

A Critical Analysis of Kalidasa's Poetic Vision of Nature

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Abstract : Kalidasa is renowned all over the world as a poetic genius for his nature poetry which sympathetically describes the beautiful landscape, soundscape, and the scenic beauty of ancient India with an unparalleled poetic mastery and charm; the lucid and elevated description of nature is the soul of his poetry. *Ritusamharam* which is supposed to belong to his days of prime describes the different aspects of nature seen from a devout lover's eye; *Meghadutam* is known for its sublime description of nature as stated by an alienated lover. *Kumarsambhavam* is based on the account of Mountain Himalaya; the setting of *Abhijanashakuntlam*, is the natural surroundings of the forest and sanctums of sage Kanva and Maricha; Shakuntala, the adopted daughter of sage Kanva, lives and rears the trees and animals with filial emotions.

Keywords: World, alienated, trees, Sanskrit, emotions, affection, emotions, sage.

Introduction - Kalidasa is widely acknowledged as the supreme poet and playwright of the classical Sanskrit tradition. He is also the greatest writer that India has ever produced (Johnson 1). His works testify his vast knowledge of Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads, and various theatrical treatises. Bana Bhatta says "When Kalidasa's sweet sayings charming with sweet sentiment, went forth who did not feel delight in them as in honey-laden flowers of mango tree?" 6 (Shastri 28). Kalidasa is indisputably the greatest poet in Sanskrit poetry and his genius has been recognised in Sanskrit literature from very early times. He has presented the worldview of Satyam, Shivam, Sundram in his writings and is an expert in picturisation of emotions through his art. Having portrayed inner feelings and the outer world, Rasa, Alamkara and metre are also used perfectly by him. Kalidasa was the summation of Indian culture in one of its most exalted periods of triumphant self-realization. His works form a treasury of the truest and the highest Indian ideals of life. If one wishes to know the heights of life and super-life to which authenticity of India can reach, one must study the works of Kalidasa with loving attention and minute scrutiny and reverential affection again and again. By a study of his works and his genius the rest of the world will be enabled to achieve its true progress by attaining a synthetic vision of life and by having a true concept of that idealised and transfigured life which alone is the crown and the consummation of one's petty worldly life otherwise so full of fruitless toil and unfraternal strife. Kalidasa has had great influence on several Sanskrit works, on all Indian literature (Gopal 8). He also had a great impact on Rabindranath Tagore. The romanticism of *Meghadutam* can be found in

Tagore's poems on the monsoons. Sanskrit plays by Kalidasa influenced late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century European literature (Sastri 26).

According to Dale Carnegie, father of modern medicine, Sir William Osler always kept on his desk a poem written by Kalidasa (2). As far as Kalidasa's biographical sketch is concerned, no authentic information is available about the life and date of the immortal poet-playwright who has left an indelible imprint on the Indian mind. There is no evidence to prove where and when he was born, who were his parents, where and when he died.

The poet has studiously observed complete silence about himself in his work. Neither directly nor indirectly does he shed any light on his personal life or any remarkable event of his life. In this circumstance, the only reliable sources of his birthplace are his writings and works. Scholars have speculated that Kalidasa may have lived near the Himalayas, in the vicinity of Ujjain, and in Kalinga. This hypothesis is based on Kalidasa's detailed description of the Himalayas in his *Kumarsambhava*, the display of his love for Ujjain in *Meghaduta*, and his highly eulogistic descriptions of Kalingan emperor Hemangada in *RaghuvaCsa* (Sixth Canto). Lakshmi Dhar Kalla, a Sanskrit scholar, wrote a book titled *The Birth-Place of Kalidasa*, which tries to trace the birth-place of Kalidasa based on his writings. He concluded that Kalidasa was born in Kashmir, but moved southwards, and sought the patronage of local rulers to prosper.

