

Foothill College Theatre

presents

# Shakuntala



## Guidebook

*By Sindhu Shastry*

# — Background —

## HISTORY

Kalidasa's "Abhijñānaśākuntala," ( meaning recognition of Shakuntala) or "Shakuntala," his most famous work, is a celebrated Sanskrit play known for its poetic beauty, intricate plot, and exploration of themes like love, fate, and redemption, making it a revered masterpiece in classical Indian literature. It is based on a story from the epic Mahabharata

## TITLE MEANING

Abhijñānaśākuntala: meaning recognition of Shakuntala or Shakuntala,

## PROTAGONIST

Shakuntala

## SYNOPSIS

Born of celestial lineage, Shakuntala captures the heart of King Dushyanta, leading to a secret marriage sealed by divine rites. However, a curse of forgetfulness threatens their happiness, setting the stage for a poignant journey of rediscovery. As fate unfolds, themes of love's endurance and the beauty of nature intertwine, showcasing Kalidasa's poetic brilliance and deep understanding of human emotions.

## PLAYWRIGHT

### Kalidasa:

The renowned Sanskrit poet and dramatist of ancient India, is considered the greatest writer of India, likely living in the 4th-5th century CE during the Gupta Empire. Legends describe Kalidasa as a gifted poet after worshiping the goddess Kali. His enduring works include three plays - Abhijñānaśākuntalam (The Recognition of Shakuntala), Vikramorvaśīyam, and Mālavikāgnimitram; and two epic poems - Raghuvamśan and Kumārasambhava.

# — Characters —

## SHAKUNTALA

Shakuntala was found by Rishi Kanva surrounded by Shakunta birds in his hermitage and named her accordingly, meaning "Shakunta-protected". He raised her as his own daughter. She is the wife of King Dushyanta and mother of Emperor Bharata, is a legendary figure in Hindu mythology

## KING DUSHYANTA

Dushyanta ("dush" meaning "bad" & "yanta" meaning "to control"). is a prominent figure in Hindu mythology from the Chandravamsha/ Lunar dynasty & the Puru lineage, known for his marriage to Shakuntala & as the father of Emperor Bharata

## MAHARISHI KANVA/ KAASHYAPA

Maharishi **Kanva** also known as **Kaashyapa**, is the adoptive father of Shakuntala, as he was born into the dynasty of Brahma's son Kashyapa. Kanva found the abandoned infant Shakuntala and raised her in his hermitage on the banks of the river Malini.

## GAUTAMI

Gautami, a revered sage, raised Shakuntala in Rishi Kanva's hermitage. Throughout Shakuntala's upbringing and the turbulent events of her life, Gautami served as her foster mother and confidante, offering guidance and unwavering love and support through life's trials and tribulations.

## EMPEROR BHARATA/

Bharata, was a legendary unifier and conqueror of ancient India, who gave his name to the Indian subcontinent. He was called "**Sarvadamana**" (conqueror of all) in his childhood

## PRIYAMVADA AND ANASUYA

Priyamvada and Anasuya are depicted as Shakuntala's closest friends who provide emotional support, practical assistance, and play a crucial role in the development of her love story with Dushyanta. Priyamvada is described as more youthful and vivacious, while Anasuya is the more serious one.

## NARADA/ NARADA MUNI

Narada, revered for his devotion to Lord Vishnu and mastery of the veena, embodies both piety and mischief in Hindu mythology. His melodic chants of "Narayana, Narayana" echo his spiritual commitment, yet he is also known for inciting conflicts through his mischievous actions. In the tale of Shakuntala, Narada's revelation to Indra about Vishwamitra's penance sets off a chain of events resulting in Shakuntala's birth.

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**BRAHMARISHI  
VISHVAMITRA/  
KAUSHIKA**

Kaushika was the original name of the sage Vishvamitra (Vishwa means world, Mitra means friend), Kaushika, was once a powerful king who renounced his kingdom and became a sage. The gods feared his growing powers from his intense practices and sent the apsara Menaka to seduce him, breaking his meditation. Their union resulted in the birth of Shakuntala. However, once her purpose on earth was over, Menaka had to return to the heavens, leaving behind a sad Kaushika and their child. Kaushika entrusted Shakuntala to the care of Rishi Kanva and returned to his austere practices, and achieved the highest spiritual state, he was named a Brahmarishi by the gods led by Indra.

