

Exploring the Geographical Data of the *Meghadūta* reconstructing the route of the cloud.



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Introduction

The *Meghadūta* tells about a certain Yakṣa who was banished by his master Kubera from Alakā, city of the gods in the Himālayan mountains, for a period of one year after he was grossly neglectful of his duty. This cursed servant of Kubera, god of wealth, is thereby separated from his wife and lives for this period on the lofty hill of Rāma. The curse is especially heavy to bear because of this separation. He wishes to send his wife a message about his health and unchanged love for her and to encourage her to hold on through the rainy season. In his desperate state of mind, he asks an inanimate object, a cloud, a mixture of smoke, light, water and wind, to function as a messenger and bring the news to his beloved wife, hoping it would delight her heart. After the Yakṣa made a respectful salutation he proceeds with describing the route the cloud must take before it reaches the celestial city on the snow-peaked mountain of Kailāsa, close to the sacred lake Mānasa. This itinerary, from Rāmagiri located in central India to the mythical city in the Himālayan range is the subject of this thesis.

This poem of Kālidāsa is one of the most famous works of kāvya, which has its roots in ancient India and belongs to the genre of love poetry called *dūtakāvya* or *sandeśakāvya*. Although Kālidāsa was not the first to compose a ‘messenger’ poem, the tradition views his poem of the cloudmessenger epitomizing the genre of *dūtakāvya*. All the *sandeśakāvyas* are modelled after Kālidāsa’s and follow his metre, structure, size and narrative logic.¹ The *Meghadūta* is written in *mandākrāntā* metre, which means that each quarter of a verse (*pāda*) contains seventeen syllables, a form longer and more elaborate than other metres like the *anuṣṭubh* or *upendravajrā*.² It enables Kālidāsa to expand in more detail on imagery and sentiments and is therefore more suitable for delineating the mental state of both lovers, longing desperately for each other during their separation.³

The theme of the *Meghasandesa*, on love, separation and the desire for reunion can be traced back to the narrative of Rāma’s longing for his absent wife Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁴ The geography of the wanderings of Rāma in exile and the travel from Laṅkā back to the city of Ayodhyā is examined by Pargiter in an inciting article called *The Geography of Rāma’s Exile*⁵ which served as inspiration in the course of writing this thesis. The issues of *viraha* (‘separation’) and geography, modelled on the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, are not limited to Kālidāsa’s *Meghadūta*, for the grand landscapes described in the two epics are often used as background for the

¹ Bronner and Shulman 2006: 11-12.

² The *anuṣṭubh* metre has only eight syllables per quarter of a verse and the *upendravajrā* metre has in each of the four lines eleven syllables. These shorter metres are easier to read, translate and understand. Mirashi, V.V. 1969, p.151.

³ Mirashi 1969: 151.

⁴ When Sītā was abducted by Rāvaṇa and carried off in a flying chariot to Laṅkā, Rāma sends Hanumān as his messenger. Hanumān flies across the sea in search of Sītā and comes back with a token of Sītā, a hair ornament, and reports to Rāma about his meeting with her. Jacobson 2010: 115.

⁵ Pargiter, F.E. 1894. ‘The Geography of Rāma’s Exile’ In: *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, April: 231-264.

imaginative maps created in Indian *kāvya*. These maps are often very complex because the geographical, physical places are difficult to differentiate from the places that go beyond the geographical and are mythological or imaginary.⁶ Other difficulties are the fact that the same toponyms are found in various parts of the country and, not infrequently, different names are used for the same place. According to Mark Collins the latter could be due to either the Hindu love of synonyms or the result of Sanskritization of original Prakrit and other vernacular language names. It reflects a desire to incorporate places of local or regional sanctity into larger conceptions of pan-Indian sacred geography. The traditional element is another confusing phenomenon in geography. Authors seem to copy names of places from other authors without any regard for the topographical location or even existence of the places, rivers and mountains they mention. For centuries names can be handed down from one author to the other in this way, which makes the identification of the geographical data very complex and the dating and placing of the texts in a social or political context problematic.⁷

The landscape Kālidāsa describes in the narrative lyric is defined by the cultural, religious and political context of his time. Steven Hopkins calls this the poet's 'religio-geocultural *imaginaire*'. This means that (part of) the poem reflects the regional identity and the royal or sectarian patronage of Kālidāsa.⁸ Kālidāsa is likely to have lived in the modern district of Malwa, north of the Vindhyan range, with Ujjain (Ujjayinī) as its headquarters. This is determined by several of his works but mainly by the *Meghadūta*, considering the details with which he describes this area.