V. V. Mirashi and Navlekar in their book, *Kalidasa, Date, Life and Works* state that the birth place of Kalidasa is Vidarbha on the base of the style of his writings. They have

also mentioned that Kalidasa has described various places across the country in his works. Kalidasa in his writings has adopted the Vaidarbhi style of composition which is distinguished by elegance of thought and expression, fineness of sentiment and imagination, and avoidance of cumbrous compounds and obscure words. All these facts show that his original home was in Vidarbha. Kalidasa has never explained his birth place in his writings. Various philosophers and eminent scholars of Kalidasa's work have discussed his birth place with the help of his internal as well as external sources. Ram Gopal in his book Kalidasa: His Art and Culture has certified that the birth-place of Kalidasa is Ujjayini. The fact cannot be ignored that Ujjayini and the river Sipra were the great liking place for Kalidasa. In Meghaduta he devotes nearly a dozen stanzas to the warm description of the beautiful ladies, palatial buildings, glittering bazaars and salubrious surroundings of his favorite city which he fondly describes as a splendid fragment of heaven.

Moreover, he has also described the other places of Central India like the hills Nichagiri, Devagiri and Ramagiri, rivers like Reva, Vetravati, Charmanvati, Vananadi, Nirvindhya, and Gambhira and the Dasarna country with its capital city named Vidisha, Dasapura (Mandasor). For example, in Meghaduta, Kalidasa "requests the cloud-messenger to proceed from Daspura to the famous battlefield of Kurukshetra in the river Brahmaputra country and to enjoy the sacred waters of the river Saraswati. Then the cloud is requested to go to his destination Alaka on Mount Kailasa via the vicinity Kanakhala where the river Ganga descends from the Himalayas" (Gopal 4). Kalidasa's deep attachment to Ujjayini coupled with his intimate knowledge of the geography of this region suggests that he spent the best part of his life in this city, whatever might have been his birth-place.

According to various scholars and philosophers, it can be well said that Kalidasa's life and his literary works are still relevant in contemporary time and his thoughts and opinion are the need of the time. Kalidasa's life cannot be described in a single word or a philosophy as he is an epitome of Indian aesthetics and literature itself, mingled with soil and air of the country. Although, Kalidasa has described the places like Mithila, Ujjayini, Vidarbha, Vidisha, Bengal and Kashmir in his writings, but it cannot be certified that his birth place is one of them because in his writings one can find a large number of natural places. In order to get an insight to the ethics, religion, and philosophy of the society, it is very pertinent to go through the life and works of Kalidasa.

Kalidasa's Contribution to Literature

Kalidasa, the greatest poet, ever India ever has seen, and his contribution to almost all branches of Sanskrit literature is well known. His works include two cantos, *Raghuvamsam* (Dynasty of Raghu) and *Kumdrasambhavam* (Birth of Kumara), two lyrical poems, *Meghadutam* (Cloud-

Messenger) and *Ritusamharam* (The Exposition on the Seasons) and three plays, *Malvikagnimitra* (The dancer and the King), *Abhijnanshakuntala* (The Recognition of Shakuntala) and *Vikramorvasiyam* (Urvashi won by Valour). He wrote his plays based on the love stories of the kings and in poems also the main sentiment is love. He wrote his works in the context of the Vedic culture and kingly rule. Evidently, his works envisage the impact of the social and cultural scenario of his times and the design and characterisation throughout his works seem to be largely based on these facts.

Alexander Vom Humboldt says, "Kalidasa the celebrated author of the Sakuntalam, is a masterly describer of the influences which nature exercises upon the minds of lovers. Tenderness and richness of creative fancy have assigned to him his lofty place among the poets of all nations" (Nagaiah 46). *Malvikagnimitram* is the first play of Kalidasa. It shows the strong gap for readers from beginning to the end. The story has been projected by the poet well and it revolves around the love of a King in a royal palace. The description of the things is beautiful and praiseworthy. Poet has beautifully handled the hurdles which were coming in the development of the story in all five acts commendably. Malavika was a perfect dancer and a skilled actor while Agnimitra was a royal king, though he is passionate but a little bit passive and deploys his minister to win over Malvika to make her queen. *Malvikagmitram* is the finest work because of its tragic-comic presentation.

