees and creepers.

May peace flow over the whole universe.

May peace be in the supreme Being Brahman.

And may there always exist in all peace alone.

Aum peace, peace and peace to us and all beings.

Tracing representation of nature in Abhijana Shakuntalam brings forth a very sensitive involvement with environment, free of selective/ selfish politics. Nature is not merely glamorizing mountains, autumn wind and daffodils. Ecocritical study of landscape, nature, geography in this drama becomes volatile of its deep ecologist culture. Landscape is caring, nature is cared for and geography divided into two parts, hermitage and palace, one engaged with nature other committed to protecting it.

Kalidasaa ascribes values to nature in his drama that has two settings hermitage in the early part of drama and palace in second half. Whatever exists has a right to exist and human lose themselves in serving nature instead of exploiting it from an assured superior hierarchy. Fawns mingling with humans in trust at the hermitage. Shakuntala calls “ madhavi vine” her sister and water plants even before drinking herself. King Dushyant considers himself responsible for the Flourishing of Flora and Fauna and prays that no sin of his, cause damage to any of it. Herein “{ human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation”(Buell) It’s obvious, unlike modern times, there was no huge gap between literary preoccupations and the environment.

In Indian culture both human and non- human have inherent value. (Bron Taylor 457) Borne of greedy indifference towards nature, human interest was not the only legitimate claim.

The state, the society and the culture in Kalidasaa’s dramatic world were nature friendly where the onus/ responsibilities of protecting environment rested on King. Even though the king and the palace unlike hermitage do not appear to be directly involved with the nurture of nature, were responsible for the protection of hermitage, Flora and fauna. Good king Dushyant was fully conscious of it.

Kalidasaa’s immortal literary work Abhijana Shakuntalam is a classic surpassing the barriers of time and space. It is a testimony of the greatness of Kalidasaa as a prolific writer of his times.



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Nature plays an important role in the psychosexual growth of Shakuntala. Whenever Shakuntala appears in the play, she is accompanied by nature in her different forms. She represents nature in her beauty and feminine grace. Her permanent companions are birds, animals and plants in the forest.

Shakuntala is a beauty of the ancient classical heroines. She is very beautiful and attractive. The beauty of such Feminine physicality overwhelm the senses giving a dynamism to lyptically further deepen traditional classical literary view of human vitality.

1.2 Overview About Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where literature scholars analyze texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature.

Ecocriticism importance in Literature-: Ecocriticism guides us to examine the world around us and critiquing the mannerisms of society in the treatment of nature.

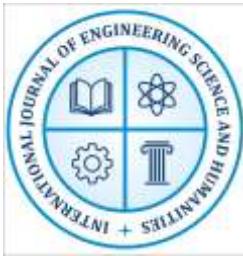
Its Key points are as Follows-:

In Ecocriticism, Nature is the center, not the man. It is the study of literature and physical environment. It is an earth- centered approach to the literary study. Ecologically man is the ultimate villain. Ecocriticism says that we all are equal. The main purpose of it is to protect the earth.

Ecocriticism investigates the relation between humans and the natural world in literature. It deals with how environmental issues, cultural issues concerning the environment and attitudes towards nature are presented and analyzed. The main goal in Ecocriticism is to study how individuals in society behave and react in relation to nature and ecological aspects. This form of criticism has gained a lot of attention during recent years due to higher social emphasis on environmental destruction and increased technology. It is hence a fresh way of analyzing and interpreting literary texts which brings new dimensions to the field of literary and theoretical studies. Ecocriticism is an intentionally broad approach that is known by a number of other designations including "green(cultural) studies," ecopoetics and environmental literary criticism. Western thought has often held a more or less utilitarian attitude to nature- nature is for serving human humanneeds. However, after the eighteenth century, there emerged many voices that demanded a revaluation of the relationship between man and environment and man's view of nature.

Arne Naess – a Norwegian philosopher, developed the notion of " Deep Ecology" which emphasizes the basic interconnectedness of all life forms and natural features and presents a symbiotic and holistic world view rather than anthropocentric one.

"Joseph Meeker in Early work "The Comedy of survival", studies in Literary Ecology (1972), used the term " literary Ecology " to refer to the study of biological themes and



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relationships which appear in literary works. It is attempt to discover what roles have been played by literature in the ecology of the human species.”