Kālidāsa's work bears a general testimony to a period characterized by a prosperous and peaceful culture, where art and literature was flourishing. This period of wealth and political stability comprises 'India's Golden Age', or the period of the Gupta-Vākāṭaka dynasty. According to Indian legends Kālidāsa enjoyed royal patronage under a Vikramāditya. This Vikramāditya is most probably Candragupta II, who reigned circa AD 380-415.⁹ Mirashi dates Kālidāsa in the period AD 350 to 450, the period when the Gupta-Vākāṭaka dynasty ruled the northern part of India. Candragupta II made Ujjayinī his second capital and Kālidāsa most probably lived there at the royal court of this Vikramāditya.¹⁰

In the *pūrvamegha*, the first part of the poem, where the Yakṣa explains in detail the imaginary journey of the cloud, Kālidāsa could not drift away into his own fantasy because a great deal of the route surrounding his home country – Ujjayinī on the Malwa plain in modern Madhya Pradesh – actually existed. As will be explained more thoroughly in Part I, the towns and villages, rivers and mountains, caves and temples the messenger passes over were familiar to the people living in Kālidāsa's time. When the *uttaramegha* begins, which contains the content and delivery of the message to the beloved, the narrative had already entered a mythological world. For the

⁶ Pollock 2003: 103.

⁷ Collins 1907: 5-8.

⁸ Hopkins 2004: 29.

⁹ Dasgupta and De 1977: 124-125.

¹⁰ Mirashi 1969: 29.

geographical subject of my thesis the *pūrvamegha* is the most important part and contains the verses 1-63 of the *Meghadūta*.¹¹

The central question of this thesis is:

Is there a historical geography underlying the route of the cloud in the *Meghadūta*?

The hypothesis I propose here is that an implicit historical geography underlies the first part of the route, from Rāmagiri to Daśapura, while the second part of the cloud's itinerary is modelled on myths of the great epics, with an emphasis on the grand pilgrimage narrated in the *Mahābhārata*. The thesis presents the results of a literature research on the geographical data in the *Meghadūta*. This study reflects my efforts and the findings of my research on identifying the topographical descriptions of the poem, introduced by Kālidāsa. Although the topic has been studied by several scholars in the past, recent literature will throw new light on some of the identifications. The method of approach is an analysis of those verses of the *pūrvamegha*, which contain descriptions of rivers, mountains, villages, lakes and forests. The well known commentators of the *Meghadūta*, Vallabhadeva (tenth century AD) and Mallinātha (fourteenth century AD) are consulted for indications or suggestions of identification of the geographical data in each verse. Research of secondary historical, geographical/topographical and mythological literature was conducted in order to reconstruct the route in its specific historical period and to explore the ways in which this poem reflects the author's religious and political milieu.¹²

In my analysis, I divided the *pūrvamegha* into two sections. The first section comprises Kālidāsa's 'religio-geocultural *imaginaire*' and the second his 'mythological *imaginaire*.' The dissertation is structured according to this division and continues after this introduction with a description of the route from Rāmagiri to Daśapura (verse 1-47¹³), which I think belongs to the 'religio-geocultural *imaginaire*' of Kālidāsa. The second section of the dissertation focuses on the part of the itinerary when the cloud reaches the region of Brahmāvarta and proceeds towards the Himalāyan range up to the city of Alakā (verse 48-63). From Brahmāvarta onwards the route is mostly based on mythological themes and therefore I call it the 'mythological *imaginaire*' of Kālidāsa. It seems that Kālidāsa was less familiar with this area and therefore less detailed in geographically depicting it.

The imaginative journey on which the cloud is sent can be perceived as a pilgrimage taken on behalf of the Yakṣa. He is instructed to visit, besides places with political importance, sacred spots or *tīrthas*. A *tīrtha* is a 'crossing place' being a place particularly associated with water, one

¹¹ In this thesis I use Hultzsch's edition of the *Meghadūta* with Vallabhadeva's commentary. The numbering of verses can be different in other editions of the *Meghadūta*. For the translation and transliteration I use Edgerton's publication of 'Kālidāsa – The Cloud Messenger', unless otherwise mentioned.

¹² A difficulty in this study is circular argumentation, for it has a tendency to assume what it is attempting to prove, which means that the identification of a place is easily accepted if it suits well in the course of the cloud. I tried to avoid this logical fallacy as much as possible.

¹³ See Appendix A for the list with the geographical data of the *Meghadūta*, including verse numbers according to Hultzsch's edition.

can here safely cross over to the far shore of a river or to cross over the far shore of the world of heaven.¹⁴ It can be translated as ‘sacred space,’ ‘pilgrimage place,’ and ‘salvific space,’ a place where practical and religious goals, such as health, wealth, rebirth in heaven and final release from earthly existence (*mokṣa*, ‘salvation’), can be realized.¹⁵ According to Diana Eck, this ‘place-oriented-cultus’ goes back to non-Vedic traditions and became related to (Vedic-) sacrifice. While myths associated with holy places change in the course of time, pilgrims continue to visit *tīrthas* and pay their respect to the deity of the place.¹⁶ While Kurukṣetra is especially known for the great battle between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, narrated in the *Mahābhārata*, by mentioning Brahmāvarta, Kālidāsa seems to emphasize the *tīrthā* as a site where great Vedic rituals were performed, possibly in order to emphasize the holiness of the region. Kurukṣetra can be considered the starting point of Kālidāsa’s imaginary journey mainly based on the grand pilgrimage according to the *Mahābhārata*, and this second part describes various myths of the great epic in order to emphasize the peculiarity of each location the cloud is instructed to visit.

