

## I. Introduction

The present research study is an attempt to analyze the associative relationship of various myths with natural phenomena. The text presents the concept of myths, deities, love and valorization of religious and sacred places. *The Meghadootam* is grounded on multiple Hindu myths and many of them are drawn from the Vedas and other religious books.

The present study concentrates on Hindu myths that Kalidasa has employed in the poem. According to the Vedic myths, the original basis of gods is in nature. The Vedic mythical imagination of god has received its groundwork in the vast nature which works according to certain established laws. The sun, the moon, the dawn, the fire and the lightning are such objects upon which all the Vedic gods are based and this sort of mythical vision of perceiving gods as deified natural phenomena makes us regard nature as the object of worship and veneration which erects a cordial and harmonious relationship between human beings and nature. Thus myth becomes a source to bring harmony and balance in society.

Kalidasa is by general consent the greatest of the Sanskrit poets. In spite of his fame, no certain information about his life or date has come down to us. Generally it is believed that Kalidasa belonged to the Gupta period and lived in the reign of Chandragupta I, who had the title of Vikramaditya and who came to power about AD345 and ruled till about 414. Tradition associates Kalidasa as one of the nine gems of the court of Vikramaditya and this assumption appears to have no factual foundation but it is not improbable that he lived during the reign of this monarch. The scholars have assumed that the period in which Vikramaditya, Kalidasa's patron, might have ruled in Ujjaini could be sometime before the beginning of the Christian

calendar or a little later. However there are numerous tales regarding him but no information about him is certain.

Of his personal history very little is definitely known. The name itself signifies a servant of the goddess Durga. Anecdotes are told asserting that he was originally extremely stupid and won skill in poetry by the favor of Kali. With regard to the external details of the poet's life we know nothing exactly about him. The numerous legends told about him are but empty figments and only bear testimony to the greatness and extreme popularity of the poet in the land of his birth. The truly great stand upon no middle ledge; they are either famous or unknown.

His name itself signifies the servant of the goddess Durga. It is probable that like so many other names, it was bestowed without any reference to its original signification. But on it is based a tradition which represents him to have been an illiterate person, till by the favors of the goddess he suddenly found himself endowed with the poetic genius. Kalidasa is curiously reticent about himself in his works, nor are any records of him by other writers available. Whatever we can say about his life is based on external and secondary sources and necessarily remain more or less matter of guess work. His birth place was probably somewhere in Malwa in Central India and from his glowing description of the city of Ujjayini in one of the lyrics called *The Meghadootam* , it has been even suggested that he was a resident of that city. Legends are current about his having been a court poet of king Vikramaditya of Ujjayini. This is not at all improbable, as his works show considerable acquaintance with court life.

He was Hindu and Brahmana by caste and a devout worshipper of Shiva. Though by no means a narrow minded sectarian. He seems to have traveled a great deal through out India; his graphic description of the Himalayan scenes is very much

like that of an eyewitness. His works bear testimony to the considerable acquaintance with the Vedas and the philosophy of the Upanishads, the Puranas, medicine and astronomy. Altogether he must have been a person of high culture, liberal ideas and unpretentious learning.

The problem of the date of Kalidasa is a much discussed one, and the last word has yet to be said in the matter. Tradition describes him as one of the 'Nine Gems' at the court of King Vikramaditia. Various kings in the history of India called themselves by the title of 'The sun of Valour'. One of these is the supposed founder of the Samvat era, commencing with 56 B.C. And Kalidasa with greater probability may be placed in this time. In *Hindu Philosophy*, Bernard Theos also held the same view who wrote, "Kalidasa stands near the beginning of the Christian era, if, indeed he does not overtop it" (124).

But many modern scholars find them unable to accept the traditional date and have tried to argue that Kalidasa must have flourished under one or more of the Gupta kings. The Gupta period (about 300 A.D to 650 A.D) was famous in the history of pre- Mohammedan India for its revival of Sanskrit learning and arts. The late Mr. Vincent. A. Smith in his *Early History of India* shows that, " Kalidasa must have flourished in the reigns of one or more of these Gupta kings- Chandragupta II and Skandagupta. Both had adopted the title Vikramaditya" (32). Some scholars believe that it is not unlikely that the earliest works of Kalidasa namely *The Ritusamhara*, and *The Meghadootom*, may have been composed before 413 A.D., that is to say while Chandragupta II was on throne; but some scholars inclined to regard the reign of Kumargupta (413-455) as the time during which the poets latter works were composed; and it seems possible or even probable that the whole of his literary career fell within the limits of that reign. It is also possible that he may have continued

writing after the accession of Skandagupta. Thus the scholars make Kalidasa's literary career extend over a period of not less than thirty years. There is thus nothing wrong in the tradition about Vikramaditya being the poet's patron. Kalidasa is indisputably the greatest mastermind in Sanskrit literature. His genius has been recognized in India from very early times. The charms of Kalidasa must have evoked spontaneous outpourings of praise and manifestations of admirations even from foreign scholars and poets like Goethe, Schelegel, Max Muller had access to his works either directly or through translation. His poetic genius has brought Sanskrit poetry to the highest level of elegance and refinement. His style is peculiarly pure and chaste. It has neither the laxity of the Purans nor the extravagant color of the later poems. It is inartificial and characterized by brevity consistent with perspicuity. An unaffected simplicity of expression and an early flowing language mark his writings which are embellished with similes and pithy general sayings. His diction is marked by the absence of long compounds, involved constructions, over-wrought rhetoric and artificial puns. He excels other poets in his description of the sublime and beautiful, especially of natural phenomena. His sentiment is neither abstruse nor profuse, but one which makes a direct sympathetic appeal to the heart. He is a master of acknowledged skill.

He occupies a unique place in the literature of the world. His highly creative powers, his massive intellect, his immense imagination, his marvelous poetical fluency, and his supreme culture place him in the very front rank of the great poets of all ages. Like them he was the best exponent of the times in which he lived. Hindu culture found its expression in the poetry of Kalidasa. From internal evidence, we can positively say that Kalidasa was indebted to the Vedas and the great epics of India, viz, *The Ramayana and the Mahabharata*. We have also evidence that he must have read quite a few texts on Vedic mythology, grammar, philosophy, politics, prosody,

Upinashads and Purans containing accounts of the dynasties of ancient kings. His mention of Bharat's Natya Sastra is quite conspicuous. Kalidasa had made deep study of it. Kalidasa was writing for the delight of the learned in his time. The classical rules of meter grammar and poetics were unbreakable in his time; and while strictly confirming to these, he had to strike out a path for himself to attempt works which would at once distil the essence of Indian ethos and acquire a universal human appeal transcending time and space. It was a time when literature, religion, philosophy and life had not become separated from one another. To provide aesthetic delight in an apparently entertaining way and at the same time to educate humanity in the traditional ideas of Indian culture- these were challenges for Kalidasa and a genius as he was, he rose to the occasion.

Only Kalidasa could do this because he had drunk deep at the springs of the Vedic Lore. The Vedas have been revered for millenniums in India because they enshrine the great insights of a long line of seers who were credited with spiritual perfection and prophetic powers. All later systems of thought, all epics and Puranas, pay more to the tradition of the Vedas. The Vedic vision was at the root of all later tenets of Indian thought and reflections on life. Kalidasa's texts are also influenced by the Vedic vision as we find numerous references to the Vedic gods and goddess as well as the Vedic philosophical vision in his literary works. Kalidasa tried his hand in all possible forms of literature known in his time, drama, epic, lyric, descriptive and narrative poetry with isolated uniqueness in each and the amount of his achievements appears to be perfectly balanced to the brilliance of his execution. He is both poet and dramatist, a great poet, perhaps than a playwright. But in their finest expressions, be it lyric, drama, ode or epic they surprisingly come to the same level and substance of excellence.

Seven works of Kalidas survive, namely three extended dramas, two epics and two extended lyrics. Of the dramas *The Shakuntala* has won favors even in the west. The plot is elaborated from an episode in *The Mahabharata* and hinges on the fact that the king Dushyanta is cursed by hermit so that he forgets his wife Shakuntala but finally recognizes her by the token of his ring. The other drama is *Malavikagnimitra*, there is a vivid description of the conventional way of royal love confined to harem and earth-bound. The king does not infringe the moral codes or religious duties. In the *Vikramorvasiya*, another masterpiece of Kalidasa, we have a pure fairytale with unexpected interruptions and solutions which have little references to the inner nature of the lovers. Kalidasa writes this third play in which his main object is to hold a mirror to the sufferings in human life as rooted in the human psyche.

The two epics are among the finest extant of Kavya (epic) style of composition. *The Raghuvamsa* (the dynasty of Raghu) has its central theme the epic story of the Ramayana and it is about the victory of the King Raghu over the Huns. Another epic the *Kumarsambhawa* describes the winning of the love of the high god Shiva by the goddess Uma and ends with their marriage. It also consists of detailed accounts of the birth of Shiva and Parvati's child, Kumara (the god of war) and his successful fight with demon Taraka who was threatening the gods.

Of the lyrics, *The Ritusamhara* (*The season*) is probably a work of poet's youth and a pen picture of the changing appearances of the seasons of the year and their influence upon human love. *The Meghadootam* is composed throughout in a most elaborate and effective meter uses a framework the story of an exiled demigod who in the sorrow of separation from his beloved wife instructs a passing cloud to bear a love message to her. The poem then describes in brilliant poetic imagery the

cities, countries, mountains and rivers over which the cloud must pass its journey to his wife's dwelling place.

In fact Kalidasa has selected diverse themes like love, marriage, history of Raghu dynasty and so on. But almost his literary works include his marvelously accurate knowledge of nature's details. The most striking thing is that he describes nature's beauty mostly connecting it with some Hindu myths. The scholars have assumed that perhaps Shiva is Kalidasa's favorite deity that's why some times he is called a Saivite. And he has addressed Shiva in almost his works so that he is sometimes called a Saivite. But it is injustice to attach him with merely Saivism.. He was essentially an eclectic in his religion and philosophy for if *The Kumarsambhawa* is distinctly Visnuitic in tendency; while Vedantic monism or Sankhya dualism or the active devotion of Yoga really engage his regard. As Ryder says, "Kalidasa moved among the sects with sympathy for all, fanaticism for none" ( *The complete works of Kalidasa*, 8). Above all, his writings are colored with his religious thoughts which ultimately lead us to recognize his intense devotion and love for Hindu mythology. That is why almost his works have formulated upon the idea of Hindu gods and goddesses.

Kalidasa is considered as the highest priest of nature. His intense love and devotion for nature finds its full expression in his works. It becomes quite explicit that his gaze was more on the broad majesty and grandeur of nature and his eyes were carefully observant of the minutest details of flora and fauna that he ever came across. It seems Kalidasa was wonderfully sensitive to the subtlest of sights, sounds and smells of the external natural world. He has immortalized flowers giving them mythical significance that no other Indian poet has even mentioned. And he has left aesthetic as well as spiritual experiences that are subtle, rare and fine. After the first

showers of the monsoon, the summer parched soil in India emits a subtle fragrance. Few in India really perceive it. And no other Indian poet makes so romantic use observation of it in his poetry as does Kalidasa. It was such power of acute perception and keen that he gave the mastery of details which vivify his imagery and make his description stay indelible in our memory. Most of his all natural descriptions and his wonderful sense of perspective are really admirable. Again and again the poet takes his imaginative camera up into the sky and seems to lose himself in the joy of looking at our earth from high above. We find that Kalidasa has made nature merge into super nature or myths by using his exceptional imaginative skills. We find in Kalidasa that the living talks with non living things, fairies, and deities. Further nature and gods get so mixed up as to make it difficult to draw the line of demarcation between their two planes.

