

***KALIDASA***



***THE BIRTH  
OF THE WAR-  
GOD: A POEM  
BY KÁLIDÁSA***

**Kalidasa**

# **The Birth of the War-God: A Poem by Kálidása**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.

THE BIRTH OF THE WAR-GOD.

Canto First.

UMÁ'S NATIVITY.

CANTO SECOND.

Canto Second.

THE ADDRESS TO BRAHMÁ.

CANTO THIRD.

Canto Third.

THE DEATH OF LOVE.

CANTO FOURTH.

Canto Fourth.

RATI'S LAMENT.

CANTO FIFTH.

Canto Fifth.

UMÁ'S REWARD.

CANTO SIXTH.

Canto Sixth.

UMÁ'S ESPOUSALS.

CANTO SEVENTH.

Canto Seventh.

UMÁ'S BRIDAL.

# ORIENTAL SERIES.

## V.

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### PREFACE.

#### Table of Contents

Of the history of KÁLIDÁSA, to whom by general assent the KUMÁRA SAMBHAVA, OR BIRTH OF THE WAR-GOD, is attributed, we know but little with any certainty; we can only gather from a memorial-verse which enumerates their names, that he was one of the 'Nine Precious Stones' that shone at the Court of VIKRAMÁDITYA, King of OUJEIN, in the half century immediately preceding the Christian era.[A] As the examination of arguments for and against the correctness of this date is not likely to interest general readers, I must request them to rest satisfied with the belief that about the time when VIRGIL and HORACE were shedding an undying lustre upon the reign of AUGUSTUS, our poet KÁLIDÁSA lived, loved, and sang, giving and taking honour, at the polished court of the no less munificent patron of Sanskrit literature, at the period of its highest perfection.

Little as we know of Indian poetry, here and there an English reader may be found, who is not entirely unacquainted with the name or works of the author of the beautiful dramas of SAKONTALÁ and THE HERO AND THE NYMPH, the former of which has long enjoyed an European celebrity in the translation of SIR WILLIAM JONES, and the latter is one of the most charming of PROFESSOR WILSON'S specimens of the Hindú Theatre; here and there even in England may be found a

lover of the graceful, tender, picturesque, and fanciful, who knows something, and would gladly know more, of the sweet poet of the CLOUD MESSENGER, and THE SEASONS; whilst in Germany he has been deeply studied in the original, and enthusiastically admired in translation,—not the Orientalist merely, but the poet, the critic, the natural philosopher,—a GOETHE, a SCHLEGEL, a HUMBOLDT, having agreed, on account of his tenderness of feeling and his rich creative imagination, to set KÁLIDÁSA very high among the glorious company of the Sons of Song.[B]

That the poem which is now for the first time offered to the general reader, in an English dress, will not diminish this reputation is the translator's earnest hope, yet my admiration of the grace and beauty that pervade so much of the work must not allow me to deny that occasionally, even in the noble Sanskrit, if we judge him by an European standard, KÁLIDÁSA is bald and prosaic. Nor is this a defence of the translator at the expense of the poet. Fully am I conscious how far I am from being able adequately to reproduce the fanciful creation of the sweet singer of OUJEIN; that numerous beauties of thought and expression I may have passed by, mistaken, marred; that in many of the more elaborate descriptions my own versification is 'harsh as the jarring of a tuneless chord' compared with the melody of KÁLIDÁSA'S rhythm, to rival whose sweetness and purity of language, so admirably adapted to the soft repose and celestial rosy hue of his pictures, would have tried all the fertility of resource, the artistic skill, and the exquisite ear of the author of LALLA ROOKH himself. I do not think this poem deserves, and I am sure it will not obtain, that admiration

which the author's masterpieces already made known at once commanded; at all events, if the work itself is not inferior, it has not enjoyed the good fortune of having a JONES or a WILSON for translator.

It may be as well to inform the reader, before he wonder at the misnomer, that the BIRTH OF THE WAR-GOD was either left unfinished by its author, or time has robbed us of the conclusion; the latter is the more probable supposition, tradition informing us that the poem originally consisted of twenty-two cantos, of which only seven now remain.[C]

I have derived great assistance in the work of translation from the Calcutta printed edition of the poem in the Library of the East-India House; but although the Sanskrit commentaries accompanying the text are sometimes of the greatest use in unravelling the author's meaning, they can scarcely claim infallibility; and, not unfrequently, are so matter-of-fact and prosaic, that I have not scrupled to think, or rather to feel, for myself. It is, however, PROFESSOR STENZLER'S edition,[D] published under the auspices of the Oriental Translation Fund (a society that has liberally encouraged my own undertaking), that I have chiefly used. Valuable as this work is (and I will not disown my great obligations to it), it is much to be regretted that the extracts from the native commentators are so scanty, and the annotations so few and brief.