After ‘travelling’ through the two sections, containing the ‘religio-geocultural *imaginaire*’ and the ‘mythological *imaginaire*’ of Kālidāsa, a brief conclusion will be the final ‘destination’ of this dissertation.

मार्गं तावच्छृणु कथयतस्त्वत्प्रयाणानुकूलं संदेशं मे तदनु जलद श्रोष्यसि श्रोत्रपेयम्
‘first hear from me the path suited to your journey as I describe it to you, and then, O cloud, you will hear my message, agreeable to the ear.’¹⁷

¹⁴ Eck 1981: 323.

¹⁵ Jacobsen 2009: 381.

¹⁶ Eck 1981: 323, 328.

¹⁷ *mārgam tāvac chṛṇu kathayatas tvatprayāṇānurūpam saṁdeśam me tadanu jalada śroṣyasi śrotrapeyam* | MeD 13
Translated by Kale 1969: 28.

PART I: Kālidāsa 's religio- geocultural *imaginaire*: The itinerary of the cloud from Rāmagiri to Daśapura.

Introduction

'The rains now at hand, seeking to sustain the life of his beloved,
He thought to induce that cloud to carry her news of his welfare;
With fresh kutaja blooms he tendered it the guest-offering
And with loving heart spoke affectionate words of welcome.'¹⁸

'Thou art a shelter for the burning, the distressed; so, Cloud, to my dear one
Bear a message from me, lonely by Kubera's displeasure.
Go to Alakā, home of the yakṣas-lords; its palaces gleam
With moonlight from the head of Śiva, who dwells in an outlying park.'¹⁹

'As a favoring breeze drives thee ever slowly forward,
And thy companion the chataka warbles sweetly here on the left,
Surely the hen-cranes, for the intimacy that can make them fertile,
Will attend, forming a garland in the air; in thee their eyes rejoice.'²⁰

These are three of the first verses of Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta*. The narrative theme used here in context of the monsoon is that of *viraha*, the anguish of separation. It is a theme frequently used in art and literature when focusing on *Śrāvaṇa* or the other three months of the rainy season. Symbolic connections between animals and birds, plants and landscapes that characterize the time of the monsoon are beautifully illustrated in poems like the *Meghadūta*. Chātaka-birds, mentioned in the verse above, are pied crested cuckoos who have flown all the way from Africa ahead of the monsoon and are recognized as an omen for the rain to come.²¹

The monsoon is a very exciting period of the year for Indian people. At the end of the hot and dry season they look forward to refresh, revive, and to the prospect of renewal. It is not just an exciting period, the monsoon has an enormous impact on the lives of the Indian people, past and present. It does and has dictated many practical, economic and religious aspects of Indian life and because of this, it figures prominently in works of culture. Much of the Indian art, music and literature is concerned with this season. While important, the monsoon evokes a certain

¹⁸ *Pratyāsanne nabhasi dayitājīvitaālambanaarthī
jīmūtena svakūśala mayīm hārayiṣyan pravṛttim |
sa pratyagraiḥ kuṭajakusumaiḥ kalpitaārgbhāya tasmai
prītaḥ prīti pramukha vacanaṃ svāgataṃ vyājahāra | |4 |*

¹⁹ *saṃtaptānāṃ tvam asi śaraṇaṃ tat payoda priyāyāḥ
saṃdeśaṃ me hara dhanapatikrodhavi śeṣitasya
gantavyā te vasatir alakā nāma yakṣeśvarāṇāṃ
bāyodyānasthitahara śiraścandrikādhautaharmyā | |7 |*

²⁰ *mandaṃ-mandaṃ nudati pavanaś cānukūlo yathā tvāṃ
vāmaś ca ayaṃ nadati madhuraṃ cātakas toyagṛdhnuḥ |
garbhādhnakṣamaparicayān nūnam ābaddhamālāḥ
seviṣyante nayanasubhagaṃ khe bhavantaṃ balākāḥ | |10 |*

²¹ Singh 1987: 37.

ambivalence since it is associated not only with terms such as ‘refreshment’, ‘revival’ and ‘renewal’ but also notions of ‘destruction’, ‘danger’ and ‘divine absence’. In the Hindu calendar the rains play an important role in dictating ritual and social events which often occur at the end of the monsoon.²² Just before the monsoon sets in, at the end of the month *Āṣāḍha*, Viṣṇu is “put to sleep” and will ritually be “woken up” after four months, marking the end of the rainy season. Because the other gods retire with Viṣṇu during this period, the earth is in the power of demons and it is the time of world destruction. In order to reverse the cosmic order and to reconcile with the gods, this period of four months is marked by an elaborate cycle of festivals and other observances. Udayagiri is one of the places mentioned in the *Meghadūta* and it is an important site for celebrating *varṣāmāsavrata*, or rainy season observance. The structural feature and iconography of Udayagiri indicate its use as a site for ritual practices through which the seasonal sleeping and waking of Viṣṇu was enacted.²³

