



Save Ancient Studies Alliance

January 2022 Texts-in-Translation Reading Group
This group is funded by a grant from the Society for Classical Studies

Loving, Losing, Remembering: Kālidāsa's *The Recognition of Śakuntalā*

Your SASA Educational Ambassador:

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Dates:

Fridays @ 12 pm EST / 10:30 pm IST

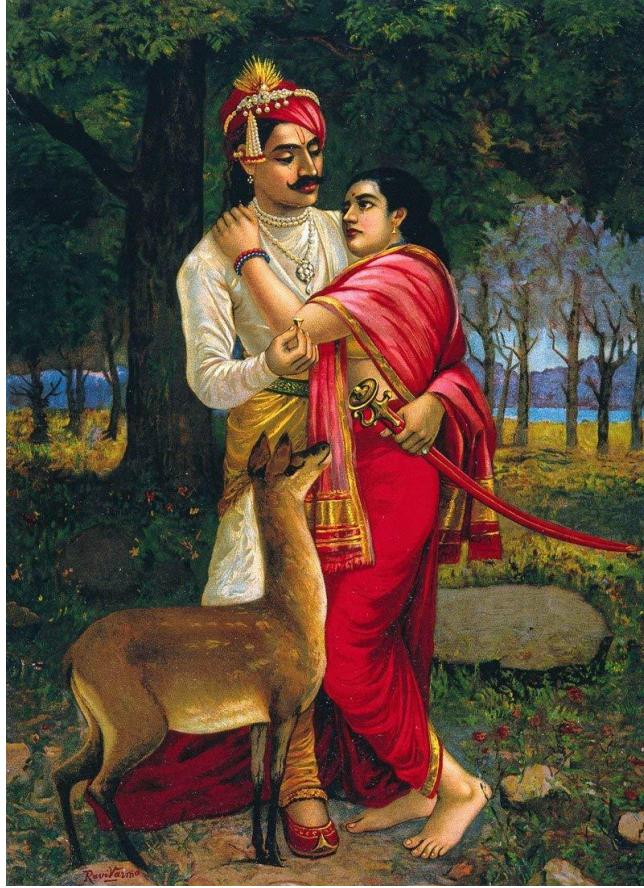
- Session 1: Jan. 21st
- Session 2: Jan. 28th
- Session 3: Feb. 4th

Location:(Provided by SASA)

Meeting Link <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81173782067?pwd=MWxVaE5ZZzFnN0EwcnBhYjVWdk1lZz09>

Zoom Meeting ID
811 7378 2067

Zoom Meeting Password 448219



*“Wouldst thou the earth and heaven itself in one sole name combine?
I name thee, O Śakuntalā! and all at once is said.”*

Goethe famously dedicated these lines to the protagonist of his favorite Sanskrit play. What is it about the figure of Śakuntalā, a young woman forgotten by her husband as the result of a curse, that has captivated audiences—ancient and modern, Eastern and Western—alike? In this reading group, we will study (in translation) Kālidāsa’s *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* (*The Recognition of Śakuntalā*), arguably the most influential play from ancient India. We will read the original story found in the first book of the *Mahābhārata* and analyze how Kālidāsa alters the form and the narrative to reflect a new cultural milieu, one that has moved away from a bardic tradition patronized by clansmen to an emerging urban aristocracy. Examining the play in the context of ancient kinship relations, Sanskrit dramaturgy and poetics (particularly, the *rasa* theory of Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra*), as well as 19th-20th century receptions of the play, we will ask: what does the play tell us about dramatic conventions in ancient India? How does ancient Indian dramaturgy relate to another famous tradition, that of ancient Greek tragedy? How was the

play received in Orientalist, German Romantic, and Indian nationalist commentaries that projected Śakuntalā as the paragon of the Indian woman? In what ways does the text speak to feminist concerns when read today?

No previous knowledge or participation is required to join this group. The discussions will be very open, fun, and laidback! Registered participants will have access to a full e-text of the play. **It is advised that participants read the entire play before the first meeting—it shouldn't take more than two sittings!**

Week 1

The full text of the play (87 pages):

■ [Kalidasa - The Recognition of Sakuntala.pdf](#)

Week I: Discussion Points

1. Introduction to the text and context—the transition from epic to drama
2. How is nature represented in the play? What is the relationship of nature to Śakuntalā and Duśyanta, particularly in the first act of the play? How is the forest different from the court?

Week II:

Text: ■ [Sakuntala story \(Mahabharata\).pdf \(19 pages\)](#)

Text: ■ [Bharata - Natyasastra \(excerpts\).pdf \(6 pages\)](#)

Week II: Discussion Points

1. Continue discussion on nature: how is the relationship between nature and female sexuality depicted in the play?
2. How does the play differ from the epic narrative? How is Śakuntalā's character transformed between the two genres?

Week III: Texts

Text 1: ■ Bharata - Natyasastra (excerpts).pdf (6 pages)

Text 2: ■ Tagore's essay on Sakuntala.pdf (7.5 pages)

Week III: Discussion Points

1. What is the role of erotic desire—both reciprocated and thwarted—in the text? How does it relate to the erotic (*śṛṅgāra*) *rasa* described in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*?
2. How was the play received in the context of India's anticolonial movement? How was the play used to define the terms of Indian literary nationalism?