

Abhijnana Sakuntalam “A Wonder Coming From A Land Of Wonders”

By Swami Tathagatananda

Through divine dispensation, India’s spiritual values and high moral tone expressed through her immortal Sanskrit literature was to make a great impact on the minds of creative writers in the West. Over the last few centuries, the new flavor of Indian literature savored in the West was so enchanting and captivating that responsive writers and thinkers showed their immediate, favorable receptivity to the literary beauty of Indian lore. In the nineteenth century, the popularity of Sir Arnold’s poetic composition on the life of Buddha, *The Light of Asia*, indicated the Western frame of mind under the effects of Romanticism. *The Light of Asia* was an instant success and enjoyed such great popularity that it achieved many editions within a few years of its first publication in 1879. Sixty editions were published in England and eighty in America, with sales of millions in both countries. It is relevant to this article on the famous *Abhijnana Sakuntalam* of the illustrious fourth-century poet Kalidasa, because the demand in the West for India’s eternal values as they are reflected in her immortal literature touched the very core of the Western mind. It provides an insight into the modern Western mood.

Professor Sylvain Lévi wrote:

The name of Kalidasa dominates Indian poetry and epitomizes it brilliantly. The drama, a grand and scholarly epic, the *Elegy* is attesting again today the power and plasticity of this magnificent genius; alone among the disciples of *Sarasvati* (the goddess of learning and the arts) he had the happy opportunity to produce a truly classical masterpiece, which India admires and which humanity recognizes. The praise which is saluting the birth of *Shakuntala* at Ujjayini, has existed over long centuries, bringing illumination from one world to the other since William Jones revealed it to the West. Kalidasa has marked his place in this radiant Pleiad, where each name embodies a period of the human spirit. The series of these names forms history; or rather it is history itself.

Arthur W. Ryder, one of Kalidasa’s translators, also expressed his homage:

The best proof of a poet's greatness is the inability of men to live without him; in other words, his power to win and hold through centuries the love and admiration of his own people, especially when that people has shown itself capable of high intellectual and spiritual achievement.

For something like fifteen hundred years, Kalidasa has been more widely read in India than any other author who wrote in Sanskrit. There have also been many attempts to express in words the secret of his abiding power: such attempts can never be wholly successful, yet they are not without considerable interest.

When Swami Vivekananda described some of India's gifts to the world, he included Shakuntala:

In literature, our epics and poems and dramas rank as high as those of any language; our "Shaguntala" [*Shakuntala*] was summarized by Germany's greatest poet as "heaven and earth united."

S. Radhakrishnan, in his inaugural address to the *Sahitya Akademi*, a creative academy of drama and music with a universal aspiration, gave the true import of Kalidasa's work:

In the millennium between the Greek drama and the Elizabethan, the only drama of quality in the world is, according to Berriedale Keith, the Indian drama. An Indian drama is not merely a play. It is poetry, music, symbolism and religion. Images chase one another beyond the speed of thought in the writings of Kalidasa who is known outside our frontiers. He represents the spirit of India, even as Shakespeare England, Goethe Germany and Pushkin Russia (S. Radhakrishnan on March 12, 1954. From his *Occasional Speeches and Writings* (Calcutta, 1956), 110).

In *The Discovery of India*, Nehru pointed out that Indian philosophy was felt by Europeans—characteristically ambivalent about the tremendous stimulus of Indian thought on western civilization—to fulfill a need that their own culture had failed to meet. August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767-1845) referred to Shakuntala in his first lecture on dramatic literature:

Among the Indians, the people from whom perhaps all the cultivation of the human race has been derived, plays were known long before they could have experienced any foreign influence. It has lately been made known in Europe that they have a rich dramatic literature, which ascends back for more than two thousand years. The only specimen of their plays (Nataks) hitherto known to us is the delightful Sakoontala, which, notwithstanding the colouring of a foreign climate, bears in its general structure a striking resemblance to our romantic drama.

The German naturalist, traveler and statesman Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) wrote about Indian poetry and observed that

Kalidasa, the celebrated author of the Sakoontala, is a masterly describer of the influence which Nature exercises upon the minds of lovers. This great poet flourished at the splendid court of Vikramaditya, and was, therefore, contemporary with Virgil and Horace. Tenderness in the expression of feeling, and richness of creative fancy, have assigned to him his lofty place among the poets of all nations.