The second play named *Abhijnanshakuntalam* is one of the most famous works of Indian Literature which was at first known in Europe. Later on, it has been translated by many English and German translators. It was welcomed and well known by all poets of the world. It dramatizes the story of Shakuntala told in the epic Mahabharata. The play tells the love story of Shakuntala and King Dushyanta in all seven acts. King meets Shakuntala on a hunting trip. She is the adopted daughter of sage Kanva, while the real mother of Shakuntala is apsara Menka. Dushyanta marries her according to Gandharva rites when he fell in love with Shakuntala at the first sight. Shakuntala and Dushyanta express their love within the environment surrounded by beautiful flowers. After returning to his court, a misfortune falls upon her. Sage Durvasa incurs a curse inadvertently that Dushyanta will forget her completely until he sees the ring he has left with her when she was pregnant with their child. In an advanced state of pregnancy, she trips to Dushyanta's court, on the way she loses the ring and has not been recognized. Because the royal seal ring is returned to Dushyanta which is found by a fisherman, in consequence, he regains his memory of Shakuntala and strives to find her. After a long traveling, they are united eventually.

The third play *Vikramorvasiyam* contains five acts and it tells the love story of King Vikrama and apsara Urvashi. The dialogues of this play are recorded in the Rigveda.

The story develops with a hymn in the Shatapatha Brahmana which is a part of Rigveda. He used Vaidharbhi style in the play. Urvashi was an apsara and she was returning from the palace of Kubera on mount Kailasa along with Chitrlekha, Rambha and many others. In a midway, the demon named Keshin abducted Urvashi and Chitrlekha and flew in the North-East direction. The group of apsaras started to scream for help, which was heard by the king Pururava, who rescued the two. Urvashi and Pururava fall in love at first sight. The nymphs were without delay called back to the heaven. King could not forget the thoughts of Urvashi though he tried a lot to focus on his work. He amazed to find that only her love is an option. Urvashi wrote a message on a birch leaf to confirm her love in invisible form. The leaf was found by the queen of Aushinari who was the princess of Kashi and the wife of Pururava because that leaf was carried off by the wind. At first, the queen became angry but later she stated that she will not interfere the two lovers. Urvashi was called again back to heaven to perform a play before having any conversation with Pururava. She mispronounced her lover's name during the performance as she had to pronounce Purushottam instead of Pururava because she was infatuated with the Pururava. She was punished by the Indra that she would be banished from heaven until her human lover laid eyes on the child that she would bear him. She suffered the result of her misfortune that she would be transformed into a vine, and it was eventually lifted. It was sentenced that the lovers were allowed to remain together on Earth as long as Pururava lived. *Raghuvamsam* (Dynasty of Raghu) is a grand historical poem in classical epic style. The great epic tells of three groups of kings. Cantos 1 to 9 deal with Rama's ancestors; Cantos 10 to 15 are directly concerned with the great Rama himself in whom the ideal of kingship reaches its highest; cantos 16 to 19 are devoted to Rama's descendants. It is an epic poem about the Kings of the Raghu dynasty. The first king to be described is Raja Dilip and was cursed to be infertile. He wholeheartedly worships and cares for his cows and as a result, his curse was redeemed. The most beautiful and interesting account in *Raghuvamsam* is of king Dasaratha and Rama. This is a brief description of Dasaratha's trip: during the hunting period, Dasaratha saw many beasts. Since he could not shoot the peacock because it reminds him of his wife's hair adorned with flowers of different kinds and how it would become disarranged during their lovemaking, for as the peacock spread its tail feathers before him. It contains about six thousand verses lines having 1564 stanzas. This story describes some great warrior kings born in holy Indian soil. *Kumarsambhavam* (The birth of the war god) consists of seventeen cantos, 1096 stanzas and about 4420 verse lines in all. This work explains the simple and firm life of Shiva who is meditating on Kailasa Mountain. It tells the story of the courtship of Lord Shiva and Parvati. Most of the chapters talk about love and romance between Shiva and Parvati. It

is a story of a powerful demon named as Tarakasur who was blessed that the child of Lord Shiva could only kill him. But Lord Shiva was very strict for the desire of love by intense meditation. By a great effort of Parvati and through much penance, she could win over the love of Lord Shiva. After some time, Lord Shiva and Parvati have blessed a son named as Kartikeya who killed the demon and restored peace and the glory of Lord Indra and the divine world. In this way, the great epic *Kumarsambhavam* comes to end. It is regarded as one of the greatest literary works of all time and pays all details of a courtship between two people. *RitusaCharam* (The Exposition on the Seasons) is a glowing tribute to the glories of six Indian seasons, each of which is vividly described in each canto. It is an early composition of his young days and in this play, Kalidasa may truly be called a poet of nature. Like Tennyson, he is also aware of the beauties and the crudities of nature and is well known to "Nature red in tooth and claw" (Tennyson 80). The contents of poems in six cantos convey the situation for the six Indian seasons: Grisma (summer), Varsa (monsoon), Sarat (autumn), Hemanta (cool), Sisirs (winter), Vasanta (spring) and this poem is generally considered to be Kalidasa's earliest work. The content of the poem is not simply a description of nature but it is also a combination of the beauty of nature and women, with an emotional response to both. Dotting the woodlands are charming glades by streams, Haunted by timorous gazelles easily alarmed Tremulous eyes like blue water lilies, enchanting and the heart is twisted with sudden longing⁸. (Kalidasa, *Ritusamhara*)

