

The Love Story of Shakuntala and Dushyant=

Perhaps no other faith glorifies the notion of love as Hinduism. This is evident from the amazing variety of mythical love stories that abounds Sanskrit literature, which is undoubtedly one of the richest treasure hoards of exciting love tales.

Classical love legends from Hindu mythology and folklore of India are both passionate and sensuous in content, and never fail to appeal to the romantic in us. These fables stretch our imagination, engage our emotions and, entertain us.

The legend of the exquisitely beautiful Shakuntala and the mighty king Dushyant is a thrilling love story from the epic Mahabharata, which the great ancient poet Kalidasa retold in his immortal play 'Abhijnanashakuntalam'.

While on a hunting trip, King Dushyant of the Puru dynasty meets the hermit-girl Shakuntala. They fall in love with each other at first sight and, in the absence of her father, Shakuntala weds the king in a ceremony of 'Gandharva'-a form of marriage by mutual consent with mother Nature as the witness. When the time comes for Dushyant to return to his palace, he promises to send an envoy to escort her to his castle. As a fond remembrance he gives her a signet ring.

One day when hermit Durvasa stops at her hut for hospitality, Shakuntala, lost in her love thoughts, fails to hear his calls. The temperamental sage turns back and curses her: "He whose thoughts have engrossed you would not remember you anymore." On the plea of her companions, the enraged sage relents and adds a condition to his curse-statement: "He can only recall you upon producing some significant souvenir."

Days roll by and nobody from the palace comes to fetch her. Her father sends her to the royal court for their reunion, as she was pregnant with Dushyant's child. While travelling, Shakuntala's signet-ring accidentally drops into the river and gets lost.

When Shakuntala presents herself before the king, Dushyant, under the spell of the curse, fails to acknowledge her as his wife. Heart-broken, she pleads to the gods for help. The spell is broken when a fisherman finds the signet ring in the stomach of a fish - the same ring that Shakuntala had lost on her way to the court. The king suffers from an intense feeling of guilt and injustice. Shakuntala forgives Dushyant and they are reunited happily. She gives birth to a male child. He is called Bharat, after whom India gets her name.