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**MENAKA**

Menaka was born during the Samudra (Ocean) Manthan (churning) by the devas and asuras and was one of the most beautiful apsaras (celestial nymph) in the world with quick intelligence and innate talent. She is the mother of Shakuntala.

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**SANUMATI**

Sanumati, a celestial nymph and friend of Menaka, plays a crucial but indirect role in the story of Shakuntala. After sensing Dushyanta's remorse, she flies back to heaven and informs Indra of Dushyanta's plight. This prompts Indra to summon Dushyanta to fight demons, setting in motion events that eventually lead to his reunion with Shakuntala.

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**CHATURIKA**

Chaturika, a devoted maidservant in the king's court, carries out his orders and provides solace during his anguish over Shakuntala. She adds to his emotional turmoil by presenting him a painting of Shakuntala.

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**SHARNGARAVA  
AND  
SHARADVATA**

Sharngarava and Sharadvata are two of Kanva's pupils tasked with escorting Shakuntala to King Dushyanta's palace

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**TRISHANKU**

Trishanku, (meaning three stumps) was a king of the Ikshvaku/ Solar dynasty featured in the Ramayana. Originally named Satyavrata, he sought to ascend to heaven alive but was cursed by Sage Vasishtha's sons. Renamed Trishanku and made a chandala (outcast), he turned to Sage Vishvamitra for help. Despite reaching heaven's gates, he was rejected by the devas. Vishvamitra then created a new heaven for him, leaving Trishanku suspended between realms eternally. This story serves as a cautionary tale about defying the natural order and the importance of accepting destiny

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**DURVASA**

Durvasa, a revered Rishi in Hindu mythology, is renowned for his unpredictable temper and formidable powers. His curses, which targeted even great kings and gods, often sparked pivotal events in mythological narratives. Notably, his curse upon Shakuntala is widely known. Despite his volatile nature, Durvasa is also esteemed for his deep wisdom, mastery of scriptures, and ability to bestow extraordinary boons.

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**MADHAVYA  
(JESTER)**

Madhavya is the king's lifelong Brahmin companion, providing comic relief, offering a voice of reason, and serving as a narrative device, enriching the storytelling in Kalidasa's "Abhijñānaśākuntala,"

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**INDRA**

Indra, the king of the gods in Hindu mythology, does not directly appear in the story, his role in sending Menaka to seduce Vishwamitra sets the stage for Shakuntala's birth.

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**MATALI**

Matali, Indra's charioteer plays a pivotal role in bringing Dushyanta back to his senses.

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**MARICHI**

Marichi is a sage in Hindu mythology who is considered one of the Saptarishi (seven great sages), the mind-born son of Brahma. Marichi is the father of the god Indra and a divine sage, the head of the celestial hermitage to which Shakuntala was spirited away by nymphs.

