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Chapter Author(s): Sheldon Pollock

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Chapter 2

WHAT HAPPENS IN *ŚAKUNTALĀ*: CONCEPTUAL AND FORMAL SYMMETRIES*

Sheldon Pollock

I. The Problem with *Śakuntalā*

As virtually every Western account of Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā* eagerly, and by now tiresomely, recounts, Europe's initial acquaintance with the play (through Jones's English version of 1789 and subsequent translations) was accompanied by extraordinary excitement and effusive admiration. Goethe, to cite only the most celebrated case, was fascinated by the work and wrote verses in its praise that have been quoted ever since. Nor was this a mere passing interest of his. He meditated long on Kālidāsa's masterpiece, and only some thirty years after his first exposure to the work did he finally determine what it was that had so impressed him:

> Das erstemal, as ich dieses unergründliche Werk gewahr wurde, erregte es in mir einen solchen Enthusiasmus, zog mich dergestalt an, dass ich es zu studieren nicht unterliess […] Ich begreife erst jetzt den überschwenglichen Eindruck, den dieses Werk früher auf mich gewann. Hier erscheint uns der Dichter in seiner höchsten Funktion als Repräsentant des natürlichsten Zustandes, der feinsten Lebensweise, des reinsten sittlichen bestrebens, der würdigsten Majestät und der ernstesten Gottesbetrachtung.[1]

And elsewhere he remarks on the 'Weibliche Reinheit, schuldlose Nachgiebigkeit, Vergesslickeit des Mannes, mütterliche Abgesondertheit, Vater und Mutter durch den Sohn vereint, die allernatürlichsten Zustände, hier aber in die Regionen der Wunder, die zwischen Himmel und Erde wie

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fruchtbare Wolken schweben, poetisch erhöht und ein ganz gewöhnliches Naturschauspiel durch Götter und Götterkinder aufgeführt'.[2]

It might prove more worthwhile to investigate Goethe's reaction to *Śakuntalā* from the vantage point of 'Orientalism' (in Said's sense) than to enquire whether it is in fact an altogether valid literary judgement. But it is the latter question I am interested in here, for it is as a literary judgement that his assessment has exercised its principal influence. Goethe articulated, and so valorized, the set of aesthetic and ideological categories to which nearly all critical attention to the work has been restricted ever since. We never cease to hear of Kālidāsa's brilliant representation of the most natural conditions of existence, his refined vision of human life, the exquisitely pure morality and earnest religiosity that inform his work.

It was through the lens supplied by such categories, however – and one must willy-nilly, if only provisionally, adopt such lenses as are offered by the critical tradition in which as a student one is nurtured[3] – that I first became acquainted with the play. And from the first it has seemed to me, not what by common Western and Indian consent it has always been considered – the greatest work of India's greatest poet, and the finest example of the finest genre of Indian literature – but a rather precious, insipid and trivial bit of romance. But it is not, in my judgement, merely that Goethe has supplied us with a distorting or otherwise imperfect lens, which refracts our vision to precisely those supposed moralistic features of the sort we now find most heavy-handed and presumptuous. There appear to be additional, and serious, problems intrinsic to the work. The reader who comes to the play from its epic prototype,[4] the *Śakuntalopākhyāna* (*Mahābhārata* I.62–69) – as Kālidāsa's audience did – is troubled by alterations made in both plot and characterization, which seem decidedly to diminish the power of the story. For example, the motif of the *rājyaśulka* (the 'brideprice' agreement consisting in the succession to the throne of the recipient's son) and all that it represents, a venerable narrative complex upon which much epic literature is founded and which is responsible for a good deal of the highly dramatic antagonisms and dilemmas that literature explores,[5] has been eliminated in the classical play, and with it has been lost, it would seem, a large portion of the epic version's mature problematic. By contrast, the introduction of the theme of Durvāsas's curse and the lost ring has, superficially at least, an aspect of manipulative special pleading, as if the poet were seeking to exculpate the epic king (usually viewed as a selfish blackguard) in the interests of the well-known idealizing tendencies of classical Sanskrit literature.

A similar, and perhaps the most obvious, unfortunate divergence between the two versions, to cite but one last instance, is the utter transformation of the heroine's character. The substantial, recognizable woman of the epic has been

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thoroughly etherealized by Kālidāsa. His suppression of the powerful and memorable declamation provided for her in the *Mahābhārata* (I.68–69),[6] the very centrepiece of the tale, is symptomatic of the transfiguration: Śakuntalā has lost the substance of particularized earthly reality and been exalted to the status of an emblematic heavenly ideal. No doubt in response to such criticisms one may urge this or that dramaturgical consideration (some features of a received tale make for interesting theatre and so can be preserved, while other things that do not must be eliminated; there could be events one may and events one may not show on the stage, and the like).[7] But this will not, I think, appreciably alter our unfavourable assessment of Kālidāsa's adaptation when we compare it with the epic version. There is a muscular vigour to the latter that the classical poet seems somehow to have sapped thoroughly.

The Westerner inevitably reads Kālidāsa's text with the expectations inculcated and continuously reinforced by experience with his own dramatic tradition. And if *Śakuntalā* is to be judged, as it cannot but be judged, by how far it satisfies those expectations, then on that score too the impartial critic must reckon it a failure. Until rather recently, when the 'habit that looks for Character and Motivation' came in critical discourse to be denigrated as a schoolroom exercise,[8] viewers and readers of plays have generally and primarily been affected by the problem of why a given character does what he does. (If in European drama from Synge onwards little is done and that too without any motive, the question does not disappear; it is only reformulated negatively.) Our search for motivation in *Śakuntalā*, however, proves to be utterly futile, for there are no reasons, in any useful sense of the word, for what these characters do; no decisions whatsoever, rational or even irrational, are actually made. Another feature of dramatic action that seems constitutive of Western theatre (can we use 'drama' instead of 'theatre'?) is the necessary sequentiality of the plot; succeeding actions are taken in response to what has already occurred. Little of the sort happens in *Śakuntalā*, except in the most trivial respects. Again, among the greatest virtues of a drama, for some students its very essence, is the dimension of conflict, the clash of human wills, and this likewise is something *Śakuntalā* altogether lacks.

