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# **Tales from the Hindu Dramatists**

R. N. Dutta

# Imprint

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## PREFACE.

Many educationists think that our Indian boys should be encouraged to read the stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the two great Epics of India and Tales from the Sanskrit Dramatists when they are recommended to read "The Boy's Odyssey," "Legends of Greece and Rome," "Arabian Nights' Tales" and Lamb's "Tales from Shakespeare." It was perhaps from this view of the matter that the University of Calcutta recommended "The Boy's Ramayana" and "Tales from the Hindu Dramatists" for the Matriculation Examination. As no books were published in time, the University had to issue an amended notice omitting the books from the list. To supply the want, I have ventured to write the "Boy's Ramayana" and this humble book. I have tried my best to narrate briefly, in simple and idiomatic English, the stories on which the chief Sanskrit dramas are based. I hope that the University will be pleased to reinsert "The Boy's Ramayana" and this book in the list of books recommended for the Matriculation Examination.

Balaramadham,  
4, Madan Mitter's Lane,  
Calcutta  
1911 – *December.* } RAMA NATH DUTT.



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### THE HINDU DRAMATISTS.

#### SAKUNTALA or THE LOST RING.

In ancient days, there was a mighty king of the Lunar dynasty by name Dushyanta. He was the king of Hastinapur. He once goes out a-hunting and in the pursuit of a deer comes near the hermitage of the sage Kanwa, the chief of the hermits, where some anchorites request him not to kill the deer. The king feels thirsty and was seeking water when he saw certain maidens of the hermits watering the favourite plants. One of them, an exquisitely beautiful and bashful maiden, named Sakuntala, received him. She was the daughter of the celestial nymph Menaka by the celebrated sage Viswamitra and foster-child of the hermit Kanwa. She is smitten with love at the first sight of the king, standing confused at the change of her own feeling. The love at first sight which the king conceives for her is of too deep a nature to be momentary. Struck by her beauty he exclaims:—

"Her lip is ruddy as an opening bud; her graceful arms resemble tender shoots; attractive as the bloom upon the tree, the glow of youth is spread on all her limbs."

Seizing an opportunity of addressing her, he soon [Pg 2] feels that it is impossible for him to return to his capital. His limbs move forward, while his heart flies back, like a silken standard borne against the breeze. He seeks for opportunities for seeing her. With the thought about her haunting him by day and night, he finds no rest, and no pleasure even in his favourite recreation—sporting. Mathavya, the jester, friend and companion of the king, however, breaks the dull monotony of his anxious time. The opportunity which the king seeks offers itself. The hermits send an embassy to the king asking him to come over to the hermitage to guard their sacrifices. As he was making preparations for departure to the hermitage, Karavaka, a messenger from the queen-mother, arrives asking his presence at the city of Hastinapur.

He is at first at a loss to extricate himself from this difficulty but a thought strikes him and he acts upon it. He sends the jester as his substitute to the city. He is now at leisure to seek out the love-sick Sakuntala who is drooping on account of her love for the king and is discovered lying on a bed of flowers in an arbour. He comes to the hermitage, overhears her conversation with her two friends, shows himself and offers to wed her. For a second time, the lovers thus meet. He enquires of her parentage to see if there is any obstacle to their being united in marriage; whereupon Sakuntala asks her companion Priyambada to satisfy the king with an account of her birth. The king hearing the story of her birth asks the companion to get the consent of Sakuntala to be married to him according to the form known as *gandharva*. [Pg 3]

Sakuntala requests the king to wait till her foster-father Kanwa, who had gone out on a pilgrimage, would come back and give his consent. But the king, becoming importunate, she at last gives her consent. They are married according to the *gandharva* form, on the condition that the issue of the marriage should occupy the throne of Hastinapur. She accepts from her lord a marriage-ring as the token of recognition.

The king then goes away, after having promised to shortly send his ministers and army to escort her to his Capital. When Kanwa returns to the hermitage, he becomes aware of what has transpired during his absence by his spiritual powers, and congratulates Sakuntala on having chosen a husband worthy of her in every respect. Next day, when Sakuntala is deeply absorbed in thoughts about her absent lord, the celebrated choleric sage Durvasa comes and demands the rights of hospitality. But he is not greeted with due courtesy by Sakuntala owing to her pre-occupied state. Upon this, the ascetic pronounces a curse that he whose thought has led her to forget her duties towards guests, would disown her.