With the rains now at hand, and Viṣṇu asleep on the serpent Ananta, Kālidāsa continues his poem and introduces the Yakṣa. It is time to undertake the grand journey.²⁴

Rāmagiri

‘A Yakṣa, who had neglected his duties, had lost his powers by his master’s curse – heavy to bear, since he had to live separated from his beloved for one year; he took up his abode in the hermitages on Rāmagiri, where the trees (spread) a cooling shade and where the waters were hallowed by the bathing of Janaka’s daughter.’²⁵

‘After having embraced that lofty hill, you, (O cloud), should take leave of your dear friend that, on its slopes, is marked by Raghupati’s footprints, venerated by mankind; every time when you and he meet, shedding of warm (tear)drops born from long separation betrays his affection.’²⁶

There has been debate over the years as to which hill Kālidāsa referred to when writing this poem since the description above may apply to any hill on which Rāma resided during his exile. Most scholars, including Wilson, Mirashi and more recently Bakker identify Rāmagiri with Ramtek, located in eastern Maharashtra, forty-five km north of the city of Nagpur.

²² Zimmermann 1987: 53-54.

²³ Willis 2009: 10, 31.

²⁴ See Appendix B and C for a (detailed) map, which shows the itinerary of the cloud from Rāmagiri to Daśapura.

²⁵ *kaścīc kāntāvīrahaguruṇā svādhikārapramattaḥ*
śāpenāstamgamitamahimā varṣabhogyeṇa bhartuḥ
yakṣaś cakre janakatanayāsnānapuṇyodakeṣu
snigdhačchāyātaruṣu vasatiṃ rāmagiryāśrameṣu | 1 | Translation by Bakker 1997: 87.

²⁶ *āpṛcchasva priyasakham amuṃ tuṅgam āliṅgya śailaṃ*
vandyaīḥ puṃsām raghupatipadair aṅkitaṃ mekhalāsu
kāle-kāle bhavati bhavatā yasya saṃyogam etya
snehavyaktiś ciravirahajaṃ muñcato bāṣpaṃ uṣṇam | 9 | Translation by Bakker 1997: 87.

The commentator Vallabhadeva identifies Rāmagiri with Citrakūṭa; *kaścid yakṣaḥ puṇyajano rāmagiryāśrameṣu citrakūṭācalatapovaneṣu vasatiṃ cakre vyadhāt* ‘A certain yakṣa, belonging to a class of supernatural beings, had made his abode in hermitages on the Rāmagiri, [situated] in a grove – in which religious austerities are performed – on Citrakūṭa.’ He further adds that ‘in this case Rāmagiri is Citrakūṭa, rather than Ṛṣyamūka, for Sīta did not dwell there.’²⁷ Vallabhadeva refers here to the last *pāda* saying that ‘the waters were hallowed by the bathing of Janaka’s daughter (i.e. Sīta).’ Mallinātha also situates Rāmagiri at Citrakūṭa; *rāmagireścitrakūṭasyāśrameṣu vasatiṃ* ‘He took up his abode in the hermitages on the Rāmagiri of Citrakūṭa.’ It is possible that both commentators identified Rāmagiri with Citrakūṭa, in the Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh, by following the description of the prominent hill of Rāma in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This position as a starting point of the route does not, however, coincide with the description given in the poem and should be rejected.

Wilson argues that although the Rāmagiri of Citrakūṭa was the most celebrated residence of the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and is still a place of sanctity and pilgrimage, the setting of the scene of the *Meghadūta* requires a different identification. Wilson was the first to identify Rāmagiri as Ramtek, on the grounds that this sacred place is both connected with Rāma and answers the geographical description in the poem. Indeed, Ramtek is simply a Marathi equivalent of the Sanskrit Rāmagiri, Wilson explains in his work.²⁸

Mirashi follows Wilson’s earlier identification. Ramtek has for many centuries been famous as a sacred place. It abounds with shrines dedicated to Rāma and his associates and it has a *kuṇḍa* or pond which is believed to be the place of Sīta’s ablutions. The *Ṛddhapur Plates* of the Vākāṭaka dowager queen Prabhāvatīguptā – daughter of Gupta emperor Candragupta II or Vikramāditya – contains one of the earliest references to Rāmagiri as a tīrtha, saying *rāmagirisvāminaḥ pādāmūlāt* (CII V, 35).²⁹ She declares here that her charters were issued from the ‘soles of the feet (*pādāmūla*) of the Lord of Rāmagiri.’ Two other fifth-century inscriptions refer explicitly to a ‘Rāmagiri’ namely the *Mandhal Plates* of Pṛthivīṣeṇa II and the not yet published inscription of Pravarasena/ Prabhāvatīguptā, found in Miragaon. The *Poonā Plates* of Prabhāvatīguptā tells that the grant had first to be offered to the ‘soles of the feet of Bhagavat’, the Lord of Rāmagiri (CII, V 7).³⁰

The thirteenth century Yādava Inscription, of the time of Rāmacandra, found in the temple of Lakṣmaṇa, describes the various temples and tīrthas on the hill and in its vicinity. It shows that the place maintained its holiness since the age of the Vākāṭakas.³¹ The hill is believed to have

²⁷ *rāmagirir atra citrakūṭaḥ| na tu ṛṣyamūkaḥ| tatra sītāyā vāsābhāvāt* | Hultzsch 1911: 2. See also Mirashi 1960: 13.