Related to all this is a set of questions we must unavoidably pose after reading the work. Do the characters come to any fundamental realization about love or life through the action of the play? They are separated, and so suffer, but what knowledge do they – or we – derive from their suffering? If it is indeed a work principally about human love, what do we learn about love from it? It is questions such as these that have provoked a particularly widespread, one may call it the dominant, interpretation of the play in modern India.[9] According to this view, what we learn from the play is the terrible danger of sexual licence: Śakuntalā has committed a gross moral error, for

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which she has to atone. Tagore enunciated this interpretation in a way that has found echoes in much modern Indian scholarship. He speaks repeatedly of Śakuntalā's 'fall', of the 'dirt' and the 'mud' that have sullied her, and of the life of 'rigid spiritual discipline' and penance she must adopt in order to purge herself 'of the evil of her first union with Dushyanta'; Durvāsas's curse, he explains, is merely emblematic, for 'a loose and secret union like that of Dushyanta and Śakuntalā is accursed in all times'.[10] But are we seriously to believe that Kālidāsa's masterpiece is a simplistic cautionary tale about chastity? Let us recall that all three heroines of Kālidāsa's three plays are separated from their lovers, and yet the notion that such separation is required for moral purification is hardly applicable in the case of Mālavikā and Urvaśī. Moreover, the fact that Śakuntalā's love is fated (and readily countenanced by Kaṇva and the powers of the cosmos, cf. IV.5.20–IV.6 and IV.0.10–14), that her *gāndharva* marriage is in perfect accord with *śāstric* precept (cf., e.g., *Mahābhārata* 1.67.25) and that Duṣyanta is portrayed throughout the play as the ideal king – all this pretty much excludes as a reasonable possibility our interpreting her actions as opprobrious: they are clearly not considered as such in the play's own terms.[11]

If, therefore, this improbable reading aside, Kālidāsa were thought still to be offering us some large interpretation of life, it would seem to be – for all the reasons raised above – if not irrecoverably obscure, then singularly simple and naïve – when, that is, the play is read as it always has been in the West, as Goethe read it and indeed as it is perhaps most natural for us to continue to do.

One may, in the face of this last stricture, respond with considerations based on traditional Indian aesthetic categories – *rasa* and all the rest – and argue that the character and function of Sanskrit drama are not those of Western drama, and will therefore resist Western analytical canons of criticism. I do not in the least want to deny the propriety of employing as interpretive tools and evaluative standards those literary-critical concepts and norms (putatively) available to the author. In fact, this in my view should be the conceptual *prius* in any hermeneutic enterprise relating to Indian culture. But *rasa*, to take the critical case, is really a category – and a brilliant discovery of Indian aesthetics it no doubt is – that should be used primarily to determine the specificity of literary communication and so to distinguish it from other kinds of verbal communication, not to distinguish Indian literature from other sorts of literature, though this is a common abuse.[12] In the present instance, moreover, much as there are demonstrably features of *Śakuntalā* to which indigenous theory has had, and can afford, no access whatsoever, so many of the basic questions such as those just posed cannot be dismissed on the grounds that they are not properly Indian questions. And even were this so, such an argument would be a weak defence, and secure but a hollow victory.

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For all the reasons to lay *Śakuntalā* down and never pick it up again, there is one particularly compelling reason to do just the opposite. The unanimous collective judgement of a great culture over a period of some fifteen hundred years is as close as one comes to an absolute standard of literary evaluation. The judgement of Indian cultural history on *Śakuntalā*'s merit is unchallenged, and it suggests that reappraisal of the text would be rewarding. I do this not so much in the spirit that I must reread adjusting my aesthetic views to alien ones that may be supposed normative, but more in the conviction that one must be receptive to the possibility of an altogether different set of historical concerns than occupied the Hamburg stage in 1800 and, further, that there may be considerably more going on in this text subliminally available to an original audience and to some extent recoverable by the contemporary reader, than has yet been clearly articulated. There is a Sanskrit verse in praise of Kālidāsa; in the translation of D. H. H. Ingalls,

> It took me a long time
> to fathom, as it were,
> the deep, sweet flood
> of Kālidāsa's muse.[13]

The sentiment of the anonymous poet may strike us as merely banal, but it is one I at least have not encountered in Sanskrit literature in reference to any other writer. It suggests that we may in the past have read Kālidāsa's most famous work too quickly or peremptorily, and encourages a serious reconsideration.

II. Structure

Sanskrit dramaturgical theory conceives of the structure of a play according to a rather naïve linearity. The three different, and sometimes irreconcilable, schemata (*avasthā*, *arthaprakṛti and sandhi*),[14] for all their apparent complexity, provide in fact only for the simplest model of narrative development. Moreover, as for example Rāghavabhaṭṭa's articulation of the *sandhis* of *Śakuntalā* illustrates,[15] we learn virtually nothing more about the structure of the play than we knew prior to applying these theoretical indices. There is no doubt that Kālidāsa was familiar with the classical dramaturgical *śāstra* pretty much as we know it today (see, e.g., with respect to emplotment, *Kumārasambhava* VII.91), but it is erroneous to believe, despite the dominant *śāstric* ideology to the contrary, that actual cultural practice anywhere constrains itself within the perimeters mapped out by theory. In the case of *Śakuntalā*, not only does

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classical theory provide us with no useful interpretive tools for analysing the structure of *Śakuntalā*, but the tools it does provide have proved instead something of a hindrance to discovering what is actually going on. The truly significant and important thing about Kālidāsa's architectonics is neither provided for in *śāstric* theory nor accessible to it.

The most striking structural feature of the drama is its carefully crafted overall 'design'. There is an extraordinary antiphonal relationship among the scenes of this play such that they anticipate/recall one another in a complex fashion, describing in fact a pattern of concentric rings that join successively the outermost down to the innermost acts. That is, Acts I and VII, II and VI, III and V present virtually identical configurations of dramatic action, often including responsions of supplemental ornament and echoes of verbal detail. This is readily demonstrated:[16]

I.) Invocation of Śiva. Violence – the hunt (note verses on the motion of the chariot, I.8–9). Duṣyanta wishes to pay homage to Kaṇva (I.12.1–4); entrance into peaceful hermitage (I.12.8–I.14). Omen-fate (I.15); blessing for a son (I.11.3). Meeting with Śakuntalā.

VII.)[17] Violence – the war [Duṣyanta as ally of the gods against the demons] (note verses on the motion of the chariot, VII.7–8); Duṣyanta wishes to pay homage to Kāśyapa (VII.9.1–2); entrance into peaceful hermitage (VII.11–12). Omen-fate (VII.13); gaining a son. Meeting with Śakuntalā. Invocation to Śiva (VII.35cd).

II.) [Hopeful] longing of the king's: How to be with Śakuntalā? Comic admixture. King gives up hunting (cf., after the departure of the general, *kidaṃ bhavadā ṇimmakkhiaṃ*, 'You have driven all the flies away,' II.7.6)[18] King abandons affairs of state and uses substitute (II.18.1ff.; cf. II.2.12).[19] King is asked by the sages to protect them against evil spirits (n.b. Duṣyanta is called Valabhitsakha, 'Friend of Indra, Slayer of Vala,' II.15.1, and cf. especially II.16: '… in their battles with the demons the gods entertain hopes for victory by relying on his bow'). Thus external intervention leads to union with Śakuntalā in the coming act.