This poem states the harmonious affinity of a human being with the forces of nature. *Ritusamhara* describes the vivid description of the importance of seasons. It is called the 'Medley' or 'Garland of Seasons.' The seasons in India are compared with the pairs of the lovers like lovers experience changes in relation to the season's changes. This poem opens with the explanation of summer with the extreme heat and dry weather and cracked lands. In this situation, everyone prays for the drops of rain. On the other side, it is a season of fruits like mango and moonlit nights. Women compel their husbands to make love but they have lost their passion because of the heat. After being enticed, their passions are restored and their longing reignited. The detachment from their partners during the Summer Season has been also portrayed that how people travel to faraway places for the sake of work. Their love shooting pain and adverse distance that detaches them is elaborated beautifully. For quenching their thirst even animals are shown to be going for looking water. They roam around in search of water even to forget animosity towards other animals along with other fellow animals they come and go to their personal territories. Because of their suffering from intense scorching sun, they are not scared of being hunted by the large animals. The Summer Season ends with a description of a forest fire caused by the heat of the sun.

After that, the poet has described the beautification of much awaited Rainy Season. In this season the whole India becomes drenched and looks neat and clean. The magic of the rainy season is added by the black clouds which are rumbling all over the sky. Because of the heavy rain and mossy environment birds and animals get affected and they do not enjoy properly. To get relief from the heat and misery, the peacocks start their dance which symbolises the liberty and freedom. The rivers are shown to be flowing fast because of the adding of spurious rainwater. By uprooting every tree that has been growing on its bank until now, these rivers flow furiously towards the ocean. The green trees and delicate flowers are seen everywhere and it looks lush and luxuriant. Women are shown to be running towards their lovers due to the thundering of clouds which creates fear in the hearts of women. The women, in this season, decorate themselves with the help of flowers and perfumes and to be sitting outside want to hear the voice of their lovers, it relates the suffering of their longing hearts. The Hemanta is a part of the pre-winter season. This season is known for the brewing of crops, blooming of flowers and sitting of swans in the ponds. The water becomes very cold. This season is filled with distinct kinds of the beauty of nature which attracts the heart of lovers for their beloved. The next season is autumn which describes the celebrating festivals and spread cheer and joy. This season is almost like a second summer because the weather remains pleasant but afternoon can be hot. Therefore, one can feel the nip in the air because of the change of weather. The season of the frost arrives also at this time of the year.

The specialty of this season is a nip in the air, chilly winds in the morning and nights and the biting cold which all signify the season of frost. Women use, in this season Jasmine flowers to decorate their hair and blue lotus for their ears. Then comes Winter Season, which is a more acute form of frost. In this season, people wear layers of clothes because temperatures fall down. But the winter season of Western countries is severer than the East. It only snows in the hilly regions and the south of India hardly experiences any winters. Lovers are shown drinking wine together and igniting their passion. They lose themselves in the long nights of lovemaking during the cold weather. People welcome Spring Season after the winter. In this season weather starts to warm a little bit. It is also the season of harvest festival and flowers can be seen blooming all around. It signifies that the changes in the season affect the minds of lovers. Trees put forth flower, waters abound in lotuses' Women's thoughts turn to love; the air is sweetly scented: Mornings are pleasant and days delightful:

All things are more alluring in springtime, my love9 . (Kalidasa, Ritusamhara, 6.2) With the theme of Ritusamhara, Kalidasa has shown his extraordinary talent for the depiction of the Seasons, their unsurpassed beauty singularly their own and in Meghaduta he has shown his masterful portrait of the most abundant beauty of the Rainy

