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**Write an essay on the dramatic irony in Kalidasa's Abhigyan Shakuntalam.**

**Dramatic Irony defined**----- Dramatic Irony occurs when the audience of a play or the reader of a work of literature knows something that a character in the work itself does not know. The irony is in the contrast between the intended meaning of the statements or actions of a character and the additional information understood by the audience. A celebrated example of dramatic irony is in Act V of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, where two young lovers meet their end as a result of a tragic misunderstanding. Here, the audience has full knowledge that Juliet's apparent "death" is merely temporary; she will regain her senses when the mysterious "sleeping potion" she has taken wears off. But Romeo, mistaking Juliet's drug-induced trance for true death, kills himself in grief. Upon awakening, Juliet discovers Romeo's corpse and, in despair, slays herself.

**Examples of dramatic irony in Abhigyan Shakuntalam**-----Dramatic irony is a very powerful weapon in the hands of the playwright. With this convenient tool, he can comment, criticize or imply in a prophetic way events and conduct. The deeper import of the words involving dramatic irony is not known to the character who utters them but the audience understands it as they are familiar with the story and the events of the play. Thus in Kailas's *Abhigyan Shakuntalam*, Shakuntala's companions Anusuya and Priyamvada for example, engaged in gathering flowers for performing a ritual for Shakuntala's well-being, are away from the ashram (in Act IV). It is during their absence sage Durvasas visits Shakuntala and curses her finding her absorbed in her own thoughts without taking notice of his arrival. If they were in the ashram at that time, they would have welcomed Durvasas in a befitting manner, thus averting Shakuntala's calamity.

In the First Act, Kanva's disciple requests king Dusyanta not to kill the deer belonging to the pious-grove. This interruption of the ascetic gives an opportunity for 'hunting' the deer-like innocent Shakuntala. Kanva has gone on a pilgrimage to Somatirtha for appeasing Shakuntala's adverse fate. But during his absence and during the time when the adverse fate is being pacified, she falls in love with and neglects her duties. Dusyanta's identity revealed at the end of the first Act gives an opportunity to the sages to invite him to the hermitage. This provides an opportunity for Dusyanta to make love to Shakuntala.

Though Anusuya and Priyamvada are aware of the curse of Durvasas on Shakuntala, they do not disclose anything about it to either Shakuntala or the other ascetics at the ashram. If they had done so, Shakuntala could have saved herself from shame and humiliation at the hands of her husband in the fifth Act. Durvasas' curse operating on Dusyanta makes him reject his own wife who is bearing his son in her womb. Thus the situation gives rise to dramatic irony that a husband is not able to identify his own wife. Again the token ring slips from the finger of Shakuntala making it impossible for her to prove her stand in spite of the fact that Anusuya and Priyamvada ask her to use her token ring in times of distress. In the sixth Act, when the king comes to know of the death of the rich Merchant Danamitra who dies without leaving an issue behind to succeed to his wealth. Though Dusyanta is gifted with a son through Shakuntala, he bemoans his childless condition for having sent his wife bearing his seed in her womb away. This gives rise to dramatic irony. Again in the seventh

act, when he meets the precocious child, Sarvadamana playing with the lion's cub, he wishes that he were his own son for he feels a strange attraction towards him and addresses him "My son". It is a pity that Dusyanta does not know that he is talking to his own son. This again is another instance of dramatic irony. In the sixth act, he is not able to recognize his wife even after she lifts her veil and in the seventh act, he finds himself recognized by her. Thus we have many instances of dramatic irony in the play which adds to its rich texture. It creates an ideal link between the audience and the dramatist on the one hand and the characters who utter the statements without knowing their deeper import on the other hand.