VI.) [Hopeless and remorseful] longing of the king's (6.11): How to be with Śakuntalā? Comic admixture. King gives up Holi (cf. after the departure of the guard and chamberlain, *kidaṃ bhavadā ṇimmakkhiaṃ*, VI.7.12, while the reference in II.7.8, *anavāptacakṣuḥphalo 'si yena tvayā draṣṭavyānāṃ paraṃ na dṛṣṭam* ('You have never made use of your eyes if you have not seen that most extraordinary sight'), is complemented by the showing of Śakuntalā's picture in VI.14.5ff., and the remark of Miśrakeśī, *mohacakkhuṇo iaṃ ṇa gadā se paccakkhadaṃ* ('His eyes are useless if he has never seen her'), VI.17.3-4. King abandons affairs of state

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and uses a substitute (VI.7.6ff.). King is summoned by Indra to protect the gods. Thus external intervention leads to re-union with Śakuntalā in the coming act.

III.) The morality of the union (III.1; 25.1, 26.1–27.3); seduction; union. Priyaṃvadā intercedes on Śakuntalā's behalf (III.21.6ff.). King protests he could never be unfair (III.22), and will always have regard for her ([III.23], this in response to Ansūyā's fear that he will ignore her [III.22.1–2]). Śakuntalā blames fate (she loves, but is not her own mistress), and implores the king, 'Don't forget me' (III.28.3–4); 'Fate is kind,' replies the king (III.32.3–4). Śakuntalā addresses Duṣyanta as *ajjaüta*, 'husband' (III.34.1). Enter Gautamī, to separate the lovers.

V.) Morality of (re-)union (V.20; and of original union, V.17–18); repudiation; dis-union. Śakuntalā addresses Duṣyanta as *ajjaüta* (V.17.1; cf. 20.5). King forgets; loss of ring is fated (V.21.9). The ascetics intercede on Śakuntalā's behalf. Enter Miśrakeśī, to separate the lovers.

[IV.) Curse of Durvāsas; discovery of Kaṇva; departure of Śakuntalā for the city.]

It is an easier matter to disinter a buried structure than to explain convincingly its function and meaning. One can suggest various possibilities, though none of them may be able to secure a credibility comparable to that which the structure arrogates to itself by its very existence, or to exhaust its possible significations.[20] There is no doubt about the sheer aesthetic pleasure, if necessarily a more or less subliminal pleasure, in sensing the symmetry of action here, as well as the unexpected asymmetry and the irony it can engender. Acts III and V illustrate the latter point clearly. The protestations of the king never to forget Śakuntalā and his expressions of trust in fate in Act III find their antithesis – all the more arresting for the contextual symmetry – in his complete oblivion and the revelation of fate's seeming obduracy in Act V.

There is one explanation, however, for the function of these intricate correspondences that seems to me especially meaningful, since it applies to the play globally. This is the deep impression gradually created by the orderly design of the drama, of the *design* underlying the action itself. The relationship of Duṣyanta and Śakuntalā and the birth of their son are matters carefully planned and brought to fruition by the cosmic dramaturge, Fate, to which so much of the play explicitly refers. The structure of *Śakuntalā* may thus be seen as an objectification in narrative form of the determinate cosmic plan underpinning the story. And that the events of the story are indeed the subject of profound cosmic concern and divine disposition is insistently asserted by the spirit as well as the very letter of the work.

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III. Fate

The role of fate in *Śakuntalā* has been the object of repeated critical attention. Winternitz understood its centrality, albeit he never argued the matter out in any detail.[21] More recently, an attempt has been made to introduce a finer distinction into the discussion. Since, according to this somewhat complicated notion, the socio-cosmic ordering of the Indian world, *dharma*, is Veda-centred and hence viewed as ultimately correct, what really underlies the action of *Śakuntalā* must be not fate but chance, not a plot or gods but a series of mischances.[22] Yet one can scarcely grant that the dramatic action here is fundamentally propelled, as is claimed, by Śakuntalā's 'minor bit of misconduct', the chance loss of the ring or the king's absentmindedness.[23] These are only the more prominent details in a vast tapestry of transcendent design, in fact details introduced into the epic version by Kālidāsa, to my way of thinking, precisely to invite attention to this design.[24] And the word for this design, the word used repeatedly by the poet, is *daiva*, 'what comes from the gods'.

The notion of 'fate', an inexplicable and imperceptible power that can intervene dramatically and irresistibly in the affairs of this sublunar plane, is introduced at the beginning of the play. On entering the hermitage of Kaṇva, Duṣyanta feels a twitching in his arm, the significance of which is unerringly interpreted for us:

> śāntam idam āśramapadaṃ sphurati ca bāhuḥ kutaḥ phalam ihāsya /
> atha vā bhavitavyānāṃ dvārāṇi bhavanti sarvatra // (I.15)

'When something is fated to happen, it can happen anywhere': the theme encloses the play as a whole, being antiphonally echoed in VII.13, where a bodily omen again informs the king of his imminent meeting with Śakuntalā. As their union is fated, so is their reunion, and so is everything else that happens in between.

Śakuntalā for her part is vouchsafed a sign that what is about to happen will happen according to a plan drawn up at some other time and place, and by some other power. She sees a springtime vine richly blossoming out of season (it is summer) and is informed that such was the omen her father Kaṇva said would foretell her marriage (I.20.15ff.).[25] And similarly, when she is rejoined with her husband in the heavenly ashram of Kaśyapa, it is only because fate, *daiva*, has taken pity on her (*aṇukampida mhi devveṇa*, VII.21.8–9). Kaṇva himself is absent from the hermitage when the king first appears, having gone to the pilgrimage site Somatīrtha to attempt to allay his daughter's untoward fate (*daiva […] pratikūla*, I.12.2–3), and in the same way he will be informed by a disembodied voice – another means by which fate manifests

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itself in the world – of Śakuntalā's marriage and pregnancy (IV.5.26ff.). If Śakuntalā can curse her fate, of being in love and yet not her own mistress (*devvaṃ uvālahāmi*, etc., III.36.3ff.), it is at the same time fate that Duṣyanta sees aiding him in his union with the maiden (*prasādenopakartavyo 'smi khalu daivasya*, III.32.3–4; *harakopāgnidagdhasya daivenāmṛtavarṣiṇā / prarohaḥ sambhṛto bhūyaḥ kiṃ svit kāmataror ayam*, III.34). It is to fate the two friends of Śakuntalā attribute her marriage with the king (*devvaṃ jeva saṃpādedi*, IV.0.13). On the other hand, while the *vidūṣaka* all along possessed the knowledge that could have spared the lovers their separation and suffering, he never shared it with the king. He innocently assumed Duṣyanta's denial of love (II.18.9ff.) to have been in earnest, and so kept silent later when he should have spoken. *Atha vā bhavidavvadā ettha balavadī* – 'But then,' the wise fool remarks, 'when something is fated to happen, nothing can stop it' (VI.9.23). And of course the ring and its loss and the rest – it was all 'arranged' to take place as it did (*vihiṇā*, by the 'arrangements' of fate, VI.13.2).

