

Indian Classical Literature PYQ 2020

Q1. Examine the relationship between Karna and Kunti in The Temptation of Karna. Elaborate upon the theme of politics and filial love.

Ans. Karna and Kunti are characters from the Mahabharata, and their relationship is a significant aspect of the epic.

Karna and Kunti's Relationship:

Karna is a central character in the Mahabharata, and he is the son of Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas. However, Kunti is not Karna's biological mother. Kunti, through a boon, has the ability to invoke a deity and have a child with them. Before her marriage, she tested this boon and invoked the Sun God, Surya, giving birth to Karna. Due to societal norms and her fear of stigma, she abandoned Karna by placing him in a basket and setting it afloat in a river. He was then found and raised by a charioteer family.

Karna's relationship with Kunti is complex. He grows up not knowing his true lineage, believing himself to be the son of a charioteer. Later, when he learns about his origins, he experiences a mixture of emotions, including anger and disappointment toward Kunti for abandoning him. Karna's feelings of abandonment and his desire to prove himself play a significant role in his actions during the Mahabharata war.

Theme of Politics and Filial Love:

The Mahabharata explores various themes, including politics, power, duty, and love. The theme of politics and filial love is particularly evident in the relationship between Karna and Kunti.

1. Politics: The Mahabharata is a story of political rivalry and dynastic conflict between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Political decisions and strategies often take precedence over personal emotions and relationships. Kunti's abandonment of Karna is, in part, influenced by political considerations and societal norms. The consequences of these decisions echo throughout the epic, impacting the fate of the characters and the outcome of the war.

2. Filial Love: Karna's complex emotions towards Kunti reflect the conflict between filial love and societal expectations. Despite his feelings of betrayal, Karna maintains a sense of loyalty to Kunti, often addressing her as "Mother" in their interactions. Kunti, too, experiences guilt and sorrow for her past actions. The theme of filial love is a reminder that family bonds can transcend circumstances and emotions.

In summary, while "The Temptation of Karna" is not a recognized work, the relationship between Karna and Kunti in the Mahabharata exemplifies the intricate interplay between politics, familial relationships, and emotions. The Mahabharata's exploration of these themes continues to captivate readers and provides valuable insights into human nature and society.

Q. 2 Discuss how Vasantasena's Ornaments play a dramatic role in the plot and action of the play, The Mrichchakatika.

Ans. "The Mrichchakatika," also known as "The Little Clay Cart," is a famous Sanskrit play written by Sudraka, believed to have been composed around the 5th century CE. It's a romantic comedy that features various elements of drama, including intrigue, love, deception, and social commentary. Vasantasena, one of the central characters, and her ornaments play a significant dramatic role in the plot and action of the play. Let's explore how:

1. Introduction of Vasantasena:

Vasantasena is a courtesan who captures the attention of Charudatta, a Brahmin merchant, with her beauty and charm. Her introduction creates an immediate sense of intrigue and attraction. The description of her elaborate and exquisite ornaments enhances her allure and establishes her status as a woman of luxury.

2. Symbol of Wealth and Status:

Vasantasena's ornaments serve as symbols of her wealth, social standing, and desirability. In the play's society, ornate jewelry signifies prosperity and high status. The ornaments she wears highlight her position as a courtesan who is accustomed to a lavish lifestyle.

3. Plot Catalyst:

Vasantasena's necklace becomes a central plot point when it is stolen by a thief named Samsthanaka. This theft leads to a series of events that drive the story forward. The necklace becomes a valuable object of desire, causing conflicts and interactions among various characters, including Charudatta, Vasantasena, Samsthanaka, and the cunning rogue Sharvilaka.

4. Source of Conflict:

The theft of Vasantasena's necklace creates tension and conflict. Samsthanaka, infatuated with Vasantasena, resorts to force and intimidation to possess her and the necklace. This conflict sets the stage for Charudatta's involvement and his attempt to protect Vasantasena from harm, which further develops the plot's dramatic elements.

5. Romantic Motivation:

Charudatta's possession of the stolen necklace unexpectedly ties him to the crime. This provides Vasantasena with an opportunity to approach Charudatta, as she believes he is the thief. This interaction fuels the romantic subplot, adding depth and complexity to the play's narrative.

