# EXPLORING FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP IN THE ABHIJNANSAKUNTALAM AND HAMLET

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**Rezumat:**
În dramele shakespeariene, autoritatea regală se uneşte cu cea părintească. Shakespeare foloseşte relaţia tată-fiică pentru a discredita practica posesiunii şi atitudinea de lăcomie, care erau profund dispreţuite în timpul Renaşterii. Pe vremea faimosului dramaturg indian Kalidasa, tatăl era considerat drept capul familiei. Opera nemuritoare a lui Kalidasa sugerează şi ideea de ascultare fără cea mai mică şovăire a consiliilor de părinţi şi profesori. Prezenta lucrare este o tentativă de a explora complicaţiile în relaţia tată-fiică în *Abhijnansakuntalam* şi *Hamlet, Prinţul Danemarcei*.
**Cuvinte cheie:**
Tată, fiică, fiu, familie, dragoste, căsătorie, soartă.

**Abstract:**
In Shakespearian dramas, the kingly authority merges with the authority of a father. Shakespeare uses the father-daughter relationship fundamentally to discredit the practice of possession and the attitude of cupidity which was under attack in the Renaissance. During the world's famous Indian dramatist Kalidasa period, the father was considered to be the head of the family. Kalidasa's immortal works also suggest that counsels of parents and teachers must be obeyed without any hesitation. The present paper is an attempt to explore the intricacies of the father–daughter relationship in the *Abhijnansakuntalam* and *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.*

**Key Words:**
Father, daughter, son, family, love, marriage, fate.

## 1. Introduction

In the Indian society, daughters are considered another's property and a father attains *Moksha*[1]only after performing *Kanyadan1*[2]. *Kalidasa*[3] also

[1] Moksha refers to liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. In Hindu religion, self realization is considered to be the best means to achieve Moksha.



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considers girls as another's property and respect the identity of a daughter. Ophelia, the heroine of Shakespeare's Hamlet, is young and inexperienced. She lost her mother and has a father named Polonius and a brother to take care of her. In *Kalidasa's Abhijnansakuntalam*[4] *Shakuntala*[5] the heroine of the play is *kanva's*[6] adopted daughter, being born of *Menka*[7] by *Vishwamitra*[8] and deserted by her natural parents.

## 2. Elizabethan Society as a Patriarchal Society

Elizabethan era was a patriarchal one as men were regarded head of the family whereas women were considered as the weaker sex not only in terms of physical but also emotional as well. It is a well known fact that in Shakespeare's plays the role of women characters were often played by young boys. The 'English Renaissance was a patriarchal society because fatherhood came to symbolize an ideal of domestic, political and religious order that ideal was not unrelated to actual behaviour, but it is the narrative and symbolic nature of fatherhood during this period, its significance as a conceptual category that designates the culture as patriarchal'( Shuger, 1977: 218). 'The Renaissance family was 'patriarchal in that the husband and father lorded it over his wife and children with the quasi-absolute authority of a despot (Stone, 1967:271). During Renaissance, 'England was a patriarchal society, 'daughters are perhaps the greatest victims of a patriarchal family and Elizabethan daughters were no exception' (Singh,

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[2] Kanyādān is used to describe the most highly valued form of Hindu marriage. Kanya Daan literary means gifting away a virgin, the word is actually a combination of two words, *Kanya* and Daan, where in Kanya means a virgin and Daan means donation.

[3] Kālidāsa is widely regarded as the greatest poet and dramatist in the Sanskrit language.Kalidasa left seven works which have come down to us: three dramas, two epics, one elegiac poem, and one descriptive poem. Among them, *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* is generally regarded as a masterpiece. Scholars of ***Kalidasa*** are of the opinion that ***Kalidasa*** belongs to *Ujjain* (an ancient city) during between the ***periods*** of 2nd century BC to 5th century AD.

[4]Abhijnana-Sakuntalam (*Śakuntalā recognized by a token)*, a drama composed in seven Acts by Kalidasa, is one of the best not only in Sanskrit literature, but in the literature of the world.

[5] Śakuntalā was the mother of Emperor Bharata and the wife of Dushyanta

[6] Kanva was a renowned sage and father of adopted daughter Śakuntalā.

7 Menaka was considered one of the most beautiful of the heavenly nymph and the mother of Shakuntala, who was left at the hermitage of the sage Kanva when she was a baby.

8 Vishvamitra is one of the most venerated sages of ancient times in India.



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1983:33). Thus, this male dominated society, women were offered a lesser status and always had to answer to their father/husband.

