

Kalidasa



There are hundreds of languages in the world. However, great and classical literature which people in all countries need to read is found only in a few languages. One such great language is Sanskrit. It is one of the oldest languages. It is the mother of several Indian languages such as Hindi, Bengali and Marathi in the North. Kannada, Telugu and other languages in the South have also been nourished by it.

It needs the genius of poets who create literary epics and great thinkers for a language to achieve world-renown. Sanskrit is eminently lucky in this respect. Sages' celebration of the wonders of nature, the sky, the stars, mountains and rivers, the sun, the moon, the clouds, fire ('Agni') and their devout offering of prayers to the Universal Power are all found in the Vedic classics which/are in Sanskrit. Puranas and historical epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata vividly describe the battle between the good and the evil. They also portray the virtues like devotion to truth, a sense of sacrifice, heroism, cultured living, etc. In Sanskrit there are also beautiful stories of birds and animals like Panchatantra; stories extolling good and basic qualities of wisdom and intelligence. Sanskrit

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can also justly boast of a rich treasure house of plays, poems and many scientific and philosophical treatises.

A poet who has made a distinct and glorious contribution to this sumptuous Sanskrit literature is Kalidasa. He has pictured in his works the beauty in life and pondered upon how we can give pleasure to others by generous and graceful behavior. His portrayals are vivid and heart-warming; his wordpower is unique. In a few words he is capable of bringing out the entire meaning intended. His writings touchingly show up a noble, meaningful mode of life for the people to pursue. His works are an intellectual treat to thinkers and common readers alike.

Who is this Kalidasa? When did he live and where in India was he residing? Much discussion has taken place for a long time now about his life and times. Not many queries on this score have elicited definite answers. Several legends have sprouted around him. For instance, one story says that he was the son of a Brahmin and lost his parents while he was a baby of six months. A cowherd brought him up; he had no schooling of any sort. At that time, a king named Bheemashukla ruled over Kashi (Banaras). He wanted his daughter Vasanti to marry Vararuchi, a scholar in his court. But she refused saying she was herself a greater scholar than he was. Vararuchi was furious.

One day, the King's minister happened to see this cowherd-boy sitting atop a tree in a forest and attempting to fell the tree by axing its roots. "What a fool! He should be an ideal husband to Vasanti!" rethought and brought the boy to the capital. The minister and

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Vararuchi instructed the boy not to say anything except 'Om Swastika' to any questions put to him at the palace, dressed him up in elegant clothes and took him to the royal presence. The boy was good-looking and they made Vasanti to believe that he was a great scholar.

Vasanti married him and only later came to know of the truth. She was grief-stricken. She was a devout worshipper of goddess Kali and taught her husband to worship her. However, no amount of his devotional prayer could please the Goddess and finally, he vowed to offer his life in sacrifice if She did not bless him. The goddess relented and inscribed some letters on his tongue. He then became a great poet- scholar. Since goddess Kali blessed him, he assumed the name of 'Kalidasa' (devotee of Kali).

This is one of the most popular legends about Kalidasa.

There are several other stories but they lack authenticity.

It appears Kalidasa was at the court of emperor Vikramaditya. The place and time of this king are also not definite. But it can be said with some certainty that Kalidasa lived before the 6th century A.D., i.e., about 1400 years ago. But when exactly he lived before the 6th century is not firmly established. Though a deep affection for the city of Ujjain is discernible in his works, it cannot be said with certainty that he lived there. But we can assume that, wherever he may have been born, he had lived at Ujjain.

Kalidasa, however, had good knowledge of the whole of Bharat. In his poem 'Meghaduta', his descriptions of mountains and rivers and cities and villages stretching from Ramagiri in Central India up to

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Alakanagari in the Himalayas are very beautiful. In another epic poem 'Raghuvamsha', Kalidasa, while portraying the conquests of emperor Raghu, describes the places and peoples, their modes of living, food-habits and trades and professions, rivers and mountains in almost the whole country -- Assam, Bengal and Utkal in the East; Pandya and Kerala in the South and Sind, Gandhara and other places in the North-west.