Perhaps, the greatest poet got the mythological lore as racial legacies. He was born to it, and as every body in their ages believed in them, he took them for granted. In India, mythological beliefs are deep rooted in the national consciousness. The people who have been believing for ages that even the so called dead matter is sentient and that our souls survive even after death, must not discover any strangeness in finding the visible merge into the invisible. The same pantheistic philosophy of life that brings the Hindu into close spiritual relationship with nature, brings him into communion with the supernatural also. To the Hindu, human life is not isolated factor in creation. It is, to him, related backward to the minerals and forward to the universal spirit. He lives with a cosmic family in which atoms demand kinship with the stars, the trees and plants become relatives of human beings and man, and gods and men live for one another and this sort of Hindu mythological vision found its finest expression in Kalidasa's works.

It was an easy matter for Hindu Kalidasa to bring the supreme spirit into relation with human life and nature in all his works as he never lived in an isolated mundane world. The devout Hindu always lives in cosmos and in eternity which brings his own little existence into perpetual contact with the immanent and transcendental force in creation. Kalidasa doesn't look at nature from ordinary perspective rather he perceives nature wearing the spectacles of mythical vision that is why the entire nature, for him, seems to be mythicized. He finds an external and pervasive presence of the supreme spirit in nature. Furthermore, he projects his opinion that the very supreme or divine spirit assumes all forms and everything emanates from Him and ultimately goes to Him. In other words, He is the final destinations of all paths. Thus, Kalidasa has become successful in attributing mythical meaning to nature by bringing divinity nearer to it and revealing its divine aspects.

Even his *The Meghadootam*, one of the finest lyrics, introduces myriads of Hindu myths and natural description. *The Meghadootam* is a small lyrical piece written in Mandakranta metre and consisting of one-hundred twenty one stanzas; it is divided into two parts known respectively as purwamegha and uttarmegha. The poem describes the message of a Yaksha to his wife to be conveyed through a cloud presenting the beautiful, sublime and spiritual aspects of natural phenomena and their effect on the human mind.

*The Meghadootam* is a messenger poem. Before no other poet tried his hand in writing a messenger poem so the credit for erecting an innovative literary tradition of writing a messenger poem goes to Kalidasa. It may be one of the reasons that he is given a rank of Mahakavi in Sanskrit literature by the scholars. This poem is divided in two cantos of sixty seven and fifty eight shlokas each. The storyline is simple and in this simplicity lies its strength. The protagonist of this poem, Yaksha by name,

works as a menial with a rich landlord Kubera who lives in Alakapuri. Yaksha is assigned the job of fetching a golden lotus from the Manasarovar Lake everyday. However he neglects his duties, spending all the time with his beloved wife. An angry Kubera exiles him for a year so that Yaksha is unable to meet her as long as the exile lasts. Kalidasa picks up the story at this point with the cursed Yaksha having lost his 'shine and power', spending his days at Ramagiri but he is not hopeless. He notices a rain cloud in the sky and thinks about sending message of his well being to his wife by making the cloud his messenger. He begs the cloud to bear to his beloved wife his welfare message and the cloud agrees after his longtime request. From Ramgiri, his place of exile, the cloud is bidden to go, in the company of the cranes and the royal swans for Lake Manasa, to the region of the Mala and to Mount Amrakuta. Thereafter it is to seek the Dasarna country with its city of Vidisa and then must drink the waters of the Nirvindhya and the Sindhu. Yaksha requests the cloud to visit the Shrine of Mahakala. Further he describes the ways and tells that after passing Dasapura, the cloud will visit the field of Kurukshetra, the scene of Arjuna's great deeds and Saraswati River will also fall on the way. Thence, the cloud must go to where Ganges descends from the Himalaya near Mount Kankhala and then to Kailasha, passing through the gap of mount Kraunca which Parasurama made as a path to the south. Then the water of Lake Mansa, will refresh the cloud, and on the top of the mountain is Alakapuri where the beloved of Yaksha dwells.

In canto 2, Ujjayini, which is supposed to have been the residence of the poet and the capital of his well known patron, Vikramaaditya, is lovingly described. Moreover the delights of the divine city named Alakapuri are fully depicted. Then Yaksha describes to the cloud the home he is to seek but it can be seen from afar off through its arch way. In its garden, there is a coral tree and its mistress's pet and a

flight of emerald steps leads to a well in which golden lotus grow. Yaksha requests the cloud to wake her wife gently from her slumber and give her a message of tender love from her husband as well and assurance of his faith and certainty of reunion. In the end, Yaksha begs the cloud to return with a message of comfort and dismisses the cloud with a prayer that he may never suffer separation, even for a moment from lightning.

On the surface level, *The Meghadootam* seems to contain merely a glowing description of the beauty of nature, interwoven with human feelings but in deep observation of the text, we find Kalidasa is reinforcing the significance of myths of contemporary culture as he brings out several mythical elements while giving an account of natural beauty. For instance, the beginning stanza of the poem contains the myth of Ramagiri:

Kashchit Kaantaa virah gurunaa, swaadhikaarat pramattah; Shaapena  
astan gamita mahima varsha Bhogyena bharuh, Yaksha chakre Janaka-  
tanyaa snaana punya udakeshu; Snigdha chaayaa tarushu vasatim,  
Ramagiri aashrameshu. (55, *The Meghadootam*)

Thus cursed for negligence of duty by his master,  
A certain Yaksha had lost his shine and power.  
Exiled to live away from home for a whole year,  
He sought refuge in Ramgiri ashrama,  
There Janaki by her ablutions had blessed and purified  
The ponds in times of yore.  
Many a tree, dense in foliage,  
Swayed in the breeze,  
Here, there and everywhere (55 *The Meghadootam*)

In the above mentioned stanza, the concluding line has mythical theme. This line contains the epic myth of *the Ramayana* which forwards the belief that once Rama (Hindu god) had lived on Ramagiri with his wife and his brother Lakshmana for some days while in exile. And Sita gave sanctity to the waters of the mountains by her ablutions therein as her sacred body came in contact with them. As Rama resided in this place in his exile so it was called Ramagiri. Here, we can clearly see that Kalidasa is describing the natural scenario of Ramagiri but he has not forgotten to bring mythical references to Sita at the same time.

We find the idea of mythicizing nature is embodied in the text. In the description of the route to be followed by the cloud, we can notice that the poet has skillfully blended the portrayal of spiritual aspects of nature. It seems that the poet aimed at immortalizing various sacred places and scenes which he had visited and whose beauty had charmed his gaze, by attaching mythical elements with them.

The text embodies the Vedic cultural idea which believes that the deities are personifications of striking aspects nature. The idea of retreat into nature, a mountain top or a forest hermitage, in search of the revelation of the spirit of the universe has been with from early time and the same sort of idea we find in the text. Nature is not mechanical and impersonal for Kalidasa. It has its *enchantment*. He makes an attempt to recognize nature by relating it with myth. His characters have mythological vision towards nature and they have sensitive appreciation for plants and trees, of hills and rivers and a feeling of brotherhood for animals. *The Meghadootam* also carries the similar kind of mythical theme in relation to the nature. He has brought myths from diverse sacred and religious books of India. We find the text is full of mythical elements and the myths are scattered everywhere. Mostly he has employed nature related myths in the text which enhances the associative relation of myth and nature.

Kalidasa's knowledge of nature was not only saturated with myths but also accurate and sympathetic. His observation was wedded to imagination. His observation of the snow in the Himalayas, of the music of the mighty current of the Ganges joining them with some gods and goddesses or giving them supernatural touch illustrate his Hindu attitude which considers nature man and gods are in and intimate and unalienable kinship. *The Meghadootam* is one of the finest epitomes of it, as it illustrates nature's kinship to and companionship with myths and human existence ultimately bringing them together. In the text, we find Yaksha living in close proximity to vast primeval forests, mighty rivers and stupendous mountain ranges. As the protagonist also chooses the cloud, a part of nature as his messenger rather than human beings, and this tendency depicts a harmonious bond between nature and human beings. For the Hindu, natural phenomena are the objects, not of exploitation but of veneration and Kalidasa has indicated the very sort of Hindu attitude towards nature. Furthermore the pantheistic Indian conception of the universe that 'all is Brahman' has found the finest aesthetic expression in all his works and *The Meghadootam* is also not an exception in it.

When there is the establishment of mythical link with nature, there emerges a vision of perceiving nature in deified form which gives birth to several nature worshipping religious practices. These religious practices are followed by the entire community and it gives birth to a sense of togetherness which binds the whole society together. These religious practices teach them to preserve and live in harmony with external nature abandoning the trend of exploiting it and it brings balance in the ecosystem too.

My fundamental focus in this research study is on the nature related mythical aspects of *The Meghadootam*. I will see the mythical elements which are associated

with natural phenomena in the text. In doing this, the study will give special attention to the contribution of Hindu mythological ideas in the establishment of inextricable relationship between myth and nature. The research will also make a brief study of Hindu mythology. The study will cover only mythical and natural aspects of the text.

This research work has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter mainly provides an introductory outline of the study. It incorporates the explanation of the hypothesis in terms of how nature has been mythicized to establish a close relationship between them in order to bring harmony and balance in society. It also provides a detailed introduction to the poet and his works.

The second chapter is the development of theoretical modality that is to be applied in this research paper. It gives a short introduction to mythical study and develops critical tools by making ideas from the study of myth. This part of work deals with the idea of Hindu mythology which will be the critical approach to the study of the text.

The third chapter of the research is an analysis of the text at a considerable length on the basis of the second chapter. It will cite out some extracts from the text to prove the hypothesis of the study. The chapter will serve as the core of this work. The chapter also provides a detailed analysis of diverse Hindu myths and their kinship with natural phenomena and also some of the religious ideas of the early Aryan and Vedic culture which the research work does not focus.

The fourth chapter is the conclusion of the whole study. On the basis of the analysis of the text done in the chapter three, it will conclude the explanations and arguments put ahead in preceding chapters and will show that the association of myth with nature brings harmony and balance in the society.

## II. Theoretical Tool

### Hindu Mythology

*The World Book of Encyclopedia* defines mythology as follows: "Early peoples made up stories about supernatural beings such as gods and heroes. These stories are called myths. The whole system of such stories is called mythology" (658). Mythology contains various myths which are more related to gods, angels, demons or other supernatural persons embodying their deeds and actions. So far Hindu Mythology is concerned, it is related to Hinduism. Hindu mythology is a term used by modern scholarship for a large body of Indian literature that details the lives and times of legendary personalities, deities and divine incarnations on earth interspersed with often large sections of philosophical and ethical discourse. Despite connotations of fiction in common usage, the term myth in theological and academic studies doesn't necessarily imply that a narrative is untrue. Many of the topics that fall under Hindu mythology are cherished beliefs of Hindus. In his book *Indian society, Religion and Mythology*, Anantray J Rawal states:

The mythology created by the Hindus is Hindu mythology. It is the body of the gods and heroes, describing their origin and surroundings, their deeds and activities and it is thus included in, though not co-extensive with that aspect of religion which is concerned with belief.

(170)

Anantray J Rawal describes that the mythology of the Hindus provides a detailed account of the deities and legendary personalities along with their deeds and activities. He also relates the entire Hindu Mythology with the beliefs of the Hindus.

Moreover, Hindu Mythology is a network of intermingling connecting threads, which, if could be perfectly understood, would provide a clear narrative map to the

rich tapestry that is Hindu thought. As in the case of the medieval cathedral, the decorations of the given Hindu temple confront the viewer as a mysterious mythological story in which everything has philosophical or religious significance. The postures of the figures depicted, the objects held by them, the way they relate to each other, all have specific meanings. So it is with Hind mythology as passed down orally and as written in the great epics and religious texts. No story is told for its own sake, every myth has meaning in Vedic tradition that is its ultimate source.

The history of Hindu mythology can be broken up into different ages, all of which have contributed to the faith as a whole. The first is the pre-Vedic age, which goes back to the time of the early Indus valley civilization of Harappa and Mohenjodaro, which were established around 2400 B.C. later these cities were destroyed.

