A collection from various sources.
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Kaalidaasa[1]

From: Encyclopedia Americana
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KALIDASA, kä-lē-dä'sa (kaalidaasa), India's greatest Sanskrit poet and dramatist. In spite of the celebrity of his name, the time when he flourished always has been an unsettled question, although most scholars nowadays favor the middle of the 4th and early 5th centuries A.D., during the reigns of Chandragupta II Vikramaaditya and his successor Kumaaragupta. Undetermined also is the place of Kaalidaasa's principal literary activity, as the frequent and minute geographic allusions in his works suggest that he traveled extensively.
Numerous works have been attributed to his authorship. Most of them, however, are either by lesser poets bearing the same name or by others of some intrinsic worth, whose works simply chanced to be associated with Kaalidaasa's name their own names having long before ceased to be remembered. Only seven are generally considered genuine.

Plays. There are three plays, the earliest of which is probably the Malavikaagnimitra (*Malavikaa and Agnimitra*), a work concerned with palace intrigue. It is of special interest because the hero is a historical figure, King Agnimitra, whose father, Pushhpamitra, wrested the kingship of northern India from the Mauryan king Brihadratha about 185 B.C. and established the Sunga dvnasty, which held power for more than a century. The Vikramorvashiiya (*Urvashii Won Through Valor*) is based on the old legend of the love of the mortal Pururavaas for the heavenly damsel Urvashii. The legend occurs in embryonic form in a hymn of the Rig Veda and in a much amplified version in the ShatapathabraahmaNa.
The third play, AbhiGYaanashaakuntala (*Shakuntalaa Recognized* by the Token Ring), is the work by which Kaalidaasa is best known not only in India but throughout the world. It was the first work of Kaalidaasa to be translated into English from which was made a German translation in 1791 that evoked the often quoted admiration by Goethe. The raw material for this play, which usually is called in English simply Shaakuntala after the name of the heroine, is contained in the Mahaabhaarata and in similar form also in the PadmapuraaNa, but these versions seem crude and primitive when compared with Kaalidaasa's polished and refined treatment of the story. In bare outline the story of the play is as follows: King Dushhyanta, while on a hunting expedition, meets the hermit-girl Shakuntalaa, whom he marries in the hermitage by a ceremony of mutual consent. Obliged by affairs of state to return to his palace, he gives Shakuntalaa his signet ring, promising to send for her later. But when Shakuntalaa comes to the court for their reunion, pregnant with his child, Dushhyanta fails to acknowledge her as his wife because of a curse. The spell is subsequently broken by the discovery of the ring, which Shakuntalaa had lost on her way to the court. The couple are later reunited, and all ends happily.
The infiuence of the AbhiGYaanashaakuntala outside India is evident not only in the abundance of translations in many languages, but also in its adaptation to the operatic stage by Paderewski, Weingartner, and Alfano.

Poems. In addition to these three plays Kaalidaasa wrote two long epic poems, the Kumaarasambhava (*Birth of Kumaara*) and the Raghuvamsha (*Dynasty of Raghu*). The former is concerned with the events that lead to the marriage of the god Shiva and Paarvatii, daughter of the Himaalaya. This union was desired by the gods for the production of a son, Kumaara, god of war, who would help them defeat the demon Taaraka. The gods induce Kaama, god of love, to discharge an amatory arrow at Siva who is engrossed in meditation. Angered by this interruption of his austerities, he burns Kaama to ashes with a glance of his third eye. But love for Paarvatii has been aroused, and it culminates in their marriage.
The Raghuvamsha treats of the family to which the great hero Rama belonged, commencing with its earliest antecedents and encapsulating the principal events told in the RaamaayaNa of Vaalmikii. But like the Kumaarasambhava, the last nine cantos of which are clearly the addition of another poet, the Raghuvamsha ends rather abruptly, suggesting either that it was left unfinished by the poet or that its final portion was lost early.

[1] Sanskrit words are modified for pronunciation with first letter upper case.