Reading these pen-pictures, one cannot help but conclude that the poet must have had a personal knowledge of these areas. In short, he must have traveled widely across the length and breadth of the land, seen those places, talked to the people and studied their modes of living.

Kalidasa possessed that distinct intellect which makes one a great poet. He was a scholar and his works display his poetic genius as well as scholarship. Also they are marked by a belief of what is good in life and people's noble goals of life. He could describe the rich and wealthy life of a royal palace and the serene, simple and peaceful life at a hermitage with equal understanding. He could, likewise, describe the joys of the marital life of a man and his spouse as well as their pangs of separation. He creates scenes of a serious and thoughtful nature as also hilarious scenes of light comedy. In his works is found an excellent combination of art-consciousness, unmatched word power and an unparalleled capacity for vivid portrayals.

Kalidasa wrote seven works. 'Kumarasambhava' and 'Raghuvamsha' are his two epic poems. 'Malavikagnimitra',

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'Vikramorvashiya' and 'Abhijnana Shakuntala' are his celebrated plays. 'Meghaduta' and 'Ritusamhara' are also poetical works of great distinction.

One of Kalidasa's greatest works is 'Kumarasambhava'. Critics maintain that Kalidasa wrote only the first eight chapters of the epic poem. The work describes the marriage of Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati. It begins with a fine description of that giant among mountains, the Himalaya. Kalidasa writes: "Himalaya is rich in life. Living there are the Siddhas, Kinnaras and Vidyadhara beauties. Clouds in front of the caves look like curtains. You can trace the track of lions' by looking at the precious stones spilled from the heads of elephants and not by bloodstains. You have to know the paths they tread by recognizing 'Sarala' trees against whose stem the elephants rub themselves attracted by the sweet milk exuded by the trees. All the things needed for a sacrifice ('Yajna') are available here. Brahma (the God of creation) himself has made this the king of the mountains." It is not only a place for lovers who want to find happiness in life; it is also an ideal retreat for those who want to meditate.

Parvati is the daughter of Parvataraja, the King of the Himalayas. In course of time she blossomed into a girl of matchless beauty. She was very good-looking, like a fine portrait drawn by a master-painter. Women wear jewelry with a feeling that their beauty is enhanced by it. But the neck of Parvati appeared to enhance the beauty of the necklace itself. Parvati's speech was sweet as the playing of the Veena. And her bearing reminded one of a deer.

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Narada, a great sage in our epics, is a wandering minstrel. He once came to the court of Parvataraja, and predicted that the king's daughter would marry Lord Shiva. But Parvataraja was doubtful whether Lord Shiva would accept the bride. Neither he volunteered to ask Shiva nor did the latter come forward to ask for the hand of Parvati. Shiva was in penance atop one of the biggest mountains in the Himalayas. Parvataraja sent his daughter to serve the Lord who acquiesced to have her near him. Parvati served him with utmost, pure hearted devotion; she would daily cleanse his place of penance, and keep ready the articles of 'Tapas' like pure water, leaves of grass, flowers, etc.

While Shiva sat thus in penance, a 'Rakshasa' named Tarakasura began to trouble the Devas. They, in panic, went to Lord Brahma, the creator of the universe, and sought salvation. He told them that Parvati had to marry Lord Shiva and that the son born out of their wedlock would be able to defeat demon Taraka. But then, how to make Lord Shiva, in deep penance to awake physically and consent to marry Parvati?

Devendra is the king of the Devas. One of the Gods at his court was Kama (Manmatha) whose wife was the beautiful Rati. Kama had the capacity to make any one desire to marry. Devendra commanded him to see that Lord Shiva would develop a wish to marry Parvati. Kama, Rati and their friend Vasanta (Lord of spring) set about the task.

Though it was not the season, Kama created all the glory and beauty of the spring. Mild, pleasant breeze began to blow from the

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south. Flowers were sprinkling down from 'Ashoka' trees. Birds and the bees began to savor the fresh flower of the young mango leaves.