The Indo-European known as the Indo-Aryans conquered India and Persia by 1500 B.C. They brought with them new gods and hymns dedicated to them. These hymns came to be called the Vedas. As C.C. Joseph in his book *John Kenneth Galibraith introduces India* states, "Hindu religious thought started with the Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva Veda of the Indo-Aryans, between 1500-900 B.C." (114) The Vedic age is the age when Hinduism properly began. The gods of the Indo-Aryan became the most important in the Hindu Pantheon but earlier gods were still revered; they were just given different roles. The Vedic gods were led by Indra, the archetypical thunder god. The other Vedic gods were the personified phenomena of nature. For instance, the fire, the dawn, the wind etc. were phenomenal gods. As Braj Chaubey in *The Treatment of Nature in the Rigveda* says, "The Vedic gods rose out of nature they were in general deified natural phenomena" (325).

Braj Chaubey's statement also points out the fact that the Vedic gods were the phenomena of nature. From around 900 B.C, as Aryan culture spread further into the

sub-continent, Hinduism underwent some major changes. This period has been referred to as the Brahmanic Age, for it was during this time that the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas fought for supremacy over Indian life. New thought had been adopted, with the idea of the soul or atman becoming a major part of Hinduism and transmigration of that soul became a foundation of the religion. It was during this time that the Brahman caste asserted that the gods need human priests to keep their power and some of the rishis or sages, became more powerful than the gods. Sacrifice became the chief form of worship. The major Vedic deities began to fall from their high positions.

As in *Mythology*, Richard Cavendish also says, "the gods of the Vedic pantheon remain as minor players in the Hindu drama in later centuries though they are no longer actively worshipped" (120). Richard Cavendish's above quoted statement emphasizes on the fact that in the later centuries the Vedic deities began to lose their significance. Gradually they were replaced by other deities. They were slowly usurped by the three gods who came to dominate Hinduism: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

The next age was the Epic or Classical period, the time of the Hindu epics *the Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata*. These great works were compiled into their present form during this time, but their origins go back at least to the Vedic times. The Puranas were also composed at this time.

No investigation into Hindu mythology is possible without the help of the Vedas, the Puranas and the epics as the entire Hindu mythology consists of these three. Hindu mythology has a pantheon of three hundred thirty million deities or lesser gods presided over by the great trinity: Brahma, the God of Creation, Vishnu, the God of Preservation and Shiva, the God of Destruction. All these gods can be

divided into the category of the Vedic gods, the Puranic gods and the inferior gods. The Vedic gods are those whose description is found in the Vedas; the Puranic gods are those who are described in the Puranas and the village god lings, scared animals, birds and rivers fall in the category of the inferior deities.

### **The Scared Book of the Hindus**

**(i) The four Vedas:** The source of the Hindu religion, the basis of social fabric of the Hindus' life are the Vedas. These are believed to be the work of the Supreme Being himself and are therefore eternal. The word Veda comes from Sanskrit "Vid". It is also allied to the Latin root "vid" and the English "to wit". It therefore signifies "knowledge" and the Hindu would add "knowledge divinely communicated". These most ancient of Hindu holy books consist of hymns addressed to the various personified powers of nature, written in the old form of Sanskrit, and according to the most generally accepted opinion, composed not less than 1000 to 14500 B.C. These hymns are the sole means of studying the development of the early Aryan peoples in religion as in the arts of civilization. They were orally transmitted from sage and Rishi to their pupils, generation by generation from a very early date. It is not known when they received written form but the sage Vyasa is spoken of as the 'arranger' of the Vedas.

In general form the Vedas consist of lyric poetry. They contain the songs in which the first Aryan invaders praised their gods. The Vedas are four in number: The Rig-Veda or the Veda of Praise; the Yajur or the Vedas of sacrifice; the Sama Veda or the Veda of metrical rearrangement of the hymns of the Rigveda; the Atharva-Veda, the Veda of sacred spells. Of these four Vedas, the Rigveda is probably the oldest, then the Yajur Veda then the Sama and last of all the Atharva Veda. Each of these Vedas consists of two main parts; a Shanhita or collection of mantras or hymns and a

Brahmana or priestly commentary, written in prose. As the Vedic hymns grew ancient, ritual and ceremonial developed in Aryan worship and theological inquiry arose. Then sprung into existence- the Brahmana, the second portion of the Vedas which consists of two varieties of ritualistic precepts and details of ceremonial usages of the Brahman priests. As a further elaboration, attached to each Brahmana is an Upanishad containing secret or mystical doctrine. The Sanhita and Brahmana are for men generally the more philosophical inquiries. Of these Sanhitas, as Monier Williams states in his book *India Wisdom*:

the Rig-Veda Sanhita, containing one thousand and seventeen hymns, is the oldest and most important; whilst the Atharva-Veda-Sanhita is generally held to be the most recent and is perhaps the most interesting. Moreover, these are only two Vedic hymn-books worthy of being called separable original collections, the others are only made up of extracts from the Rig-Veda. (9)

Monier William's statement also emphasizes on the fact the Rig-Veda is the oldest and most important than other Vedas. He superiorizes the Rig-Veda to other Vedas saying that the others are made up of the extracts of the Rig-Veda. However praises the Atharva Veda saying that it is the original collection of the mantras but his main focus is on the significance of the Rig-Veda.

The Sanhitas of three of the Vedas are said to have some peculiarity. If a mantra is metrical and intended for loud recitation and is called Rich (from rich, praise) whence the name Rig-Ved; i.e. the Veda containing such praises. If it is prose, it is called Yajus (Yaj, sacrifice, hence, literally, the means by which sacrifice is effected); therefore Yajur-Veda signifies the Veda containing such Yajus. And if it is metrical and intended for chanting , it is called Saman(equal), hence Sama Veda

means the Veda containing such Samans. The Atharva-Veda is one of the utmost interest; the greater part of it is full of charms spells for the destruction of enemies.

The Vedas depict that how strong and all controlling even in the early times was the religious motive, the reverence for divine things and the belief in immortality. The early poets were intense nature lovers, and in nature sought nature's god. And the Vedas also show the purity of the early code of morals.

**(ii) Manu Sanhita: the code of Manu:** This well known law book is the earliest of all the post-Vedic writings and in the chief of the works classified as Smiriti. In its present form, it belongs to the fifth century B.C. It contains two thousand six hundred and eighty five verses and is evidently not the work of one man, but the production of many minds. It gives the observances of a tribe of Brahmans called Manavas, who probably belonged to a school of the Yajur Veda. It was written in a period later than the Vedas and not of the Epics and Puranas so it occupies a middle place between the Vedas and the Purans.

It is the foundation of Hindu law, a collection of current laws and creeds rather than a planned systematic code. The great number of its rules fall under the following four heads: (i) Atharva, 'immemorial practices'. These, in fact include all the observances of caste, and are regarded as constituting the highest law and highest religion. (ii) Vyavahara, 'practices of law and government, embracing the procedure of legal tribunals, rules of judicature, and civil and criminal law. (iii) Pnyas- chita, 'penitential exercises', rules of expiation, both of the sins of this present life especially sins against caste- and the effects of offences committed in previous bodies. (iv) Karma-Phala, 'consequences of acts', good or bad, as leading to reward in heaven or punishment in various hells and involving repeated births through numberless existences until the attainment of final beatitude.

Praising The Code of Manu, Monier Williams in his book *Hinduism* says:

This is one of the most remarkable books that the literature of the whole world can offer. It not only presents a picture of the usages, manners, and intellectual condition of an important part of the Hindu race at a remote period, but some of its moral perceptions are worthy of Christianity itself. (54)

The above quoted statement of Monier Williams also reinforces the significance of the book, *The Code of Manu*. He explains that the book depicts the manners and customs of the Hindu race of a remote period. And his statement illuminates the prominence of this book.

**(iii) The Epics Poems and Purans:** The eighteen Puranas and the two great Epics- *the Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata* are the principal sources of the knowledge of the gods of India. In the later centuries, the gods of Puranas and Epic poems succeeded the Vedic gods and they became dominant whilst gradually the impression of the Vedic gods faded away. John Dowson also expresses the similar kind of opinion. In *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and religion* he states:

The Veda is a mere name- a name of high authority, often involved and greatly revered. But its language is unintelligible and its gods and rites are the things of the past. The Puranas and later writings are the great authorities of modern Hinduism; their mythology and legends fill the wonderful tales of the great poems, also, exercise a supreme influence. The heroes of these poems are heroes still; their exploits, with many exaggerations and embellishments are recounted in prose and verse by hundreds of wandering priests and recited in every temple. (14)

The above cited statement of John Dowson also makes it clear that the influence of the Vedic gods gradually fell down and they were replaced by the Puranic deities in the later centuries. Moreover, he says that mythology and legends became so much dominant that they started to influence and mould the thoughts of the popular minds becoming the great authorities of modern Hinduism.

Little is known as to the date of the Epics beyond that they are later than the Vedas and earlier than the Puranas. It is believed that the Epics were originally composed not later than B.C 500, though *the Ramayana* was probably cast into its present form about B.C 300, and *the Mahabharata* about B.C 200.

*The Mahabharata* was supposed to be written by the sage Vyasa, a century nearer our own time, but the truth in it is a poem having a vast storehouse of Hindu mythology, legendary history, ethics and philosophy. Moreover it is the growth of centuries of Hindu thought. Some parts of it date as early as the fifth century B.C and others as late as the seventh or eighth century A.D. altogether it contains twenty-two thousand lines and fully justified the saying that 'what is not in *the Mahabharat* is not in Bharata(India)', so vast it is.

*The Ramayana*(Rama and ayana-the glories and the adventures of Rama) contains only about fifty thousand lines, and is largely one continuous narrative written by the sage Valmiki. It presents a charming idyll of Hindu life. The gentle Rama who is true in thought and noble in action, and Sita who is faithful wife, pure as the stainless snow are rightly held in the highest honor.

The Puranas succeed *the Mahabharata* and *the Ramayana* but at a considerable distance of time. Though it is difficult to determine the date of Puranas, it is believed that none of them are older than the eighth century A.D. They are considerably later than the two great epics is evident from the fact that many who are

described in the epics as men and heroes only in the Purans are said to be divine beings. These books differ largely from the Vedas in this respect, that whilst the Vedas treat of the religion common to the Hindus of that period, all of whom worshiped the same deities, each Purana is concerned with any one god whose excellences are extolled, whereas others are spoken of in a depreciatory manner. Generally a certain measure of respect is shown to all the gods of the Pantheon, yet the particular deity to whose praise the Purana is devoted, is said to be Supreme; the others beings regarded as emanations or incarnations of this One. The Puranas may be classified into three categories. In the first category fall those Puranas which are devoted to the praise of Brhama , viz. the Brahma, the Brhamanda, the Brahmavaivarta, the Markandeya, the Bhavishya, and the Vaman. In the second category, fall those Puranas which are related to Vishnu; viz. the Vishnu, the Bhagavata, the Naradiya, the Ganeda, the Padma, and the Varaha. In the third category fall those Puranas which are chiefly connected with Siva' viz. the Shiva, the Linga, the Skanda, the Agni, the Matsya, the Kurma. For the Agni Purana another called the Yaju is sometimes substituted.

The Puranas are the stories told of polytheism, pantheism and idolatry. Legends about some of the Vedic gods and gods of later times abound. Together with the advocacy of the Puranic gods, each of which is honored with separate chapters, in which he is supremely praised and lauded above the other gods, the worship of planets is developed, rivers are deified and many animals and birds receive divine worship as the 'vahanas' or vehicles of the gods and goddesses. Certain trees also are regarded as sacred and receive worship. We may therefore regard the Purans as giving sanction to the later and more extravagant developments of Hinduism.

## **The Vedic Deities**

The Vedic gods are those whose description is chiefly to be found in the Vedas, and whose worship was more general in the Vedic age. All the Vedic deities were equal in power but three of them desired to be superior to the rest, viz. Agni, Indra and Surya. The detailed account of some of the chief Vedic deities is mentioned below.

