

Gauri Jog to present Shakuntala dance drama

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CHICAGO: After staging five successful Indian Ballet programs in the past such as Queen of Jhansi (2005), Fire - the Fiery Tale (2007) and East Meets West (2008) among others, Indian Dance School is now all set to bring its latest creation, "Shakuntala" on Friday, March 19, at 7.30 pm at Prairie Center for the Arts in Schaumburg, a north side suburb of Chicago.

The dance drama will feature more than 100 dancers and it will present a combination of Indian Classical dance, Kathak, Bharatnatyam, Bollywood and Jazz styles.

Shakuntala is a name that sparks an aura of indefinable beauty and innocence of young love. Shakuntala was the daughter of celestial Apsara Menaka and sage Vishwamitra and was abandoned by her parents' right after she was born.

The baby was found by sage Kanva who gave her refuge in his ashram and raised her like his own daughter. Shakuntala grew up to be a breathtaking beauty. In a chance encounter she met King Dushyant and they got married in Gandharva form in vogue at that time.

King Dushyanta returned to the capital with a promise to send his envoy to escort her up to him and Shakuntala started counting days for reunion with the King. One day sage Durvasa came to Shakuntala's hut and sought the hospitality of the Ashram. Shakuntala engrossed in thoughts of Dushyant failed to hear his call or offer the sage any hospitality.

The infuriated sage cursed her saying: "He whose thoughts have engrossed you would not remember you anymore." On the plea of her playmates, the angry sage relented but added a condition to his statement saying: "He would only recall you upon your producing some significant souvenir."

Days pass by, and Sage Kanva on his own decided to send her to the royal as she was pregnant with Dushyant's heir.

On her way to the court, Shakuntala's signet ring accidentally dropped into a river and a big fish swallows it. Dushyant under the spell of Durvasa curse, failed to acknowledge her as his wife. The loss of the signet ring earlier meant that Shakuntala had no proof at all of her meeting and marriage with Dushyanta. Disappointed, she left the court to a far away land where she gave birth to a son and commenced living like a hermit.

In the mean time, a fisherman had accidentally caught the fish that had swallowed the signet ring. On cutting the fish, he found the ring and took it to a jeweler who recognized the royal signet ring and produced it before

the King. On seeing it, Dushyanta came out of the spell and remembered all about Shakuntala. Overcome with guilt, Dushyanta makes Herculean but unsuccessful efforts to find her.

While on a hunting expedition some years later, he came across this little kid in the jungle, who was fearlessly playing with lion cubs and other animals. Searching for the child's parents he got informed that it was his and Shakuntala's son, later known as King Bharat.. Shakuntala forgave him and they returned to the palace.

Shakuntala is one of the most passionate love stories ever written and Gauri Jog, a dancer, choreographer who is running an Indian dance school since 1999 in Chicago area, announced presenting this evergreen story on the stage with her group of artists coming March.

The Gauri Jog run Indian Dance School has performed more than 100 shows since its inception. Her shows are characterized by professionalism, creative content, storyline and fusion with numerous other styles such as Jazz, Ballet, Mexican, Flamenco and Bharatnatyam.

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