Finally there are two lyric poems, the Meghaduuta (*Cloud Messenger*) and the Ritusamhaara (*Description of the Seasons*). The latter, if at all a genuine work of Kaalidaasa, must surely be regarded as a youthful composition, as it is distinguished by rather exaggerated and overly exuberant depictions of nature, such as are not elsewhere typical of the poet. It is of tangential interest, however, that the Ritusamhaara, published in Bengal in 1792, was the first book to be printed in Sanskrit.
On the other hand, the Meghaduuta, until the 1960's hardly known outside India, is in many ways the finest and most perfect of all Kaalidaasa's works and certainly one of the masterpiece of world literature. A short poem of 111 stanzas, it is founded at once upon the barest and yet most original of plots. For some unexplained dereliction of duty, a Yaksha, or attendant of Kubera, god of wealth, has been sent by his lord into yearlong exile in the mountains of central India, far away from his beloved wife on Mount Kailasa in the Himaalaya. At the opening of the poem, particularly distraught and hapless at the onset of the rains when the sky is dark and gloomy with clouds, the yaksa opens his heart to a cloud hugging close the mountain top. He requests it mere aggregation of smoke, lightning, water, and wind that it is, to convey a message of consolation to his beloved while on its northward course. The Yaksha then describes the many captivating sights that are in store for the cloud on its way to the fabulous city of Alakaa, where his wife languishes amid her memories of him. Throughout the Meghaduuta, as perhaps nowhere else So plentifully in Kaalidaasa's works, are an unvarying freshness of inspiration and charm, delight imagerry and fancy, profound insight into the emotions, and a oneness with the phenomena of nature. Moreover, the fluidity and beauty of the language are probably unmatched in Sanskrit literature, a feature all the more remarkable for its inevitable loss in translation.

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From: The Student's English Dictionary
V. S. Apte
Word: navan.h नवन्

नवरत्नं The nine gems or poets at the court of king Vikramaaditya.

धन्वंतरिक्षपणकामरसिंहशंकु
वेतालभट्टघटकर्परकालिदासाः ।
ख्यातो वराहमिहिरो नृपतेः सभायां
रत्नानि वै वररुचिर्नव विक्रमस्य ॥

The navarathnas are:
धन्वंतरि (dhanva.ntari)
क्षपणक (kshapaNaka)
अमरसिंह (amarasi.nha) of the author amarakosha , the most popular Sanskrit Lexicon. He was a Jaina.
शंकु (sha.nku)
वेतालभट्ट (vetaalabhaTTa)
घटकर्पर (ghaTakarpara)
कालिदास (kaalidaasa)
वराहमिहिर (varaahamihira)
वररुचि vararuchi, Poet and grammarian, identified by some with kaatyaayana, the celebrated author of the vaartikas on Panini's suutraas.

From: THE DISCOVERY OF INDIA
by: Jawaharlal Nehru

Europe first learned of the old Indian drama from Sir William Jones's translation of Kalidasa's Shakuntula published in 1789. Something in the nature of a commotion was created among European intellectuals by this discovery, and several editions of the book followed. Translations also appeared (made from Sir William Jones's translation) in German, French, Danish, and Italian. Goethe was powerfully impressed, and he paid a magnificent tribute to Shakuntala. The idea of giving a prologue to Faust is said to have originated from Kalidasa's prologue, which was in accordance with the usual tradition of the Sanskrit drama.

Kalidasa wrote other plays also and some long poems. His date is uncertain, but very probably he lived toward the end of the fourth century A.D. at Ujjayini during the reign of Chandragupta II, Vikramaditya of the Gupta dynasty. Tradition says that he was one of the nine gems of his court, and there is no doubt that his genius was appreciated and he met with full recognition during his life. He was among the fortunate whom life treated as a cherished son and who experienced its beauty and tenderness more than its harsh and rough edges. His writings betray this love of life and a passion for nature's beauty.

One of Kalidasa's long poems is the Meghaduta, the Cloud Messenger. A lover, made captive and separated from his beloved, asks a cloud, during the rainy season, to carry his message of desperate longing to her. To this poem and to Kalidasa, the American scholar Ryder has paid a splendid tribute. He refers to the two parts of the poem and says: "The former half is a description of external nature, yet interwoven with human feeling; the latter half is a picture of a human heart, yet the picture is framed in natural beauty. So exquisitely is the thing done that none can say which half is superior. Of those who read this perfect poem in the original text, some are moved by the one, some by the other. Kalidasa understood in the fifth century what Europe did not learn until the nineteenth, and even now comprehends only imperfectly, that the world was not made for man, that man reaches his full stature only as he realizes the dignity and worth of life that is not human. That Kalidasa seized this truth is a magnificent tribute to his intellectual power, a quality quite as necessary to great poetry as perfection of form. Poetical fluency is not rare; intellectual grasp is not very uncommon; but the combination has not been found perhaps more than a dozen times since the world began. Because he possessed this harmonious combination, Kalidasa ranks not with Anacreon and Horace and Shelley but with Sophocles, Virgil, Milton."