William Rueckert is believed to have coined the term Ecocriticism in 1978, while he defines as” the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature.

In broader perspective, Ecocriticism guides us to examine the world around us and critiquing the mannerisms of society in the treatment of nature. The theory helps in analyzing any text with an eye on nature portrayal by the author and the Eco-critical trope within the text. In US Ecocriticism is often associated with the Association for the study of literature and Environment(ASLE) which hosts a biennial conference for scholars who deal with environment matters in literature and the environmental humanities in general. ASLE publishes a journal-interdisciplinary studies in literature and Environment(ISLE)- in which current international scholarship can be found. Ecocriticism was first defined by CherlyGlotfelty in simple words making it clear for other critics and writers. The work and efforts of Glotfelty played a significant role in convincing other scholars for using this term to refer to the line of studies known as green studies previously. Due to her efforts this field of criticism gained a recognition and popularity as a theory. Therefore, scholars acknowledge her as a major contributor to the emergence og this name as a theory with a broad scope. It is especially notable that the scope of this theory is not limited to the books and essays on nature, romantic poetry or canonical literature and have a great impact on the other areas of the physical world. It has spread in the other mediums like film, television and theatre, stories and narratives of animal life, science and architecture in addition to the range of other literary forms.

Ecocriticism Defined

Ecocriticism is a lens of literary theory which is an “Earth- centered approach” to literary studies.

The central premise of an ecocritical perspective is that human culture is connected to the physical world and humans inevitably affect and are affected by the natural world.

Where Marxism is primarily concerns with power relationships between people and social classes, ecocriticism is concerned with the power humans and human language/ society exert over the natural world.

Characteristics of Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is primarily concerned with the application of the rules of criticism and ecology to literature.

Attempts to find out environmental concerns voiced by writers in literature.

Foregrounds Nature and environment in literary texts.

Re-reading of major literary works from an eco-critical perspective.



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Emphasis on relevant factual writing especially topographical material such as essays, travel writing, memoirs and regional literature.

Ecocritics encourage others to think seriously about the relationship of humans to nature, about the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis and about how language and literature transmit values with profound ecological implications.

Major Figures in Ecocriticism – Cheryll Glotfelty

C. Glotfelty is the first professor of literature and Environment in the USA. In 1996 she and Harold Fromm co-edited *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, a critical anthology that helped green the field of literary studies. She is co-founder and past president of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE).

Scot Slovic prefers to offer a broad description of the field.

“ Ecocriticism is the study of explicitly environmental texts from any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human -nature relationship in any text, even texts that seem, at first glance, oblivious of the non- human world.”

Ecocriticism is against the old established definition of nature. Therefore, ecocriticism puts forth the idea that man is not master of the nature. It is not a slave as well.

Ecocritical literary criticism points out the importance of re-reading major literary texts in order to subvert our anthropocentric view of the world.

They also put emphasis on the relationship among man, culture and nature. Ecocritics also discuss this relationship by using the concepts and terms of philosophy and biology. By doing so, they create an ecological consciousness and compose an ecological ethics.

Ecocriticism is a name that implies ecological literacy. Eco and critic both derive from Greek, okios and kritis and in tandem they mean “ house judge”,(...)

Ecocritic is a person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depicts the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature” berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action.”(Howard 69).

1.3 ECO-FEMINISM

This approach combines the ecology and feminism and explains the feminist nature to help understand the ecology. Feminists have given the concept of Gender theory to analyze the relationship between the human and nature. So it can be considered a branch of ecocriticism and is the field of studying the interconnection between the oppression of women and nature. The term was originally coined in the book *Le Feminism Oula Mort* (1974) written by the French author Francoise d' Eaubonne. But the term is being used in different ways and meanings in the modern time, they are eco-feminist art, social and political philosophy, social justice, religion poetry and contemporary feminism. Two sections of this approach where first is referred to as a radical camp which is largely focused on reversing the domination of man over woman



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and uncontrolled use of nature. This is because nature and women are close to each other biologically, emotionally and spiritually.

The second section of the field follows the first which refuses to accept the concept of feminine essence that is considered responsible for the assumption that women and nature are connected to a great extent.