²⁸ Wilson 1961: 1.

²⁹ Mirashi 1960: 17.

³⁰ Bakker 2007: 76.

³¹ Mirashi 1960: 17.

received its name after Rāma began to dwell on it when he was asked to punish Śambūka.³² The thirteenth century Yādava Inscription, or Ramtek Stone Inscription, gives a local version of the story of Śambūka in the *Rāmāyaṇa*: Rāma had already been crowned king in Ayodhyā when he heard about the death of a Brahmin caused by someone who abused the dharma. He found out that a *śūdra*, named Śambūka, was practicing asceticism on the slope of the Śaivala mountain³³ situated to the south of the Vindhya. This practice is forbidden for *śūdras* and therefore Śambūka violated social hierarchy. Rāma encountered the ascetic on Śaivala mountain – identified with Ramtek hill, and can therefore be interpreted with Rāmagiri – and beheaded him. The Ramtek Stone Inscription associates the *śūdra* with a local deity named Dhūmrākṣa. It is explained that immediately after Śambūka was killed he turned into a *Śivaliṅga*. It is still possible to visit and worship this *liṅga* at the Dhūmrēśvara Temple on the southern plateau of this hill.³⁴ Besides this description it also mentions the tradition that the mountain had been ‘touched by the lotus-feet of the illustrious Rāma (v.83)³⁵, which echoes Kālidāsa’s description of the hill.

Although footprints have not been found on this hill, a tablet containing a pair of footprints was discovered in the Nagardhan area, in the vicinity of Ramtek. According to Bakker this footprint icon may represent a miniature version of the sanctuary at the top of the hill.³⁶ Viṣṇu Trivikrama is especially known for leaving a footprint behind and this idea was eventually extended to other incarnations of Viṣṇu, of which the footprints of Rāma on the Rāmagiri is an example.³⁷ Bakker writes: “(...)the idea of visible traces on earth left by the feet of one of god’s manifestations, which arises within Hinduism during the early centuries of our era, led to a wide spread of sanctuaries and temples enshrining a pair of footprints – mainly, but not exclusively of Viṣṇu – all over the Indianized world of the fifth century.”³⁸ Kālidāsa shows with verse nine of the *Meghadūta* that he was fully aware of this tradition, by writing *raghupatipadair aikitaṃ mekhalāsu* ‘on its slopes,[it] is marked by Raghupati’s footprints.’³⁹

While waiting in despair on the Rāmagiri for the curse to pass, the Yakṣa, eager to see his spouse, tries to make a picture resembling his beautiful and beloved wife. He has no other drawing material at hand than a stone-slab with mineral dyes (*dhātu*).⁴⁰ This mineral turns the earth into a red colour and suits the other name for Ramtek Hill, given by Yādava king

³² Mirashi 1960: 18.

³³ Śaivala mountain is identified with Ramtek Hill by Dey 1927: 171, and accepted by Bakker (2007: 75).

³⁴ Bakker 2007: 74-75

³⁵ Ibid: 76.

³⁶ Bakker 1997: 65. Bakker has accomplished extensively elaborated research on Rāmagiri and for this reason I would like to refer to his publications on Ramtek Hill and the epigraphical records in connection with it.

³⁷ Bakker 2007: 78. A 5th century image of Viṣṇu Trivikrama still stands on top of the Rāmagiri. It shows that the Vakāṭakas were acquainted with Viṣṇu’s most important feature, his avatāras. With his descents Viṣṇu preserves and protects the universe.

³⁸ Bakker 1991: 25.

³⁹ Raghupati means ‘lord of the Raghus’ which is another name for Rāma.

⁴⁰ *Megh* 102.

Rāmachandra in the previously mentioned Ramtek Stone Inscription, namely ‘Sindūragiri’.⁴¹ *Sindūra* means ‘red lead’ or ‘vermilion’.⁴² According to the myth, Narasiṃha – also worshipped on Ramtek hill, the Man-Lion *avatāra* of Viṣṇu – had come to this hill to kill the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu to prevent him from murdering Lord Viṣṇu himself. This heroic but bloody act turns the earth of the mound red and it therefore receives its name ‘Sindūragiri’. On the Rāmagiri and its surroundings, the rocks, when broken, are bright red in colour. Many images found in this area are made out of red sandstone, which makes its name Sindūragiri very suitable.⁴³

This combination of the epigraph on Ramtek Hill, the Vākāṭaka-inscriptions, the red sandstone and the itinerary of the cloud in Kālidāsa’s *Meghadūta* makes Ramtek Hill the most plausible identification with the Rāmagiri mentioned in the poem.