**3. Relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude**

Shakespeare's dramas largely loom upon the relationship between men and women. At the backdrop of this statement, it is revealed that Hamlet has mix emotions towards his mother Gertrude. He loves his mother despite a lot of mixed feelings such as doubt, regret, anger and contempt. Gertrude's marriage with Hamlet's uncle Claudius wounds Hamlet's tender heart and prompts him to seek vengeance. Hamlet finds Gertrude's remarriage as a disgusting act and feels that by killing Claudius he can free his mother from his father's murder.

The intimacy between Hamlet's Mother and Claudius brings a deep sense of anger and pain to Hamlet. He observed that when Gertrude was with his murdered father, 'he was so loving to her' and 'she would hang on him' (Hamlet, I, ii, 140-143). After the brutal murder of his father, Gertrude quickly marries his uncle, which made Hamlet feel frenzy and confirmed his faith in believing that a woman's love is fickle, 'frailty, thy name is woman' (Hamlet,I,ii,146). He starts feeling that his mother not only betrayed his father but also has betrayed the sanctity of the institution termed as 'marriage'. Throughout the drama, it is observed that Hamlet feels that Gertrude assisted his uncle in the heinous act of killing his father. Hamlet clearly warns his mother to 'repent what's past; avoid what is to come' (Hamlet, III, iv, 141) and cautions her 'go not to mine uncle's bed' (Hamlet, III, iv, 150). He speaks 'daggers to her but use none' (Hamlet, III, ii, 366). In distraught, he asks his mother 'O shame! Where is thy blush?' (Hamlet, III, iv, 72) and thereby he tries to make Gertrude regret and repent for her all past deeds. Hamlet kills Polonius in his mother's bedroom mistaking him for Claudius, Gertrude reacts on Hamlet's action by stating 'O, What a rash and bloody deed is this!' (Hamlet, III, iv 27). Then Hamlet assures Gertrude of conspiring to murder his father and remarks sharply, 'A bloody deed- almost as bad, good mother, As kill a king and, marry with his brother' (Hamlet, III, iv, 28-29) but Gertrude's reply 'As kill a King!' (Hamlet, III, iv, 30) enables Hamlet to believe that she did not kill his father and gives him a chance to mend his relationship with his mother.

Towards the end of the drama, there are various incidents available to prove this point. During the fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes she says, '*Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows; the Queen carouses*



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*to thy fortune, Hamlet*' (Hamlet, ii, 231-32). It reflects Gertrude's care and concern for the well being of her son. Then she drinks from the poisoned cup to Hamlet's fortune, even though Claudius warns her, '*Gertrude, do not drink*' (Hamlet, V, II, 233). In the end, she appears to call out against Claudius to Hamlet crying, '*the drink, the drink! I am poisoned'*. (Hamlet, V, ii, 318). Thus, it is observed that Hamlet wants to take vengeance against those who had murdered his innocent father but did not want to harm his mother. On the other hand, Gertrude was not consciously aware that her new husband Claudius had killed her former, but she was aware of her incestuous action and did all her best to restore Hamlet's faith, just like a caring and responsible mother.

**4. Relationship between Polonius and Laertes**

Polonius is overprotective of his son, Laertes and daughter, Ophelia. He always offers them pieces of advice on how to face life and meet its challenges. When Laertes prepares for his departure for France, Polonius provides his son points on how to make it on his own in France.

'*This above all to thine own self be true,*
*And it must follow, as the night the day,*
*Thou canst not then be false to any man,*
*Farewell: my blessing seasons this in thee*'. (Hamlet, I, iii, 78-82)

When Laertes arrives from France, it is disclosed that Polonius has very little faith in his son, as he orders his servants to go to France and spy on him and make sure Laertes is doing alright. He also sends money, notes and tells him to 'enquire of his behaviour' just to make sure Laertes is a dutiful, obedient and loyal son to his father. When Polonius is mistakenly murdered by Hamlet, then Laertes came back to Denmark to seek revenge for his father's murderer:

'*I dare damnation. To this point I stand,*
*That both the worlds I give to negligence,*
*Let come what comes; only I'll be revenged*
*Most thoroughly for my father*'. (Hamlet, IV, v, 129-33)

Laertes knew what he had lost in his life when his father had been killed. '*And so have I a noble father lost*' (IV, vii, 25). The sad demise of his father and sister made him realize that he was becoming a man but in the end, it also enabled him to die as a man. Throughout the play, Polonius asserts his dominance over his son, leading to a one way relationship and forced him to live a life like a parasite.