But all this would not deter Lord Shiva from his penance. Kama went there. Shiva was doing his penance sitting on a tiger-skin under a Devadaru tree. Kama was overwhelmed on seeing the exquisite grace of Lord and the cupid's bow and arrow fell down without his being aware of it. At this time, Parvati arrived on the scene to attend to her daily chores of service to the Lord. She wore a saree colored like the bright red rays of the Sun. Nice spring flowers adorned her plait. A diamond chain shone on her forehead. Her gait was like that of a delicate flower- creeper.

This great beauty of Parvati inspired Kama, who hitherto was somewhat, dejected, again to strive to fulfil his task. Parvati raised her hands to offer her garland of lotus flowers to Shiva who also eagerly came out of his penance to accept the offering. Kama was waiting for such a moment and exercised his 'sword of love'. Shiva eyed Parvati once and immediately realised that he had been weaned away. From his penance. How could this happen?

Kama, Cupid, was ready with his and arrow for action.

Lord Shiva was angry and opened his Third Eye. A great fire flowed forth. Kama was burnt to ashes and Shiva then disappeared. Rati, seeing her husband destroyed collapsed unconscious. Parvati's father sorrowfully took her to his home.

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Regaining consciousness after some time, Rati lamented that she too would end her life. Then a voice from the sky told her that Kama would come back to life when Lord Shiva married Parvati.

Meanwhile, Parvati sat for a highly strenuous penance. She would setup a huge fire around her and standing amidst the fire in blazing Sun would stare at the Sun God. She would sit unmoved in pouring rain and biting cold and winds. To test this damsel engaged in such severe penance, Lord Shiva himself appeared before her in the guise of a 'Brahmachary' (a young lad who had his 'Upanayana' or sacred thread ceremony) and began to pour abuse on Shiva thus; "Why do you wish to accept the hand of one whose bracelet is a snake? Why do you, a damsel in glorious silk, seek unison with one wearing an elephant-skin? Don't people laugh to see you driving around with Him sitting on an old, emaciated ox? Add to his grotesqueness his three eyes! Why did you? Have to choose such a groom?"

Not knowing that the lad was Shiva in disguise, Parvati naturally was angry with him for abusing Shiva. She asked her aide to 'send the boy away and she herself rose to leave the place. Shiva then appeared to her in his true form. Parvati on seeing his divine form was overwhelmed. She stood glued to the ground not knowing what to do. The poet's description of this scene is extraordinarily beautiful.

Parvati sent word through her maid to Shiva to ask him to talk to her father about their marriage. Shiva thereupon sent a message

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to him through the seven great Sages. The king of the Himalayas gladly agreed. The marriage took place in a grand style.

The part authored by Kalidasa in 'Kumarasambhava' ends here. The remaining episodes such as the birth of the son Kumara to Shiva and Parvati, his becoming the Commander of the Devas' forces and the slaying of the demon Tarakasura are written by another poet.

Kalidasa's works are known for their triple qualities -- a sense of beauty, a capacity for appreciation of the aesthetic values and our traditional culture. Kalidasa's portrayals of the great Himalayan mountain and of the mode in which the season of spring (vasanta) blossomed are some of the most lyrical expressions in the language. His descriptions are vivid and heart-warming; it is as if we are seeing the events happening before us. Kalidasa's portrayal of Parvati's grace and beauty magnificently shows his ability as a poet. Rati's lament upon Kama being consigned to flames moves us to tears. Kalidasa is equally at ease in portraying the happy marital life of Shiva and Parvati as a couple deeply in love as also of picturing the grace and beauty of both nature and man, Feelings of joy and sorrow and all other emotions.

Crowning all these pen-pictures of things that are beautiful and sweet in life is Kalidasa's extolling of a noble culture. What does 'culture' mean? It is a sense of decent behavior - in body and mind; it is the blossoming of the mind and heart to savor the rich and colorful beauty around us -- such as the color and fragrance of flowers which gladden the hearts of one and all. The thought, word and action of a man's mature mind give happiness to others. Besides describing