That the entire dramatic action is designed by fate is a fact as palpable and striking and meaningful as the structural design of the play that objectifies it. There is here no question of chance, of coincidence, of blind happenstance or capricious fortune, but of a programmed course of events, of some preternatural governance. And to recognize this may take us some way in resolving several of the basic aesthetic problems encountered by the reader who brings to the play Western expectations of motivation and conflict. Where the principal stages of an action are strictly regulated from without, all question of motivation, or volition, is necessarily eliminated. There can similarly be no meaningful conflict, for conflict is now altogether displaced by the depersonalized operations of fate. Nor is there any Oedipus-like confrontation of man and his fate: fate here does not cause the characters to react to circumstances and make decisions that expose the poignant frailty of human effort and the vanity of human wishes; quite the contrary, just as they initially act (or react, to be more precise) only because their fate compels them, so they wait inertly and passively until fate once again disposes of matters.[26]

Furthermore, we are not justified in attempting to resurrect individual human will by reformulating fate as karmic retribution. The dramatized experiences of Duṣyanta and Śakuntalā have nothing whatsoever – or at least, nothing in any way made meaningfully apparent – to do with this doctrine. Kālidāsa, for all I know, may well have been assured that things are 'governed by a just fate which man makes for himself by his own deeds'.[27] On the evidence of the text itself, however, we have no grounds for assuming this, for no such assurance informs the presentation of the tale.[28] Kālidāsa rarely makes reference to the doctrine of *karma* here, and when he does it is not as some central explanatory moment, but rather almost as a commonplace of discourse,

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an automatic, in fact nearly proverbial, response (as in the paired verses II.11c and VI.11b, and cf. VII.24.2–4). Karma is not seriously postulated and scrutinized as the fundamental ground of the drama, nor is it ever associated with the personal histories or specific characters of the lovers. Responsibility is never given or taken, nor is anyone held accountable for anything whatsoever. Thus, far from being posited on any reasonable view as the outcome of human deeds, the action of *Śakuntalā* is clearly shown to be prepared at some remove far beyond the realms of human enterprise and directed by some force – in the long view a wholly benignant force – far different from that comprised in human agency.

IV. Myth and Ideology

The red threads of fate, then, which are woven thickly into the fabric of the play and fundamentally affect its colour – and which are replicated by the overall configuration of the play's structure – reveal a pattern of transcendent intentionality and agency altogether affecting our interpretation of the drama. If we then persist in viewing it principally as a reading of the 'bitter mystery' of human love,[29] Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā* will have little substance, and make less sense. For what do the characters, or the audience, finally learn about love? What possible interpretation of human relationships is it supposed that we are being given? Are we to believe that the quotidian affairs of terrestrial everyman and everywoman are being revealed to us as the object of persistent and urgent cosmic intervention? Quite evidently not. The disposition of everyday human affairs by the power of fate seems irrelevant to Kālidāsa here, irrelevant in direct correlation with the fact that the hero and heroine of the drama are beings of a stature far exceeding that of everyday creatures.

We do well to remember, first of all, that Duṣyanta is a king, and Śakuntalā a woman of most unusual parentage. Here is not the place to go deeply into the political-theological representation of kingship in traditional India.[30] We can, however, get a good idea of the king's anomalous and transcendent nature from the ancient and widely attested conception, clearly formulated in a key text of Indian culture, that 'kings are gods who walk the earth in the form of men' (*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* IV.18.38). It is a notion that in premodern India attains the status of what may be called an 'episteme', or mental paradigm of a historical epoch. As such it thoroughly conditions the significance of such kingly literary figures as Duṣyanta. For her part Śakuntalā is the offspring of a divine nymph and Viśvāmitra, a king (i.e., a *kṣatriya*) who, by a unique act of will shattering the otherwise infrangible laws of the Indian universe, achieved brahmanhood.[31] Ontogenetically considered, the king is as far above mortal man as a god is (indeed, he is above the gods themselves, for

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they look to him as their saviour, VII.0.1–VII.3), while Śakuntalā in fact walks among the gods: we recall how in Act V she is spirited away to the summit of the world where, in the celestial hermitage of Kaśyapa, father of gods and antigods (VII.9), she gives birth to her child. But there is more. These characters have transcendent associations not only in their own person, as king and demigoddess, but also by reason of the mythic patterns to which the poet has assimilated them.

For there is, additionally, a pervasive mythic patterning to *Śakuntalā*. It is one the poet would continue to meditate on deeply, ultimately giving it explicit, and consummate, expression in his *Kumārasambhava*. I mean the union of Śiva and Devī. We may note first of all that, morphologically considered, the poet's two greatest works are identical. Their elementary structure shows a movement from union to separation and suffering to reunion and finally fruition. The encompassing Śaiva framework is further adumbrated by the subject matter of the verses that begin and end the drama, the *nāndī* and *bharatavākya*, which are here antiphonally linked (celebrating as they do Śiva's cosmological and soteriological activities respectively). And it is not long into the play before the equations determining the treatment of Duṣyanta and Śakuntalā come into clear focus.

Duṣyanta is portrayed in the quintessentially Śaiva combination of violence and sexuality.[32] He is first introduced as the hunter, the great bowman chasing the wild deer, and the latent analogue is made fully manifest: 'It is as if there came before one's very eyes Śiva himself, the Bearer of the Pināka bow, chasing [the sacrifice in the form of] the deer' (I.6cd). This aspect of violence resurfaces at the end of Act VI, where the king is summoned by Indra to help fight the enemies of the gods (and it can be glimpsed in his repudiation of Śakuntalā in Act V). Now, the relationship between the earthly king and Śiva is the subject matter of a chapter yet to be written in an analysis of Indian political theology. Yet even so, some connections seem clear enough. Since punishment is his alone, there is about the king, necessarily and essentially, a concomitant dimension of violence (emblematized here by hunting and war). From the epic onwards it is Rudra-Śiva who in mythic terms most thoroughly expresses this aspect of the king's violent terror (*raudra*).[33] For this reason, and because the king comprises substantival properties of all the gods, he can, given favourable circumstances, become Śiva himself.[34] Again like Śiva, Duṣyanta is a highly seductive lover, whose erotic powers are well illustrated in the finely crafted seduction scene of Act III. And – one final intertextual detail of similarity – it is an ascetic girl raised in a hermitage in the Himalayan foothills whom he wins, rather as Śiva wins Himālaya's daughter Pārvatī, who has sought to secure his love through asceticism (*KumāSam.* V).