Will Durant highlighted the impact of Shakuntala when he addressed the need for a deeper study of India's culture in *The Story of Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage*:

In 1789 Sir William Jones opened his career as one of the greatest Indologists by translating Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*; this translation, re-rendered into German in 1791, profoundly affected Herder and Goethe, and—through the Schlegels—the entire Romantic movement, which hoped to find in the East all the mysticism and mystery that seemed to have died on the approach of science and Enlightenment in the West.

THE FIRST SANSKRIT DRAMA TO BE TRANSLATED BY EUROPEANS JONES' SHAKUNTALA INSPIRES OTHER ENGLISH SCHOLARS

Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Sakuntalam* was the first Sanskrit drama ever to be translated into a European language. This was accomplished by Sir William Jones in 1789 in order to display an example of India's treasures of Hindu drama to an admiring Europe. It created a landmark in the history of Indian studies in the West. It may be remembered that Sir William Jones had founded the Asiatic Society in Bengal in 1784. The society had published the first complete translation from the Sanskrit into English of the *Bhagavad Gita* by Charles Wilkins the same year. Its literary organ, *Asiatic Researches*, swiftly disseminated India's Sanskrit lore throughout England, Germany and France. The first generation of Indic scholars was vigorously interested in the research and publications of the society. Jones actually completed his first translation of Kalidasa's drama in Latin, "which bears so great a resemblance to Sanskrit, that it is more convenient than any other modern language for a scrupulous interlineary version," but then rendered it "word for word" into English, "without suppressing any material sentence" and "disengaged it from the stiffness of a foreign idiom and prepared the faithful translation." When Sir William Jones translated *Abhijnana Sakuntalam* into English as *Shakuntala* or the *Fatal Ring*, it took only a decade for him to achieve international fame as the translator of *Shakuntala*, "incomparable" in Goethe's estimation, in whose correspondence and diaries it is revealed that it held a special place Goethe's heart. From the fresh soil of Jones' translation, others sprang up in German, French, Danish and Italian. *Shakuntala* became one of the most circulated Indian masterpieces—it was reprinted five times in England between 1790 and 1807 and it was retranslated and published many times throughout Europe. The century after Jones translated it, *Shakuntala* appeared in forty-six translations in twelve different languages in Europe.

Jones went on to translate another of Kalidasa's poems, *Ritusamhara*, in 1792. He published it in Calcutta as *The Seasons, A Descriptive Poem*. His English translation of *Shakuntala*, together with his *Hymns to Narayana*, were studied with fond devotion by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), Robert Southey (1774-1843), Thomas Moore (1779-1857), Alfred Tennyson (1850-1892) and other nineteenth-century English poets. They read his works with admiration and quoted him, calling him the "harmonious Jones." Thanks to the influence of Jones' *Shakuntala* and *Hymns to Narayana*, Shelley was able to overcome his atheistic and materialistic tendencies and develop his spiritual outlook.

Another great English Indologist translated Kalidasa's beautiful dramatic composition. Sir Charles Wilkins (1750-1836), whose translation of the Bhagavad Gita had the greatest impact in Europe, returned to England in 1786 after sixteen years in India. Wilkins fitted a printing press in Bath, England, with Devanagari characters and from this press, he printed his Story of Shakuntala from the Mahabharata in 1793. Around the nineteenth century, a new cultural and literary currency was being wrought in Europe, with India playing a significant role in England's Romantic period. Jones' work, particularly Shakuntala, pervaded England through her thinkers and by way of the receptive, intuitive wells of thought in her poets. The "Himalayan barrier of language" and the "cruel inadequacy of poetical translation" that translators must accept were to be surmounted by another great Indologist who came under the spell of Shakuntala.