**(i) Dyaus and Prithivi:** The general opinion respecting Dyaus(heaven) and Prithivi (Earth) is that they are amongst the most ancient of the Aryan deities: hence they are spoken of in the hymns of the Rig-Veda as the parents of the other gods. They are described as great, wise energetic and those who promote righteousness and lavish gifts upon their worshippers. They are said to have made all creatures and through their favor of immortality is conferred upon their offspring. Not only are they the creators but also the preservers of all. Dyaus and Prithivi are said to have been formed by Indra.

**(ii) Agni, the Fire God:** Agni, the god of Fire as one of the most prominent of the deities of the Vedas. With the single exception of Indra, more hymns are addressed to him than to any other deity. Agni is represented as a corpulent man, red in color, with two faces, and eyes, eyebrows and hair of a reddish tawny hue. He has three legs and seven arms, he rides a ram and has that animal emblazoned on his banner. From his mouth forked tongues or flames issue, by means of which he licks up the butter used in sacrifices. These characteristics have each and all their special significance. The two faces represent the two fires, solar and terrestrial or creative heat and destructive fire. The three legs probably refer to his power over the three portions of the universe- the celestial, terrestrial and infernal regions, which is manifested by the three forms he

takes, sun, lightning and sacrificial fire. His seven arms may denote the universal power of the all-prevading nature of fire.

**(iii) Surya or Savitri, the Sun God:** Surya and Savitri are two names by which the Sun is addressed in the Vedic hymns. Although the Hymns in which Surya is addressed are not very numerous, his worship was common in the olden time, and has continued to the present hour. Surya is regarded as the son of Aditi; at other time he is said to be the son of Dyaus.

From the character ascribed to Surya in some hymns, it seems more natural to regard him as the sun shining in his strength. He is golden-eyed, golden-headed, golden-tongued. He rides in a chariot drawn by radiant, white footed steeds. He illuminates the earth. Other gods follow him as he gives them immortality. He is prayed to for deliverance from sin and to conduct the souls of the departed to the abode of the righteous.

**(iv) Varuna, the Omniscient God of the Universe:** Varuna is known as the lord of Water. Moreover he is represented as the ruler of the night. He is described as the sovereign ruler of the universe. It is he who makes the sun to shine in heaven, the winds that blow are his wrath. The rivers flow at his command. He has made the depths of sea. His ordinances are fixed and unassailable; through their operation, the moon waxes and the stars vanish in daylight. He knows the flights of the birds, the course of the wind, the paths of ships on the ocean and beholds all the secret things that have been done or shall be done. He witnesses men's truth and falsehood.

He is represented in picture as a white man sitting upon an animal called makara. In his right hand he carries a noose. He is worshipped in the seasons of drought.

**(v) Indra, the Rain God:** Indra is the god of the firemament, in whose hands are the thunder and the lightning at whose command the rain falls. In some hymns he is spoken of as the twin brother of Agni. He is the king of gods. In pictures, he is represented as a god with four arms and hands; in two he holds a lance in the third a thunderbolt, whilst the fourth is empty. He is generally depicted as riding upon the wonderful elephant Airavata, who was produced at the churning of the ocean. In the Vedic age, his worship was far more popular than it is at present.

### **The Puranic Deities**

The Puranic deities are those who are more fully described in the Purans and whose worship was more general in the Puranic Age. Some of the dominant Puranic deities are described as follows:

**(i) Brahma, the God of Creation:** Brahma is the first of the three great Hindu gods, the personified emanation of the Supreme Spirit, Brahma. He is called the Creator, the framer of the Universe. He is the father of gods and men and in the Vedas his title is 'Prajapati', 'Lord of Creatures'. From Him all created things proceeded. It is believed that he created gods. Having created gods, he placed them in these worlds, viz. Agni in this world, Vayu in the atmosphere and Surya in the sky. And in the worlds which are yet higher, he placed the gods which are still higher. Then Brahma proceeded to the higher sphere. The gods were originally mortal but they were pervaded by Brahma, they became immortal. Within Brahma is this entire Universe. Monier Williams in his book *Indian Wisdom* says:

In the Purusha Sukta of the Rig-Veda, the one spirit is called Purusha. The more common name in the later system is Brahma. Brahma, being 'simple infinite being'- the only real eternal essence-which, when it passes into actual manifested existence, is

called Brahma; when it develops itself in the world, is called Vishnu; and when it again dissolves itself into simple being, is called Shiva; all the other innumerable gods and demi-gods being also mere manifestations of the neuter Brahma, who is eternal. (216)

The above quoted statement of Monier Williams also focuses on the fact that the all are mere manifestations of Brahma and He is present everywhere and everything. Moreover he explains that all the gods and demi-gods are also mere manifestations of Brahma and He is eternal.

The Puranas goes on to say that creation is effected through the agency of Brahma. Again the Puranas describe that there are two states of Brahma-one with and one without shape; one perishable, one imperishable; which are inherent in all beings. The imperishable is the Supreme Being; the perishable is all the world. The Vishnu Purana interprets that the word 'Brahma' is derived from the root 'Vriha' (to increase) because it is infinite (spirit) and because it is the cause by which the Vedas and all things are developed.

Brahma's life, in Hindu mythology, is said to consist of a hundred of his own years, and a year consists of day each of which is equal to forty-three lakh and twenty thousand of our years, followed by a night of equal duration. At the close of each kalpa the universe is destroyed and has to be recreated after Brahma has rested through his prolonged night.

He is represented in pictures as a red deity with four heads. He is shown dressed in white garments and riding upon a goose. In one hand he carries a staff, and in the other a dish for receiving alms.

**(ii) Vishnu, The God of Preservation:** Vishnu is called the second deity of the Hindu Trimurti. As Brahma's special work is creation, that of Vishnu is preservation. As H.H Wilson in his book *The Vishnu Purana* says:

In the beginning of creation, the great Vishnu, desirous of creating the whole world, became threefold; Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer. In order to create this world, the supreme spirit produced from the right side of his body himself as Brahma, then, in order to preserve the world, he produced from his left side Vishnu; and in order to destroy the world, he produced from the middle of his body the eternal Shiva.

(58)

The statement of H.H Wilson also makes it clear that the chief work of Vishnu is preservation and He is considered as the god of preservation. Moreover he explains that the Supreme Spirit produced Vishnu from the left side of his body in order to preserve the world.

In pictures Vishnu is represented as a black deity with four arms: in one hand he holds a club; in another shell; in a third a chakra, or discus, with which he slew his enemies; and in the fourth a lotus. He rides upon the bird garuda, and is dressed in yellow robes. His wife is Laxmi, the goddess of wealth. Wherever, any great calamity occurred in the world, Vishnu, as preserver had to lay aside his invisibility, come to earth in some form and when his work was done, returned again to the sky. The Puranas describe about his Avataras (incarnations) which are as follows:

**(i) The Fish Incarnation or Matsya Avatar:** In Hindu writings, mention is frequently made of a great flood that in the early ages devastated the world. This bears a striking resemblance to the flood described in *the Book of Genesis*. In order to preserve the human race from absolute extinction of the flood Vishnu appeared in the

form of a great fish and rescued Manu, the progenitor of the new human race from destruction. About the Matsya Avatara, Monier Williams in his *Indian Wisdom* states:

There lived in ancient time a holy man called Manu,  
 Called Manu, who, by penances and prayers,  
 Had won the favor of Lord of Heaven.  
 One day they brought him water for ablution.  
 Then, as they washed his hands, a little fish,  
 Appeared, and spoke in human accents thus:  
 'Take care of me and I will be thy Savior!'  
 'From what wilt thou preserve me?' Manu asked.  
 The fish replied: 'A flood will sweep away  
 All creatures; I will rescue thee from that' (24)

The above statement of Monier Williams hints towards the Matsya Avatara of Lord Vishnu. The story mentioned above also tells about the role of Vishnu as a preserver of the world. As stated by Williams, He is supposed to be taken an incarnation on earth in order to save the world from every calamity.

**(ii) The Tortoise Incarnation or Kurma Avatara:** As described in Hindu mythology, once a never ending warfare is waged between gods and demon. The demon forces were triumphant and the gods implored Vishnu to help them. Vishnu commanded the gods to start the churning of the ocean along with the demons, by which Amrita (elixir) would come out which would bestow immortality to the gods. Then the churning of the ocean is called Samudramanathan began and Vishnu himself, in the form of a tortoise descended to the bottom of the sea and allowed his broad back to serve as a pivot on which the mountain swung as it was whirled round by the gods and demons.

**(iii) The Boar Incarnation or Baraha Avatara:** According to Hindu mythology once the earth was submerged under the waters by a demon named Hiranayakshya and the final extinction of all life was imminent when Vishnu infused part of his essence into the form of a huge boar who dived into the abyss of waters and slew the demon rescuing the earth. The elevation of the earth on the tusks of a huge boar is regarded as the extrication of the world from the deluge of sin by the power of Vishnu.

**(iv) The Man- Lion Incarnation or Nrisinha Avatara:** Hindu mythological account depicts that, a demon named Hiranyakasipu had obtained a boon from Brahma that he should not be slain by any gods, men or animals. This immunity increased his pride that he usurped universal dominion. But Vishnu took the form of a being half lion and half man and killed the demon.

**(v) The Dwarf Incarnation or Vamana Avatara:** Bali was the King of the demons and by his austerities; he had acquired dominion over the three worlds capturing the Heaven as well. In order to recover the lost estate of the gods, Vishnu appeared before Bali as a dwarf and asked boon of the land he could step over in three strides. Vishnu placed one foot in heaven, and one on the earth, and at once regained the whole for the gods. Thus by taking Dwarf incarnation or Vamana Avatara, lord Vishnu saved the three worlds from being dominated by the king Bali.

**(vi) Rama with the Axe( Parsurama) Avatara:** The incarnation of Rama with an axe undertaken for the sole purpose of exterminating the Kshatriya caste. Parasurama, an incarnation of Vishnu was the son of the sage, Jamadagni. Once a mighty king of Kshatriya caste visited the hermitage of Parasurama and carried off the calf without his permission. Parasurama was so enraged by this act of the king that he killed him.

Then the king's sons attacked the hermitage and killed Parasurama's father.

Parasurama then vowed vengeance against the whole Kshytriya race and seven times over cleaned the world of every male member of Kshytriya caste filling the five large lakes with their blood.

**(vii)The Ramachandra Avatara:** The epic *Ramayana* is largely occupied with the story of Rama's life. It is believed that Vishnu incarnated as Rama in order to free the world from the oppression of the demon Ravana. This incarnation is one of the most important incarnations and throughout North India it is a most popular object of worship.

**(viii) The Krishna Avatara:** This is also an important incarnation Vishnu. The Bhagavata Purana describes that Vishnu's incarnation as Krishna for the purpose to kill the evil king Kansa.

### **(iii) Shiva, The God of Destruction**

Shiva is the third deity of the Hindu Triad and He is the god of Destruction. The work of creation and preservation being undertaken so it was necessary to provide an agent for that of destruction, as things created are by an inexorable law liable to decay. According to Hinduism death is not death in the sense of passing into non-existence but simply a change into a new form of life. He, who destroys, therefore, causes beings to assume new phases of existence- the destroyer is really a re-creator, hence Siva is also a recreator as He is a destroyer.

The Puranas depict that Shiva resides on Mount Kailasa with his consort, Parvati. Ganesha and Kartikaya are believed to be their sons. Ganesha is the elephant headed deity of wisdom and remover of obstacle. And Kartikeya is the god of war and he is the commander-in-chief of the armies of the gods, which he often leads in battle against the demons.

*The Bhagavata* describes Shiva's appearance as follows: Shiva assumes half of the body of Parvati, fastens the matted hair, rubs his body over with ashes, wears a Brahmanical thread composed of white snakes, clads in an elephant's hide, with a garland of skulls, rides upon a white bull named Nandi. On his forehead is the moon he places the Ganges on his head, and has three eyes. His third eye is situated in the middle of his forehead. His weapon is trident(trisul).

