**Abhijnanasakuntalam: About the play**

Abhijnanasakuntalam, famously known as “The Recognition of Sakuntala” (through a token) was the first ever translation made of an Indian play into Western languages. This brilliant tale of romance and emotions attracted William Jones so much that he translated the play in English during the year 1789 and the tradition of translating the work of Kalidasa is continuing even today.

The play was not composed entirely in Sanskrit and contains elements of a Middle Indian dialect known as Maharashtri Prakrit. There is no certainty about the exact timeline or period in which the play of Kalidasa is written. The reason behind this uncertainty is due to the fact that there is no historical evidence about when Kalidasa was born and the period of his lifetime varies from 2nd century B.C to 4th century A.D.

About the play:

The roots of the play are taken from the Indian epic “Mahabharata” and several changes were made to derive dramatic effects and they all worked. As a result, most people consider the version of the origin of Bharata, misfortunes of Sakuntala and the story of Dushyanta by Kalidasa in Abhijnanasakuntalam is authentic. The plot revolves around Sakuntala, the daughter of the great saint Viswamithra and the heavenly damsel Menaka. Viswamithra in order to gain great rewards gets into deep meditation and the lord of heavens, Indra gets worried about his predicament if the saint completes his meditation. To save his position and be worshipped as the one with no equal, Indra sends Menaka to lure Viswamithra out of his contemplation to God.

After many efforts Menaka successfully disturbs the firm mind of the saint and he falls in love with the beauty of the damsel. As a result, Sakuntala (the name is given by the sage Kanva) is born and Viswamithra realizes what he has lost due to the union and rejects to be with Menaka and Sakuntala. Menaka is forbidden to enter Heaven with a human child so she leaves her daughter in a forest knowing well that the forest is under the protection of Kanva and he will take care of her. As expected by Menaka, Kanva finds the baby girl surrounded by birds called Shakunta, thus he names her as Sakuntala as she was seen with the birds who seem to enjoy playing with her. When the play Abhijnanasakuntalam opens, Sakuntala is seen in her youth with graceful mind and body.