THE MOST FAITHFUL ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF KALIDASA'S
ABHIJNANA SHAKUNTALAM

In 1853, the eminent Sanskrit-English lexicographer, Sir Monier Monier-Williams (1819-1899) came under the eternal charm of Sanskrit. He considered the vast Sanskrit lore and was induced to compile and publish a "correct edition" of Kalidasa's Abhijnana Shakuntalam with a view to providing for Sanskrit students desiring a "close and literal translation" of the drama. In his Sakoontala; or, The Lost Ring; An Indian Drama, Translated into Prose and Verse from the Sanskrit of Kalidasa, Monier-Williams redeemed his pledge to present the English public with a free translation of Shakuntala. It was published in 1855 (a second edition was published in 1876). In his Introduction he wrote of providing

the first English translation, in prose and verse, of the true and pure version of the most celebrated drama of the great Indian Shakspeare [sic]. The need felt by the British public for some such translation as I have here offered, can scarcely be questioned. A great people, who, through their empire in India, command the destinies of the Eastern world, ought surely to be conversant with the most popular of Indian dramas, in which the customs of the Hindus, their opinions, prejudices, and fables; their religious rites, daily occupations, and amusements, are reflected as in a mirror. Nor is the prose translation of Sir W. Jones (excellent though it may be) adapted to meet the requirements of the Englishman who, unacquainted with Sanskrit, desires an accurate representation of the original text, and notes to explain unintelligible allusions. That translation was unfortunately made from modern and corrupt manuscripts (the best that could then be procured), in which the bold and nervous phraseology of Kalidasa has been weakened, his delicate expressions of refined love clothed in a meretricious dress, and his ideas, grand in their simplicity, diluted by repetition or amplification. It is, moreover, altogether unfurnished with explanatory annotations. The text of my edition, on the contrary, represents the old and pure version of the drama, and from that text the present has been made; while abundant notes have been added, sufficient to answer the exigencies of the non-oriental scholar. Moreover, the metrical portions of the play have, for the first time, been rendered into verse.

Monier-Williams highly appreciated Kalidasa's use of eleven different varieties of meter in the first thirty-four verses of the poem to convey the characters' diction with "boldness and felicity." He chose to preserve the "grand, yet simple and chaste creation of Kalidasa" in translation by employing both blank verse and rhyming stanzas and even hypermetrical lines of eleven syllables. He felt his own meters to be "prosaic" and was aware that he might not have "expressed in language as musical as his [Kalidasa's] own."

He humbly acknowledged, "I have done all in my power to avoid substituting a fictitious and meagre poem of my own" and that "no metrical system in English could give any idea of the almost infinite resources" of Sanskrit. When Sir John Lubbock (1824-1913) listed one hundred of the best titles in the world, Monier-Williams' *Sakountala*; or, *The Lost Ring* was included and listed as *Abhigyan Sakuntala*.

THE PROFOUND IMPACT OF SHAKUNTALA IN GERMANY

The impact of *Shakuntala* was not isolated from the overall profound impression made on the West by other Indian works and the new field of comparative Sanskrit studies. England was regarded as the "native land" of Indian studies but Germany was the true cradle of the Indian renaissance. During the 1790s, Oriental research in Jena, Weimar and Heidelberg and then at Bonn, Berlin and Tübingen was established "like a rapid-fire series of explosions." German translations and re-translations of *Shakuntala*, along with the *Laws of Manu* and the *Gita Govinda* as well as *Asiatic Researches* published by Calcutta's Asiatic Society were studied in depth and ignited "a fervid intensity" in receptive German minds. Their contact with India's original and universal religion through these works gave them a sense of exaltation. *Shakuntala* was the first work to attract Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803)—with far-reaching effects.

Shakuntala proved to be the first link with the authentic India. When Georg Forster (1754-1794) published his very popular English translation of *Shakuntala* from Jones' English version in 1791, he retained the poetic verse in the Prologue, but rendered the rest of the poetic play into prose. He sent it to Herder. Herder wrote Forster that *Shakuntala* "was a masterpiece that appears once every two thousand years" and heartily acknowledged his appreciation of *Shakuntala* by writing the Preface to Forster's second edition. Herder used *Shakuntala* for the basis of his construction of the Indian origin of the human race. His sagacious work, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (*Ideas on the Philosophy of History*), successfully established India's relationship to the rest of the world and gave the philosophy of history its rightful new foundation. Herder was enchanted by *Shakuntala* and wanted others to experience his recognition of it as a new model in dramatic theory. He wrote a lengthy essay about *Shakuntala*, challenging the Aristotelian dramatic theory by which all dramatic works were evaluated up to that time. The fruit of this effort to free himself from the yoke of Classicism (shared by other writers of his time) was published in *Zerstreute Blätter*, the fourth collection of his works. Herder also reevaluated his conceptions about Indian art in light of *Shakuntala* and concluded that the Greek model was not the absolute model in art. Significantly, Herder joined the historic Enlightenment and Romantic Movements in Germany and set the course for future German Indologists.