Sakuntala does not hear it, but Priyambada hears it and by entreaties appeases the wrath of the sage, who being conciliated ordains that the curse would cease at the sight of some ornament of recognition.

Sakuntala becomes quick with child and in the seventh month of her pregnancy is sent by her foster-father to Hastinapur, in the

company of her sister Gautami, and his two disciples Sarngarva and Saradwata. Priyambada stays in the hermitage. Sakuntala takes [Pg 4] leave of the sacred grove in which she has been brought up, of her flowers, her gazelles and her friends.

The aged hermit of the grove thus expresses his feelings at the approaching loss of Sakuntala:—

"My heart is touched with sadness at the thought, "Sakuntala must go to-day"; my throat is choked with flow of tears repressed; my sight is dimmed with pensiveness but if the grief of an old forest hermit is so great, how keen must be the pang a father feels when freshly parted from a cherished child!"

Then he calls upon the trees to give her a kindly farewell. They answer with the Kokila's melodious cry.

Thereupon the following good wishes are uttered by voices in the air:—

"Thy journey be auspicious; may the breeze, gentle and soothing, fan the cheek; may lakes, all bright with lily cups, delight thine eyes; the sun-beam's heat be cooled by shady trees; the dust beneath thy feet be the pollen of lotuses."

On their way, Sakuntala and her companions bathe in the Prachi Saraswati, when, as Fate would have it, she carelessly drops the ring of recognition into the river, being unaware of the fact at the time. At last they arrive at Hastinapur, and send words to the king.

The king asks his family priest Somarata to enquire of them the cause of their coming. Whereupon the priest meets them at the gate, knows the objects of their coming and informs the king of it. The curse of Durvasa does its work. The king denies Sakuntala. At the intercession of the priest, she and her companions are brought before the king. The king publicly [Pg 5] repudiates her. As a last resource, Sakuntala bethinks herself of the ring given her by her husband, but on discovering that it is lost, abandons hope. Sarnagarva sharply remonstrates against the conduct of the king and presses the claim of Sakuntala.

Gentle and meek as Sakuntala is, she undauntedly gives vent to her moral indignation against the king. The disciples go away saying that the king would have to repent of it.

Sakuntala falls senseless on the ground. After a while, she revives, the priest then comes forward and asks the king to allow her to stay in his palace till her delivery. The king consents, and when Sakuntala is following the priest, Menaka with her irradiant form appears and taking hold of her daughter vanishes and goes to a celestial asylum. Everyone present there is astonished and frightened.

After this incident, one day while the king is out on inspection, a certain fisherman, charged with the theft of the royal signet-ring which he professes to have found inside a fish, is dragged along by constables before the king who, however, causes the poor accused to be set free, rewarding him handsomely for his find.

Recollection of his former love now returns to him. His strong and passionate love for Sakuntala surges upon him with doubled and redoubled-force.

Indulging in sorrow at his repudiation of Sakuntala, the king passes three long years; at the end of which Matali, Indra's chariot-eer, appears to ask the king's aid in vanquishing the demons. He makes his aerial [Pg 6] voyage in Indra's car. While he is coming back from the realm of Indra, he alights on the hermitage of Maricha.

Here he sees a young boy tormenting a lion-whelp. Taking his hand, without knowing him to be his own son, he exclaims:—"If now the touch of but a stranger's child thus sends a thrill of joy through all my limbs, what transports must be awakened in the soul of that blest father from whose loins he sprang!"

From the vaunting speeches of the boy, the king gathers that the boy is a scion of the race of Puru. His heart everflows with affection for him. A collection of circumstantial evidence points the boy to be his son. The amulet on the boy indicates his parentage.

But while he is in a doubtful mood as to the parentage of the refractory boy, he meets the sage Maricha from whom he learns everything. The name of the boy is Sarvadamana, afterwards known as

Bharata, the most famous king of the Lunar race, whose authority is said to have extended over a great part of India, and from whom India is to this day called Bharata or Bharatavarsa (the country or domain of Bharata.)

Soon after, he finds and recognises Sakuntala, with whom he is at length happily re-united. [Pg 7]



## VIKRAMORVASI or URVASI WON BY VALOUR

**OR**

### THE HERO AND THE NYMPH.

In the Himalaya mountains, the nymphs of heaven, on returning from an assembly of the gods, are mourning over the loss of Urvasi, a fellow-nymph, who has been carried off by a demon. King Pururavas enters on his chariot, and on hearing the cause of their grief, hastens to the rescue of the nymph. He soon returns, after having vanquished the robber, and restores Urvasi to her heavenly companions. While carrying the nymph back to her friends in his chariot, he is enraptured by her beauty, falls in love with her and she with her deliverer. Urvasi being summoned before the throne of Indra, the lovers are soon obliged to part. When they part, Urvasi wishes to turn round once more to see the king.