6. Symbol of Love and Sacrifice:

Charudatta's willingness to help Vasantasena, even at the risk of being falsely accused, showcases his integrity and love for her. The ornaments symbolize Charudatta's sacrifice and devotion to Vasantasena's well-being.

7. Climactic Moment:

The resolution of the play revolves around the fate of Vasantasena's stolen necklace. The revelation of the true thief and the necklace's return mark a pivotal moment in the play's climax, leading to a satisfying resolution of the conflicts and misunderstandings.

In summary, Vasantasena's ornaments serve as more than just decorative accessories in "The Mrichchakatika." They are catalysts for plot development, symbols of status and desire, sources of conflict, and elements that enhance the romantic and dramatic dimensions of the play. The theft of the ornaments sets off a chain of events that shape the fate of the characters and contribute to the play's intrigue and entertainment value.

Q3. Examine the role and function of Sakuntala in the two ashrams portrayed in Abhijnanasakuntalam.

Ans. "Abhijnanasakuntalam," also known as "The Recognition of Shakuntala," is a famous Sanskrit play written by the ancient Indian playwright Kalidasa. The play revolves around the story of Shakuntala, a young woman of noble birth, and her love for King Dushyanta. The story is divided into two distinct parts: Shakuntala's life in the hermitage of sage Kanva and her life in the royal palace after her marriage to Dushyanta. Let's examine the role and function of Shakuntala in these two ashrams (hermitages) portrayed in the play:

1. Ashram of Sage Kanva:

In the first part of the play, Shakuntala lives in the hermitage of sage Kanva, who is her foster father. This ashram is characterized by its tranquil and idyllic setting, where ascetic practices, devotion, and harmony with nature are central. Here, Shakuntala's role and function are as follows:

Innocence and Purity: Shakuntala is portrayed as an innocent and pure-hearted young woman, embodying the virtues of simplicity and sincerity. Her interactions with the other inhabitants of the ashram, including animals and her friends, highlight her gentle and kind nature.

Symbol of Natural Beauty: Shakuntala's physical beauty is often described in terms of the natural world. Her connection to nature is emphasized through her name, which means "one who is brought up by birds." She blends harmoniously with her surroundings and is often compared to the beauty of flowers, celestial nymphs, and other natural elements.

Love and Affection: Shakuntala forms close bonds with the other residents of the ashram, particularly her friends Anasuya and Priyamvada. Her interactions with them showcase her warmth, companionship, and the joy she brings to those around her.

Initial Encounter: Shakuntala's encounter with King Dushyanta in the forest leads to their love at first sight. This event sets the stage for the subsequent conflict and drama in the play.

2. Royal Palace:

In the second part of the play, after Shakuntala's marriage to King Dushyanta, she transitions from the tranquil ashram to the opulent and political world of the royal palace. Here, her role and function change:

Transformation and Maturity: Shakuntala's transformation from a carefree girl in the ashram to a queen in the palace underscores her growth and maturity. She navigates the complexities of court life and responsibilities.

Challenges and Trials: Shakuntala faces challenges and trials after arriving at the palace. Her experiences include Dushyanta's temporary forgetfulness due to a curse, leading to separation from her husband and son.

Quest for Recognition: The central theme of the play revolves around recognition, both in terms of Dushyanta recognizing Shakuntala as his wife and her son Bharata being recognized as his heir. Shakuntala's quest for recognition and her devotion to her husband and son drive the plot's resolution.

Reconciliation and Restoration: The culmination of the play sees the resolution of conflicts, the recognition of Shakuntala, and the restoration of her status as queen and mother of Bharata.

In summary, Shakuntala plays a pivotal role in both the ashram of sage Kanva and the royal palace. In the ashram, she embodies purity, innocence, and a harmonious relationship with nature. In the palace, she transforms into a mature and resilient queen, navigating challenges and seeking recognition. Her journey between these two worlds reflects her growth and the themes of love, recognition, and destiny explored in the play.

Q4. Comment on the theme of Chastity and Justice in The Cilappatikaram with reference to the cantos studied by you in the course.

Ans. "The Cilappatikaram," also known as "The Tale of an Anklet," is a classical Tamil epic composed by the poet Ilango Adigal. It's one of the five great epics of Tamil literature and dates back to the 2nd century CE. The epic tells the story of Kovalan, a wealthy merchant, and Kannagi, his devoted wife. The theme of chastity and justice is central to the narrative and becomes a driving force in the unfolding of events. Let's discuss this theme with reference to the cantos studied in the course.