1.4 Abhijana Shakuntalam in Feminist perspective

Position of Women in Vedic Era

Abhijana Shakuntalam undoubtedly a masterpiece of the great poet Kalidasa is supposed to have been composed during the 4 th century or even earlier at a time when the society was deeply patriarchal. Historical records, media reports over the behavior of rural backward societies indicate that women in such society had very low status. Males have dominant and decisive role for affairs household or public.

In Kalidasaa AbhijanaShakuntalam ,shakuntala is a meek and demure girl, she succumbs to her sexual desire on the sight of king. She does not oppose the king over his erratic remarks. The salacious words used at her don't stir her up against the king. She hasn't put forth any precondition. She is such a weak girl that she even doesn't defend against the vilification by the king in public (royal court)

Shakuntala As a Nature child-; Shakuntala is nature's child who finds her life being shaped by natural forces. She is heavenly nymph born embodies natural beauty, innocence and simplicity. Her simple but powerful joys arise out of the nearness with nature, trees, and vines. She tends like her own sisters and forms an antelope like her children. In the first act , she has been shown to carry water to nourish the plants. This deep affection comes to surface in strong colours when shakuntala is ready to leave for the king's palace and tearfully bids farewell to her dear friends as well as the trees and animals. There is a complete harmony between her and the surroundings.

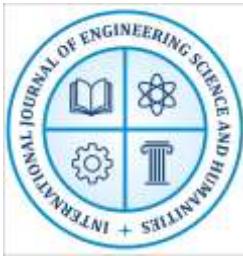
Works of Kalidasaa

1). Ritusamharam(Gathering of seasons).

2). Kumarsambhav

3). Meghadootam

The use of nature as an inseparable part of life imparts a new strength to plot. It provides freshness and vitality to the main action. Nature has been used as a backdrop for a romantic play like this . This play establishes a unity between human world and nature, and creates a harmony between undivided sensibilities and universal sensibilities. Thus, Kalidasaa'simmortal literary work Abhijanashakuntalam is a classic surpassing the barriers of time and space. It is also a testimony of the greatness of Kalidasaa as a prolific writer of his times. Nature plays an important role in shakuntala psychosexual growth whenever shakuntala appears in the play, she



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is accompanied by nature in her different forms .She represents nature in her beauty and feminine grace . Her permanent companions are birds, animals and plants in the forest.

Shakuntala beauty is described in the play as_;

**“ A pair of long expansive eyes,
graceful curves of tendrils like eyebrows
the lower lip bathed in the radiance of smiles bright as moonbeams,
the luscious upper glowing rose-hued
with the sheen of jujube berries
this is her face that seems to speak even in picture
a dazzling beauty bursts forth in streamy rays.**

Shakuntala is a beauty of the ancient classical heroines . She is very beautiful and attractive. The beauty of such feminine physicality overwhelm the senses giving a dynamism to lyptically further deepen traditional classical literary view of human vitality.

Kalidasaa opens his play with creating a world pf deep and dark forests near the banks of river Malini.

“Shakuntala is the heroine of the play who has been portrayed as nature’s daughter. She is a delicate flower of nature created by her friends like trees, creepers, animals and birds of Ashrama. Thus, this is one of the green world of the Ashrama, and then comes a man created and reared in the golden world, the king dushyanta, and the two worlds never reconcile in the play. The fact is that the two worlds –the green world of ashrama and the glided world of the court and the capital can never reconcile together. They are two paradoxes Dushyanta calls shakuntala as the ornament of the hermitage and a creature of the woodlands who never brought in to the contact of the queens, kings or the court and so there remains a great deal of difference between the two. The innocence and simplicity of shakuntala is unmatchable with the cleverness and cunningness of the material world. And what happens ultimately is that the green world is gobbled up by the glided world. The happy ending of the play culminates in the golden world. And when shakuntala goes to live in the glided world , she is given parting gifts by animate as well as inanimate friends of the hermitage to cope up with the change of life there,As we read the text it has been quoted as

**“ A certain tree produced as if
By magic garment of silk- another noble tree
Poured out rich so rose red juice, at the hour of parting from
Shakuntala, the whole of the holy grove expresses grief,
The doe tosses out mouthful of grass, the peacock dance no more,
Pale leaves flutter down, as if the vines are shedding their limbs.”**



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This shows the close relationship of shakuntala with the nature around her, all that she was a nature child.

