

# Plants of the Kalidasa's *Meghaduta*

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## Abstract

Kalidasa was a greatest poet, writer and playwright of Sanskrit literature. He was a court poet greatest king Vikramaditya of Ujjain around 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and was one of his nine gems. Kalidasa is the author of two Mahakavyas- *Kumarasambhavam* and *Raghuvamsa*, two Khandkavyas- *Ritusamharam* and *Meghadutam* and three plays *Abhigyanasakuntalam*, *Malavikagnimitram* and *Vikramorvasiyam*. Among these, *Meghaduta* is considered to be one of the greatest masterpieces of Sanskrit literature. The *Meghaduta* literally meaning Cloud Messenger is a lyratic poem written by Kalidasa in northern India. The poem consists of 120 stanzas and divided into two parts, *Purva-megha* and *Uttara-megha*. The author has critically gone through the Sanskrit version of famous work *Meghadutam* and information based on description and distribution of plants has been recorded and presented in this paper.

**Keywords:** Plants, Kalidasa, Meghaduta

## Introduction

Kaviguru Kalidasa was a greatest poet, writer and playwright of Sanskrit literature. Several ancient and medieval books state that Kalidasa was a court poet of greatest king Vikramaditya of Ujjain around 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and was one of his nine gems. His plays and poetry are primarily based on the Vedas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas. Kalidasa is the author of two Mahakavyas (epics)- *Kumarasambhavam* (means the birth of a Kartikeya) and *Raghuvamsa* (Dynasty of king Raghu), two Khandkavyas- (minor poems) *Ritusamharam* (which has six cantos for the six Indian seasons) and *Meghadutam* (the Cloud Messenger), and three plays- *Abhigyanasakuntalam* (of the recognition of Sakuntala), *Malavikagnimitram* (pertaining to Malavika and Agnimitra) and *Vikramorvasiyam* (the story of king Pururavas and celestial nymph Urvasi) (Sikarwar 2018).

Among all Kalidasa's literature, the khandkavya *Meghaduta* (*Meghadutam*) is considered to be one of the greatest

masterpieces of Sanskrit literature. The *Meghaduta* literally meaning Cloud Messenger (the story of a Yaksha trying to send a message to his lover through a cloud) is a lyratic poem written by Kalidasa in northern India. It is the lament of an exiled Yaksha (a benevolent nature spirit) who had been banished by his king Kubera (the God of wealth) of Alakapuri for neglecting his duties, to a remote region for a year. During one year exile, Yaksha resided on the mountain peak called Ramagiri (the Chitrakoot hill). He was pining for his beloved wife on a lonely mountain peak. When, at the beginning of a monsoon, a cloud perches on the peak Ramagiri, he asks it to deliver a message to his love living in the Himalayan city of Alakapuri. The Yaksa accomplishes this by describing the many beautiful sights the cloud will see on its northward course to the city of Alakapuri, where his beloved wife awaits his return.

Under this fiction, Kalidasa presents a sympathetic portrait of northern India, and weaves in the various moods of love traditional in classical Sanskrit poetry. Most of the poem, composed in an extremely graceful metre, consists of a description of the landmarks, cities, and sights on the cloud's journey to Alaka. The poem become well-known in Sanskrit literature and inspired other poets to write similar poems (known as "Messenger Poems", or Sandesha Kavya) on similar themes.

The great scholar of Sanskrit literature, Arthur Berriedale Keith (1928) wrote of this poem: "It is difficult to praise too highly either the brilliance of the description of the cloud's progress or the pathos of the picture of the wife sorrowful and alone. Indian criticism has ranked it highest among

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Table 1: Plants mentioned in *Meghaduta*