Herder, Goethe (1749-1832) and Schiller (1759-1805)—all ardent admirers of Kalidasa—shared Forster’s great fervor for *Shakuntala*. It awakened in them the “highest degree” of enthusiasm, according to Bhim Sen Gupta in *The Glassy Essence: A Study of E. M. Forster, L. H. Myers and Aldous Huxley in Relation to Indian Thought*. Goethe’s legendary fascination with *Shakuntala* is probably responsible for its reputation in the West. His adaptation of *Shakuntala* for the German stage was also the source for his “Prologue in the Theater” in *Faust*, according to the poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), who revealed the details of Goethe’s sources. Heine, whose “spiritual home was on the banks of the Ganges,” was inspired by his passionate interest in Indian literature to model three sonnets after *Shakuntala* and sent them to Ernst Friedrich Ludwig Robert.

Rabindranath Tagore praised Goethe by translating his glowing lines of *Shakuntala* into Bengali. E. B. Eastwick in turn, translated the German philosopher’s lines into English:

Wouldst thou the young year’s blossoms and the fruits of its decline,
And all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted, fed,
Wouldst thou the earth and Heaven itself in one sole name combine?
I name thee, O Sakuntala! and all at once is said.

The inspiration Goethe and other Europeans derived from India’s sacred scriptures was noted by Swami Vivekananda in his “Memoirs of European Travel”:

He is a good poet [referring to Jules Du Bois, the famed French writer], and is an advocate of the Indian Vedantic ideas that have crept into the great French poets, such as Victor Hugo and Lamartine and others, and the great German poets, such as Goethe, Schiller, and the rest. The influence of Vedanta on European poetry and philosophy is very great. Every great poet is a Vedantin, I find; and whoever writes some philosophical treatise has to draw upon Vedanta in some shape or other. Only some of them do not care to admit this indebtedness, and want to establish their complete originality, as Herbert Spencer and others, for instance. But the majority do openly acknowledge.

Friedrich von Schlegel (1772-1829), the first German Indologist to study Sanskrit and Indian religion and philosophy in depth, was also greatly inspired by Georg Forster’s translation of *Shakuntala*. Schlegel’s pioneering work in 1808 established the contributions in antiquity of the language and wisdom of India (*Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier: Ein Beitrag zur Begründung der Altertumskunde*). It was a primary publication of nineteenth-century European Indology influenced by the Romantic Movement. This work was enthusiastically acknowledged for its scholarly translations of extracts from the sacred Sanskrit texts and forever inspired Germans to refer to the “Wisdom of India.”

A close friend of Friedrich Schlegel, the poet Novalis was inspired by *Shakuntala*. The death in her early youth of his fiancée became merged in his mind with the German perception of India as the “childhood of humanity” and occasioned his Romantic mystery-poem about Sophie von Kühn, whom he represents as the manifestation of the universal, divine cosmos. In this work, he united the values of the departed young soul of

Sophie with the values of Hinduism, reflecting Maier's definition of Sanskrit poetry as Morgentraume unseres Geschlechtes, "the childhood dreams of our species."