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The homology that subsists between Śakuntalā and Devī is principally comprised in one central aspect of the goddess: her character as earth mother. The image of Pārvatī developed in the *Kumārasambhava* as an elemental power of nature has been attractively delineated by Ingalls.[35] Very nearly the same, if not quite so sensuously drawn, is the image of Śakuntalā as a divinity of the earth and a basic power of fertility and life. She has grown up in a thoroughly natural state (according to *Mahābhārata* I.66.10ff.; her name comes from the fact that she was protected by birds when abandoned in the wilderness). The vines and creepers of the forest are her sisters (I.16.6–7, 20.28); she would never drink water until the trees had drunk first (IV.11). She was raised with the fawns (II.19; cf. I.26, V.21.18) and adopted a fawn as her son (IV.16). By her departure the natural world of the hermitage is vitally diminished: animals stop eating, their mating calls cease, the leaves fall off the trees and the lianas weep (IV.14; cf. IV.15.1ff., especially IV.17.5–6, 'not a sentient creature but feels grief at losing Śakuntalā',[36] and IV.18). Nature comes to a halt when Śakuntalā departs as if the very 'force that through the green fuse drives the flower' had been lost. (I would note that it may be this dimension of Śakuntalā's character in Kālidāsa that resolves the problem of the apparent flattening of her personality as portrayed in the epic version of the tale: for here she is no longer figured as fully human at all.)

This constellation of associations prompting the recognition of an integral Śaiva mythological background to the narrative is not, I think, meant merely to increase the aesthetic depth of the drama. There may be, far more significantly, an argument to it all. The union of Śiva and Pārvatī in the *Kumārasambhava* of Kālidāsa (as in the epic versions of the myth) is, like that of Duṣyanta and Śakuntalā, a matter of urgent divine concern. According to the former legend, the universe is threatened by a demonic force of overwhelming magnitude, which none of the gods has the power to confront, namely, Tāraka. It is only the offspring of the Great God and the Mother Goddess who shall be able to defeat the demon. Now, who is the offspring of Duṣyanta and Śakuntalā, of the Śaiva-empowered god on earth and the goddess of nature? It is Bharata, so called because he is some day to 'bear' and support all the world (VII.33). It is he who has been born for the welfare of all the world (*bhūtaye bhuvaḥ*, IV.6), he who shall become the universal emperor: 'He shall cross the oceans on an unstoppable chariot, and bring all the seven continents of earth under his protection' (VII.33). This is how the epic version of the legend describes him:

> The illustrious wheel of great Bharata's political power commenced to roll, a brilliant, heavenly, invincible wheel, resounding greatly through the world. He conquered all the lords of earth and reduced them to his sway; he followed the code of conduct followed by good men, and won fame without compare. He

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> was a 'Turner of the Wheel,' a mighty universal emperor; he instituted many sacrifices, just like Śakra, Lord of Maruts […] From Bharata came the Bhārata fame, and thence the Bhārata tribe: Men of later times, as those of the past, are known as Bhāratas. For in the lineage of Bharata there have been many a godlike mighty king, many an excellent king the very equal of Brahmā; in all their names are past numbering. (*Mahābhārata* I.69.45–51)

The child who is the outcome of the manipulations of fate and the gods' complex machinations dramatized by *Śakuntalā* is thus, according to one major legend (and Kālidāsa's source), the first universal emperor[37] and, it would seem most likely, the eponymous ancestor of all India, called in ancient times as it still is at present, Bharatavarṣa, the 'Land of Bharata'.[38] And the significance of the role of cosmic fate is sharply enhanced by the Śaiva mythical framework. As Skanda eliminates the enemies of the gods and restores to divine hegemony the operations of the universe, so, we are encouraged to infer, has Bharata. And by the same token his sociopolitical legacy is shown to be sanctioned by the gods and ratified as a matter of benevolent cosmic governance. The play thus emerges as an enactment – and justification, and celebration – of the origins of the vast communality known as India; in the trappings of a drama is presented a cultural foundation myth of the first order.

But then, we naturally ask, why should a poet of the mid-fifth century AD feel called upon to resuscitate in dramatic form an archaic epic charter-legend recounting the divine sanction of primeval Indian empire? Here, I think, is the question that takes us near to the heart of the work. 'For the core of any literary text does not lie in its sheer textuality', that modish but empty notion, but quite the contrary, in those intersections with historical reality and historical consciousness that make it, literally, an intersubjectively 'meaningful' cultural production. The fruitfulness of this historical perspective in Sanskrit studies – and in fact, with specific attention to Kālidāsa – has recently been reaffirmed in a comprehensive survey by Ingalls.[39] Such breadth and detail of analysis is not my intention here; I only wish, very briefly and with reliance on this predecessor, to make several suggestions that may help to restore to *Śakuntalā* some of the historical roots through which it draws sustenance.

The first point Ingalls makes, and it is one that is often ignored in classical Indian historical studies, is that under the Gupta kings northern India saw not only its first unified and powerful government in more than half a millennium but also its first *indigenous* government in as long.[40] And this was an occurrence that must have impressed itself forcefully upon the contemporary imagination, especially that of a poet necessarily connected, as Kālidāsa assuredly was, with the court (so many of whose ideals, as Ingalls shows, centrally informed the poet's work). Just as Kālidāsa without any doubt was celebrating

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the achievements of the founders of this imperial dynasty by assimilating them to legendary and mythical figures from India's glorious past in his epic, the *Raghuvaṃśa*, so it seems likely that in *Śakuntalā* he was seeking to examine with a larger vision the congruence of cosmic destiny and the destiny of empire.[41]

The Śaiva mythological framework might be thought to fit, in a general way, with the poet's overall interests in the self-authentication of the empire. Yet there may be a higher degree of specificity than such broad terms would imply. If we accept, as I think by now we must, the approximate dates for Kālidāsa of AD 390–470,[42] then he is placed rather squarely in the reign of Kumāragupta (c. AD 415–455). What marks the epoch of this emperor, besides the continuing consolidation of the empire, is the slow encroachment upon the borders of the realm of Western and Central Asian tribes; Kālidāsa in fact appears to have seen the Persians and Huns in person.[43] Although these inroads were slowed or successfully repelled both by Kumāragupta and by his son and successor Skandagupta, the threat was considerable, of such sort as finally to bring the empire to its knees.

It is not going too far, I think, to see in Kālidāsa's resurrecting the legend of Bharata's birth and investing it with those highly suggestive, emotionally and religiously charged associations with the myth of Śiva and Pārvatī, an aesthetic response to or interpretation of such major, formative historical realities.[44] It is precisely the theme the poet would return to in direct fashion in his greatest work, the epic poem *Kumārasambhava* (in my view never completed): as the gods contrived the birth of Skanda to repel the antigods and their otherwise invincible leader Tāraka, so, it is again urged, the divine concern evinced in the birth of the Indian imperial order would continue to secure that order by providing a king, himself a godly being, to repel the demonic aliens that threatened it.[45] In neither case, I would stress, whether that of the legend of Bharata or that of the Śaiva myth, is the play presenting us with mere unstructured imaginative reflection, nor yet with a rigid allegory. The essences of both Skanda and Bharata are in fact concretely present – as validated by the all-important political theology of traditional India in the one case, and by reason of the biology of dynastic descent in the other – in the Gupta emperor before whom the play was staged, as the appeal that ends it makes certain.[46]

The *Śākuntalam* thus may perhaps more productively be viewed, or may be analysed with more explanatory coherence, as something larger than that precious and superficial romance – Goethe's charming homiletic on love – punctuated by the small but finally meaningless mischances of daily life. It may in fact be providing us with a deeply meditated and solicitously crafted illustration in dramatic form of the design behind a grand empire, as well as a fervent blessing for its welfare. What Oldenberg required of the play and

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found it lacking – 'der Lichtglanz mächtiger wirklichkeiten'[47] – hereby streams forth, and as it does in all great art, unobtrusively yet essentially.