From: A Portable India
Editors: Jug Suraiya and Anurag Mathur
Written by: Harish Trivedi

In secular Sanskrit literature, the biggest name is that of Kalidasa (5th century AD). Of his two epics, the longer Raghuvamsha describes the dynasty of Rama, and the shorter Kumarasambhava celebrates the wedding of Shiva and Parvati and their union in their lofty picturesque abode, "the divine souled Himalayas." His masterpiece is the play Shakuntala, a romantic tragicomedy involving a tenderhearted forest maiden and a king who then goes away and under a curse forgets her. But perhaps the most original and popular work of Kalidasa is the Meghaduta (The Cloud Messenger), in which a banished newlywed lover sights a likely cloud on the exhilarating first day of the monsoon and begs it to carry a message to his beloved wife pining in their fabled city of Alakapuri in the Himalayas. The first half of the poem gives an enchanting cloud's eyeview of the changing landscapes of central and north India, and the second half describes in sensuous and glittering detail the pining lady, still ravishing in her attenuation. Though he mainly wrote epics and plays, Kalidasa's genius was essentially lyrical. He delights constantly with his apt similes and he is the master of sweet elaboration of the softly unfolding sentiment. Many readers including Western orientalists have regarded him as the greatest Indian poet ever, and the one who expresses best the characteristic Indian sensibility. In colonial times, in proud patriotic counterassertion, he was often claimed by Indian scholars to be the Shakespeare of India.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote a marvellous humorous poem on Kalidasa. Can anyone find it and add it here? If it is in Bengali, please send it as you would pronounce it.

Add here

शीतं बहु बाधति ।

The cold hurts very much

by: Kedar Naphade, ksn2@lehigh.edu

सर्वे जानन्ति यत् भोजराज्ञः दरबारे अविद्यत् कविः कालिदासः । कदाचित् एकः परदेशियः पण्डितः भोजराज्ञै सन्देशः प्रक्षिप्तवान् । सन्देशे लिखितं, आगमिश्यामि अमुकदिवसे भवतः दरबारस्य पण्डितैः सह चर्चा विवादं च कर्तुं इति । तथा भोजरजा दरबारे अकथयत् एषः पण्डितः आगमिश्यति इति ।

Everybody knows that poet Kalidasa was in King Bhoj's court. Once a foreign scholar sent a message to King Bhoj. IT said, "I shall come on such and such date to debate and discuss with the scholars in your court". King Bhoj then entioned in his court that this scholar was going to come.

यस्मिन् दिवसे पण्डितः आगच्छति, तस्मिन् कालिदासः पालखीधारकस्य रूपं परिदधानः तस्य स्वागताय उपस्थितः अभवत् । न खलु जानाति पुण्डितः यत् कालिदासः एव सः । पालकःई स्कन्दयः वहन् निर्गतः कालिसासः पुण्डितेन सह । तस्मिन् काले शिशिस्रः अभवत् ऋतुः षितः च पवनः देहं अताडायत् इव । अवदत् पुण्डितः, शीटं बहु बाधति इति । चत्रुरः कालिदासः त्वरया एव पुनरवदत्
"न तथा बाधते शीतं यथा बाधति बाधते "

On the day the scholar arrived, Kalidasa disguised himself as a "pAlakhi" carrier and went to recieve him. The scholar did not know that he was indeed Kalidasa. Carrying the pAlakhI on his shoulders, Kalidasa set off with the scholar. It was winter that time and the cold wind was hitting the body. The scholar said, "The cold hurts very much," Clever Kalidas immediately retorted,

"Cold does not hurt as much as 'badhati' "

आत्मनेपदी खलु बाध् धतुः इति न विज्ञातं पुण्डितेन । अमन्यत सः, यदि एतस्मिन् राज्ये पालखीधारकाः अपि एतावत् जानन्ति संस्कृतं पुण्डितैः सह मेलः मम पराभवाय एव। तथा कालिदसं आज्ञापयत् न खलु इच्छामि एतस्मिन् राज्ये गन्तुं । गृहे गमिष्यामि। इति।

The scholar did not know that the verb "badh" was 'Atmanepadi' (and hence had used the wrong form bAdhati instead of the correct form bAdhate') He thought, if even the palakhicarriers in this kingdom know the language so well, then meeting with the scholars shall certainly lead to my defeat. then he ordered kalidasa, "i really do not want to go to this extremely cold place. we should go back home."
NOTE: Please tell me the appropriate verb for "send" and a word for PALAKHI in English as well as sanskrit.

चतुरस्य कालिदासस्य ।

Of the clever Kalidasa

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घोषितं कदाचित् भोजराज्ञा यदि कोऽपि कविः मम दरबारे नुतनं काव्यं पठति तर्हि ददामि तस्मै लक्षरुप्यकाणि इति । श्रुत्वा एतद् बहवः खलु आगताः कवयः दरबारे स्वकाव्यपठनं कर्तुं ।

(King Bhoj once proclaimed, “If any poet reads a new poem in my court, I shall give him One Lakh Rupees”. Having heard this indeed many poets thronged the palace in order to read their poetry.)

परन्तु दरबारे अविद्यन्त केचन विद्वानाः ये कं अपि काव्यं प्रथमश्रुत्यनन्तरं एव सम्पूर्णतया पुनरोक्तुं शक्ताः । इतरे च द्वीतीयपटःअनानन्तरं पुनरुक्तवन्ताः । अन्ये तृतीयपठनत् पुनरुक्तवन्ताः ।

(However, in the court there were several scholars who could re-recite a poem completely just after having listened to it once. Then there were others who could re-recite it after they had heard it twice, and yet others who could do it after the third reading.)