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these in a masterly style and imagination, Kalidasa also exhibits his powers of perception while recognizing what we can call as 'beauty in action and behavior'. Episodes such as the Parvataraja's not going by himself to see Shiva even when sage Narada tells him that Parvati was to marry Shiva, his agreeing for Parvati's desire to go to serve Shiva, her sitting for penance, his acceptance of Shiva's offer, sent through the seven Sages, to marry Parvati -- all these enable us to weave in our minds his personality shining with full grace and honor. Parvati allows no distraction of her mind and engages herself with singular devotion; she sits for a strenuous penance to make Shiva accept her and would not tolerate anyone abusing Him. All these show the high culture in which she is molded. Though stirred a bit on noticing the beauty of Parvati, Shiva, in his anger at being disturbed in his penance, burns down Kama, puts Parvati's mind and thoughts to test, sends the seven Great Sages to Parvataraja -- thus exhibiting his maturity of mind. In fact, Shiva was not enamoured by the physical beauty of Parvati and only destroyed Kama who attempted to make him desire her physically. Actually he admired her several fine, noble qualities and her devout penance. Both he and Parvati were performing penance and leading a life of sacrifice -- i.e., 'tapasya'. Both were embodiments of purity. Born to them was Kumara. His parents' penance fortified him with strength to destroy the demon Taraka.

Kalidasa's poem gives us a vivid picture of what a good, meaningful life a man could and should lead as propounded by our learned ancestors.

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Kalidasa's second epic is 'Raghuvamsha'. There are nineteen chapters ('sargas') in this poem. The epic describes the history of the kings Dileepa, Raghu, Aja, Dasharatha, Sri Rama, Lava and Kusha. It also deals briefly with the twenty kings from Nala up to Agnivarna. In the beginning, the poet extols the fine qualities of the kings of Raghu dynasty.

The dynasty is a noble one. Those belonging to it have their early education at the right time from distinguished teachers. They are married at the right age and rule justly adhering to 'Dharma' (law of righteousness). As they grew old, they renounced the kingdom in favor of the younger incumbents and led a life of saintly renunciation and ultimately renounced the mortal life by way of 'yoga'. They earned wealth so that they would offer it to the worthy who are in need. They liked to conquer a kingdom for the thrill of success. Culprits were punished. Those kings were ever vigilant; generally undaunted and strove their best to achieve their goal. They ruled a kingdom stretching up to the seashore. They would even drive a chariot right up to the Heavens. The poet asserts that his main aim in writing this poem is to celebrate the ideal royal qualities of the kings of the clan of Raghu and to portray the history of a galaxy of such men. The story begins with king Dileepa.

Dileepa, as portrayed by the poet, was a majestic personality. He was impressively built, broad-shouldered, tall. In effect he personified 'Vishatradharma' (the royal tradition). His intellect matched his physique. That intellect matched his vast learning. His actions were dictated by his superior knowledge and the results were

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true to his efforts. His consort Sudakshina was an ideal wife worried at not having children; they go to the 'ashram' of the great sage Vashishta who suggests to them that they offer obeisance to Nandini, the calf of the Heavenly Cow Kamadhenu.

Accordingly, Dileepa follows Nandini to the forest daily and serves her for twenty-one days. On the last day, a lion attacks Nandini and when Dileepa tries to draw an arrow from his bow to kill the beast, his hand gets stuck on the bow. The lion, speaking like human beings, tells him to return to the 'ashram', as the cow was his meal. Dileepa thereupon offers his own body as food for the lion. Then the lion disappears. In fact the lion was the creation of Nandini herself to test the king. She blesses him and says he would beget children when he drank her milk.

They return to the 'ashram' where the royal couple drink the milk and return to the capital. In due course, Sudakshina gives birth to a son who was named Raghuraja. The poets' description gives us a fine picture of a great king devoted to truth and highest moral and spiritual ideals. The close contact between the kings and sages and the fact that great personalities are born when the heroic king is blessed by a sage whose life is a saga of purity, are narrated memorably.

The poet then goes on to tell us the story of Raghu. Even while he was the Prince, he had displayed his prowess by protecting the horse his father had sent out on a victorious march at the time of conducting an Ashwamedha (a sacrifice featuring a highbred horse). A fierce battle rages between Raghu and the king of the 'Devas' Indra

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at the time of Dileepa's one hundredth 'Ashwamedha' sacrifice. Impressed by Raghu's heroism, Indra blesses Dileepa to enjoy the fruits of the sacrifice. Thereupon, Dileepa hands over the reigns of the kingdom to his son and goes away to the forest to spend his last days in penance.