S.No.	Hindi Name	Sanskrit Name	Botanical Name	Family	Habit	Shlok No.
1	इन्द्रजव	कुटज	<i>Holarrhena pubescens</i> Wall. ex G.Don	Apocynaceae	Tree	पूर्व मेघ-4, 24
2	कमल	किसलय, उत्पल, कमल, पद्म	<i>Nelumbo nucifera</i> Gaertn.	Nelumbonaceae	Aquatic herb	पूर्व मेघ-11,28,33, 37,48,52,66 उत्तर मेघ-2,3,16
3	बेत	वानीर	<i>Calamus rotang</i> L.	Arecaceae	Climber	पूर्व मेघ-14,45
4	आम	आम्र	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.	Anacardiaceae	Tree	पूर्व मेघ-18
5	जामुन	जम्बु	<i>Syzygium cumini</i> (L.) Skeels	Myrtaceae	Tree	पूर्व मेघ-21,25
6	कदम्ब	नीप, कदम्ब	<i>Neolamarckia cadamba</i> (Roxb.) Bosser	Rubiaceae	Tree	पूर्व मेघ-22,27 उत्तर मेघ-2
7	कंदली	कंदली	<i>Crinum viviparum</i> (Lam.) R. Ansari & V.J. Nair	Amaryllidaceae	Aquatic herb	पूर्व मेघ-22
8	केवड़ा	केतकी	<i>Pandanus odorifer</i> (Forsk.) Kuntze	Pandanaceae	Shrub	पूर्व मेघ-25
9	जूही	सूधिका	<i>Jasminum auriculatum</i> Vahl	Oleaceae	Climber	पूर्व मेघ-28
10	ताड़	ताल	<i>Borassus flabellifer</i> L.	Arecaceae	Tree	पूर्व मेघ-35
11	अगर	अगरु	<i>Aquilaria malaccensis</i> Lam.	Thymelaeaceae	Tree	पूर्व मेघ-36
12	कमलिनी, नीलकमल	कमल, नलिनी, पद्मिनी, कुवलय	<i>Nymphaea nouchali</i> Burm.f.	Nymphaeaceae	Aquatic herb	पूर्व मेघ-43 उत्तर मेघ-3,23,32,37
13	कुमुद	कुमुद	<i>Nymphaea pubescens</i> Willd.	Nymphaeaceae	Aquatic herb	पूर्व मेघ-44
14	गूलर	उदुम्बर	<i>Ficus racemosa</i> L.	Moraceae	Tree	पूर्व मेघ-46
15	कुन्द	कुन्द	<i>Jasminum multiflorum</i> (Burm.f.) Andrews	Oleaceae	Climber	पूर्व मेघ-51 उत्तर मेघ-2,56
16	देवदार	देवदारु	<i>Cedrus deodara</i> (Roxb. ex D.Don) G.Don	Pinaceae	Tree	पूर्व मेघ-57, उत्तर मेघ-50
17	बांस	कीचक	<i>Bambusa bambos</i> (L.) Voss	Poaceae	Shrub	पूर्व मेघ-60 उत्तर मेघ-19
18	कल्प वृक्ष	कल्प द्रुम	<i>Adansonia digitata</i> L. / <i>Nyctanthes arbor-tristis</i> L.	Malvaceae/Oleaceae	Tree	पूर्व मेघ-66 उत्तर मेघ-5,6,11, 12,15,20
19	लोध	लेघ्न	<i>Symplocos racemosa</i> Roxb.	Symplocaceae	Tree	उत्तर मेघ-2
20	कुरवक	कुरवक	<i>Barleria cristata</i> L.	Acanthaceae	Shrub	उत्तर मेघ-2,18
21	सिरिस	शिरिः	<i>Albizia lebeck</i> (L.) Benth.	Fabaceae	Tree	उत्तर मेघ-2
22	केला	कदली	<i>Musa paradisiaca</i> L.	Musaceae	Perennial Herb	उत्तर मेघ-17,38
23	माधवी	माधवी	<i>Hiptage benghalensis</i> (L.) Kurz	Malpighiaceae	Climber	उत्तर मेघ-18
24	लाल अशोक	रक्त अशोक	<i>Saraca asoca</i> (Roxb.) W.J.de Wilde	Fabaceae	Tree	उत्तर मेघ-18
25	मौलसिरी	बकुल	<i>Mimusops elengi</i> L.	Sapotaceae	Tree	उत्तर मेघ-18
26	बिम्बा	बिम्बाफल	<i>Coccinia grandis</i> (L.) Voigt	Cucurbitaceae	Climber	उत्तर मेघ-21
27	मालती	मालती	<i>Jasminum grandiflorum</i> L. / <i>Aganosma heynei</i> (Spreng.) I.M.Turner / <i>Combretum indicum</i> (L.) De Filippis	Oleaceae/ Apocynaceae/ Combretaceae	Climber	उत्तर मेघ-40
28	पियंगु	प्रियंगु	<i>Callicarpa macrophylla</i> Vahl/ <i>Aglaia</i> <i>elaeagnoidea</i> (A.Juss.) Benth.	Lamiaceae/ Meliaceae	Shrub	उत्तर मेघ-46

Kalidasa's poems for brevity of expression, richness of content, and power to elicit sentiment and the praise is not undeserved".

Pandit Acharya Sitaram Chaturvedi (1997) said "Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* is a sweet laddu from wherever you break it, sweet comes out of it, as many times as you read it you get new miracle in it". Some Sanskrit scholar says, मेघे माघे गतं वयः i.e. *Meghaduta* of Kalidasa and *Shishupal Badh* of Magha read throughout his life but could not get satisfaction.

Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* has had a great influence on several Sanskrit works, on all Indian literature. He also had a great impact on Rabindranath Tagore. *Meghaduta*'s romanticism is found in Tagore's poems on the monsoons. Sanskrit plays by Kalidasa influenced late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century European literature. According to Dale Carnegie, Father of Modern Medicine Sir William Osler always kept on his desk a poem written by Kalidasa. Jayadeva later Sanskrit poet and writer of *Gita Govinda*, has called Kalidasa a *Kavikulaguru*, (the lord of poets). Sir William Jones called Kalidasa as the "Shakespeare of India" (Kale 2015).

The *Meghaduta* poem written uniformly in the Mandakranta metre and consisting of 121 stanzas. It is divided into two parts, known respectively as the *Purvamegha* and the *Uttaramegha*.

## Material and methods

The beauty and specialty of Kalidasa's literature is that the description, distribution and analogies of plants have been given in it in a very unique way. The author has critically gone through the Sanskrit version of famous Khandkavya *Meghadutam* and information based on description and distribution of plants has been recorded. For correct identification of botanical names of plants, author consulted latest updated version of "Plants of the world online, Kew sources" (POWO 2022).

The recorded plants are arranged as per Hindi name, Sanskrit name, Botanical name, family, habit and Sloka number (Table1).

## Result and discussion

The analysis of Plants of *Meghaduta* shows that 28 species of plants belonging to 26 genera and 24 families. Out of 28 species, trees are 13, shrubs 4, Climbers 6 and herbs are 5. Oleaceae is the dominant family having 3 species, followed by Arecaceae, Fabaceae and Nyphaeaceae 2 each and rest families have single species. *Jasminum* is the dominant genus having 3 species, followed by *Nymphaea* 2 species and rest 24 genera have single species.

It is observed that during Kalidasa period, all 28 plants found in the forests, but now *Mangifera indica* L., *Neolamarckia cadamba* (Roxb.) Bosser, *Pandanus odorifer* (Forssk.) Kuntze, *Jasminum auriculatum* Vahl, *Nymphaea nouchali* Burm.f., *Jasminum multiflorum* (Burm.f.) Andrews, *Musa paradisiaca* L., *Hiptage benghalensis* (L.) Kurz, *Saraca asoca* (Roxb.) W.J.de

Wilde, *Mimusops elengi* L., and *Jasminum grandiflorum* L. are generally cultivated as ornamental purposes, while *Holarrhena pubescens* Wall. ex G. Don, *Nelumbo nucifera* Gaertn., *Calamus rotang* L. *Syzygium cumini* (L.) Skeels, *Crinum viviparum* (Lam.) R. Ansari & V. J. Nair, *Borassus flabellifer* L., *Aquilaria malaccensis* Lam., *Nymphaea pubescens* Willd., *Ficus racemosa* L., *Cedrus deodara* (Roxb. ex D. Don) G. Don, *Bambusa bambos* (L.) Voss, *Adansonia digitata* L. or *Nyctanthes arbor-tristis* L., *Symplocos racemosa* Roxb., *Barleria cristata* L., *Albizia lebbek* (L.) Benth., *Coccinia grandis* (L.) Voigt and *Callicarpa macrophylla* Vahl or *Aglaia elaeagnoides* (A. Juss.) Benth. are still found in forests. It is also worth mentioning that in the Indian literature, in the name of 'Kalpavriksha', two plants are mentioned i.e. *Adansonia digitata* L. and *Nyctanthes arbor-tristis* L. Likewise in the name of 'Malati' three plants are mentioned such as *Jasminum grandiflorum* L., *Aganosma heynei* (Spreng.) I. M. Turner and *Combretum indicum* (L.) De Filippis and name of 'Priyangu' two plants viz. *Callicarpa macrophylla* Vahl & *Aglaia elaeagnoides* (A. Juss.) Benth. (Ambasta, 1986, Lankaster, 1965). The *Nymphaea nouchali* Burm. f., *Nelumbo nucifera* Gaertn., *Crinum viviparum* (Lam.) R. Ansari & V.J. Nair and *Nymphaea pubescens* Willd. are aquatic plants while rest plants are terrestrial.

## Conclusion

It is known from reading Kalidasa literature that he had thorough knowledge of phytogeography of that period. He was fully aware of which vegetation is found in different parts of India. For example, Deodar in Himalaya and Lodh, Am, Jamun and Kadamba in the plains. The ancient Sanskrit literature of India is an emporium of vast incredible scientific knowledge on plant resources. But ancient literature is mainly written in Sanskrit language which is not easy to read and understand by the common people. Besides, now days, nobody is interested to study Sanskrit and everybody is running behind to learn English. To understand our incredible knowledge of ancient sages and hermits, Sanskrit language should be made compulsory in schools, colleges and universities. The knowledge given by our sages which is hidden in the ancient texts now needs to be brought out. This knowledge is completely scientific and proven. With this knowledge and culture, there is a need to make new generation knowledgeable and cultured. Government of India launched new National Education Policy (2020), which will help to brought out our vast ancient hidden treasure.

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