अतः यदा कोऽपि कविः आगतवान् स्वस्य नवकाव्यं पठितवान् केऽपि विद्वानाः अकथयन् न खलु नूतनं एतद् । पश्य, वयमपि एनं जानीमहे । ततः पुनरवदन् तद काव्यं । तदनन्तरं ये द्विपाटःइनः अभवन् तेऽपि तदेव अकथयन् अवदन् च काव्यं । तदनन्तरं तृपाठिनः तथैव अकुर्वन् । अतः न कोऽपि कविः प्राप्नोतुं शक्तः लक्षरुप्यकाणि ।

(So whenever any poet came and read his new poem, some scholars sad, this is not really new. see, we also know it. Then they recited the whole poem. then those who could remember things after they had heard it twice said the same thinf and recited the poem. Then those who remembered things after they had heard them thrice did the same thing. Hence no poet was able to claim the lakh rupees.)

कालिदसाय न खलु अरुच्यत एतद् । कंचित् नवकविं सः स्वकक्षे आनीतवान् तं एतद् सुभाशितं च ददानः ्

(Kalidasa didnt really like this. He took one poet to his room, and gave him the following subhAshita -)

स्वस्ति श्री भोजराजन् त्वमखिलभुवने धार्मिकः सत्यवक्ता पित्रा ते संगृहीता
नवनवतिमिता रत्नकोट्यो मदीयः । तांस्त्वं देहीति राजन् सकल बुधजनैर्ज्ञायते सत्यं
एतद् नो वा जानन्ति यत्तन्ममकृत्मपि नो देहि लक्षं ततो मे ॥

(O King Bhoj, let there be good ! You are the (greatest) just and true-speaker in the whole world. 99 Crores of precious stones belonging to me were taken by your father. Give them back t me, O king .. all the scholars in your court know that this is true. If they do not, then they do not know my poem either. Then give me the lakh !)

दरबारे कविः तत् काव्यं अपठत् । न खलु वक्तुं अशक्नुवन् केऽपि विद्वानाः यत जानन्ति तं काव्यं इति । अतः अप्राप्नोत् कविः लक्षरुप्यकाणि । चतुरः खलु कालिदासः ।

(The poet read this poem in the court. None of the scholars were able to say that they knew this poetry . So the poet got one lakh rupees. Kalidasa was indeed clever !)

A story on Kaalidaasa's name

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The following (far-fetched) story is told about the name of Kaalidaasa.
There was a learned and intelligent princess who said she will marry only the man who is able to defeat her in debate. Many tried and failed. In revenge, some of them got hold of a dim-wit and brought him to debate the princess. But they said that this man was currently observing a vow of silence and will debate in sign language. The princess interpreted the signs the dim-wit made in her own way and thought herself defeated. But the truth came out on the wedding day. The princess was angry and turned out her husband. In dejection he went to the Kaali temple to sacrifice himself. But Kaali stopped him and gave him the gift of 'Vaac'. When he returned home, the princess asked him "asti kaachid.h vaag.h?", to be intrpreted as "what do you have to say?" (see note below). The man then replied, reciting the Meghaduuta starting with "kashchid", RaghuvaMsha starting with "vaagarthau" and Kumaarasambhava starting "asti". Because he became a poet by the grace of Kaali, he became known as Kaalidaasa.
Note: the princess's question is the weak link in this story. "asti kashchid.h vaak.h?" is grammatically wrong (the genders dont agree).

The End

Notes to contributors

Search for hrule to separate the items in the above file. The file is directly loadable to ITRANS for devanagari printout of sanskrit portion. If you do not have ITRANS installed but if you have postscript printer, send a message on sanskrit@keshav.informix.com that you want a postscript file giving your email address at the end. Your contribution will be added, to this file, with credits. It may be useful to add following items:
3) Does anyone remember his samasyaapurtii on
????
????
??????? sopaana maarge karoti shabdaM
ThaaThaM ThaThaM ThaM ThaThaThaM Tha ThaM Thaa ???
Kalidasa completes first three lines knowing only the last line provided by the King. It describes that a woman was carrying a metal pot full of water, and it fell down on the stairs (sopaana) and made noise ThaaThaM .... . Can any one describe this in a story format?
4) A humorous poem by Ravindranath Tagore on Kalidasa will be interesting.
5) Stories of Kalidasa and Vikramaditya or Bhojaraja mostly in samasyaapurtii style. 7) Update Ganapathy's story about elephant/ankusha with quotations and different format.
8) Collect references on his work.
9) Anything else you can think of?