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## 5. Relationship between Polonius and Ophelia

Polonius appears to command Ophelia not as a father but more like a stubborn boss. Ophelia follows her father's commands without any discrimination and negligence. It seems that Ophelia drowns due to a flood of advice. To Shakespeare, too much advice is like 'poison in the ear'. Laertes advises her sister not to mingle with Hamlet, on which Ophelia replies '*I shall the effect of this good lesson keep, As watchman to my heart*' (Hamlet, I, iii, 47-48) but later on, it is reveled that she does not follow it as she likes to be with her beloved Hamlet. Laertes explains to her that she must take due regard for Hamlet's rank and position. He also warns her not to be faithful to Hamlet as:

'*For Hamlet and the trifling of his favour,*
*Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,*
*A violet in the youth of primy nature,*
*Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,*
*The perfume and suppliance of a minute; No more*'. (Hamlet, I, iii, 5-7)

On a similar account, Polonius instructs and commands Ophelia: '*Tender yourself more dearly; Or--not to crack the wind of the poor phrase, Running it thus--you'll tender me a fool*' (Hamlet, I, iii, 107-9). It appears that Polonius is more concerned about his own position in the court rather than his ward's well being. He likes to be certain of Ophelia's dependency on him and we find that this over dependency becomes the main cause of Ophelia's madness and forces her to commit suicide after her father's murder. Thus, it is observed that Polonius considers his opinions as final and the only solution to all problems.

Polonius is introduced as a father deeply concerned with the affairs of his children in Hamlet. But he has nothing to do with any scruple of conscience or sense of honor. 'The portrait of Polonius was based on some of Queen Elizabeth's elder statesman and was meant to be somewhat satirical, emphasizing vanity, verbosity, servility and loyalty and a tendency towards intrigue and espionage'. (Parrott, 1949:284) He can stoop to anything to accomplish his ends.

To test Hamlet, he makes use of his daughter as a spy and there is no evidence that she is an unwilling one, Ophelia is young, docile, obedient innocent, loving, and surely, undeserving of her fate. She is far from the 'insane, nympho-maniac that is found in the German version of the Ur'Hamlet'. (Parrott, 1949:284) Polonius makes general mistakes among



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parents, beginning with an attitude of suspicion, doubt, and criticism, utterly ignoring all the innate womanly instincts. He puts the matter in such a way as almost to challenge and force her to revolt against his authority, and makes it utterly impossible that he should really understand the situation or give him her sympathy. She is, nevertheless, a lady and a dutiful daughter, with an entirely clear conscience; so she replies, simply and modestly: 'He hath my lord, of late made many tenders of his affection to me'. (Hamlet, I, iii, 99-100) Ophelia's relationship with her father is not a reciprocal one. Her love for her father is deep though mingled with fear. She is an obedient daughter, who fulfils her father's wish. In the handling of father-daughter relationship, Shakespeare points out the importance of trust, especially that on the part of the father.

It is exactly this trust that Polonius does not have towards his daughter. He cannot believe that Ophelia can be trusted in her relationship with Hamlet and therefore he guards her unreasonably. Polonius advices Ophelia to avoid Hamlet without giving any just grounds for his distrust of Hamlet and he manages to shatter for the moment all her faith in Hamlet. Polonius advises Ophelia not to agree to meet Hamlet every time he urges her to do so. Polonius considers Hamlet as an immature young man. He advises Ophelia not to trust Hamlet's promises and oaths. Furthermore, he wants Ophelia to mend herself and behave as directed by him. She quietly obeys her father's will.

'I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth,
Have you so slander any moment leisure
As to give words or talk with the lord Hamlet
Look to't, I charge you. Come your ways'. (Hamlet, I, iii, 132-135)

Polonius sows the seed of doubts in Ophelia's mind and spoils the tender relationship which is bonding between her and Hamlet. 'The first affection of young people of either sex, if they have had any of the advantages of cultured blood and breeding are a response to some actual or imagined ideal. Nothing is more disastrous or more futile than for elders to inject into a romantic situation of this kind, not even the cold, calculating blight of intellectual and world-wise criticism or the more disastrous poison of suspicion, the suggestion of improper motive or distrust of good faith. Polonius pours all of this upon the head of his surprised and embarrassed daughter' (Gerwing, 1929:122).



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Polonius' sudden and unexplained death has unbalanced Ophelia's mind. Breaking off with Hamlet may be a contributory cause of her trouble, but this is practically ruled out as the king states that her madness is due to the death of Polonius. Her words and snatches of songs contain constant reference to her father, but none to Hamlet. Ophelia becomes the symbol of human love to which Hamlet turns for support and her rejection of him emphasizes symbolically that man faced with Hamlet's task must rely upon himself alone.

Polonius is a worldly wise man. To test Hamlet, he makes use of his daughter as a spy and there is no evidence that she is an unwilling one. Ophelia's moral law is her father's word and she is incapable of discovering that her father is an instrument of evil. 'I shall obey my lord' (Hamlet, I, iii, 137) is her only reply to the great moral issues which every human being confronts with.