Notes

1 In a letter to Chezy cited in M. Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Literatur*, Vol. III (Stuttgart: K. F. Koehler, 1920), 214.

2 Cited in A. Hillebrandt, *Kālidāsa, ein Versuch zu seiner literarischen Würdigung* (Breslau: M.-H. Marcus, 1921), 77–78.

3 Hillebrandt puts the matter rather more emphatically: 'Wo die Grossen unserer Literatur so geurteilt haben, darf das Wort der andern schweigen' (ibid., 78).

4 On the question of Kālidāsa's source see M. B. Emeneau, 'Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā* and the *Mahābhārata*', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82 (1962), 41–44. (For a text-critical analysis of the epic version itself, see R. M. Smith, 'The Story of Śakuntalā in the *Mahābhārata*', *Journal of the Bihar Research Society* 46 (1960), 163–76.)

5 See Sheldon Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: Ayodhyākāṇḍa* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

6 The Kashmiri recension alone preserves a verse that dimly echoes this speech, cf. A. Scharpé, *Kālidāsa Lexicon Vol. 1, Basic Text of the Works, Part I: Abhijñānaśākuntala* (Brugge: De Tempel, 1954), 5.25* (p. 125).

7 Indeed, the later rhetoricians were quite conscious of the necessity of altering traditional tales in order to intensify or otherwise modulate the aesthetic experience. Ānandavardhana, for example, directly addresses the issue and specifically refers to Kālidāsa (*Dhvanyā*. 3.14, pp. 360 and especially 368 of the Vidyābhavana Sanskrit Series ed.). See also P. K. Narayana Pillai, *Kālidāsa: An Assessment by Ānandavardhana* (Hoshiarpur: Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute, 1974), 30ff.

8 See, e.g., H. Kenner, *A Colder Eye* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 122.

9 It may be a rather old interpretation, for such (if it is not mere levity) could be the implication of *KāmSū*. V.4.14, which pairs the relationship of Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta with the adulterous and acknowledgedly immoral liaison of Ahalyā and Indra.

10 See R. Tagore, '*Śakuntalā*: Its Inner Meaning', *Modern Review* 9(2) (1911), 171–75. The poet reverts to these issues in 'Kālidāsa the Moralist' (*Modern Review* 14(10) (1913), 347–49), from which the last quotation is cited. The view is shared by the foremost Indian Sanskrit scholars of the century, among them S. K. De ('Kālidāsa', *IHQ* 16 (1940), 409–13) and S. K. Belvalkar ('The Application of a Few Canons of Textual and Higher Criticism to Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā*', *Asia Major* 2 (1925), 90–93, et passim), and has recently been expressed once more by R. D. Karmarkar (*Kālidāsa* (Dharwar: Karnatak University, 1971), 124–25), who adds that the drama 'is thus at once a warning and a guide to maidens […] Śakuntalā ought to be taught a lesson – that is how the poet seems to have argued to himself' (and for this reason the author, exhuming another dead idea, asserts that Kālidāsa lengthened an originally five-act play to seven acts, p. 128). While V. Raghavan for his part sufficiently perceives the 'self-control' with which Kālidāsa invests the *nāyikā* in Act III (Śakuntalā does in fact consistently deny Duṣyanta and shows herself to be a paradigm of sexual propriety), he proceeds to suppose that in Act VII she is doing penance (V. Raghavan, *On Kālidāsa* (Mysore: Kavyalaya, 1980), 84ff.; I do not find this signification in VII.21, which refers merely to the *virahavrata* incumbent on any chaste wife in separation; see also below, n. 35). For several dissenting contemporary Indian views, see K. P. Jog,

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'A Fresh Revaluation of the Inner Meaning of *Śakuntalā*', in S. N. Gajendragadkar, Hari Damodar Velankar and S. A. Upadhyaya (eds.), *H. D. Velankar Commemoration Volume* (Bombay: Prof. H. D. Velankar Commemoration Volume Committee, 1965), 206–13 (his remarks on the sacrificial imagery used by the poet to describe the union are noteworthy, p. 211).

11 Note that V.25 does not assert that Śakuntalā ought not to have entered into the *gāndharva* marriage; it insists instead that what she ought to have done is first ascertain the true character of her prospective husband. It is furthermore not at all clear that the instruction on wifely duty given by Mārīca (VII.12.2ff.) is in any sense to be taken as a tacit censure of Śakuntalā.

12 For instance, Sanskrit drama is often differentiated from the Greek on the basis of *rasa*, as in the following: 'The organization of factors to sustain the dominant emotion [in an Indian play] proceed on principles that bear little relation to a calculus of events […] The organization of the play, then is not of the action at all. It is an organization of the elements of the nascent emotional tone' (E. Gerow, 'The Rasa Theory of Abhinavagupta and its Application', in E. Dimock (ed.), *The Literatures of India* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 134–35). What, one is often tempted to ask when presented with such dichotomies, is the status of emotion in the absence of the human actions of which they are the direct function? Moreover, if this whole process is not in some important and fundamental way mimetic (which Gerow denies, p. 134), how does it become meaningful to the viewer?

13 D. H. H. Ingalls, *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 444.

14 Cf. *Nāṭyaśā.*, Chapter 21 (ed. M. Ghosh, Calcutta, 1967), *DaśRū.* 1.17ff. (ed. Venkatacharya, Madras, 1969); A. B. Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), 297ff.; H. Oldenberg, in my view justly, found the dramaturgical theory of plot structure to be altogether superficial (*Die Literatur des alten Indian* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1923), 262).

15 Conveniently excerpted (along with the commentator's remarks on the *sandhyaṅgas* as well as Kāṭayavema's analysis) in V. Bhavalkar, 'Śākuntalasya Nāṭyaśāstrīyam anuśīlanam', *Sāgarikā* 13 (1974), 22ff. (in Sanskrit).

16 All references that follow are made to Pischel's edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922; HOS 10); a cross-check of Scharpé's (partial) variorum edition ('partial' because it does not take account of the prose portions of the Kashmiri recension) shows that all the material cited is adequately attested by all the recensions of the play. I should mention that, although my analysis of the play's structure was done altogether independently, I now see that I have been anticipated, if only in a very sketchy way (M. R. Kale, *The Abhijñānaśākuntala of Kālidāsa* (Bombay: Oriental Publishing Company, 1969 [1898]), 73–74; W. Ruben, *Kālidāsa: Die menschliche Bedeutung seiner Werke* (Berlin: Akademie, 1956), 63; Ruben appears to believe that the reason for this patterning is a certain 'heimliche Freude' on the part of the poet).