### **The Inferior Gods**

Hinduism is quite prepared to receive and acknowledge the village godlings. The local gods became so popular that they are called the inferior deities. The mountains, the rivers, the sacred trees and some sacred animals and birds fall into the category of inferior deities.

The rivers are considered as female divinities. Ganga is the chief of the sacred streams. Her waters are said to have the power of cleaning the sins and she is believed to be divine. It is believed that she washes away the sins of him whose ashes or corpse are committed to her waters. She is the source of redemption. Mythology forwards the belief that Bhagiratha, Sagara's great grandson, compelled Ganga to follow him over the earth, thence to the ocean and from there to the infernal regions, where she watered the ashes of Sagara's sons and became the means of sending their souls to heaven. Ganga was received by Shiva into his locks as described in Hindu mythology. In addition to the Ganges there are other rivers which are regarded as sacred by the Hindus. The Nerbudda river is also considered as sacred. According to the belief of the Hindus, the mere sight of the Nerbudda is sufficient for the forgiveness of sins. Some of the rivers of India are considered male and some female deities, the two male rivers are Brahmaputra and the Sona, the female rivers are Kaveri, Atreyi, Gomatri, Sarju, Gandaki, Yamuna and others. Not only rivers but also

certain lakes are considered inherent holy. There are such lakes, of which the holiest is Manasarovar in the Himalayan mountains. The well of Salvation in Benares is also supremely holy.

Many animals are regarded as sacred by the Hindus because they are the vahanas or vehicles by which the gods travel. For instance, Shiva rides on his bull Nandi, Indra rides on an elephant, Airavat. Ganesha, on a rat, and Durga on a tiger. As these animals are connected with the deities, the Hindus worship them regarding them as sacred. Like animals, the cow, though not regarded as the vahana of any deity, is worshipped too. Brahma is said to have created cows and Brahmins at the same time and this may be one of the reasons that they are worshipped by most of the Hindus.

Birds also serve as the vehicles of the deities and are worshipped as such. The goose is the Vahana of Brahma, the peacock of Kartikeya and Saraswati, the goddess of learning, Vishnu mounts Garuda and the mount of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, is an owl. All these birds are also considered as sacred and worshipped because of their connection with the deities.

According to the Hindu theory all trees and plants are conscious beings having distinct personalities and souls of their own as gods. The trees may become the receptacles of the spirits of gods. So that the trees are worshipped regarding them as divine. The Peepal tree, the Banyan tree, the Nimba tree and the Babul tree are considered as the sacred trees by the Hindus.

Max Muller, in his book *India: What Can It Teach Us* explains, "In most villages, there is a sacred tree, a peepal tree and the gods are supposed to delight to sit among its leaves and listen to the music of their rustling. . . The Peepal tree is generally supposed to be occupied by one of the Hindu deities" (46).

Max Mullar links the trees with the deities and his idea is identical to the Vedic cultural idea that believed in the association of the gods with nature. He further explains that the trees are believed to have been resided by the gods and the Hindu religious belief also brings forth the similar notion as mentioned by Muller in the above statement.

Trees and Plant worship is of very ancient sanction and authority. As we can notice the Soma plant was revered in the Vedic times, was not merely as the abode of divinity but as itself god. In Puranic times there arose, as the result of the churning of the sea of milk, a divine tree out of the ocean, named Kalpataru which was transferred to the heaven. This tree was also called Kalpadruma as granting all desires to those who did homage to its divinity. So that this tree is also regarded as sacred. Thus the tree worship can be said as the relic of the religion of the Hindus.

The whole Hindu mythology is based on the Vedas, the epic and the Puranas which are full of the description of different gods and goddesses along with their adventures. With the help of these religious texts, the Hindus have created a rich and complex mythology, which is called Hindu mythology.

Based on the idea of Hindu mythology, Kalidasa's *The Meghadootam* is analyzed as the text itself is based on the Hindu mythological ideas. We find numerous references to the myth form Hindu mythology in the text. *The Meghadootam* includes a beautiful description of nature in association with several Hindu myths. In order to explore the cultural significance of such myths, Hindu mythology is a relevant theoretical tool for the text.

### III. Textual Analysis

#### Association of Myth and Nature in *The Meghadootam*

This lyric poem contains many Hindu myths which have been connected with natural description in order to attach mythical significance to nature which is helpful in rendering a mythical vision that perceives the entire nature in mythicized form. And this vision is serviceable in generating a harmonious relationship between human beings and nature.

Moreover Hindu mythological ideas are also embedded in the poem. An introductory outline of Hindu mythology has already been mentioned in the second chapter. Hindu mythology provides the evidence that the idea of regarding all the phenomena of nature as animate and to attribute distinct personalities of gods to them is fundamental aspect of Vedic religion. The poem implements the very idea of Vedic religion as we find Kalidasa employs an inanimate cloud, a part of nature, as a messenger in the poem. He attributes divine personality to it by using the method of personification.<sup>1</sup> The poet uses this figure of speech in order to depict nature in animate and conscious form and this idea is identical to the Vedic religion.

We find the impression of Hindu mythology even in the selection of the characters of the poem. As the description provided by Hindu mythology, Yaksha is from the class of demigods who are described as attendants of Kubera. Kubera is the god of riches and occupies a conspicuous position in the mythology of the Hindus. Yakshas are employed in guarding the gardens and treasures of Kubera. The main character of the poem who is Yaksha is one of them. He is exiled from Alkapuri because of his negligence of the duties assigned by Kubera. He spends his time of exile on Ramagiri mountain. One day he sees the cloud on the peak of the mountain

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<sup>1</sup> Projection of conscious being upon unconscious objects is called personification.

and thinks of the idea of sending the message of his welfare to his wife who resides at Alkapuri.

Yaksha prefers the cloud to human beings for the conveyance of his message. He identifies himself with nature so he gives human shape to it. Moreover, he considers that the cloud is capable enough to understand the tidings of his heart and to import a message of his well-being to his wife. He plucks a few fresh Kutja flowers and offers them to the cloud as if in worship. His act of worshipping the cloud is similar to Hindu mythological culture of nature worship which was prevalent in the Vedic age. According to the mythology of the Hindus, the phenomena of nature are the objects of worship. We find Yaksha following the religion of the Vedic age as he worships the cloud by offering some flowers to it. Not only this, he attempts to invest the cloud with life and soul and treats it as an animate being by choosing it as his messenger. We find its hints in the followings stanza:

Dhooma jyotih salila marutaam sannipatah kwa meghah  
 Sandeshaarthaah kwa patukarandih pranishih praapaneeyah.  
 Iti autsukyaat apariganayak guhyakah tam yayaache.  
 Kaamaarthaah hi prakriti kripanaah chena dchetaneshue. (58)

Smart human beings carry messages,  
 Not clouds formed of smoke, fire, water and the wind  
 His discrimination diminished.  
 Hardly could Yaksha comprehend this fact.  
 He begged of Megha to carry his message.  
 No wonder, the love-struck  
 Know not between the sentient and the insentient. (59)

The above shloka implies that the power of mythical vision fully functions in Yaksha's treatment of the cloud. It is the mythical vision of Yaksha that makes him able to perceive the cloud more than what it is. From mythical perspective, he sees the cloud more than what it is. From mythical perspective, he sees the cloud, not mere a conglomeration of smoke, fire, water and the wind but it becomes a living organism full of sentiments, emotions and feelings. He doesn't discriminate between smart human beings and an inanimate cloud by making it as his messenger. He eliminates all the differences between the sentient and the insentient not merely being a love-struck person but he seems to do it intentionally by looking at the cloud mythologically. Hindu mythological conception forwards the belief that the clouds are the chief agents of Indra, who is the lord of the atmosphere and the dispenser of rain. Perhaps, viewing the cloud as an attendant of Indra. Yaksha begs of it to carry his message. In this act of Yaksha. We find the impression of Hindu mythological belief of the Vedic age in which natural phenomena represent some divine personalities.

Further Yaksha addresses the cloud as a provider of succor for the afflicted and starts giving directions of Alkapuri which is the destination of the cloud. He says:

Santaptaanam tulam-asi Sharanam tat payoda priyaa yaah.

Sandesham me hard, Dhanapati Krodha Kishleshit - asya.

Gantauyd te vasatih Alkaa naama Yaksheshwaraanaam.

Baahya Udyaan sthita Hara-shirah Chandrikaa Chauta harmaa. (60)

When mankind suffers from heat,

You alone provide them succour

O Megha, bear these tidings of my beloved,

From one by the angry Kubera exiled !

You travel to Alkapuri where the prosperous Yaksha live.

Its mansions are illuminated  
 By the moon on Shiva's crest while  
 He resides in the garden beyond. (60)

In the above mentioned shloka, Yaksha gives the description of Alkapuri by connecting it with lord Shiva who is the god of destruction in Hindu mythology. Alkapuri is the capital of Kubera, the god of wealth whose curse is responsible for the exile of Yaksha. He describes Alkapuri as the city of prosperous Yakshas. Alkapuri is situated on Mount Kailasha, a peak of Himalayas. According to Puranic accounts, it is below Mount Kailash which is the dwelling place of lord Shiva. Further Yaksha tells that the mansions of Alkapuri are lit up by the crescent moon on the head of lord Shiva who is supposed to reside on the outer garden of Kubera. Here we can notice the mythical link with nature. The natural beauty of the garden of Kubera is mythicized. The concluding lines of the above shloka links the outer beauty of Alkapuri as well as the natural beauty of Kubera's garden with lord Shiva. According to the illustration provided by the mythology of the Hindu. Lord Shiva carries the consent moon on his head. The second last line brings the mythical image of the very crescent moon that sheds a powerful light which illuminates the mansions of Alkapuri. The garden of Kubera gets mythical recognition after its connection with lord Shiva who is supposed to live there, being a friend of Kubera. Lord Shiva's presence enhances the natural beauty of Kubera's garden by importing mythical identity to it. Here we can notice the link of nature spot of the garden with the mythological deity of the Hindus lord Shiva Moreover there is an invitation for the cloud to look at Alkapuri from mythological perspective and the surroundings of this city is mythicized which is evident in the concluding lines of the fore-mentioned shloka.

There is an expression of the Vedic religious vision everywhere in the poem. The concept of regarding deities as embodied expression of nature itself is the Vedic religious trait. We find the very trait in the poem. While explaining about the route that the cloud should follow, Yaksha says:

Aaprichhasva priya sakham amun tungam dalingya shailam.  
 Vandyaitth punsaam Raghupati Paadih ankitam mekhalaasu.  
 Kaala Kaale bhavati bhavato yasya sanyogametya,  
 Sneha Vyaktih Chira Virahaam muncha to vashpam Ushnam. (64)

The mountain which you caress  
 Carries Rama's footprints  
 On many a slope.  
 These are worshipped by men all over.  
 Like a long-last friend  
 It hugs you close when you come.  
 It sheds tears of love and affection.  
 Bid farewell to its friendly peaks. (65)

In the above quoted stanza, there is endowment of all the propensities of a conscious being to the object of nature. As we can observe, the mountain also becomes a living organism, full of feelings and sentiments. It appears as a man. Moreover Yaksha addresses it as a long lost friend who hugs the cloud close and sheds tears of affection which is signified by the following line, " Like a long-lost friend, it hugs you close when you come. It sheds tears of love and affection"(65). By the use of personification. There is attribution of all the feelings of a man to the mountain in which we find the reflection of the Vedic religious trait. Furthermore, every object of nature seems to have link with divinity. As in the initial lines, there is a link of the

mountain with Rama's foot-prints. Hindu mythology depicts Rama as an incorporation of Lord Vishnu who is the God of Preservation. One of the great epics of the Hindus named *the Ramayana* contains the story of Rama's life. The reference to Rama's footprints diverts the attention towards the epic mythological belief that Rama was once been to the mountain mentioned in the above shloka. The mythological connection of Rama with the natural landscape makes the mountain not mere a mountain but it gets mythicized. It becomes a sacred place and a place of worship as the line depicts, " These are worshipped by men all over"(65). Thus the natural setting gets religious significance after getting mythicized. There is a focus on the importance of mythological vision again and again by the depiction of a sort of connectivity of Hindu deities and myths with natural description. For instance Yaksha compares the cloud with the mythological deity of the Hindus while explaining about the route to Alkapuri:

Ratmah chhayaa Vyatikara iva prekshyam etata purastaats  
 Valmeekagraat prabhavati dhanuh dhandama dakhandalasya  
 Yena shyaamam Vapuf ati-taraamkaantima aapatsyate te.  
 Baharneva sphurita ruchinaa gopa veshasya vistinofi. (67)

Growing out of an ant hill,  
 In front of you, sparkling like a mass of gems sublime,  
 Hangs Indra's broken bow.  
 Adorned with rainbow,  
 Wrapped so delightfully around your dark silhouette  
 You look like Vishnu,  
 Descended on earth,  
 Dressed as a cowherd,

Crowned with peacock feathers of glittering splendor. (67)

In the initial lines of the above cited shloka there is comparison of the rainbow with Indra's bow. By bringing the simile of Indra's bow, the connection between mythology and nature is established. In Hindu mythology, Indra is the God of rain and the king of heaven as well. The appearance of rainbow is possible only after the rain fall. Thus, the above lines depict an explicit connectivity between the Hindu deity Indra and nature. Moreover, we find a sort of intermingling of myth and nature that evokes a mythical vision. As we can notice the reference to lord Vishnu who is the God of preservation in Hindu mythology. Yaksha compares the cloud with lord Vishnu. He looks at the cloud with mythical eyes and his mythological vision makes him able to see the cloud look like lord Vishnu; "You look like Vishnu."(67) The reference to lord Vishnu brings a famous Hindu myth here..The line,"Descended on earth, dressed as a cowherd, crowned with peacock feathers of glittering splendor"(67),refers to lord Vishnu's appearing on earth as Krishna and as a cowherd in his juvenile character. As such he is described as wearing a head dress of peacock's feathers in Hindu mythology.Yaksha finds the very appearance of lord Vishnu as Krishna, identical to the cloud's appearance. He elevates the cloud to the rank of lord Vishnu by comparing it to him.

Hence, the above mentioned shloka provokes the myth of lord Vishnu's Krishna avatar by linking it with the cloud's outer appearance. Not only this but we also find the impression of the Vedic religion which identifies divine beings in nature. It believes in the presence of God in nature and the above shloka expresses the same theme as Yaksha finds glimpse of lord Vishnu in the cloud's appearance.

In the description of the route to Alkapuri, Yaksha tells that the cloud will reach the holy temple of lord Shiva. We can notice the mingling of mythological vision with the description of the natural beauty of the route. Yaksha describes:

Bhartuh Kanthah Chavih iti ganaith saadaraam veekshyamaanah,

Punyam yaayaah tribhuvana-gurah dhaama chndeeshwara\sy

Dhoota udyaanam Kuvalaya rajo gandhibih gandhavatyadahi

Toya Kreedaa nirata yuvati snaana tiktaith mrudhih. (96)

Traelling ahead you vist

The sacred temple of Chandeeshwara,

Of Shiva, the lord of the three worlds.

His attendants, looking at your dusky mi,

Blue like the throat of their lord and master,

(Admiringly) will gaze at you with respect.

In the temple lawns

The plants sway to breeze that is

Redolent with the fragrance of the Gandhawati waters

This breeze carries the aroma of

Yours women playfully bathing therein,

And if the lotus pollen scattered

(On the waters of the river). (86)

Again we find the above shloka expresses the mythological conception. As we can notice the depiction of mythological concepts along with the detailed account of the surrounding from the starting line of the shloka Yaksha says that the attendants of lord Shiva will gaze at the cloud after it reaches the temple of Chandeeshwara which is another name of lord Shiva. Hindu mythology depicts that Chandi is Parvati's fierce

form..Lord Shiva is also called Chandeeshwara because he is the husband of Chandi. In mythology of the Hindus, Shiva is believed to have save the world by drinking the deadly poison that emerged from the ocean when the gods and the demons churned it in order to get possession of the amrita (elixir) that would best an immortality on anyone who drank each a drop of it. Lord Shiva held the poison in his throat, which thereafter turned blue.Yaksha says that the attendants of lord Shiva will assimilate the colour of the cloud with the colour of their lord's neck so that they gaze the cloud with respect which can be noticed in the following lines, "His attendants, looking at your dusky mein, blue like the throat of their lord and master, will gaze at you with respect" (86).

In the shloka, we can notice the rendering of detailed account of the outer environment along with the myth related to lord Shiva. The beautiful portrayal of the surrounding can be observed in the concluding line that explain, "The plants sway to breeze that in redolent with the fragrance of the Ganohavati waters. This breeze carries the young women playfully bathing, therein, and of the lotus pollen scattered on the waters of the river"(86).Yaksha requests the cloud to stay in the temple of Mahakala, another name of lord Shiva, till the sunset so that it can participate in the evening prayers of Shoolinah. Yaksha refers to lord Shiva as Shoolinah, literally Shoolinah means the one who carries a trishool, a trident. Lord Shiva carries the very weapon so he is also called Shoolinah in Hindu mythology. Yaksha makes another plea to the cloud to beat its thundering drum in the service of Shoolinah along with other bells and drums. Then the cloud will obtain the full fruit of its reverential act. After mentioning about the evening prayer Yaksha tells about lord Shiva's cosmic dance. Here, again we find the mingling of myth with the description of natural spot. As the shloka explains:

Pashchat vichchaith bhuja taru vanam mandalena abileenah.  
 Saandhyam tejah pratinava japaa pshpa raktam dadhaandh.  
 Nritta aarambhe hara Pashupateh dardra naagaaginechchham.  
 Shaanta udmega stimita nayaram dristitahktih Bhavaanyaa. (89)  
 The evening prayers over,  
 Lord Mahakala wil dance the tandava.  
 At that moment, paint the sky red as the fresh japa blooms  
 Over the trees which stand tall and high  
 Like Shiva's arms.  
 Your pressure will fulfill his desire.  
 To put on and cloak of an elephant skin.  
 Bhavani will be frightened, not knowing  
 Wherefrom has this elephant skin arrived ?  
 But, ere soon recognizing your  
 Her fear will melt away  
 Transfixed, she'll admire  
 Your devotion to her lord. (89)

We can observe the expression of Hindu mythological ideals along with the description of natural, scenery in the above shloka. The word 'tandava' refers to a myth connected with lord Shiva whose another name is Mahakala. According to Hindu mythology, when lord Shiva killed a demon named Gaja, who was disguised as an elephant. He tore of his skin and wore it as a trophy of war. With the hide dripping blood, he danced his cosmic dance, the tandava. When portrayed performing the tandava, Shiva is often dressed in this skin. Yaksha seems to refer to the very mythological event as he states, "Lord Mahakal will dance the tandava"(89). Parvati or

Bhavani, lord Shiva's consort, would have been frightened to see this spectacle of her husband dancing, draped in a blood soaked skin. Therefore, Yaksha asks the cloud to wrap Shiva in his form and please Bhavani as the lines explain, "Your presence will fulfill. His desire to put on a cloak of an elephant skin. Bhavani will be frightened not knowing wherefrom has this elephant skin arrived ? But, ere soon, recognizing you, her fear will melt away" (89). The cloud, on account of its resemblance to an elephant's skin, is asked to remove Shiva's desire for the elephant's hide at the time of his evening dance by clinging to his neck so that he might mistake it for the skin and begin his dance.

Along with the myth of lord Shiva's cosmic dance, Yaksha describes the scenario of the surrounding. He says that, at the time of lord Shiva's Tandav nritya, the sky becomes red like the colour of Japa flowers. Moreover, he compares the height of the trees with lord Shiva's arms and this comparison hints that the trees are tall and high. The shloka creates a strong and vivid visual that is full of movement and imparts a mythological knowledge at the same time that establishes a link between external scenario and mythical idea.

As described by Yaksha, soon the cloud will arrive at the Devagiri mountain. Again Hindu mythological ideals find their full manifestation here with enchanting and mesmerizing description of Devagiri mountain. Yaksha tells that at Devagiri mountain blows a soft, cool breeze that is enriched by the fragrance of the earth. He asks the cloud to take a deep breath there and hear the elephants roar while they drink at the ponds through their trunks. Then, he mentions about Skanda who, according to him, resides on the Devagiri mountain which is his eternal abode. Here, we find the manifestation of Hindu mythological ideas. As the shloka interprets:

Tatra Skandam niyata-vasatim pushpameghee kritaamaa.

Pushpaa saaraih snapayati bhavaan vyoma-gangaa jala aardraih.

Rakshaa hetoh nava-shshi-britaa vaasveinaam chamoonaam,

Atyaadityam huta vaha mukhe sakhritam taddhi tejaah. (95)

On the Devagiri mount

Skanda resides in his eternal abode.

Become a bouquet of blooms and

Shower him with flowers

Dipped in waters of Akasha Ganga

Born out of the mouth of the sacred Agni

Whom Shiva Himself.

Had offered His glorious seed.

Skanda is not a lovely god !

Born to save Indra and his armies.

He burns brighter than the sun ! (95)

There is a reference to Skanda, the god of war in the above shloka which hints about a myth related with him. Yaksha links Devagiri mountain with Skanda. He mentions that this mountain is the residence of Skanda. Skanda is another name of Kartikeya who is the son of lord Shiva and Parvati. Hindu mythology describes that the gods, led by Indra, being harrassed by the demon Taraka came to lord Shiva asking him to beget a son who could lead them successfully against Taraka. Lord Shiva married Parvati and made love to her for months together. He completely forgot the god's request. Indra and his fellow goods deputed Agni, the god of time, to remind lord Shiva of their suffering and of his promise to put an end to it. Agni, disguised as a dove, startled lord Shiva during his lovemaking thus causing the latter to caste his seed into Agni's mouth. Agni, unable to contain this powerful force in his throat, spat

it into the Ganga, the holy river. In Ganga, the six Krittikas, the stars from the constellation pleiades, received lord Shiva's semen. They later gave birth to six sons who mysteriously merged into one body with six heads and proportionate number of limbs. This child came to be known as Kartikeya or Skanda. he grew up in a few days to be strong and fully trained to fight. Soon he led the forces of Indra and killed the demon Taraka. The shloka evokes this myth related to the birth of Kartikeya by referring to Skanda. In order to show reverence towards Skanda yaksha directs the cloud to transform itself into a bouquet of flowers as the cloud has the power to assume any form at will. The lines go on to describe; "Become a bouquet of blooms and shower him with flowers" (95). We can observe the intermingling of mythical idea and the account of natural scenario when Yaksha says to the cloud to shake the mountain caves with its thunder so that hearing the echo Kartikeya's peacock begins to dance. Hindu mythology portraits Kartikeya riding on a peacock called Paravani, holding a bow in one hand and an arrow in another. Yaksha requests the cloud to shake the mountain caves with its thunder so that Kartikeya's peacock will begin to dance hearing the echo. Here, the selection of Kartikeya's peacock rather than an ordinary one implies the hidden intention to brighten up the beauty of mythology. Furthermore, the link of the cloud's thundering act with the mythological bird bring forth the mythological beliefs related to Kartikeya.

Having worshipped Skanda, the cloud is asked to move ahead honouring the river called Charmanvati. While giving the directions of the route, Yaksha happens to compare, the cloud's complexion with lord Krishna's complexion which exposes the mythological link with nature as the following line also hints the same thing, "Twyi aadaatum jalama vanate shaaranginovarna cheure" (97). "When you descend having stolen Sharanga's dusky complexion to sip the water from the river." (97).