The German creative mind was strongly attracted to the Upanishadic ideals. A flow of novels and poems was inspired from Asian streams as German scholars read and translated India's most important classical poems and dramas. During the 1830s, the dissemination of the works of Kalidasa and Bhartrihari were greatly assisted through the translations of Peter von Bohlen (1796-1840) in Germany. *Shakuntala* was translated more than ten times, *Vikramorvasi* five times (and produced as an opera in Munich in 1886), *Mricchakatika* ("The Little Clay Cart") four times (and staged in Western theaters) and *Dasa-kumara-charita* three times. *Shakuntala* was adapted to the German theater and the Parisian ballet and produced on the English stage in 1899, 1912 and 1913. The banal taste of theatergoers everywhere was elevated by the productions of *Shakuntala*—in Russia, Alexander Tairov deliberately staged the play at Moscow's Kamerny Theater in 1914 expressly for that reason. He adapted it to the aesthetics of the prevailing Symbolist School, which emphasized the visual, poetic and contemplative descriptions of nature.

APPRECIATION FOR SHAKUNTALA IN FRANCE

By the late eighteenth century, French writers had also acquired intimate knowledge of Indian literature. Jean-Jacques Ampère predicted that Indian thought would introduce another Renaissance in his own time. Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) was penning reliable prose about the original Hindu epics along with translations of Indian poetry and drama. According to the great Sanskrit scholar, Louis Renou, the three principal poets of the Romantic period in France, Lamartine, Alfred-Victor de Vigny (1797-1863) and Victor Hugo (1802-1885) were all greatly influenced by the *Upanishads* and Indian lore. Their enthusiasm and wonder increased when they became acquainted with translations of the great Sanskrit works, such as Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, which captivated so many writers of significance. Lamartine, who studied the rules of Sanskrit dramaturgy available at the time as well as the moral goals of the play, lauded it variously. For him, it was a "masterpiece of both epic and dramatic poetry, combining in one work the essence of the pastoral charm of the Bible, of the pathos of Aeschylus and tenderness of Racine." Again, Lamartine wrote that *Shakuntala* had within it "the threefold genius of Homer, Theocritus, and Tasso combined in a single poem."

Shakuntala's significant inspiration was not only direct—it was also subtle and indirect. During the same period, Louis Matthieu Langlès, curator of Oriental manuscripts at the *Bibliothèque Nationale* and its provisional specialist on India, possessed the entire set of the *Asiatic Researches* of the *Asiatic Society* in Bengal together with Jones' *Shakuntala*. Langlès documented Indic research and was well aware of the importance of the *Society*, which was dedicated to Oriental research and scholarship. With great foresight, he included a history and bibliography of the early publications of the *Society* in the third volume of the *Magasin Encyclopédique*. Langlès was also aware of the pleasing novelist Pougens' excellent analysis of Jones' *Shakuntala* in the *Journal des théâtres*—a significant indication that Jones' translation had wonderfully passed beyond the realm of the specialists and reached the public domain.

In 1800, France became a center for Oriental studies when the accumulated Indian manuscripts languishing in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* began to be prepared for inventory. The *Asiatic Researches: Transactions of the Society* (published by the *Asiatic Society* from 1788) had been published in Calcutta in 1805 and were being translated into French along with the works of both Wilkins and Sir William Jones. The journal *Décade philosophique* published extracts from Jones' translation of *Abhijnana Sakuntalam*. In 1818, Bruguière de Sorsum, characterized by Baldensperger as "a well-read administrator and former advisor to Jerome in Westphalia," changed his career and became a writer. His love for poetry earlier brought him in contact with *Shakuntala*, which he had translated from Jones' English version in 1803. He also gathered together ideas from Forster's German translation of *Shakuntala* that he had discovered in Anquetil-Duperron's French edition of Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo's travels and added them to his work. Bruguière was inspired to learn Sanskrit and Chinese and became one of the founders of the *Société Asiatique de Paris* in 1822. In 1825, the French scholar Joseph Daniel Guigniaut exclaimed, "Who has not read the *Shakuntala*?" and wrote about Hindu poetry that "the small portion of it with which we are familiar has surprised and impressed all Europe."