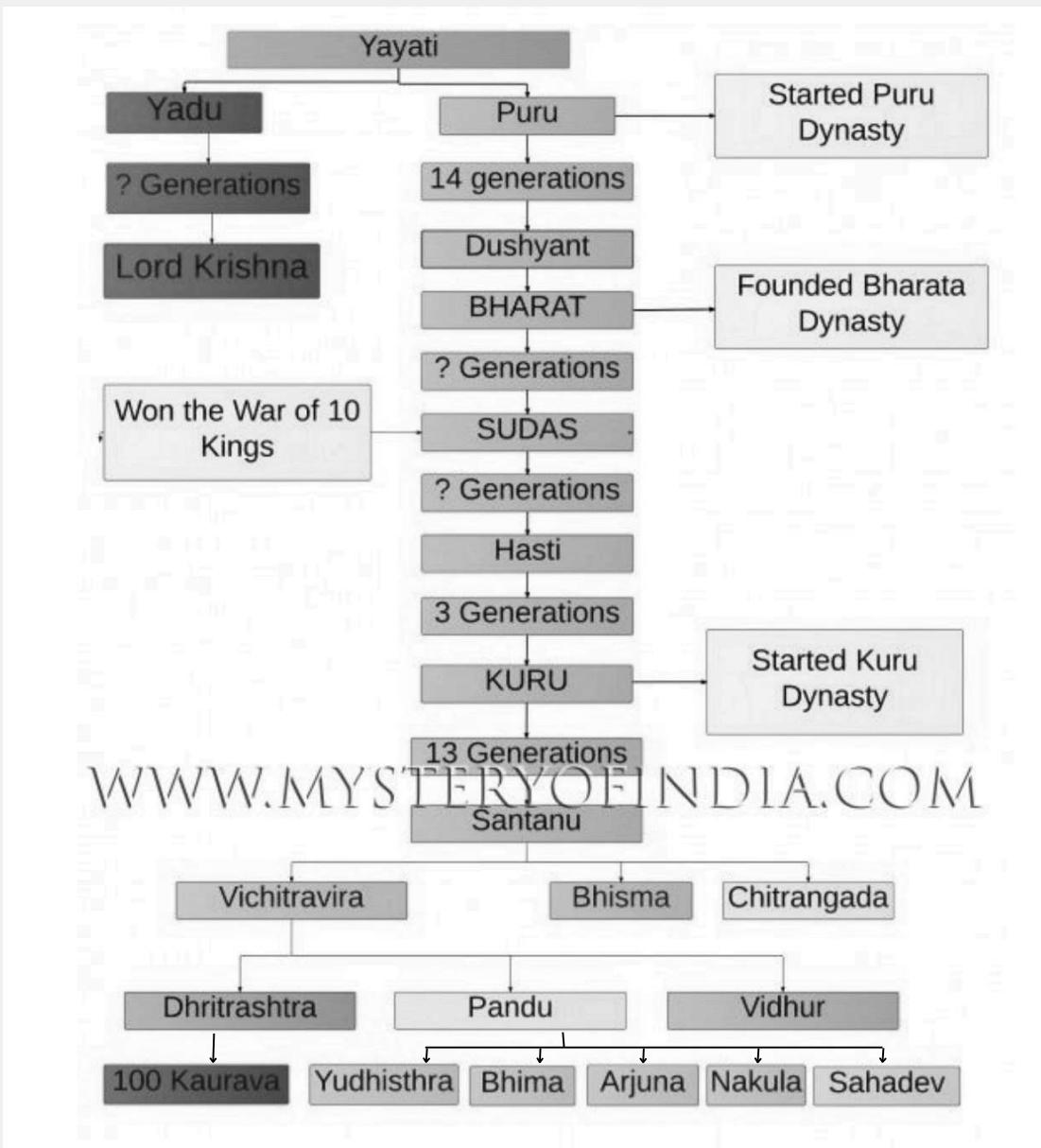
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**HARI**

Hard is a name of the Hindu preserver deity **Vishnu**. Hari, mean 'the one who takes away', refers to the one who removes darkness, illusions and obstacles to spiritual progress.

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# Puru Lineage



# —Mystical Glossary—

## RISHIS/ MUNIS

Rishis were revered sages and seers who received divine revelations, composed the Vedic hymns, propagated Hindu spiritual traditions, and made seminal contributions to various branches of knowledge in ancient India. It is derived from the Sanskrit root word "rishi" which may ultimately come from a root meaning "to see", referring to the spiritual insight and vision of the sages

## BRAHMARISHI

Brahmarishi is a Rishi who has realized the highest spiritual truth of Brahman, has attained Moksha/ Kaivalya (enlightenment and is considered the most elevated among different types of Rishis. He is the ultimate expert of religion and spiritual knowledge known as 'Brahmajnana'(Knowledge of Brahman).

## DURJAYA

Durjaya, means individuals or entities who are difficult to conquer or defeat

## MAYA

Maya refers to the illusion or the power of illusion that causes the material world to appear real. Overcoming this illusion is the goal of spiritual practice.

## SHASTRAS/ SHASTR

Shastras are the vast body of sacred and scientific texts in Indian traditions that provide instructions, guidelines, and knowledge on various aspects of life, composed by revered sages and considered authoritative sources of wisdom

## BRAHMAN

Brahman is the supreme, unmanifest, eternal reality from which everything originates<sup>1</sup>. It is the ultimate, unknowable divine principle that underlies the universe. Brahman is pure consciousness and is also called Purusha. Brahman is considered genderless and formless

## BRAHMA, VISHNU, SHIVA

Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are considered equal aspects or manifestations of the supreme Brahman. They are the three main deities of the Hindu pantheon. They represent the three essential functions of the universe:

- Brahma is the creator(God of Creation)
- Vishnu is the preserver and sustainer(God of Sustenance)
- Shiva is the destroyer & transformer(God of Destruction)

## ASHRAM

Ashram is a spiritual hermitage or Hindu monastery. It is the abode of a spiritually enlightened sage, where they would impart wisdom to their students in a secluded, natural setting away from worldly distractions. Rishis would frequently perform Vedic rituals and yajnas in their ashrams. Ashrams played a key role in the spiritual education and development of disciples in ancient India.