Ophelia's father causes her to see love as madness and lust, to reject her fellow man in Hamlet, and in the nunnery scene to become like her brother Laertes, an instrument of evil, in spite of her natural inclination towards the good. Ophelia is so deeply attached to her father that, after her beloved Hamlet murders her father and after seeing his strange behavior afterwards, she becomes crazy. She looses her cool and drowns herself.

**6. Relationship between Kanav and Shakuntala**

*Kana*v, the foster father of *Shakuntala* appears to be more real than a practical character. He understands the duties of a noble father. He counsels *Shakuntala* from time to time. It seems that he is well aware about women psychology. *Kanva* plays an important part in the fourth act of the drama. *Shakuntala's* affection and care for her father was also unbounded. He is described as being possessed by a superhuman power, which is the outcome of his ripened spiritualism. Though an old hermit, he is so deeply attached to his daughter, that he is touched to tears on the occasion of his separation from his daughter.

*Kanav* as a father becomes so sad, his heart smitten with grief, his throat chocked and his sight heavy with anxiety. Unlike Polonius, *Kanav* does not create any obstacles between Dushyanta[9] and Shakuntala. Moreover, he sends Rishikumaras[10] along with *Shakuntala*, when she

9 Dushyanta was a great king in classical Indian literature and mythology. He is the husband of Shakuntala and the father of the Emperor Bharat.

10 Rishikumaras are considered as the sons of sages.



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proceeds to meet the king. *Kanav* is happy that *Shakuntala* has chosen a husband of her own will and feels free from all sorts of anxiety. It seems that *Kanav* knows very well the importance of *Kanyadan.* He also shows practical wisdom in the counsel; he gives to *Shakuntala* some of the duties of a wife and a daughter-in-law. It also seems that *Kanav* considers a daughter another's property. Therefore, he finds his inward soul intensely serene after having sent *Shakuntal*a to her husband.

Ophelia's father is anxious about her welfare as they know her to be ignorant and innocent. Her whole character is that of simple, unselfish, affection. Naturally, she is incapable of understanding Hamlet's mind, though she can feel its beauty. *Shakuntala* loves king *Dusyanta* with the same passion like Ophelia does. Her love affair is not even disclosed to her father. Her father knows well that *Shakuntala* will not cross the boundaries of a woman. *Shakuntala* too presents an illustration of the Aryan female modesty. When encountered by her very lover, she is again the same genuine picture of womanly modesty peculiar to Hindu woman. Her words also indicate clearly her lively sense of feminine dignity and her respect for her father and other elders.

**7. Shakuntala and Ophelia as daughters and lovers**

*Shakuntala* and Ophelia both have been discarded by their lovers and mentally suffered due to their irresponsible actions. But their relationship with their father remains unaffected. Both follow their fathers' will and advice religiously. The case of Ophelia is typical one as lover Hamlet unknowingly kills her father. Hamlet, her dream lover is believed to have gone mad. He has been estranged from her. She feels utterly alone. Towards the end of the drama, we find that even Ophelia looses her mental balance and commits suicide by drowning herself.

Whereas *Shakuntala* is desperate to find her lover king *Dusyanta*. In course of action, she also gives birth to a child but she never looks mentally unfit. She is guided by her father throughout her days of suffering. Though she is pure and faithful, she is unaware about the ill effect of the curse. She does not loose hope and she never thinks of committing suicide or taking such a fatal step. She loves life and desires to live under the parental shadow and love of her dear husband. Thus, it appears that Ophelia is in tight corners, as she is always ready to obey the will of others in the detriment of her own, considered to be meaningless. She is fearful of the consequence.



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Hence, she respects and follows her father's will and command. On the contrary, *Shankuntal*a is a typical Indian woman, she knows her limitations. She is aware of her father's dignity and status as her father is a sage. She tries all possible measures to bring back her lover and ultimately she succeeds.

Though Polonius, like *Kanav,* is greatly attached to his daughter, he is unable to understand her feelings and emotions. Polonius is over protective and conscious about his own honor, because he feels that Prince Hamlet is an immature young man and being a young man he can cherish greater freedom of the movement than can be allowed to Ophelia.

Polonius – '*Affection! Pooh! You speak like a green girl, Unsifted in such perilous circumstance. Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?*'(Hamlet, I, iii, 101-103).

**8. Conclusion**

Thus, it is noted that Ophelia and *Shakuntala* both are young, docile and obedient daughters. Ophelia has hardly any will of her own. She has been brought-up in complete submission to her father and is always ready to obey him without questioning. Ophelia seems not that strong to resist the influence and interference of her father. Her filial obedience is an obstacle between her and Hamlet. Therefore, in the end she becomes the cruel victim of fate. On one hand, Polonius does not act as an ideal father either. On the other hand, *Shakuntala* is lucky enough to aspire to what her heart desires. In the end, she finds her lost love. *Kanav* also paves her way and encourages her to fulfill her dreams.

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