It is most likely that Kālidāsa visited the political capital of the Vākāṭakas or even stayed there while he travelled to Vidarbha. This royal residence – was located at Nandivardhana, only about 5km from the Rāmagiri.⁴⁴ Mirashi suggests that Kālidāsa appears to have composed his *Meghadūta* in this area. At least he must have known the state sanctuary of the Vākāṭaka dynasty very well and therefore chose this hill of Rāma as the starting point of the itinerary in the *Meghadūta*.

The land of Māla

‘As thou art drunk by the eyes of country-women, unskilled in eyebrow-play
And moist with affection (they think the fruit of plowing depends on thee),
Mount thou the high plain fragrant from fresh furrowing of the plowshare;
Afterwards, moving more lightly, drift on a short space northward.’⁴⁵

The Yakṣa summoned the cloud to go to the high plain [*i.e.* *kṣetram mālaṃ* ‘land of Māla’]. Where this land of Māla is situated topographically is difficult and therefore the opinions of scholars vary widely.

Vallabhadheva writes in his commentary *mālam uḍḍāraṃ kṣetraṃ* ‘land of Māla is an alluvial plateau’ and Mallinātha gives a similar comment saying *mālaṃ mālakhyam kṣetraṃ śailaprāyam unnatasthalam* which I translate as ‘the land of Māla is named Māla [for] the ground/soil is elevated like a hill.’ This interpretation was not only followed by Edgerton, for he translated

⁴¹ Upadhyaya 1968: 72.

⁴² translation of *Sindūra* according to Monier-Williams Sanskrit Dictionary.

⁴³ Rajan 1989: 298.

⁴⁴ Mirashi 1964: 138-139.

⁴⁵ *tvayy āyattam kṣīphalam iti bhrūvilāsānabhijñaiḥ
prītisnigdhair janapadavadhūlocanaiḥ pīyamānaḥ |
sadyaḥsīrotkaṣaṇasurabhi kṣetram āruhya mālam
kiṃcit paścāt vraja laghugatir bhūya evottareṇa ||16||*

kṣetram mālam with ‘high plain’, but also by Kale. Wilson, on the other hand, does not portray the land of Māla as a kind of landscape but as a particular place or region. According to him, in the next verse the cloud is to reach mount Āmrakūṭa, which for Wilson proves that Māla must be in vicinity of Ratanpur, in the northern part of Chhattisgarh. The land of Māla is also recognized by many scholars as ‘the land of the Mālavas’ and they identify it with the district Malwa. Sircar does not agree with this identification. He argues that the land of Mālavas was known as Malwa only since medieval times. Malwa was known to be divided into west- and eastern Malwa. In the ancient period, the eastern part of this territory was called Daśārṇa which has its capital at the city of Vidiśā. The Avanti country, also in Madhya Pradesh, had Ujjayinī as its headquarters on the banks of the Sivrā river and was situated in the western part of Malwa.⁴⁶ It was only when the Paramāras – known as the lords of Mālava – occupied the territory in the latter half of the tenth century, that it became popular as the name of Malwa.⁴⁷

Therefore, the region to which the cloud is summoned to go was not yet known as the ‘land of the Mālavas’ or (eastern) Malwa during Kālidāsa’s time. Consequently, I take the description of the ‘land of Māla’ as the ‘plateau-land’, describing the nature or landscape of the area the cloud is about to discover. This coincides with Mirashi’s identification of the land of Māla with tableland Sātpuḍā, just near Ramtek. According to him a stone inscription found at Roṇ identifies Sātpuḍā⁴⁸, southern part of the Vindhya range, with the Māla country.⁴⁹

In addition to the interpretation of the land of Māla, there has also been some debate regarding how best to translate *kiṃcit paścāt* in the last pada of the aforementioned verse. Edgerton translates this *pāda* with ‘afterwards, moving more lightly, drift on a short space northward’ while Kale writes ‘[then] having travelled a little westward, proceed again in the northerly direction with a quickened pace.’ Also Wilson translates *paścāt*⁵⁰ with ‘west’ in the following interpretation ‘Thence sailing north, and veering to the west, On Āmrakūṭa’s lofty ridges rest.’⁵¹ Wilson’s interpretation cannot be correct, since he identifies the next destination of Āmrakūṭa with Amarakaṅṭaka, which is not situated north-west of Ramtek and not situated north-west of Ratanpur (his identification of the land of Māla). I follow Mallinātha’s translation of *kiṃcit paścāt*. According to Mallinātha’s commentary there was no direct reason why the cloud should turn west and he therefore translates *kiṃcit paścāt* with ‘[move again]after a little while [northward]’⁵² Hultsch follows Mallinātha as well but gives another reading for the *pāda* altogether: *kiṃcit paścāt pravalaya gatiṃ bhūya evottareṇa* which he translates as ‘turn the

⁴⁶ Sircar 1971: 205-207.