She pretends that a straggling vine has caught her garland, and while feigning to disengage herself, she calls one of her friends to help her.

The friend replies: —

"I fear, this is no easy task. You seem entangled too fast to be set free: but, come what may, defend upon my friendship." The eyes of the king then meet those of Urvasi. They now part.

The king is now at Prayag, the modern Allahabad, his residence. He walks in the garden of his palace, accompanied by a Brahman who is his confidential companion, and knows his love for Urvasi. The companion [Pg 8] is so afraid of betraying what must remain a secret to everybody at court, and in particular to the queen, that he hides himself in a retired temple. There a female servant of the queen discovers him, and 'as a secret can no more rest in his breast than morning dew upon the grass,' she soon finds out from him why the king is so changed, since his return from the battle with the demon, and carries the tale to the queen. In the meantime, the king

is in despair, and pours out his grief. Urvasi also is sighing for him. She suddenly descends with her friend through the air to meet him.

Both are at first invisible to him, and listen to his confession of love.

Then Urvasi writes a verse on a birch-leaf, and lets it fall near the bower where her beloved reclines.

Next, her friend becomes visible, and at last, Urvasi herself is introduced to the king. After a few moments, however, both Urvasi and her friend are called back by a messenger of the gods, and the king is left alone with his jester. He looks for the leaf on which Urvasi had first disclosed her love, but it is lost, carried away by the wind. But worse than this the leaf is picked up by the queen, who comes to look for the king in the garden. The queen severely upbraids her husband, and, after a while, goes off in a hurry, like a river in the rainy season.

When Urvasi was recalled to Indra's heaven, she had to act before Indra the part of the goddess of beauty, who selects Vishnu for her husband. One of the names of Vishnu is Purushottama.

Poor Urvasi, when called upon to confess on whom [Pg 9] her heart was set, forgetting the part she had to act, says "I love Pururavas," instead of "I love Purushottama."

Her teacher Bharata, the author of the play, is so much exasperated by this mistake, that he pronounces a curse upon Urvasi. "You must lose your divine knowledge." After the close of the performance, Indra, observing her as she stood apart, ashamed and disconsolate, calls her and says:—

"The mortal, who engrosses your thoughts, has been my friend in the days of adversity; he has helped me in the conflict with the enemies of the gods, and is entitled to my acknowledgements. You must, accordingly, repair to him and remain with him till he beholds the offspring you shall bear him." The god thus permits her to marry the mortal hero.

After transacting public business, the king retires to the garden of the palace as the evening approaches. A messenger arrives from the queen, apprising his Majesty that she desires to see him on the ter-

race of the pavilion. The king obeys and ascends the crystal steps while the moon is just about to rise, and the east is tinged with red.

As he is waiting for the queen, his desire for Urvasi is awakened again. On a sudden, Urvasi enters on a heavenly car, accompanied by his friend. They are invisible to the king as on the previous occasion. The moment that Urvasi is about to withdraw her veil, the queen appears. She is dressed in white, without any ornaments, and comes to propitiate her husband, by taking a vow. [Pg 10]

Then she, calling upon the god of the moon, performs her solemn vow and retires.

Urvasi, who is present, though in an invisible state, during this scene of matrimonial reconciliation, now advances behind the king and covers his eyes with her hands. The king says:—

"It must be Urvasi; no other hand could shed such ecstasy through my emaciated frame. The solar rays do not wake the night's fair blossom; that alone expands when conscious of the moon's dear presence."

She takes the resignation of the queen in good earnest and claims the king as granted her by right. Her friend takes leave and she now remains with the king as his beloved wife in the groves of a forest.

Subsequently the lovers are wandering near Kailasa, the divine mountain, when Urvasi, in a fit of jealousy, enters the grove of Kumara, the god of war, which is forbidden to all females. In consequence of Bharat's curse she is instantly metamorphosed into a creeper. The king beside himself with grief at her loss, seeks her everywhere. The nymphs in a chorus deplore her fate. Mournful strains are heard in the air.