Here Sharanga is used to refer to lord Krishna. Yaksha says that the cloud is the robber of Sharanga's complexion. Hindu mythology depicts Krishna a deity of dusky complexion. Lord Vishnu is believed to be incarnated as Krishna on earth. Sharanga is a bow of lord Vishnu that is made up of horn. He is depicted as the wielder of Sharanga in Hindu mythology. Here, the use of mythical allusion of Sharanga's complexion is explicitly visible that is brought for the description of the cloud's complexion.

According to the directions given by Yaksha, the cloud's journey moves ahead towards Dashapura. He pleases the cloud to cast its glance on Brahmavarta and Krukshetra. The peripheral description of Kurukshetra is coloured by the epic mythological ideas which can be noticed in the following shloka:

Brahmaavartam janapadama athah chaayayaa gaahamaanah  
 Kshetram kshatra pradhana pahunam kauraunam tat bhajethah.  
 Rajanyaanaam shita shara shtaih yatra gaandeeva dhanva  
 Dhaaraa paataih twama iva kamalaani abhya virshat mukhaani. (98)

Casting your shadow on Brahmavarta  
 Moving on you arrive at Kurukshetra,  
 Still renowned for the internecine battle.  
 Fought between Kshatriyas  
 On this field Arjuna, the archer  
 Bearer of Gandiva.  
 Showered a barrage of arrows on his enemies.

It was just like your showers on lotus blooms. (99)

There is a reference to Kurukshetra in the above shloka which seems to be used here to evoke epic mythological thoughts. Kurukshetra is a holy land. The territories

surrounding Kurukshetra is given the name of Brahmavarta. We find the trace of epic mythological idea in Yaksha's instruction. "Moving on you arrive at Kurukshetra, still renowned for the interim battle fought between Kshatriyas"(99).The epic describes the Mahabharata war that was fought for eighteen days between cousins, the Kauravas and the Pandavas on the battle field of Kurukshetra. The shloka refers to the very battle fought on Kurukshetra. We can notice that there is a comparison between Arjuna's pouring of a rain of arrows on the heads of the Kshatriya warriors and the cloud's showering on the lotuses. According to the epic *Mahabharata*, Arjuna is the third of the Pandava brothers and Gandiva is the name of his bow. He is shown as a skilled archer in the epic.

The following lines of the above mentioned shloka expresses the same idea of epic mythology; "On the field Arjuna, the archer, bearer of Gandiva, showered a barrage of arrows on his enemies. It was just like your showers on lotus blooms" (99). Thus by narrating the story of the *Mahabharata* war in brief, Yaksha enlightens the cloud about the importance of the place. The description of the landscape of Kurukshetra ends in the narration of the mythological event of the Mahabharat war.

Yaksha says that the cloud can quench its thirst by drinking the water of Saraswati river at Kurukshetra. Leaving Kurukshetra behind, Yaksha instructs the cloud to move on towards another holy town named Kankhala. He tells the cloud that the presence of the holy river Ganga heightens the holiness of Kankhala. According to him,Ganga descends from the himalays near this place. While describing the natural beauty of Kankhala, the religious aspects of this place are exposed taking the shelter of Hindu mythology.As the following shloka indicates:

Tasmaat gachcheh anu kanakhalan, shailaraaja avateernaam

Jaahnoh Kanyaam Sagara tanaya swarga panktim

Gauri Vaktra bhrukuti rachanam yaa vihasyevya phenaits

Shambho kesha grahama akarot indu lagna urmi hastaa. (100)

(Leaving Kurukshetra behind)

Move on to Kankhala where

Ganga descends from the Himalayas

She provided a stairway to heaven

To the sons of Sagara.

With her pure, white foam, laughing as if

Ganga mocks at Parvati

Making her furious

(for both vie for Shiva's affection).

Firmly securing with her weaves

The moon on Shiva's tresses,

(Ganga thus taunts Gauri:

'See, I'm in better control of the Lord.'). (100)

The above mentioned shloka creates a beautiful picture of Kankhala, where the holy river Ganga descends from the Himalayas. The geographical details of Kankhala mixes with mythological details connected with Ganga. Hindu mythology regards Ganga as a sacred river. She washes away the sins of him whose ashes or corpse are committed to her water. The reference to Ganga is mythical in the shloka. Yaksha mentions that Ganga provided a stairway to Heaven for the sons of Sagara. We find the mythological expression in his statement. One of the Hindu myths indicate that Sagara was a Suryavanshi Kings whose sixty thousand sons were decimated by the hermit named Kapila because they disturbed him while he was meditating. For their salvation, their ashes had to be washed away by Ganga. Sagara's grandson, Bhagirath,

performed penance till Brahma, the God of creation, was pleased enough to let Ganga flow down to the mortal world. It may be one of the reasons the Ganga is also called Bhagirathi. As the fall from heaven of such a great river as Ganga would have washed off the earth. Brahma asked Bhagiratha to request lord Shiva to bear Ganga first on his head. Bhagiratha was then obliged to practice penance. Lord Shiva was pleased after a year and granted his request. Ganga, in her pride, thought that she might bear away lord Shiva also to the nether world, and fell upon his head with great violence. She hurt lord Shiva while descending. Therefore, she made her lose her way in his mighty locks. Once again Bhagiratha had to do penance and propitiate lord Shiva to permit Ganga to flow as a river and wash away the ashes of his ancestors awaiting salvation. Hence, lord Shiva came to be called Gangadhara as well. The shloka expresses the very myth of Ganga. Moreover, the myth of Ganga's descending on earth furnishes the theme to present Ganga and Parvati as co-wives. As the lines imply, "Ganga mocks at Parvati making her furious (for both vie for Shiva's affections). Firmly securing with her wives, the moon on Shiva's tresses, Ganga thus taunts Gauri: 'See I'm in better control of the lord'" (100).

The above mentioned lines carry mythological theme which is explicitly visible as there is reference to mythological deities like lord Shiva, Parvati and Ganga. The lines talk about Parvati's jealousy on finding Ganga controlling her lord's head. On seeing Ganga situated on Shiva's head, she wrinkles her eyebrows in anger as described by the shloka. Moreover, Ganga's mighty rising waves extend her reach like hands to catch the moonbeams as the moon is also situated on nearer to Ganga on lord Shiva's forehead. The white mounds of her bubbly foam represents her taunting laughter. She taunts Gauri, another name of Parvati for she finds herself in superior position to Gauri as she says that she is in better control of the lord.

Thus the shloka uses the mythological event of Ganga's descending on earth and the mythological imagery of Parvati and Ganga's jealousy towards each other. These mythological concepts are linked with the geographical details of Kankhala which connect material beauty of this place with mythological thoughts.

After Kankhala, the cloud is supposed to arrive at the Himalayas Yaksha suggests the cloud to rest on stones of which are made fragrant by the scent of musk deer. The beautiful scenario of the Himalayas are endowed with mythological significance. We can take the following shloka as an example:

Asenanam surabhita shilam nabhi gandhaib mriganam  
 Tasya eva prabhavam acholamprapya gauram tusharih  
 yakshya adhuwa strama vinayane tasya shringe nishannah  
 Shobhaam shubhram Trinayana vrisha ukhata pankha upamegam. (102)

Moving ahead, you rest your body  
 On the snowcapped Himalayan peaks  
 Where takes birth, the Ganga.  
 You rest on stones made fragrant forever  
 By frolicking musk deer.  
 Resting on these peaks  
 You look like the mud stuck  
 To the horns of Shiva's pure white bull  
 When it charges into muddy hillocks. (102)

The above shloka describes about the snowcapped Himalayan peaks and the rocks scented by the musk of the deer squatting thereon. It creates an enchanting picture of the surrounding. But we can observe the mythological connectivity with the surrounding in the reference to lord Shiva's bull. The shloka uses the mythological

image of the bull in order to give a descriptive detail of the natural scenario. As we can notice there is a reference to lord Shiva's vahana in the following lines; "Mound a white bull; You look like the mud stuck to the horns of Shiva's pure white bull when it charges into muddy hillocks" (102). These lines compare the sight of the cloud's resting on the snowcapped Himalayan peaks to lord Shiva's white bull with mud stuck horns. The bull's horns are mud stuck because of its engagement in the sport of butting. Like elephants, bulls are also in the habit of tearing up earth from mounds. The shloka expresses the same idea. Furthermore, the gods of the Hindu pantheon are associated with all animal as their vahana or vehicle in mythology. Taking the shelter of this idea of mythology, the above mentioned shloka depicts the white bull as Shiva's vahana which is referred here. The comparison of the cloud is not with an ordinary bull but with a mythological bull that is lord Shiva's vahana. This unusual linking of the natural scenario with lord Shiva's bull attaches mythological significance to the entire nature. By connecting the cloud with the mythological bull, the shloka presents a mythicized picture of nature.

After the Himalayas, the cloud will arrive there where the Himalayan bamboos play a melodious music with the help of the wind. The Kinner wives also join this music singing the songs of Tripura Vijaya. Again, we find the mixture of the details of natural panorama with the mythological concept. Yaksha refers to the myth of Tripura Vijaya suddenly while describing about the sweet music played by the himalayan bamboos:

Jhabdayante madhuraṁ anilāih kechakah poryamaṇah.

Sansaktabhīh tripuravijayo geyate kinnarebhīh.

Wirhlardaste muraja ira chet kandareshu dhvani syat

Sangetarthaṁ nanu paśhupateh tatra bhāavee samagrah. (59)

The winds blowing through  
 The hollow Himayan bamboos  
 Play a melody sweet.  
 The Kinner wives join this music  
 They sing the song of Tripura Vijaya.  
 Now, when you thunder,  
 Its echo in the mountain caves, deep like mridanga.  
 Will enhance the orchestra at Shiva's court. (59)

In the above quoted shloka, we can observe that there is a mixture of the melodious music of the himalayan bamboos with the mythological music of Tripura Vijaya sung by the Kinner wives. Even the selection of the characters are also mythological. Kinnar wives are females of Kinnaras; they are a class of demigods. They play on musical instruments and sing praise of gods and goddesses. They are called Kinnaras because they have human figures with horse's heads as described in mythology. Hindu mythology mentions that Tripur Vijaya refers to the conquest by lord Shiva of tripura- three cities of gold, silver and iron built in the sky, mid-space and on earth by Maya for three demon chiefs, Vidyumali, Raktasha and Hiranyakasha. Later on lord Shiva gets victory over these three cities by destructing them so that it is called Tripur Vijaya. Thus the natural music produced by the bamboos mingles with mythological song of Tripur Vijaya. Even in the concluding lines of the above cited shloka, the cloud's thunder is made as a conductor of an orchestra at lord Shiva's court. In order to show deep devotion and reverence towards the deity. Yaksha pleases the cloud to thunder by echoing the himalayan caves to complement the orchestra playing in lord Shiva's court. The sound of its thunder sounds like the mridanga which is sonorous. Moreover, its thundering sound makes the song of Tripur Vijaya much more deeper

and musical. In this way the above shloka blends the description of natural panorama with mythological theme.

Yaksha says that the cloud will have to pass through the narrow Knroncha valley to reach Mansarovar. The Manasarovar lake is situated on mount Kailasha as described in mythology. It is said to be the native place of swans, which are described as migrating to its shores every year at the onset of rains. It is believed that Brahma created the lake from his mind. Literally 'mana' stands for the 'mind' and 'sarovar' stands for the 'lake'. It is also called Brahmasarah- Yaksha also talk about Parashurama and lord Vishnu's dwarf incarnation which renders mythological impression in the shloka:

Praleya adreh upatatam atikramya tanstan visheshaan.

Hansadwaram bhrigupatiyasho vartma yata kroncha randhram.

Tena udeecheen disham anusaneh tiryagaayaama shobibee

Shyamah pado bali niyamana abhudyas tasyeva Vishnoh. (106)

Having visited all the sites enchanting

In the Himalayas,

Move on north through the Kroncha pass.

Swans use it to fly to Manasarover.

Parashurama added to his glory

In carving out this passage (with the strike of an arrow).

Through this narrow valley you pass.

Horizontally and slanting.

Like Vishnu when he twisted his dusky foot to trick the king Bali.

