

## Summary

In her novel ***Shakuntala: The Play of Memory***, Gokhale depicts the struggle of Shakuntala against the patriarchal norms that tries to suppress and quench her individuality and identity. The novel is a splendid work of art in which writer has depicted women's pathetic condition. The novel opens up new and fresh avenues for discussion of women, their personal emotions and aspirations.

Shakuntala, the protagonist of the novel is a provincial girl living with her widowed and illiterate mother along with her brother Govinda in a village in the northern mountains. She is a carefree and very ambitious girl, eager and restless to see the world. However Shakuntala's life is dictated by the conventions and norms of a patriarchal society that are embedded into the feminine psyche. According to her mother her life is meant only to be happy with feminine roles. So she should try to be an ideal girl in all feminine relation such as a faithful wife, an obedient daughter and a loving mother. Shakuntala is denied of basic happiness and space, which she yearns for but fails to achieve. She is forced to lead a life that denies her any freedom. She is portrayed as a simple girl cherishing the desire to lead a life that fascinates her. She lives in a family that neglects and ignores her as human being. She is never cared for her ambitions and for her desire which she has in her heart. The very ground for becoming a successful female is denied to her on the ground of gender discrimination between her and her brother by her mother.

On the slightest mistake of Shakuntala, her mother cries, "You wicked, heartless girl!" and says, "Were you born only to trouble and torment me (page 6)?" As in male dominated society, a son is given more value than a daughter, Shakuntala's mother showers all her love upon her son **Govinda**. For the entire day, things are planned and done only for Govinda in a proper manner by the mother. She provides good food and education for her son and also appoints a teacher for his studies. But when Shakuntala asks her mother for her education, she is chided by her mother who says, "the scriptures" are "forbidden to women(page 11)". Being a male child Govinda is entitled to better facilities for his career but Shakuntala is denied the same on the name of tradition. The mother is only concerned for her son's future and considers Shakuntala to be a burden on their life. On several occasions Shakuntala is dominated by her mother for being a female child. As in our society, women are felt shame for their gender and sexuality; we find how on reaching puberty when Shakuntala's menstruation starts, she is treated scornfully by her mother who is driven by orthodox beliefs and rituals. When her mother sees the blood trickling down the legs of Shakuntala who is in the kitchen at the time, she cries out, "Have you no modesty, girl (page 31)!" During menstruation, restrictions are laid upon the movements of women especially from the view of rituals related to notions of purity and defilement. A woman is considered impure, dirty and is not permitted to come out of their seclusion, touch or even show her face to others, or touch cooked food during the period of her menstruation. The idea of purity is forced on women by religious beliefs and values in the various communities in India. Shakuntala is dragged to the low stoop beside the cowshed by her mother. Full of anguish and pain

Shakuntala asks herself, "What had I done wrong (page 31)?" A girl who should be treated in a polite and lovable tone during such a great change in her life, she is scolded for this moment of menstruation.

A son is always a matter of pride for the parents either he is worth for nothing and a girl who is always dedicated and caring for her parents is a burden for them. When the mother compares Govinda as a "reflection of some divinity" (page 19), Shakuntala dissolves into a jealous rage, plucks all the marigolds in the garden and stomps on them till they are interred in the damp earth. Her rage is symbolic of her rebellion against the male-female child discrimination.

Shakuntala feels burdened up by the oppressive dominance of her mother who always insisted on her conforming to the traditional way of life. Shakuntala decides to free herself from the bondage of her mother.

Shakuntala's mother settles her marriage with **Srijan**, chief of fourteen villages and a widower; **Shakuntala is his third wife**, the earlier wives having died during childbirth. Marriage provides Shakuntala with a rare degree of freedom like to swim in the river, climb the trees in the forest and rest in the grassy meadows. She prepares herself for marriage so that she can enjoy her life on her own terms but her marriage does not give her autonomy to fulfil her desires according to herself. Shakuntala's aspired freedom and joy is however illusory and short lived. Srijan brings a beautiful **handmaiden called Kamalini** from one of his foreign journeys. The exotic beauty of Kamalini makes Shakuntala jealous and insecure of her authority and position in Srijan's life and house. She becomes anxious of her future and is apprehensive of her possible replacement by Kamalini. Shakuntala feels betrayed and frustrated by Kamalini's presence in the house and says. This male dominated society gives all the freedom to males where as a woman is always supposed to restrict herself according to the norms of the society. It is really quite surprising that these all rules which are made by men for women always give pleasure and benefit to men.

Shakuntala decides to leave her husband's house. When Shakuntala gets pregnant she is advised to visit the holy temple to pray for a safe childbirth. At the temple Shakuntala meets a Greek mercenary, a **foreigner, Nearchus**.

Shakuntala elopes with Nearchus to live and travel to her heart's content. She throws her "**silver anklets**" (page 115) which are symbolic of her breaking off from the traditional binds of her home and family. The rebel and seeker in her revels in the new found freedom and independence, and she does not even hesitate to form a sexual relationship with Nearchus. Shakuntala is aware of the fact that **Nearchus is a Yavana, a melachha, a foreigner** who is considered impure and unclean. His presence is considered to be a polluting influence on the high castes but still Shakuntala dares to run away with him. In her rebellion, Shakuntala rebels not only against the patriarchal norms and constraints but also against social and religious codes and dogmas.

Another significant dimension of Shakuntala's personality is her desire to shed all her memories associated with her old identity that was more of an imposed identity than her own. In her endeavour to break away from her earlier life she tries to carve out and create a new identity by discarding her old name and adopting a new name. **She assumes the name of Yaduri, 'the uninhibited', the fallen one.** Through Shakuntala's calculated attempts to acquire a new name and thereby a new identity, the novelist makes its explicit that women need to redefine themselves. While she is truly alone and free she is struck by tragedy and dies leaving a male child to be looked after by monks. She and the twin female child die.

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Info- Important points are marked in red . Please do read attentively. So that you can attempt short question also.