17 The *praveśaka* to Act VII found in the Kashmiri recension of the *Śakuntalā* (cf. S. K. Belvalkar, 'Nāṭaka and Nartana', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute* 20 (1960), 119–22) shows interesting parallels with the prologue to Act I, especially the discussion of the dramas to be performed and the *ṛtuvarṇana* topos (indeed, the *apsarās*' song in the Kashmiri version may in fact, like those of the vulgate Prologue (vv. 3–4), refer to the summer and not the spring, as Belvalkar would have it: the substance of the verse definitely suggests this, though admittedly we should be required to take *mahusamayo* – assuming the reading is correct – in an unusual sense). The overall

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structural symmetry of the drama adds weight to Belvalkar's claim of authenticity for the scene on intertextual grounds.

18 So the Bengali and Devanāgarī recensions; the Kashmiri (which for a good part is available in the edition of the play by Belvalkar (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1965)) reads *kido bhavadā ṇiddhūmako daṃsapadīāro* (II.7.6), 'You have thwarted the gnats without the use of smudge-pots.' In VII.7.14 it affirms the version of the other recensions.

19 The substitute is employed for the ceremony called *puttapiṇḍapāraṇo* (II.17.17). Again the structure of the play, especially the all-important responsion of VI.27 (Duṣyanta laments his childlessness and speculates on the anxieties it is awakening in his ancestors), may be taken as both authenticating the reading (as accepted by Pischel from the Bengali recension, which is confirmed by the Kashmiri [II.16.17], over and against the irrelevant and insipid *paüttapāraṇo [me uvavāso]* of the Devanāgarī tradition, II.16.17) as well as verifying the signification: for though I find no information about this ceremony elsewhere, it seems quite clearly to refer to a ritual activity undertaken to ensure the birth of a son, who shall continue the *śrāddha* ceremony for the ancestors. (Emeneau renders this as 'the cherishing of a son's body' (*Kālidāsa's Abhijñāna-Śakuntalā* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962)), and the most recent translator as 'Safeguarding of the Son's succession' (Michael Coulson, *Three Sanskrit Plays* (New York: Penguin, 1981)), neither of which offers a compelling alternative.)

20 For Tagore, who faintly perceived the symmetry of the play, the structure shows the progress of love 'from the sphere of physical beauty to the eternal heaven of moral beauty' ('*Śākuntala*', 172). I find nothing in the play, however, that sustains this (anachronistic) dichotomy, except of course the spatial distribution itself. It is worth noting that such structural craftsmanship on the part of the playwright is evident elsewhere in the drama: Śakuntalā's exit from the ashram in Act IV is described in the exact reverse order of Duṣyanta's entrance in Act I (noticed by S. K. Belvalkar, 'Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntala*: Its Dramatic Setting', *Vikrama Volume* (Ujjain, 1948), 53–55.

21 Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Literatur*, 216–17.

22 H. van Buitenen in Dimock, *Literatures of India*, 86–88 (Gerow calls it 'the arbitrary superimposition of chance', ibid., 134). Winternitz rightly remarks, 'Ebenso ist das Verlieren und Wiederfinden des Ringes kein "blinder Zufall", sonder ein Schicksal […] bestimmt durch göttliche Fügung' (*Geschichte der indischen Literatur*, 217).

23 van Buitenen in Dimock, *Literatures of India*, 87.

24 Far too much significance has been attached to the curse of Durvāsas. Winternitz, for instance, bends over backwards trying to establish its importance, claiming what a 'grave offence' Śakuntalā's 'insult' to the reverend sage would have been thought to be in the 'indische Geisteswelt' (*Geschichte der indischen Literatu*, 216–17). Far from being the pivotal event of the play, it is a relatively minor (one might say illustrative rather than conclusive) and lightly handled incident offstage in an entr'acte and can hardly bear the heavy interpretation regularly placed upon it. Such an interpretation probably results from the fact that scholars are prone to identify the ring motif as the *one* 'element of chance' in the play, as, e.g., De ('Kālidāsa,' 408–9), or from a perceived need to explain Śakuntalā's suffering in the event one rejects the standard argument (as a penance for a sexual sin).

25 This is missing in the Kashmiri recension (and of course in the Devanāgarī, which rather brutally truncates the scene). Belvalkar believed it to be an interpolation, but his case is not I think a terribly strong one ('Śṛṇgāric Elaboration in *Śakuntalā*, Act III',

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Indian Studies in Honor of Charles Rockwell Lanman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 189–90).

26 The following characterization of the role of fate in *Oedipus Tyrannos* makes for an instructive contrast: 'The best modern criticism of the play – in particular that of Bernard Knox – has argued conclusively that the oracle predicts events but does not predetermine them […] and that the actions initiated by Oedipus stem from his own decisions. "Oedipus" action is not only the action of a free agent, it is also the cause of the events of the play. The hero is not only free but fully responsible for the events which constitute the plot […], that is to say the process by which Oedipus' identity is revealed' (B. Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy* (London: Longman, 1973), 497.

27 Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, 160.

28 Like Keith, van Buitenen speaks of the world represented in Indian drama as 'the present product of all the interacting destinies created by people through innumerable lives' (see also Jog, 'A Fresh Revaluation,' 212: the lovers have to suffer the effects of their earlier karma before they are reunited through the grace of the gods). I do not care to dispute such a generalization for the genre as a whole, but I see little support for his specific remarks on *Śakuntalā*: 'The curse [of Durvāsas] is the very power of *karma*, the automatic retribution for past deeds, which may at any time take effect in anyone's present life' (in Dimock, *Literatures of India*, 88, 99); see also above, n. 24.

29 'The theme here [in *Śakuntalā*] is love, both in its rapture and its torments' (K. Krishnamoorthy, *Kālidāsa* (New York: Twayne, 1972), 45); 'a simple story of love' (V. V. Mirashi and N. R. Navlekar, *Kālidāsa* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1969), 307); 'but principally [the play] is a dramatic representation […] of Śakuntalā's love as a young girl and her frustration in marriage' (van Buitenen in Dimock, *Literatures of India*, 99), to cite only three more recent remarks out of countless.

30 See for details Sheldon Pollock, 'The Divine King in the Indian Epic', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104 (1984), 505–28.

31 Note the encomium on Viśvāmitra in the *Mahābhārata* version of the legend, I.65.27ff. (Indra fears him, Yama and Soma and the great seers all stand in awe of him, etc.).