⁴⁷ Ibid: 206-211.

⁴⁸ Sātpuḍā means ‘related to the Satpura’ (translation by Bakker).

⁴⁹ The inscription states that “Āchugi II, a feudatory of the later Chālukyas of Kalyānī, defeated the lord of Ḍāhala (i.e., the contemporary Kalachuri king ruling at Tripuri near Jabalpur) after conquering the Māla country”. Mirashi 1960: 15-16.

⁵⁰ *paścāt* according to Monier-Williams Dictionary means ‘from or in the west’, ‘westwards’, ‘afterwards’, ‘hereafter.’

⁵¹ Wilson 1961: 16.

⁵² Nandargikar 1979: 22.

course, after a short while, again towards the north.’⁵³ Kale explains his interpretation by arguing that the translation of *bhūyas* (‘again’) becomes meaningless if the direction of the course had not been changed to the west before returning to the northerly course again.⁵⁴ I reject the reading and interpretation of both Hultzsich and Kale, for it would only be appropriate after reaching Amaraṅṅaka, because, as will be explained, the itinerary will only then turn westwards to reach subsequent places.

The mountain Āmrakūṭa

‘When thy showers have fully quenched its forest fires, Mount Mango-peak
Will hold thee, weary with journeying, on its crown;
Remembering former favors, not even a churl would turn his face
From a friend who seeks asylum. How then could one so lofty?’⁵⁵

This is what the Yakṣa subsequently tells his messenger. Āmrakūṭa – here translated with Mount Mango-peak – has generally been identified with the mountain Amaraṅṅaka, which is a part of the Mekhala hills, on the eastern part of the Vindhya mountains.⁵⁶ While the commentators Vallabhadeva and Mallinātha do not give any indication as to the geographical interpretation of Āmrakūṭa, Wilson and Kale are two of the prominent scholars who seem to be confident with the identification of Āmrakūṭa with Amaraṅṅaka. According to Kale Amaraṅṅaka or ‘the peak of the immortals’ is a corrupt form of Āmrakūṭa.⁵⁷ Wilson argues: “(...) it was necessary for the cloud to begin the tour by travelling towards the east, in order to get round the lofty hills which in a manner form the eastern boundary of the Vindhya chain. It would otherwise have been requisite to have taken it across the most inaccessible part of those mountains, where the poet would not have accompanied it; and which would also have offended some peculiar notions entertained by the Hindus of the Vindhya hills.”⁵⁸

The mountain Amaraṅṅaka connects the Vindhyas with the mountain range of the Satpura and it is the natural boundary between North and South India.⁵⁹ The name Āmrakūṭa means ‘whose summit is [surrounded] with mango-trees.’⁶⁰ Amaraṅṅaka is surrounded mostly by bamboo-forests but also banana and mango gardens are to be found in the vicinity of this mountain.⁶¹ It is not, However, a specific species connected solely to North India. India has wild and cultivated

⁵³ Hultzsich 1911: 92.

⁵⁴ Kale 1969: 65.

⁵⁵ *tvām āsāraprasāmitavanopaplavaṃ sādhu mūrdhnā
vakṣyaty adhvaśramaparigataṃ sānumān āmrakūṭaḥ |
na kṣudro spi prathamasukṛtāpekṣayā saṃśrayāya
prāpte mitre bhavati vimukhaḥ kiṃ punar yas tathoccaiḥ | | 17 | |*

⁵⁶ Kale 1969: 36; Wilson 1961: 15; Nandargikar 1979: 22 [notes]; Bhattacharyya 1977: 76; Rajan 1989: 283; Dey 1927: 4; Law 1954: 303.

⁵⁷ Kale 1969: 36. Translation of *Amaraṅṅaka* according to Monier-Williams Sanskrit Dictionary.

⁵⁸ Wilson 1961: 15.

⁵⁹ Bhattacharyya 1977: 76-77.

⁶⁰ Translation of *Āmrakūṭa* according to Cappeller Sanskrit-Dictionary.

⁶¹ Neuß 2007: 55.

mango trees (*Mangifera Indica*) all over the country and therefore mango is the national fruit of India.⁶²

Although most scholars agree with the identification of Āmrakūṭa with Amarakaṇṭaka, its position in relation to the route of the cloud is extraordinary. Looking at the map (appendix C), we notice that it is situated at some distance to the north-east, when leaving Ramtek, while the *Meghadūta* does not mention an eastern direction in its description. According to Mirashi the identification with Amarakaṇṭaka is questionable because it does not lie on the way to Vidiśa and its ancient name was Mekhala and not Āmrakūṭa.⁶³ Further, Mirashi translated *kiṃcit paścāt* (discussed in the previous paragraph), with ‘west’ or ‘westwards’ and uses this translation to support his rejection of Amarakaṇṭaka, this hill is north-east of Ramtek rather than north-west. Mirashi identifies Āmrakūṭa with a hill north of the town Amarwāḍā.⁶⁴