## GANDHARVA VIVAH

Gandharva Vivah is a type of valid Hindu marriage based solely on mutual love and consent between the bride and groom, without elaborate ceremonies, rituals or parental consent. The couple typically exchanges garlands in the presence of a deity or a sacred fire, symbolizing their commitment to each other.

## THE VARNA SYSTEM

The Varna system, as outlined in the **Dharmashastra** ("Dharma," meaning duty, righteousness, or law, and "Shastra," meaning science or study), represents a foundational aspect of ancient Hindu society, organized as a hierarchy of four main classes. This hierachial system categorizes society into 4 varnas:

- the Brahmins (priests and teachers),
- the Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers),
- the Vaishyas (traders and agriculturists), and
- the Shudras (servants and laborers).

Each varna was tasked with specific duties and responsibilities that aimed to maintain social order and the welfare of the community.

## VASANT RITU (SPRING SEASON) FESTIVAL

Vasant Ritu (Spring Season) festival indeed holds a significant place in Indian culture, blending mythological symbolism, poetic expressions, & festive revelries. Spring season has been described as the "friend of the God of Love, Kamadeva." According to mythology, the mango is often associated with love and is a "male" plant. Kamadeva, targets with mango-shoot arrows those he wishes to inspire with love. The spring festival in honor of Kamadeva is a wild celebration called "Holi," now dedicated to Lord Krishna. Vasant Panchami celebrates the onset of spring and honors Goddess Saraswati, patron of knowledge, music, and arts. It's marked by rituals & prayers for blessings in learning

## WASHING GUESTS' FEET

Washing guests' feet in Hindu culture, is a longstanding tradition that reflects beliefs in hospitality, purity, and the spiritual significance of the feet. Washing the feet is believed to promote health benefits and balance the body's energy by stimulating the over 72,000 nerve endings housed in the feet.

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## VAKULA FLOWERS

Vakula flowers, small and creamy white, are star-shaped blooms from the Vakula tree, prized in Indian culture for their mythological importance, fragrance, and medicinal properties. Collected even after falling, they retain their scent for days. They are offered in temples throughout India. Additionally, they're utilized for their oral health benefit.

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## APARAJITA

Aparajita (means unconquered) is considered a divine flower used in daily puja rituals of deities like Vishnu, Saraswati, Krishna, and Tripura Sundari. Its mythological significance adds to its reverence in Ayurvedic medicine and spiritual practices.

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## HEMAKUTA HILL

Hemakuta Hill in Hampi, the former capital of the Vijayanagar Empire, boasts pre-Vijayanagar temples and pavilions dating from the 9th to 14th centuries. Associated with Hindu mythology about Lord Shiva, the name "Hemakuta" comes from Sanskrit, meaning "gold hill" due to the belief that gold rained there when Shiva agreed to marry Pampa. It's singularly referred to as "Hemakuta Hill," not part of a mountain range.

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## THE VIDAAI (FAREWELL CEREMONY)

The vidaai (farewell ceremony) marks the significant transition and parting from the ashram that was the bride's maternal home to her husband's home to start a new chapter of their life. The vidaai ceremony is marked by mixed emotions - joy for the new life ahead, but also sorrow at the parting from one's family and home. During the vidaai, the bride is given blessings, gifts, and well-wishes by the ashram community. Family members, elders, and others in the ashram accompany the bride for a distance, as a gesture of respect and care.

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## HASTINAPUR

Hastinapur, an ancient city in Uttar Pradesh, was the capital of the Kuru kingdom, central to events in the Mahabharata. Archaeological findings by B.B. Lal in the 1950s correlated with Mahabharata texts. Today, Hastinapur is a small town, 37 km from Meerut and 96 km northeast of Delhi.

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## OMEN: THROBBING OF RIGHT ARM OF A MAN

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This omen is considered auspicious, indicating that he will acquire or attract a beautiful woman.

# Shakuntala



## THANK YOU

*“Together is a wonderful place to be.”*