Raghu defeated several kings and expanded his domain, conducted a great sacrifice called Vishwajit Yaga and then gave away all his worldly riches in charity. At that time, Kautsa, the son of a sage, comes and asks for some money to pay as 'Gurudakshina' (tribute to his guru). But the king had by then donated all his wealth and belongings. The king could only offer him sanctified water from an earthen bowl. When he learnt of the need of the sage's son, he decided to wage a war against Kubera, the God of Wealth, but the latter hastens to aid Raghu and fills his treasury to enable him to fulfil the desire to make the gift to Kautsa.

A son is born to Raghu and is named Aja. He was extremely good-looking and of a tender nature. On coming of age, he goes to the Swayamvara (where the bride choose her groom from amongst several aspirants) of princess Indumati of the province of Vidarbha. As she entered the Swayamvara Hall, her maid Sunanda introduces each prince describing his physical features, heroism and prowess. None appeals to the princess. Sunanda then introduces prince Aja and extols his fine qualities and his illustrious family. Indumati garlands him accepting his hand in marriage. Kalidasa's description of this Swayamvara is a very pleasant one. The princes' descriptions are not overdone, their physical strength, heroic disposition, riches

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are all described with absorbing interest. None has been belittled. Indumati does not reject other suitors because of any defects in them. However, each person has a nature distinct to himself, the poet feels, and one cannot reason out why a person particularly falls in love with another. The narrative here shows the poets' high taste, aesthetic awareness of beauty and also a lively light-heartedness.

The marriage of Indumati with Aja is performed in a grand manner. But then, the disappointed princes attack them vengefully and fierce battle ensues. Aja defeats all of them and triumphantly returns to his capital with his bride. Raghu instantly recognizes his son's heroism and majesty, gladly hands over the reigns of the kingdom and goes to live in a hermitage on the outskirts of Ayodhya. A father who ascends a seat of renunciation ('Yoga') and a son who ascends the throne -- the stance and actions of the two personalities are narrated with moving lyricism and understanding. The father is guided by sages and the son is assisted by ministers. The former has conquered all the worldly desires in him while the latter has defeated enemies outside. Raghu's life displays a personality that shows how one can achieve that exquisite serenity and peace if only one could concentrate on total devotion to God. Likewise, the pleasures of living a man of sterling qualities can achieve and enjoy are evidenced in the life of Aja. Though both Dileepa and Raghu are great men, we notice a difference in them.

As laid down by our learned ancestors, a man should have four goals before him: spiritual awareness or righteousness ('Dharma'), acquisition of wealth ('Artha'), love or a desire for physical pleasure

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('Kama'), and ultimately salvation ('Moksha'), Neither the desire to earn wealth nor the urge for pleasures of life is wrong but they should be accompanied by a sense of righteousness. One should try to acquire wealth through moral means; he should earn it in a manner, which does not do any injustice to others.

He should spend money for right and good causes. He should not take to wrong or harmful ways, which may hurt others. He should live a life, which could bring him salvation when death approaches and seeks to be one with divinity. We see that Dileepa's life is dominated by 'Dharma'. He is so self-sacrificing as to offer himself as food for the lion, which comes to attack Nandini. And we find the true meaning of 'Artha' (acquisition and spending of wealth) in the life of Raghu. While conquering many domains, he gives away all his riches to those he found deserving and at last he is left with only an earthen bowl for himself!

Aja's rule had earned the affection of all his subjects. One day he was holidaying in the garden outside the city with his wife. Sage Narada was passing through that sky-route when a heavenly garland adorning his Veena slipped down and hit Indumati who instantly collapsed, and breathed her last. His aides shock Aja to unconsciousness and wakes up after ministrations. Resting Indumati's head on his lap, he laments: "Should a flower take away your life? Why don't I die even as I hold this garland? It's God's will that poison could turn into nectar and the latter may change into poison. You were everything to me--wife, counselor, aide

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and my disciple in learning of arts. By snatching you away, death has robbed me of everything".