2.1 Significance of Prologue in *Abhijana Shakuntalam*

Kalidasaa's *Abhijanashakuntalam* begins in the prologue where benediction," May the Isha , the God of nature apparent in eight forms (water, fire sun, moon, earth, ether, time, air),bless and sustain you". Then there appears sutradhar as the director and his wife Nati set the preliminaries and lead the audience or sahridaya in to the action of the drama. The king pururavadvadushyanta appears chasing an antelope . Two hermits suddenly come running and ask the king to spare the deer as it belongs to the ashrama, the king obeys and they in turn give him blessings that he would father a son who would reign over the whole worlds. This is a prologue , an opening section of a longer work of which sutradhar and nati usually husband and wife. It performed a number of functions like establishing the situation in which the play will be dramatized.

In 17th century and also in some plays of 18th century a prologue usually in verse stated a moral point or anticipated the theme and action . But in Sanskrit plays of Kalidasaa , the prologue was announced by sutradhar and nati in order to establish the situation in which the drama was to be carried out. The prologue is not a monologue but a dialogue between the sutradhar and nati or jester or any other character, through the dialogue , they indicate towards the character or situation going to be focus of the drama. This enables the audience to understand the narrative.

In this play nature plays a vital role. In the lap of nature the entire story takes place. Kalidasa, a devotee of nature, has beautifully described the charms of nature. In fact, compounding of internal and external nature is the speciality of the art of Kalidasa. In short, *Abhijana Shakuntalam* is an excellent presentation of human love and natural love. The play *Abhijana Shakuntalam* is a testimony of the poetic genius of Kalidasaa. He is also regarded as the best poet in Sanskrit language. Historical evidences show that Kalidasaa lived in the first Century B.C. *Abhijana Shakntalam* is a play of love, anxiety , separation and reunion. The story of the play is originally found in the book of beginning(Adiparva) of the Mahabharata where king Dushyanta and Shakuntala enact the drama of passions and love. Kalidasaa is a poet in Sanskrit literature who has infused the romantic spirit in it. In his verse and plays, Nature provides a setting for the main action. His poetic play *Abhijana Shakuntalam* presents the main characters enacting the drama of emotions in Nature's sylvan surroundings. The opening pages of the play introduce Shakuntala as a child of Nature and she is often compared with flowers like jasmine. On the other hand, her lover King Dushyanta belongs to the other world which is alien to nature. *Abhijana Shakuntalam* is a play of love, anxiety, separation and reunion. The story of the play is originally found in the book of beginning(Adiparva) of the Mahabharata where King Dhushyanta and Shakuntala enact the drama of passions and love. Shakuntala is the daughter of



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Celestial nymph Menaka who unites with Sage Vishwamitra. Shakuntala's mother belongs to heaven and her father lives on the earth. When Kalidasa describes the beauty of Shakuntala, he draws images from nature. Often she is compared with a flower or a delicate plant. She even marries her creeper sister Vanjyotsana to a mango tree. The little fawn follows her all the time. He does not drink water from the hands of Dushyanta. When Shakuntala bids farewell to the hermitage, and its inhabitants after her marriage, the whole nature sheds tears. Animals and plants express their grief over the departure of their companion. Hazari Prasad Dwivedi observes that Nature itself becomes a living character in the play. Nature has been a witness to all the major developments in the play. Romila Thapar finds the play and its theme "a veritable treasure hunt with pointers" which has taken her far from the epic. Thapar observes, "In Shakuntalam we are in the realm of delicacy and romance, of anguish and imminent tragedy, of pathos, and of happiness. The emotional range is infinite and in the intermeshing of emotions and the images of Shakuntala undergoes a transformation." In Nature, one finds another face of Shakuntala. Kalidasa does not over-romanticize situation and characters. Even love may appear to be erotic, finally it leads to order and serenity of conjugal love. In the play, there is a search for harmonious conjugal love.

Aims and Objectives

1. To explore the interconnectedness between human and non-human worlds in Abhijana Shakuntalam, Meghadutam and Ritusamharam.
2. To analyze the text's ecological and feminist themes using ecocriticism and ecofeminism.
3. To contextualize Kalidasa's work within contemporary environmental and gender studies.