And now one word as to the manner in which I have endeavoured to perform my task. Though there is much, I think, that might be struck out, to the advantage of the poem, this I have in no instance ventured to do, my aim having been to give the English reader as faithful a cast of

the original as my own power and the nature of things would permit, and, without attempting to give word for word or line for line, to produce upon the imagination impressions similar to those which one who studies the work in Sanskrit would experience.

I will not seek to anticipate the critics, nor to deprecate their animadversions, by pointing out the beauties of the poet, or particularising the defects of him and his translator. That the former will be appreciated, and the latter kindly dealt with, late experience makes me confident; so that now, in the words of the Manager in the Prelude to the HERO AND THE NYMPH, "I have only to request the audience that they will listen to this work of KÁLIDÁSA with attention and kindness, in consideration of its subject and respect for the Author."

ADDERLEY LIBRARY, MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE,  
*April, 1853.*

A [This date is much too early. It has been shown by H. Jacobi from the astrological data contained in the poem that the date of its composition cannot be placed earlier than about the middle of the fourth century A.D.]

B Goethe says:

Willst du die Blüthe des frühen, die Früchte des späteren Jahres,  
Willst du was reizt and entzückt, willst du was sättigt and nährt,  
Willst du den Himmel, die Erde, mit einem Namen begreifen;  
Nenn' ich Sakontalá, Dich, und so ist Alles gesagt.

See also Schlegel's Dramatic Literature, Lect. II., and Humboldt's Kosmos, Vol. II. p. 40, and note.

C [Ten more cantos, of very inferior merit, have been published since this was written.]

## PRELIMINARY NOTE.

Table of Contents

## PRONUNCIATION.

As a general rule, the Sanskrit vowels are to be sounded like those of the Italian alphabet, except the short or unaccented *a*, which has the sound of that letter in the word *America*: "*pandit*," a learned man, being pronounced *pundit*.

*á*, long or accented                      like *a* in *father*.

*e*    like *e* in *they*.

*i*, short or unaccented,                      like *i* in *pick*.

*í*, long or accented                              like *i* in *pique*.

*o*    like *o* in *go*.

*u*, short or unaccented,                      like *u* in *full*.

*ú*, long or accented                              like *u* in *rule*.

The diphthongs *ai* and *au* are pronounced severally like *i* in *rise* and *ou* in *our*.

The consonants are sounded as in English. In the aspirates, however, the sound of *h* is kept distinct; *dh*, *th*, *ph*, *bh*, &c., being pronounced as in *red-hot*, *pent-house*, *up-hill*, *abhor*, &c. *G* is always hard, whatever vowel follows.

In HIMÁLAYA the accent is on the *second* syllable.

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# THE BIRTH OF THE WAR-GOD.

## Canto First.

[Table of Contents](#)

## UMÁ'S NATIVITY.

[Table of Contents](#)

Far in the north [HIMÁLAYA](#), lifting high  
His towery summits till they cleave the sky,  
Spans the wide land from east to western sea,  
Lord of the hills, instinct with deity.  
For him, when [PRITHU](#) ruled in days of old  
The rich earth, teeming with her gems and gold,  
The vassal hills and [MERU](#) drained her breast,  
To deck [HIMÁLAYA](#), for they loved him best;  
And earth, the mother, gave her store to fill  
With herbs and sparkling ores the royal hill.  
Proud mountain-king! his diadem of snow  
Dims not the beauty of his gems below.  
For who can gaze upon the moon, and dare  
To mark one spot less brightly glorious there?  
Who, 'mid a thousand virtues, dares to blame  
One shade of weakness in a hero's fame?  
Oft, when the gleamings of his mountain brass  
Flash through the clouds and tint them as they pass,  
Those glories mock the hues of closing day,  
And heaven's bright wantons hail their hour of play;  
Try, ere the time, the magic of their glance,