(106)

The above cited shloka is an example of the detailed account of enchanting himalayan sites as well as the rendering of the myths connected with Parashurama and lord Vishnu. The story of Parashurama and Bali provides a mythological theme in the above shloka. After visiting the Himalayan sites, Yaksha requests the cloud to move towards north direction through the Kroncha pass. Kroncha is a pass in the himalayas through which, according to the mythology, swans fly to visit lake Manasarover. This pass is believed to be carved out by Parshurama by shooting an arrow. The exact location of this pass has never been ascertained. Parashurama was the son of the sage Jamadagni and Renuka. In mythology, he appears as an angry person all the time. He beheaded his mother at the instance of his father who suspected her fidelity after seeing her in a river in company of another man. This beheading so pleased the sage that he granted many boons to his son, including bringing his mother back to life. Further, he blessed his son to be invincible. He was taught dhanurveda by lord Shiva on Mount Kailash. Mythologically, it is said that one day, being jealous of the fame of Kartikeya, as the piercer of the Kroncha mountain, he also sent an arrow right through the mountain. And the fissure made by it in the mountain ever remained as the monument of the symbol of his strength. The epic *Mahabharata* also describes Kroncha in personified form as the son of Mainaka. The Kroncha pass symbolizes the strength and glory of Parashurama. Besides the symbol of Kroncha pass that embodies the myth connected to Parashurama, there is another myth related to lord Vishnu's dwarf incarnation in the concluding lines of the shloka mentioned above. The reference to king Bali symbolizes one of the well-known myths from Hindu mythology. King Bali was the grandson of the saintly king Prahlad, son of Hiranyakasipu. He was of a charitable disposition through his devotion and penance he defeated Indra, humbled the gods and extended his authority over the three worlds.

However, he became haughty after conquering the three worlds. To humble him, lord Vishnu disguised as a dwarf, visited Bali and asked for land measuring three steps in charity. Despite advice given by his mentor, Bali granted the dwarf's request. Lord Vishnu extended his body in all directions and measured the entire universe in two steps. There was nothing left to measure with the third step. Then Bali bowed his head and asked lord Vishnu to place his foot on it and take him as his slave. Lord Vishnu pleased and elevated Bali above all the sundry gods in status. The shloka refers to the very myth as we can notice Yaksha instructs the cloud to move horizontally and slanting while passing through the fissure "like Vishnu when he twisted his dusky foot to trick the king Bali" (106). In this way the shloka associates the Kroncha pass which is a natural place with mythological norms and values.

Next Yaksha talks about a touching mythological scene of lord Shiva strolling hand in hand with Parvati on the slopes of Kailash. The cloud has privilege to be there but it is not allowed to drizzle on the celestial couple. Hindu mythology presents lord Shiva and Parvati as divine couples whose eternal abode is Mount Kailash. After mentioning about the divine couples, Yaksha gives an account of natural sight of Manasarover. He also talks about the mythological plant and animal while giving descriptive detail of the surrounding. He refers to plants animal in such a manner that they seem to represent some mythological events. The shloka mentioned below can be taken as an example of it as it indirectly tells about the mythological event of Samudramanathan:

Hema ambhojka prasavi salilam Manasasya adadanah,

Kurvak kamam kshana mukha pata pretim airavatasya

Dhunvat kalpadruma kisalayani anshukani iva vataih

Nana Chaihtaih jalada lalitaih nirvishestam nagendram. (110)

At Manasarover you quench your thirst  
 With waters wherein the golden lotuses bloom.  
 Try to please Airavata.  
 Comfort him with shade, as if drawing a curtain.  
 Gently breeze the soft Kalpataru leaves,  
 As if with a fan made of fine cloth.  
 Prancing in many a mood,  
 Wander you thus at Kailash  
 The lord of the mountains ! (110)

The above shloka contains the mythological theme along with the description of Manasarover's natural beauty. Yaksha suggests the cloud to quench its thirst with the water of Manasarover wherein the golden lotuses bloom. Further he assigns the cloud with a task to comfort Airavata and to breeze the leaves of Kalpataru, Yaksha says that it can wander according to its own will at Kailash. The reference to Airvaata and Kalpataru is noticeable as it imparts mythological notion in the shloka. Airavata and Kalpataru symbolize the event of Samundramanthan in mythology because they are depicted to have emerged from the process of churning the ocean. Once the devatas and rakshasas had churned the Samundra in order to get the Amrita (elixir) that would bestow immortality on anyone who drank it. And this act of churning the ocean was called Samundramantha. Both Airavat and Kalpataru emerged from the ocean at the time of Samundramanthan. Airavat is depicted as a white elephant having four tusks. It is the vahana (mount) of Indra, who is the god of the firmament and the dispenser of rain. Kalpataru is also another product of Samundramanthan. It is shown as a wish granting tree in mythology. It grants the desired objects. Thus we can observe the

mingling of mythological components with the account of beautiful scenario of Manasarover and Mount Kailash.

The cloud's actual destination is Alkapuri so that Yaksha starts telling about this place. He gives an introductory outline of Alkapuri by describing its buildings and gardens. According to Yaksha, Alkapuri is a natural paradise where the trees are perennially in bloom. Having described the natural beauty of this place, he talks about his mansion and the predicament of his wife after their separation. At the same time, he describes his pathetic condition as well. He finds the entire nature moaning with Yaksha in his grief of separation from his beloved wife. For him nature becomes sentient that affects human beings and is also affected by them. Moreover, he starts feeling that nature has an empathetic attitude towards human being which is clearly visible in the following shloka:

Mama akasha praninita bhujam nirdaya ashleshetoh.

Labohayaste kathamapi maya swapna sandarshaneshu.

Pashyasntenam nakhalu bahusho na sthale devatanam

Mukta stholath taru kisalayeshu ashruleshah patanti

(134)

When I extend my arms to hold you tight,

In my dreams

The forest gods take pity and

Shed tears as large as pearls

On the tender leaves of the trees. (154)

The above cited shloka explicitly lays emphasis on the associated relationship of myth and nature. It also adopts the Vedic mythical conception of nature which believes that the whole nature is the dwelling place of gods and goddesses. The above shloka

expresses the very Vedic mythical notion of nature. As we can notice that Yaksha's act of attempting to hold his beloved tight in dreams, seems to excite the sympathy of the forest deities that they weep for him.

The dew drops dropped on the shoots of the trees symbolize on the tears of the deities presiding over the place. Here we find that Yaksha views the nature mythologically. His mythological vision enables him to perceive the whole nature in mythicized form. He assumes that "the forest gods take pity and shed tears as large as pearls on the tender leaves of the trees" (154) for him. The shloka presents a deified picture of the whole nature as it expresses the belief that the gods reside on the forest who shows empathy for Yaksha by dropping their tears in the form of dew drops. The mythological belief about the presence of divinity in nature gets manifested in the above cited shloka. Telling about his pathetic condition cause by the separation from his wife, Yaksha begs the cloud to carry out his message of welfare to Yakshini. Once again he requests it to obtain his wife's well-being news and return back. But the noticeable fact is that when he tells about Kailash to the cloud, he connects the natural setting with mythological notion by referring to lord Shiva's bull. As he says, "Hasten your return from Kailash, its peaks desecrated by Trinayana's bull" (Shaillat Aashu Trinayana Vrisha utkhaata kotat nirvittah") (56). Again we find the manifestation of a mythological notion here which is skillfully connected with the description of Kailasha. According to his request the cloud will have to return having been to Kailash because Alkapuri, the destination of the cloud is situated in the lap of Kailash itself. He tells the peaks of Kailash are dug up by Trinayana's bull. He refers to lord Shiva by the name of Trinayana. Literally the word 'Trinayana' means the one who has three eyes. Hindu mythology depicts lord Shiva as a deity having three eyes. His third eye is shown in the middle of his forehead. Yaksha's referring to lord Shiva

as Trinayana brings forth the mythological notion mentioned above. In this way he connects Kailash with mythological idea. Finally, the description and directions of the route to Alkapuri ends on the note of Yaksha's prayer. He makes a prayer that the cloud may never suffer separation, even for a moment, from lightening, its spouse.

From this long discussion, citing the shlokas of the poem we can reach the conclusion that Kalidasa has employed various Hindu myths connecting them with the description of natural landscape in order to focus on the creative power of mythological vision that offers harmony and balance in society. There are clear references to lord Krishna and Parshurama in particular, to lord Vishnu trampling down Bali, to Skanda and of course to lord Shiva and Parvati in the poem. All these deities are connected with the natural spots either directly or indirectly. For instance, Kailasha is linked with lord Shiva and Parvati. Similarly, Kroncha pass is connected with Parashuram who is supposed to be an incarnation of lord Vishnu. In the similar manner Kankhala is linked with Ganga and so on. Indeed, the hidden intention seems to enhance the religious significance of distinct Hindu myths which are usually linked with natural description. Thus, the valorization of natural beauty is practised in order to impart mythological knowledge.

In a nutshell, *The Meghadootam* is grounded on the associative relationship of myth and nature, which reinforces the creative power of mythical vision that offers harmony and balance to society.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The present research arrives at the following conclusion which is drawn in the light of critical analysis done in the preceding chapters.

Kalidasa, one of the well known literary figures of Sanskrit literature employs many Hindu myths associating them with nature in order to reinforce the creative power of mythical vision which offers harmony and balance in society. The employment of different Hindu myths which are drawn from diverse religious and sacred books has especial motive to expose the mythological and religious aspects of nature by mythicizing it.

Many Hindu myths focus on the fact that nature is the source of God's emanance. Particularly the Rig-Veda, which is the oldest religious book of the Hindus, exposes that all natural phenomena are none other than the representation of Gods. Kalidasa adopts the very Vedic notion and implements it with slight variation in the poem. He creates the world that is full of Gods and Goddesses. He shows that divinity is latent in all the life forms in the form of Spirit. Therefore every life form in nature should be regarded as holy and one should live in harmony with all causing no harm to any form of life. The poem expresses the same belief by showing the associative relationship of myth and nature.

The selection of the character itself is also mythical. The main character Yaksha belongs to the class of demi-gods. He is the servant of another mythical deity, Kubera, the god of wealth. For Yaksha, nature is all divine and he finds a divine spirit in it. Perhaps, this is the reason that he chooses the cloud as his messenger. The mythological vision enables him to perceive the cloud not merely as the combination of smoke, fire, water and but it becomes a living organism for him that is full of sentiments and emotions. Moreover the poet attempts to advance the notion that the

whole nature is a creation of one supreme creator and as such all objects of nature have the self- same traits of the same creator. Perhaps by the same reason he depicts a communication between nature and man represented by the cloud and Yaksha in the poem. Between nature and man there is at work one self same soul or spirit so that the communication between the two is as readily possible as between two sympathizing human friends and this may be one of the reasons for showing the communication between the cloud and Yaksha. Through their communication, the poet diverts our attention towards the mythological tales and emphasizes on their religious significance. As we can observe that Yaksha associates different deities and mythological events while giving directions of the route from Ramagiri to Alkapuri yet the basic contours of the directions are correct and accurate. He brings out numerous references to several deities of Hindu mythology like Kubera, Sita, Vishnu, Balarama, Parsurama, Lord Shiva, Parvati and so on. All these gods and goddesses are shown having sort of connection with different places, rivers, plants and gardens mentioned in the poem. Further, mythological events are also mentioned along with the description of the cloud's journey. Whether it is Samundramanthan or it is Tripur Vijaya, all symbolize some mythological events but the notice worthy thing is that all mythological incidents are linked up with the description of the natural landscape by one way or another. Thus the poem becomes a celebration of the beautiful natural landscape along with the fairyland of the gods above.

In a nutshell, we can say that *The Meghadootam* exposes the associative relationship of myth and nature from which emerges a pantheistic vision that believes in the presence of god in nature. This sort of vision teaches to show reverential attitude towards nature. As a result there emerges a harmonious kinship between human beings and nature that ultimately leads to balance in society.

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