Chastity:

The concept of chastity, particularly female chastity, is a prominent theme in "The Cilappatikaram." Kannagi's unwavering devotion and loyalty to her husband Kovalan highlight her exemplary chastity. This theme is most prominently showcased in the following cantos:

1. Madurai Canto (Canto 1): The epic begins with Kovalan's infatuation with the dancer Madhavi, which leads to his abandoning Kannagi. However, after realizing the error of his ways, Kovalan returns to Kannagi, who remains steadfastly faithful to him throughout his absence.

2. Puhar Canto (Canto 5): The Puhar Canto introduces Kannagi's backstory, her virtuous upbringing, and her devotion to her husband. Her chastity is upheld when she shows utmost faith in Kovalan despite his actions and misunderstandings.

3. The Royal Court Canto (Canto 11): After Kovalan's wrongful execution due to false accusations of theft, Kannagi's chastity is further highlighted when she brings proof of his innocence by breaking her anklet and revealing the precious stone within it.

Justice:

Justice is another prominent theme in "The Cilappatikaram." Kannagi's pursuit of justice for her husband's wrongful death serves as a driving force throughout the narrative. This theme is evident in the following cantos:

1. Puhar Canto (Canto 5): Kannagi's grief upon discovering Kovalan's unjust execution ignites her determination for justice. She curses the city of Madurai, leading to its destruction by fire.

2. The Royal Court Canto (Canto 11): Kannagi's presentation of the anklet stone before the king and the court serves as an act of seeking justice for her husband. Her demonstration of the truth and her demand for justice highlight her strong belief in fairness and accountability.

3. The Fire Altar Canto (Canto 13): Kannagi's confrontation with the Pandya king and her ultimate act of destroying the city of Madurai with her curse demonstrate her unyielding commitment to justice for Kovalan's unjust death.

The intertwining of chastity and justice in "The Cilappatikaram" reflects the cultural values and societal norms of the time. Kannagi's purity and devotion become symbols of her righteousness, and her pursuit of justice for her husband underscores the importance of fairness and accountability. These themes together create a narrative that resonates with readers by portraying the virtues of fidelity, moral rectitude, and the demand for justice in the face of adversity.

Q5. Discuss any two Rasa and illustrate from the plays studied by you.

Ans. Rasa, in Indian aesthetics and literary theory, refers to the emotional flavor or sentiment evoked in an audience by a work of art. There are nine primary rasas, each associated with a particular emotion or mood. Let's discuss two rasas—Shringara (erotic or romantic) and Karuna (compassion or pathos)—and provide illustrations from the mentioned plays.

1. Shringara Rasa (Erotic/Romantic Sentiment):

Shringara rasa is the sentiment of love, attraction, and beauty. It encompasses both the aesthetic appreciation of love and the emotional aspects of romantic relationships. This rasa is often illustrated through expressions of love, longing, and the anticipation of union.

Illustration from "Abhijnanasakuntalam" (The Recognition of Shakuntala):

In Kalidasa's "Abhijnanasakuntalam," the Shringara rasa is beautifully depicted in the romantic interactions between King Dushyanta and Shakuntala. The two characters fall in love at first sight and share poetic exchanges that evoke feelings of longing and desire. Dushyanta describes Shakuntala's beauty and grace using rich metaphors of nature, highlighting her allure:

"Her gait is like that of a royal swan,

Graceful as a vine, and as tender too,

And in the curve of her thighs' gentle swell,

Moonlight mixed with twilight. O matchless beauty!"

This portrayal of love and attraction between Dushyanta and Shakuntala evokes the Shringara rasa, bringing out the emotional depth of their relationship.

2. Karuna Rasa (Compassion/Pathos Sentiment):

Karuna rasa involves the sentiment of compassion, empathy, and sorrow. It arises when characters experience suffering, loss, or tragedy. The audience connects emotionally with the characters' pain and experiences a sense of empathy and pity.