Aja had a son Dasharatha who at that time was still a young boy. The king managed to live for eight more years when he hands over the crown to him; he then goes to the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Sarayu and breathes his last in that holy spot.

The poet has illustrated 'Kama' ('desire for pleasure') in the life of Aja. Here we see the portrayal of his happy life with Indumati as well as of his anguish upon her sad demise. Aja Pines for her and ends his life by drowning in the river as he cannot bear the pangs of separation from his beloved wife. It is an excellent example of devoted love. The stories of king Dileepa, Raghu and Aja are told in the first eight 'sargas' (chapters) and the subsequent chapters deal with the lives of Dasharatha, Sri Rama and the brothers Lava and Kusha. The poet presents here the theme of Ramayana in a condensed form. The story of Ramayana is quite well known but Kalidasa's narration can be said to be unique. Valmiki's original narrative is marked by simplicity and grace, shining like a pure diamond. Kalidasa's handling of this theme makes this diamond shine more glitteringly by expert processing.

After Kusha, his son Atithi ascends the throne. Kalidasa is full of praise for this young king and emphasizes that he ruled as dictated by 'Dharma', successfully protected his kingdom from enemies; sages were performing their penance unhindered.

Kalidasa lists twenty kings belonging to the Raghu dynasty who ruled after Atithi.

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According to the poet, Agnivarna, the last of this clan, was a pleasure-seeker who forgot his kingly duties and obligations. It was said that he would bestow an audience to those who came to see him by relaxing at window stretching his legs on the windowsill. Disease bedeviled him and upon his death, his wife fulfilled the obligation as a queen with the help of wise old ministers. Thus ends the description of the Raghu clan on a sad note.

'Raghuvamsha' depicts our ancient, historical culture and tradition. Our ancestors had discussed in detail about such matters as to who could be a good ruler, who is a man of 'tapas' (penance), how one should lead a good, purposeful life and the like. The poet has portrayed diverse characters like Vashishta, Dileepa, Raghu, Aja and others. Agnivarna is an example of a king who could be termed as 'depraved'.

'Malavikagnimitra' is Kalidasa's first play. The author shows his humility and is uncertain whether people would accept play. He pleads 'Puranamityeva Na sadhu sarvam, Na chapikavyamnavamityavadyam' (Everything old is not good, nor is everything new bad). There may be some thing, which may not be of much use in the old, and the new may also be good. The theme of the play is the love-story of Agnimitra and Malavika.

Kalidasa's second play 'Vikramor -vashiya' is about the love and tribulations of king Pururava and the heavenly damsel 'Urvashi'.

'Abhijnana Shakuntala' is Kalidasa's greatest creation. This literary

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masterpiece has been translated into several languages around the world.

The story of Shakuntala appears in the 'Adiparva' chapter of the epic Mahabharata. King Dushyanta, while on a gaming expedition (safari), and arrives at the hermitage of sage Kanva. The latter was away and his adopted daughter Shakuntala looks after the distinguished guest's needs. Dushyanta, immediately on seeing her, is struck by her beauty and offers to marry her. Shakuntala lays down a condition that the king should promise to hand over the kingdom to the son born to her and Dushyanta agrees. They marry and spend some happy days, after which the king returns to the capital. Shakuntala, in course of time, gives birth to a son who is named Sarvadamana.

Six years pass and still Dushyanta does not send for his spouse and son. Sage Kanva voluntarily decides to send Shakuntala to the palace. When she arrives at Dushyanta's abode, he refuses to recognize her. Shakuntala is grief-stricken. Then amidst her lament a heavenly voice commands Dushyanta: "He is your son. Accept him." The king then takes him in and the boy later comes to be renowned as Bharata.

Kalidasa weaves a great play basing on this Mahabharata theme. The first meeting of Dushyanta and Shakuntala is a lively, 'colorful sequence in the play. Dushyanta, in the course of his hunting Expedition arrives at Kanva's hermitage and there in the garden he sees Shakuntala engaged in watering the plants along with her maids. Mesmerized by her beauty, he desires to marry her while

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Shakuntala also is deeply impressed by the sight of the royal dignitary. They then marry in the 'Gandharva' style. The king returns to the capital while Shakuntala, left behind does not directly ask for the king's promise to make her son the prince consort to succeed him. It is supposed to be understood. After the king returns, sage Durvasa comes to call on sage Kanva. The latter was away and Shakuntala was so lost in her thoughts of king Dushyanta that the sage's words: "I, a guest, have come" fell on her deaf ears. The sage is enraged and always quick to anger, curses her: "May the person about whom you are thinking forget you!" Later, he relents and says: "When he sees an object, which he has given you and recognizes it, he will remember you."