Antoine-Léonard de Chézy (1774-1832), considered the first French Sanskrit scholar, had read Jones' version of *Shakuntala*, which made him exclaim, "I shall never forget the impression it made on me." It actually determined his vocation as a philologist. Chézy was the first to fully and directly translate *Shakuntala* from a Bengali version into French. He published it in 1830 with ample notes that included an explanation of the meaning of the term "Vedas," that proved useful to many writers after him. One of them was the novelist Théophile Gautier, who was uniquely able to convey and diffuse the oriental *presence* through his poetry (influencing Mallarmé and Victor Hugo). His numerous tales made ample use of Chézy's notes. Chézy also included Goethe's famous lines as an epigraph to the work, which prompted Goethe to write to Chézy that *Shakuntala* was a star that makes the night more agreeable than the day. Chézy's love for *Shakuntala* also made him exclaim, "Oh most happy Forster! His simple task of reproducing Jones' English version in German was rewarded in the best way by the famous Herder's flattering remark: 'Georg Forster's name will, for us Germans, always be fondly remembered, linked with that of Shakuntala.' Oh, how I envy him!" Chézy's *Shakuntala* singularly nourished all of France, which had a strong infatuation for Hindu literature in the early 19th century.

Chézy and Jean Pierre Guillaume Pauthier (1801-1873) noted excerpts from the *Mahabharata* text—"Shakuntala," "Nala," "The Flood," and "The Abduction of Draupadi"—in the *Revue de Paris* in September 1832. It was not until 1834 to 1839 that the *Asiatic Society* in Bengal was able to publish the complete text of the *Mahabharata*, because the size of the work intimidated translators. Between 1839 and 1841, Théodore Pavie also noted these excerpts in the *Journal Asiatique*, the literary organ of the *Société Asiatique de Paris*.

Victor Hugo (1802-1885) as we have seen, received inspiration from the work of Théophile Gautier. While working on his *Le Rhin*, Hugo used a volume written by

Chézy's widow as a reference, indicating that he must have been aware of Chézy's translation of *Shakuntala*, which Hugo's publisher Paul Lacroix—enchanted by his reading of the *Mahabharata*—described to him as if it were a very popular work. Hugo in turn gave a definite metaphysical and literary form to India in the Romantic period in Europe.

In 1853, the first of volume of the *Ramayana* appeared in translation, published by the extraordinary scholar and linguist, Valentin Parisot. The enthusiasm of Hippolyte Fauche (1797-1869) was fired after reading it and he immediately began to produce a flood of Hindu translations, including his notable one of Kalidasa's complete works in two volumes published in 1859-60. The French poet and satirist, Joseph Méry (1798-1865) earned legendary repute among his peers for his love for the works of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti. His contemporaries claimed that "There is not one line from Kalidasa or Bhavabhuti that he can not complete when someone says the first word of it." Méry could quote lengthy passages from Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti from memory.

A century later in the critical period of the 1940s, writers such as René Guénon appealed to the masses to seek their way out of the world's mortal crisis through Oriental sources of contemplation. The popular French stage inspired audiences with presentations of *Shakuntala* and *Mricchakatika*. The poet Rimbaud wrote that the French were inclined to continue returning "to the Orient and to the first and eternal wisdom."

THE LITERARY "MIRACLE" AND CHARM OF *SHAKUNTALA*

The entire world literature of the nineteenth century was directly influenced by Kalidasa's *Abhijnanam Sakuntalam*. It was a literary "miracle" whose creative spark unexpectedly inspired the minds of writers everywhere. The renaissance of literature began with René Chateaubriand (1768-1848). He provided firsthand evidence of the impact of translated Indian literature on London in his *Essai sur les Révolutions*, which he began in 1794 and which was published in 1796. *Essai* reached London in 1797, when Sanskrit studies were at a height. In his treatment of India in the first chapter, Chateaubriand wrote: "The Sanskrit, or sacred, language has finally been revealed to the world. We already possess the translations of a number of poems written in this idiom. The strength, and philosophy, of the English in India has given the republic of letters a priceless gift." One of his chapter headings read, "Kreeshna . . . Fragment du poème Mahabarat, tire du Sanskrit . . . Sacontala."