Hypothesis

1. The text significantly demonstrates an ecological consciousness, illustrating environmental issues and human-nature relationships in ways that reinforce ecocritical perspectives.
2. The portrayal of women and nature in the text reveals parallel structures of oppression, supporting the ecofeminist claim that gender and ecological exploitation are interconnected.
3. The narrative emphasizes the agency of both women and the environment, challenging dominant patriarchal and anthropocentric ideologies through ecocritical and ecofeminist frameworks.
4. The text integrates ecofeminist values by representing women as protectors and advocates for nature, suggesting a link between feminist empowerment and ecological stewardship.
5. The roles and agency granted to female characters in Kalidasa's texts reflect dynamics that are pertinent to modern gender studies, indicating that his literature provides insights into both historical and current gender issues.



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6. The interplay between nature and gender in Kalidasa's work supports ecofeminist readings, demonstrating that the connection between environmental ethics and gender justice evident today can be traced back to classical texts.

7. By examining Kalidasa's works through the lenses of environmental and gender studies, evidence will emerge that these texts contribute meaningfully to ongoing scholarly debates about ecological responsibility and gender equality.

Review of Literature

1. Promoting Ecological Awareness: By uncovering ecological consciousness in Kalidasa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, *Meghadutam* and *Ritusamharam* the study reconnects modern audiences with ancient Indian values of nature's sanctity and interconnectedness. This can inspire sustainable living practices essential for tackling contemporary environmental crises, such as climate change and biodiversity loss, by highlighting traditional ecological wisdom embedded in cultural narratives.

2. Advancing Gender Justice: The research reveals the intersections of gender and ecological oppression in the text, reflecting ongoing patriarchal dynamics that disadvantage both women and nature. Such ecofeminist readings contribute to broader social conversations about gender equity and environmental justice, encouraging more inclusive policies and ethical frameworks that acknowledge these linked forms of exploitation.

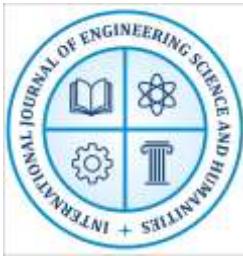
3. Bridging Cultural and Academic Discourses: By integrating indigenous Indian ecological philosophies and feminist insights with global ecocritical and ecofeminist theories, the study promotes cross-cultural dialogue. This enriches environmental humanities and feminist scholarship, challenging Western-centric paradigms and validating diverse knowledge systems in addressing ecological and social issues.

4. Educational and Ethical Impact: Situating a classical literary work within contemporary environmental and gender studies offers new pedagogical tools for education in literature, ethics, and sustainability. It fosters critical thinking about 15 human-nature relationships and gender roles, encouraging students and scholars to adopt holistic and justice-oriented worldviews.

5. Contributing to Policy and Activism: Insights from this research may inform socio-environmental activism and policy-making by providing ethical paradigms rooted in cultural history. Recognizing the enduring relevance of Kalidasa's work can help shape community-based and culturally sensitive approaches to ecological conservation and gender empowerment.

Conclusion

An ecofeminist evaluation of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, *Meghadūtam*, and *Ritusamhāram* reveals that the poetic imagination of Kalidasa is deeply aligned with principles that modern ecofeminism seeks to articulate. Across these texts, nature is not treated as a mute or exploitable resource but as a living, responsive presence intricately bound to human emotion, ethical conduct, and especially feminine



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experience. Women and nature are portrayed as nurturing, resilient, and cyclically regenerative, yet both are shown to be vulnerable to neglect, abandonment, and patriarchal authority. Shakuntala's suffering parallels the disruption of the forest order; the yaksha's separation in *Meghadūtam* is mirrored by a sentient landscape that mourns with him; and *Rtusamhāram* celebrates seasonal rhythms that affirm fertility, sensuality, and balance rather than domination. Together, these works foreground relational values—care, empathy, interdependence, and harmony—that stand in contrast to anthropocentric and hierarchical worldviews. Reading Kalidasa through an ecofeminist lens thus not only enriches the interpretation of classical Sanskrit literature but also demonstrates how ancient texts can offer enduring ecological wisdom. His poetry anticipates a holistic vision in which human well-being, gender justice, and environmental balance are inseparable, making his works profoundly relevant to contemporary ecological and feminist discourse.

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