Season. Meghaduta (Cloud-Messenger) consists of 122 stanzas and it is one of Kalidasa's most famous works. This lyric shows how Yaksha feels after having been exiled from Alaka. Suffering the agony of separation, Yaksha, the lover, becomes completely love ridden and takes the help of a Cloud, the Megha, to address his love message to his beloved. The graphical descriptions of nature and topographical details of ancient India have been shown in the lyric by Kalidasa. It also shows the Mountains, rivers, historical places, mythological characters and rituals of those days. One feels surprised to find its Romanticism, classicism, rational, spiritual and emotional which are intermingled with each other properly. Its material is bound in Mandakranta metre. The poem contains two parts Purvamegha and Uttaramegha. Both the parts are complete in tone and attitude. The first part of it explains a kind journey which goes through the hills, rivers, Mountains to Alka City. In the second part, the Cloud visits to deliver the message to the wife of Yaksha who is living in Alkapuri. Her husband is left out by the Lord of the treasure of wealth, Kubera because of some disobedience and was sent to Ramgiri hill for one year, in the hope of reunion she is waiting for him. In the opening of the poem, Yaksha is yearning to meet his beloved because he is away from the eight months of exile. On the very first day of the month of Asadha, he requests the Cloud to be the messenger of his love. He indicates the route of Alkapuri and says while traveling towards North the Cloud will come across the region of Mala. After that, it will float towards NorthWest, will pass through Amarkoot Hill and it will touch the foothills of Vindhya where Reva or Narmada is flowing in a zigzag motion. Then passing through Darshan cloud will reach capital Vidisa, after taking a straight route and turn towards Ujjaini the capital of Avanti. After that, he gives the description of the number of rivers, hills, states, temples, and flowers. It can be assumed that poet must have visited his places of India individually. In the second part, the task of the cloud is to convey to message to Yaksha's wife that she should not be in grief. He calls cloud, his gentle friend to deliver the message to the lady who is unwidowed. The period of his exile will come to end soon and the time of reunion is very near, after that, they will enjoy together to fulfill their every desire.

Kalidasa's Treatment of Nature

Kalidasa is renowned all over the world as a poetic genius for his nature poetry which sympathetically describes the beautiful landscape, soundscape, and the scenic beauty of ancient India with an unparalleled poetic mastery and charm; the lucid and elevated description of nature is the soul of his poetry. *Ritusamharam* which is supposed to belong to his days of prime describes the different aspects of nature seen from a devout lover's eye; *Meghadutam* is known for its sublime description of nature as stated by an alienated lover. *Kumarsambhavam* is based on the account of Mountain Himalaya; the setting of *Abhijanashakuntlam*,

is the natural surroundings of the forest and sanctums of sage Kanva and Maricha; Shakuntala, the adopted daughter of sage Kanva, lives and rears the trees and animals with filial emotions. Further, the plays like *The Vikarormvashiyam* and *The Malvikagnimitram* also describe nature in various aspects.

Nature and poetry of Kalidasa are as inseparable as a rose and its smell. For example, in *Raghuvamsa*, the following verses describe the beautiful journey of Lord Rama as: "Looking thin, being distant, like the rim of a wheel/ coloured blue by rows and rows of tamala and palm trees"¹⁰ (Kalidasa, *Raghuvamsa* 13.15). The natural scenery of India has been described by Lord Rama and his companions when they were returning from Lanka to Ayodhya by Pushpak Vimaan. It shows the extraordinary power of imagination of the poet. The poet says that the river Mandakini is flowing with calm and clear current in the vicinity of Chitrakuta. It looks like the necklace of pearls around the neck of the earth when looked from the sky. Along with this description of river Mallinatha has vivified picture of the union of Ganga and Yamuna in *Raghuvansama*: "presenting an aerial view of the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna, Kalidasa imagines that the former mingled in its flow with the waves of the latter looks at one place like a necklace of pearls inlaid with sapphires emitting luster" (Gopal 120). In the following verses of *Raghuvamsa*, the poet has vividly compared the river Mandakini with a necklace of Earth: 'We have arrived at Mandakini of which Crystal clear waters flow at leisure. From a distance, it looks so lean. Running below the Chitrakoota Mountain, The river resembles a necklace of pearls around the neck of the (mother) earth'¹¹. (Kalidasa, *Raghuvamsa* 13.48) In the same way, the poet has given a praiseworthy description of the landscape when Matali and King Dushyanta were descending from the heaven to earth. King Dushyanta has described the natural scenery and the lustre beauty of mother earth in *Abhijanansakuntalam* in act VII as following:

As the mountains rear upwards the land sinks rapidly Off their great peaks: trees whose forms were merged within the dense foliage Emerge distinct as their branched shoulders thrust into view; Those fines lines are now seen as rivers brimming with waters: See how the Earth looms at my side As if some mighty hand had flung her up to me¹². (Kalidasa, *Abhijanansakuntalam* 7.9) This verse has been composed in quatrain which has been extracted from the magnum opus work of Kalidasa i.e. *Shakuntalam*. In this verse, King is giving the picturesque description of deer that is running fast because of the fear of sharp arrows of King Dushyanta. The deer runs to save his life: Arching his neck with infinite grace, now and then He glances back at the speeding chariot, His form curving fearful of the arrow's fall The haunches almost touch his chest. Painting from fatigue, his jaws graping wide Spill the half-chewed tender grass to mark his path. With long leaps bounding high

upwards, see how he soars Flying in the sky, scarce skimming the surface of the earth¹³. (Kalidasa, *Abhijanansakuntalam* 1.11) The King states to Matali when he was looking below while descending from the sky, that the world of man appears wonderful because of our rapid descent. It seems that the earth descends from the peaks of the mountains. Because of the rise of their trunks, the trees are withdrawing the state of being enveloped in their foliage. The water of the rivers is disappearing because of the thinness. But now these rivers acquire the manifestation owing to the expansion. Behold this world of men; it seems that it is brought near me by someone throwing it up (Shastri 381). Kalidasa is a sharp beholder of nature. He has included each and every type of flora and fauna like forests, rivers, lakes, creepers, trees, plants, mountains, animals, and birds. In the *Ritusamhara* poet elaborates the various seasons of India. The following verses describe the penuriousness of thirsty deer in summer season: "Antelopes suffering from Summer's savage heat/ race with parched throats towards the distant sky/ the colour of smooth-blended collyrium, thinking/ there's water there in another forest"¹⁴ (Kalidasa, *Ritusamhara* 1.11).

Further there is a scene describing and delineating the plight of the animal life in the summer season because of the excessive heat; birds sit thirsty panting for water on leafless trees; monkeys gather in dens under dry bushes; wild bulls wander here and there in search for food and water; elephants eagerly looking into dry wells for any trace of water¹⁵ (Kalidasa, *Ritusamhara* 1.23).

Kalidasa minutely observed the seasons of India. In the next verse, the poet has vividly described the current of the water in the rainy season. He also observes manifold varieties of the flora and the fauna which mainly originate in the rainy season. Kalidasa compares the water of torrential rain with snakes because of its crisscross movement of descending water and the fearful situation of frogs as: "Thick with insects, dust and bits of grass/ a dirtygrey in colour, headed downward/ rain water snakes slowly on its tortuous way/ watched anxiously by a brood of nervous frogs"¹⁶ (Kalidasa, *Ritusamhara* 2.13).

Conclusion: The vision of Kalidasa regarding the nature is immensely rich, for instance, in fourth canto of *Raghuvansama*, like the sandal forests infested with snakes on the southern Mountains of Malaya and Dardura, vineries of Persia, the pearl-fishery in the Bay of Bengal which is near the river Tamarapani, the walnut trees of the Kamboja country, the cardamom plant and the trees named Ketaka, Pumnaga (Nagakesara) and Rajatali growing in the south, the saffron plant growing on the banks of the river Indus, the groves of pepper plants in the valleys of the mount Malaya, the betel-plant growing in Orissa, a variety of rice known as Kalama cultivated in the eastern part of India, the herbs, musk-deer, minerals, bamboos, birch-trees, Sarala trees and deodar trees of the Himalayas, and the forest of palm trees on the eastern coast. Kalidasa is the

master of presenting the description of the mountains and his fondness can be seen in the Kumarasambhava. He gives a lucid description of the Himalayan Mountain which is snow-clad. It is the treasure house of innumerable house of precious stones, minerals, important herbs, trees, plants, and creepers with delightful flowers.

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