Unfortunately, Shakuntala loses the ring given by Dushyanta who just forgets her. Kanva sends Shakuntala, now pregnant, to the court of Dushyanta along with his disciples. (Mahabharata pictures her child, about six now, who is very active.) Kalidasa portrays the farewell of sage Kanva to Shakuntala very touchingly. The whole ashram is plunged in sorrow. Kanva, Shakuntala's maids, all shed tears at departure; even the trees, plants, and birds bow down with grief.

Upon her arrival, king Dushyanta cannot recognize Shankuntala. He even thinks it improper to eye a damsel who is a stranger to him. He could not believe that this woman is his wife. The ring is lost on the way and Shankuntala, overcome with grief after being rejected by Dushyanta, collapses and is then carried away by a divine light. After a few days, the ring is found in the stomach of a fish

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and Dushyanta, upon seeing it, remembers everything. He feels sad that he rejected Shakuntala. Later, on his way back from Heaven where he had gone to assist Indra on an errand, he visits the hermitage of Mareecha. There he sees a boy daringly attempting to bare the jaws of a lion's cub. On inquiry, he learns that he is none other than his own son Sarvadamana. Dushyanta, his consort and their son are happily united.

At the end of the play, one feels sad at the sufferings of Shakuntala and we are at a loss as to whether we should blame Dushyanta or the 'Divine Power' for these happenings. In the last act, we see Shakuntala wrapped in a very ordinary saree, but she is a picture of grace and dignity. Though young in age, she speaks but a few words in a profound sense.

She is a real Tapaswini (one who wants to sacrifice life for eternal salvation). One wonders at the manner in which she has transformed herself from a pleasure-seeking young girl into a young woman imbued with a sense of total renunciation and service. Through portraying scenes of Shakuntala's maids teasing her, sage Kanva's far-sightedness, the King's pining for Shakuntala's love when she is away, Shakuntala's unsullied sense of love, the divine grace which brought about the happy reunion, the playwright presents before us a large canvas on which all the vicissitudes of life are touched upon.

'Meghaduta' is a beautiful love-lyric. A 'Yaksha', who is forced to be separated from his mistress for a year, sends her a message. The lady is residing at Alakanagari. 'Go and tell her that I told so', instructs

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the Yaksha to the cloud who becomes his messenger. The very fact that a cloud ('Megha') is chosen to be a messenger of love is something unique. The poet fascinatingly describes the travels of the cloud from Ramagiri to Alakanagari. The rivers, hills and mountains, cities and towns, vast fields, farmers' daughters as well as girls in the cities, the birds and the bees -- are all described by the poet vividly. It is a total picture of a beautiful world. His descriptions of Alakanagari, the Yaksha's house and the garden around, the Yaksha's wife playing the Veena and her grace and beauty are captivating.

'Ritusamhara' is a somewhat small-scale poetical creation depicting the six seasons. However, it is equally appealing. The poet here sees beauty in everything. Each different facet of nature he sees in each of the seasons fascinates him; it is a romantic sight.

In sum, it gives us great aesthetic pleasure to read Kalidasa's works. His descriptions enthrall us. With him we are in the company of a highly civilized, cultured personality. It is like a flower which, in bloom, spreads its fragrance all around. And a man's mature, ripened mind and intellect brings pleasure to those around him. In Kalidasa's creations, we enter the world of people pure in mind and body and who are graceful. We learn here the manner in which man's nature can reach high, moral levels. It pleases us deeply to come into contact with characters like Parvati, Dileepa, Raghu, Aja, Shakuntala, Dushyanta and Kanva. It is for this wonderful experience that we as well as people in other countries read Kalidasa.

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