

The Use of Prakrit Dialects in Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*

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Abstract:

This paper examines the nuanced use of Prakrit dialects in Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, highlighting the linguistic diversity employed to distinguish characters and enrich dramatic expression. The heroine Śakuntalā and her companions Priyamvadā and Anusūyā, together with the actress (Nāṭī) converse in Śaurasenī, while policeman and the fisherman (Dhīvara) employ Māgadhī. Through these variations, Kālidāsa demonstrates a sophisticated interplay between verse and dialogue, wherein the same female character may employ different dialects depending on poetic or conversational context—using Mahārāṣṭrī for verse and Śaurasenī for dialogue.

The central question addressed in this study is: Why does Kālidāsa assign different Prakrit dialects to specific characters in *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, and what aesthetic or cultural purposes does this serve?

The study investigates the rationale behind assigning specific dialects to particular characters, situating this practice within broader cultural and aesthetic frameworks. It further illuminates the inherent beauty of these spoken forms by drawing upon *Siddha-Hema-Śabdānuśāsana* of Ācārya Hemacandra, which provides a grammatical and stylistic lens for appreciating Prakrit usage.

Methodologically, the paper adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, combining textual analysis with linguistic insights to explore how dialectal diversity contributes to characterization, dramatic texture, and the cultural resonance of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*.

Key Words: Kālidāsa, *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, Prakrit dialects, Śaurasenī, Māgadhī, Mahārāṣṭrī, Hemacandra, *Siddha-Hema-Śabdānuśāsana*