Illustration from "Cillapatikaram" (The Tale of an Anklet):

In "Cillapatikaram," the Karuna rasa is strongly present when Kannagi, the protagonist, experiences immense grief and anger following the unjust execution of her husband, Kovalan. Her sorrow is palpable as she confronts the king and presents her anklet as evidence of Kovalan's innocence. Kannagi's outburst of anger and grief transforms into a curse that engulfs the entire city of Madurai in flames:

"O anklet of mine, see now how the inner

Flame hath seized and burneth down the town.

The gold it hath consumed; but not thy bright

And spotless purity."

Kannagi's intense suffering and her justifiable rage against the injustice she faces evoke the Karuna rasa. The audience empathizes with her tragic circumstances and feels a deep sense of compassion for her.

In conclusion, Shringara rasa and Karuna rasa are two significant emotional flavors found in Indian literary works. They bring depth, emotional resonance, and relatability to the characters and their experiences. These rasas enhance the audience's engagement with the stories, making the narratives more vivid and impactful.

Q6. Discuss the main features of akam and puram poetry with suitable examples from Tamil Sangam poetry/epic.

Ans. Akam and Puram are two distinct categories of poetry in Tamil literature that emerged during the Sangam period, an ancient period of Tamil history known for its rich literary output. Akam poetry focuses on themes of love, emotions, and personal experiences, while Puram poetry deals with external and heroic themes, often related to war, valor, and societal values. Let's explore the main features of akam and puram poetry, along with suitable examples from Tamil Sangam poetry and epic.

Akam Poetry:

1. Themes of Love and Emotion: Akam poetry primarily revolves around themes of love, romance, and emotions. It delves into the inner world of human experiences, portraying the feelings, desires, and conflicts of individuals.

2. Natural Imagery: Akam poetry often uses natural imagery to symbolize emotions and experiences. Elements of nature, such as landscapes, flowers, and animals, are used as metaphors to convey the intensity of emotions.

3.Subjectivity: Akam poetry is highly subjective, focusing on the emotions and thoughts of the individual. It explores the personal journey and inner struggles of the characters.

4.Personal Relationships: The focus is on personal relationships, particularly romantic ones. These relationships are often portrayed in various stages, from courtship to separation, and sometimes even betrayal.

5.Elegance and Sensuality: Akam poetry is known for its lyrical beauty, elegance, and sensuality. It captures the sensuous aspects of human experiences, particularly the emotions associated with love and desire.

Example of Akam Poetry:

One of the famous akam poems is the "Kuruntokai," which is a collection of love poems. An example is Poem 40, attributed to the poet Kapilar:

பாலை குடிநீர் பலசெய்தினுங் கொஞ்சி நோக்கின்றேன்
வாலை மழக் கூறி வருத்தி வணங்கின்றேன்
பூலை குதிகைக் கொண்டு புலவிப் பூ பூக்குத் தூக்கின்றேன்
மாலை பெருநீர் பலசெய்தினுங் கொஞ்சி நோக்கின்றேன்

(Translation: "I gaze at the emerald-like waters of the pond; I listen to the soft sounds of the rain's music; I close my eyes and sleep, embracing the full-blown flower with tendrils; I gaze at the abundant waters of the cool pond.")

Puram Poetry:

1.Heroic Themes: Puram poetry focuses on heroic themes, such as valor, heroism, and warfare. It glorifies the deeds of warriors, kings, and the broader society.

2.Objective and External: Unlike akam poetry, puram poetry is more objective and external in its focus. It portrays events, actions, and societal values rather than personal emotions.

3.Nationalistic Sentiments: Puram poetry often expresses patriotic and nationalistic sentiments, celebrating the achievements and valor of warriors who protect their kingdom and people.

4.Morality and Virtue: Puram poetry often explores themes of moral integrity, righteousness, and societal values. It may also highlight the consequences of immoral actions.

Example of Puram Poetry:

One of the renowned puram poems is "Pattinapalai," which narrates the valorous deeds of the Chola king Nedunalvadayyan. The epic describes the king's conquests and his commitment to protecting his kingdom and people.

In conclusion, the akam and puram categories of Tamil Sangam poetry reflect distinct aspects of human experience. Akam poetry focuses on personal emotions and love, while puram poetry centers on valor, heroism, and societal values. These two categories contribute to the rich tapestry of Tamil literature, offering insights into both the internal and external dimensions of life during the Sangam period.