

KALIDASA

(c. 5th c. CE)

Life

Despite his unparalleled place in the history of Indian literature, little is known about the life of the classical poet and dramatist Kalidasa. He was certainly patronised by kings of the Gupta Empire, and there is some textual and archaeological evidence to place him in the late fifth century CE. Scholars have poured through his plays and poems, looking for some definitive evidence of where he might have lived, with the most likely locations being Ujjain and Kalinga, in central and eastern India, respectively.

Achievements

Kalidasa is one of the few Indian writers in an Indian language, and certainly the only one from the classical period, to have cross cultural and linguistic borders. His *Shakuntala* was among one of the earlier Sanskrit texts to be translated into English, whence it moved to German and other European languages in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Goethe, Schiller and Herder all praised its beauty and complexity, and used the text to construct a notion of 'world literature', beyond the Greek and Latin models. Kalidasa is often referred to as 'Shakespeare of India', which would be accurate except that this poet lived a full thousand years before the English writer, which makes his longevity and extent of his influence even more impressive.

List of works

Drama

Mālavikāgnimitram (*Malavika and Agnimitra*)
Vikramorvasiyam (*Vikram and Urvasi, or Urvasi Won by Valor*)
Abhijnasakuntalam (*The Recognition of Shakuntala*)

Poetry

Kumarasambhava (*Birth of the War God Kumara*)
Raghuvamsa (*Dynasty of Raghu*)
Megaduta (*The Cloud Messenger*)
Rtusamhara (*Garland of the Seasons*)