The king enters a wild forest, his features express insanity, his dress is disordered. Clouds gather overhead. He rushes frantically after a cloud which he mistakes for a demon that carried away his bride.

He addresses various birds and asks them whether they have seen his love,—the peacock, 'the bird of the dark-blue throat and eyes of jet,'—the cuckoo, 'whom lovers deem Love's messenger,'—the swans, 'who are sailing northward, and whose elegant gait be-

trays that they [Pg 11] have seen her,'—the chakravaka, 'a bird who, during the night, is himself separated from his mate,'—but none responds. He apostrophises various insects, beasts and even a mountain peak to tell him where she is.

Neither the bees which murmur amidst the petals of the lotus, nor the royal elephant, that reclines with his mate under the Kadamba tree, has seen the lost one.

At last he thinks he sees her in the mountain stream:—

"The rippling wave is like her frown; the row of tossing birds her girdle; streaks of foam, her fluttering garment as she speeds along; the current, her devious and stumbling gait. It is she turned in her wrath into a stream."

At last the king finds a gem of ruddy radiance. He holds it in his hands, and embraces the vine which is now transformed into Urvasi. Thus is she restored to her proper form, through the mighty spell of the magical gem. The efficacious gem is placed on her forehead. The king recovers his reason. They are thus happily re-united and return to Allahabad.

Several years elapse. An unlucky incident now comes to pass. A hawk bears away the ruby of re-union. Orders are sent to shoot the bird, and, after a short while, a forester brings the jewel and the arrow by which the hawk was killed. An inscription on the shaft shows that its owner is Ayus. A female ascetic enters, leading a boy with a bow in hand.

The boy is Ayus, the son of Urvasi, whom his mother confided to the female ascetic who generously brought him up in the forest and now; sends him back to his [Pg 12] mother. The king who was not aware that Urvasi had ever borne him a son, now recognises Ayus as his son. Urvasi also comes to embrace her boy. She now suddenly bursts into tears and tells the king:—

"Indra decreed that I am to be recalled to heaven when you see our son. This induced me to conceal from you so long the birth of the child. Now that you have accidentally seen the child, I shall have to return to heaven, in compliance with the decree of Indra."

She now prepares to leave her husband after she has seen her boy installed as associate king. So preparations are made for the inauguration ceremony when Narada the messenger of Indra, comes to announce that the god has compassionately revoked the decree. The nymph is thus permitted to remain on earth for good as the hero's second wife.

Nymphs descend from heaven with a golden vase containing the water of the heavenly Ganges, a throne, and other paraphernalia, which they arrange. The prince is inaugurated as Yuvaraj. All now go together to pay their homage to the queen, who had so generously resigned her rights in favour of Urvashi. [Pg 13]

## MALAVIKAGNIMITRA,

or

### AGNIMITRA AND MALAVIKA.

We learn a wise sentiment from the prologue. The stage-manager, addressing the audience, says:—"All that is old is not, on that account, worthy of praise, nor is a novelty, by reason of its newness, to be censured. The wise do not decide what is good or bad till they have tested merit for themselves: a foolish man trusts to another's judgement."

Puspamitra was the founder of the Sunga dynasty of Magadha kings, having been the general of Vrihadratha, the last of the Maurya race, whom he deposed and put to death: he was succeeded by his son Agnimitra who reigned at Vidica (Bhilsa) in the second century B.C. King Agnimitra has two queens Dharini and Iravati. Malavika belongs to the train of his queen Dharini's attendants. The maid was sent as a present to the queen by her brother, Virsenā, governor of the Antapala or barrier-fortress on the Nermada.

The queen jealously keeps her out of the king's sight on account of her great beauty. The king, however, accidentally sees the picture of Malavika, painted by order of the queen for her *chitrasala*, or picture-gallery. The sight of the picture inspires the king with an ardent desire to view the original, whom he has never yet beheld.

Hostilities are about to break out between Agnimitra and Yajnasena, king of Viderbha (Berar). The [Pg 14] first, on one occasion, had detained captive the brother-in-law of the latter, and Yajnasena had retaliated by throwing into captivity Madhavasena, the personal friend of Agnimitra, when about to repair to Vidisa to visit that monarch. Yajnasena sends to propose an exchange of prisoners, but Agnimitra haughtily rejects the stipulation, and sends orders to his brother-in-law, Virasena, to lead an army immediately against the Raja of Viderbha. This affair being disposed of, he directs his attention to domestic interests, and employs his Vidushaka or confidant,