Chateaubriand published an updated edition of *Essai* in 1826, attractive for its documentation of the progress in Sanskrit studies over the intervening thirty years. In 1802 he listed *Shakuntala* under the special heading of "Sanskrit Poetry" in his *Génie du Christianisme* and added a reference note to "Robertson's India." This reference was significant because in 1791 Robertson had treated *Shakuntala* in his widely-read work, *An Historical Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India*, which had been translated into German as well as into French (*Recherches historiques*

sur l'Inde). As Jones had done before him, he also compared *Shakuntala* to one of the oldest epic works known at that time other than Homer's—the work of Ossian, the great poet of antiquity. Chateaubriand's book produced a great impact on the mind of August Wilhelm Schlegel, who was inspired by it as much as he was by his brother, Friedrich, to learn Sanskrit and make a lasting contribution to Indology. *Génie du Christianisme*, according to Raymond Shwab in *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Discovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, offered two major inducements to its many readers: “the revival of religious belief and a poetry invigorated by sources far removed in time and space.” It was a work of “anticipation of a great religious tide, veneration of a distant past in which historical understanding expanded, and an invitation to a cultural uprooting that was seen or expressed as a kind of emancipation. The ancient Sanskrit epic poetry was being united with the poetry of Europe.

Not too far away in America, the transcendentalist Thoreau (1817-1862) was living in self-imposed retreat by his sacred “Ganges” at Walden Pond. Putting the *Bhagavad Gita* to the test while proving to his generation that “money is not required to buy one necessary for the soul,” he practiced the ascetic disciplines of yoga, labored hard, and pondered deeply upon the Hindu concepts of *dharma*, *karma* and rebirth. He nourished his intellect with Jones' translation of *Shakuntala* along with other sacred Indian lore. These included Wilson's translations of *Samkhya Karika* and the *Vishnu Purana*, Wilkins' translation of Vishnu Sharma's *Hitopadesa*, Langlois' French translation of *Harivamsha* and Garcin de Tassy's *Histoire de la littérature hindoue et Hindustan* with its worthwhile anthology. With deep reverence, he gave these texts and other volumes of “Oriental wisdom an Occidental shrine” by housing them in a special driftwood bookcase that he constructed himself. The transforming message of *Shakuntala* and India's sacred teachings purified his mind: “By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent,” he wrote.

The Everyman's Library edition of Arthur W. Ryder's Kalidasa: Translations of *Shakuntala* and Other Works was published in New York and London in 1912. In his Introduction, Ryder wrote that, from the time of Jones' translation of *Shakuntala*, “as is testified by new translations and by reprints of the old, there have been many thousands who have read at least one of Kalidasa's works; other thousands have seen it on the stage in Europe and America . . . [it has] a reputation that maintains itself indefinitely and that conquers a new continent after a lapse of thirteen hundred years . . .”

These gleanings demonstrate that the revelation of Sanskrit was universal: it touched widely creative minds both immediately and generally. Each receptive, scholarly mind presented here was occupied solely to extract the essence of Hinduism the Sanskrit language offered. *Shakuntala* was the “ideal footbridge” to the new field of Sanskrit studies in the eighteenth century, over which liberal minds such as those of Goethe and Herder were able to cross into India. In 1991, a scholarly work of great devotion was published by Dorothy Matilda Figueira that indicates the enduring and profound interest on the subject of *Shakuntala*. *Translating the Orient, The Reception of Sakuntala in Nineteenth-Century Europe* documents the author's painstaking comparative study of the

major European translations of *Abhijnana Sakuntalam*. Her critical analysis of the text fulfills the objective of addressing the specific problems encountered in cross-cultural translation to serve the nobler purpose of greater understanding between all the cultures of the world. Taking into account that some pedantic Germans used *Shakuntala* to promote their agenda of national cultural ascendancy, Figueira affirms that the literary event of the discovery and translation of *Shakuntala* “opened up not only the boundaries of humanism, but also fostered a widespread reevaluation of national literatures . . . in the ability of all ethnic groups to produce great art.”

We end with an interesting detail in the story of Shakuntala. She was found lying in a deep forest by a recluse who was living in a hermitage, seeking divine communion and undergoing severe austerities. Still, with tremendous compassion for the helpless infant, he raised and nurtured her. In due course, she married King Dushyanta, the hero of the drama, *Shakuntala*. They brought forth a child who was named Bharata who, on growing up, became a great king. India has come to be known as “Bharata-varsha” ever since.

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