32 Rāghavabhaṭṭa's reading of the *nāndī* reveals a traditional understanding of the verse that comprises an identical (here explicitly allegorical) element: '"The verses [at the beginning] of a poetic text should suggest its entire meaning." What this verse suggests is as follows. "May the Lord", i.e., the lordly Duḥṣanta, "protect you." The king can be thought of as "endowed with the eight forms" [which are attributed in the verse to Śiva] as follows: He is an embodiment of the five elements; he is institutor of sacrifices and so has a ritual form; and as a being consisting of portions of the world protectors [he cites 'Bhṛgu': 'The king is fashioned from eternal substances derived from the gods'], he is of transcendent luminous glory, and so can be said to comprise the forms of the sun and moon' (ed. Bombay, 1891, p. 5).

33 J. Scheuer, *Śiva dans le Mahābhārata* (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 1982), p. 241 et passim.

34 See Sheldon Pollock, 'Rāma's Madness', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* (forthcoming); and cf. also Rāghavabhaṭṭa's citation quoted above, n. 32.

35 Ingalls, *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry*, 27ff. Here a parallel with Śakuntalā is also drawn: Umā is purified for her marriage by the practice of yoga, just as another heroine of Kālidāsa, the nymph's daughter Śakuntalā, is purified by sorrow' (p. 29). This notion is advanced by many others, among them Keith ('Śakuntalā's own love for him is purified by her suffering, and, when she is finally united to him, she is no

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longer a mere loving girl, but one who has suffered tribulation of spirit and gained in depth and beauty of nature' (*The Sanskrit Drama*, 158)). I fail to understand, however, why Śakuntalā, a perfect vessel of purity, should need yet further purification. Moreover, I am not at all convinced that suffering in the Indian cultural domain is ever viewed as producing wisdom (the *pathein – mathein* conception is quintessentially Hellenic). (Can we see the *krauch* episode and *soka* being the origin of *kavya*, and *kavya jnana* as suggesting *soka* as the source of knowledge?) One assuredly shares the sense of compulsion to find meaning in the heroine's pain and suffering, but as I remarked earlier, to understand this as some sort of moral purification seems to me quite the wrong task.

36 On the text-criticism of this passage, see Belvalkar, 'Nāṭaka and Nartana,' 84–86.

37 While the historical reality behind the political title is no doubt of an altogether different order from that presented by the text, the historical reality of Bharata himself is on somewhat surer footing; cf. the account of the *AitBr.* (39.9) cited in P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. V (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1962), 1525, n. 2483.

38 The word is attested elsewhere before and around Kālidāsa's period, e.g., *Mahābhārata* VI.7.6, *BṛhSaṃ.* 14.1 (PW). Kane (*History of Dharmaśāstra*, 1525, n. 2483) seeks to cast doubt upon the identification of this Bharata, citing several (generally late) *purāṇas*, which at all events are self-contradictory and even so still report the tradition that the Bharata meant was Bharata Dauṣyanti. It seems to me that the evidence of the play itself, and the arresting encomium cited from what is, again, Kālidāsa's source, the *Mahābhārata*, puts the matter to rest as far as Kālidāsa is concerned. (Given its prominent locating of the legend near the commencement of the epic, the *Mahābhārata* without a doubt intended 'Bharatavarṣa', along with every patronymic use of 'Bhārata' in the text, to refer to this king; cf. also XVIII.3.25, where in the very highest heaven attainable by heroes Yudhiṣṭhira finds Bharata Dauṣyanti.) The one argument offered by Kane on why we should not assume Kālidāsa to have made this identification is *ex silentio* (i.e., had the poet been aware of this identification 'there would have been nothing to prevent [him] from adding another prophecy about [Bharata] [in addition to VII.33] that a varṣa would be named after him' (*History of Dharmaśāstra*, 1525, n. 2483) and hardly needs refutation. (I now see that Belvalkar drew the same connection as I have done ('Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntala*,' 45), as did Ruben (*Kālidāsa*, 54).)

39 D. H. H. Ingalls, 'Kālidāsa and the Attitudes of the Golden Age', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 96 (1976), 15–26.

40 Ibid., 16.

41 To cite one detail, the formulaic titles of Samudragupta ('Samudragupta, the conqueror of all kings, unopposed upon earth, whose fame has extended to the four oceans' (ibid.)) certainly recall both the *Mahābhārata* encomium of Bharata and Mārīca's prophecy in *Śakuntalā* (VII.33). From this perspective, I would add, many of the points earlier noted of unfavourable comparison with the *Mahābhārata* version of the story are effectively addressed. In what may have been as much as a millennium separating the two texts, the historical concerns of Indian royal circles had changed radically. The issue of the *rājyasulka*, for example, has demonstrably become irrelevant for Kālidāsa's purposes. For he was not confronting the problems of the relatively primitive polity that engrossed the epic poets (the transfer of newly monopolized political power, for example), but rather the ideological foundations of an empire.

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42 Reaffirmed by Ingalls, 'Kālidāsa and the Attitudes of the Golden Age', 15.

43 Ibid., 15 and n. 1, 20–21 and n. 22.

44 This sort of symbolic adaptation of legendary/mythic paradigms would not be without significant parallel in Gupta India. It has recently been suggested (by J. Williams, *The Art of Gupta India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 43–46) that the Varāha monumental relief carving of Udayagiri, executed during the reign of Candragupta II, may best be explained by historical rather than iconographic considerations, i.e., as figuring an exploit of the emperor himself (or better, the salvational dimension of the emperor's rule). The author goes on to comment, 'Such a topical and propagandistic interpretation of an Indian work of art may seem heretical. Yet a connection between ruler and deity was common in Southeast Asia and probably had Indian sources' (p. 46; relevant also is of course Viśākhadatta's *bharatavākyam* in *Mudrārākṣasa*, which openly proclaims Candragupta an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu in connection with his soteriological intervention in the Varāha form (*MudrāRā.* 7.19)). I would only observe that *all* art is, in a nontrivial sense, essentially 'topical' in view of its irreducible *Geschichtlichkeit*, and furthermore that what might seem 'propaganda' to us may as readily be viewed as a religious celebration in honour of a 'present deity'. The ideological dimension remains of course the same on either view, but its mechanisms, and the intention of the responsible agents, are by the latter route I believe more usefully articulated.

45 One hesitates to appear so self-assured – or reckless – as to identify this king with Skandagupta. Still, it is true that the barbarian encroachments begin with Kumāragupta, who appears to have been a very weak military leader (Ingalls, Ingalls, 'Kālidāsa and the Attitudes of the Golden Age,' 18), and Skandagupta quite the opposite (cf. the latter's Girnar inscriptions (AD 455–457) along with the Bhitari inscription recounting his victory over the Huns, which at the same time suggest that Kumāragupta's activity was quite insignificant).

46 This sort of multilayered reference is well paralleled in Western literature, in the *Aeneid*, for example, where the referential layers include the mythic past, the historical founding of Rome, and the actual moment of the poet.

47 Oldenberg, *Die Literatur des alten Indian*, 261.

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