Although I admit the peculiar position of Amarakaṇṭaka, to the east of Rāmagiri, with the (seemingly) obscure description of this part of the itinerary, I do think that there is sufficient justification to identify Āmrakūṭa with Amarakaṇṭaka. As we will notice, Kālidāsa mentions in his work places of religious and political interest of his time. Amarakaṇṭaka was already a sacred hill during Kālidāsa’s age, and it still is. According to Neuß it is believed to be the oldest of all the pilgrimage sites or *tīrthas* in India.⁶⁵ In the vicinity of Amarakaṇṭaka there are many holy places and a number of rivers have their source at this hill. One of these rivers is the Revā — now called the Narmadā— and this river is, besides the Ganges and the Yamunā, one of the most sacred rivers of India.⁶⁶ The river is also called *Mekhalasutā*, ‘daughter of the Mekhala’, in the *Padma Purāṇa* (ch.VI).⁶⁷ Other important places of pilgrimage on the Amarakaṇṭaka are the the footprints of the Pandu-prince Bhīma, the birthplace of the river Son, and the waterfall of Kapildhārā.⁶⁸ The waterfall is said to be the first fall of the Narmadā from Amarakaṇṭaka and is seen as a very auspicious place, a bath at this site is believed to be a hundred times more beneficial than in Kurukṣetra.⁶⁹ According to Dey, Amarakaṇṭaka is recommended in the *Viṣṇu-Saṃhitā* (Ch.75) especially for performing the *Śrāddha* ceremony.⁷⁰ If this ceremony is performed according to the prescribed rites and carried out by someone who is pure, exercising self-restraint, the person in question ‘liberates his seven ascendants and descendants combined

⁶² www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mangifera_indica, 10th of Nov.2011.

⁶³ Mirashi 1960: 16.

⁶⁴ Ibid. It strikes me that Mirashi rejects the identification of Rāmagiri with Rāmagaḍh by positioning the latter to the location of Amarakaṇṭaka: “Still, its identification with Rāmagiri appears to us unacceptable; for Rāmagaḍh is to the north-east of Amarakaṇṭaka (supposing it to be identical with Āmrakūṭa).” Mirashi 1969:152.

⁶⁵ Neuß: 2007: 53.

⁶⁶ Neuß: 2007: 51.

⁶⁷ Law 1954: 303.

⁶⁸ Glasenapp 1928: 43.

⁶⁹ Kantawala 1964: 299.

⁷⁰ Dey 1927: 4. ‘A *Śrāddha* ceremony is a ceremony in honour and for the benefit of dead relatives.[...] It is an act of reverential homage to a deceased person performed by relatives, and is moreover supposed to supply the dead with strengthening nutriment after the performance of the previous funeral ceremonies has endowed them with ethereal bodies’. Translation of *Śrāddha* according to Monier-Williams Sanskrit Dictionary.

and after his death he enjoys celestial pleasures and is waited upon *siddhas*⁷¹ and *cāraṇas*⁷² in company of nymphs for a period of 60,000 years.⁷³

This shows that the hill is considered very sacred, it has important religious significance to the Hindu-pilgrims. With regard to the religio-geocultural *imaginaire* of Kālidāsa, in writing this poem, he may have imagined visiting this sacred spot himself, while travelling to or from the royal court at Nandivardhana, close to Ramtek. It might very well be possible that he travelled along the traderoute, which connects Amaraṅṭaka, located between two trading towns namely Malhār and Bilaspur, to Vidiśā.⁷⁴ I also agree with Wilson's explanation that, given the difficulty of crossing the Vindhya and the Satpura mountains, it is most likely that Kālidāsa decided to have the cloud travel around these mountains and then let it rest at the prominent mountain of Amaraṅṭaka, the birthplace of the river Narmadā.

The river Revā at the foot of the Vindhya Mountains

'Pause on that mount, in whose bowers the foresters' girls take their pleasure;
Let fall a shower; then travel the way beyond with quickening speed.
Outspread at the jagged foot of the Vindhya Mount thou shalt see Reva-river,
In channels like ash laid in furrow streaks on an elephant's frame.'⁷⁵

After the cloud had its rest at 'Mount Mango-peak', it is pushed by the wind towards the river Revā – unanimously identified with the Narmadā – and must have had a magnificent view over the Narmadā valley. The identification with the Narmadā was already known to Vallabhadeva and Mallinātha, for the latter remarks: *revā tu narmadā somodbhavā mekalakanyakā* | 'The Revā is the Narmadā, the source of soma, the daughter of the Mekala.'⁷⁶ After its rise at the Amaraṅṭaka, the river flows between massive rock formations, which are called the Vindhya⁷⁷ and Satpura range, mentioned earlier, and they form the natural boundary between North and South India. It is the fifth largest Indian stream, which traverses the Central Plains before it joins the Arabian sea in the Gujarat Coastal plain. As is written above, the Narmadā is one of the

⁷¹'*Siddhas* are believed to be great saints who belong to a class of semi-divine beings. They contain supernatural power and are skilled in magic art.' Translation of *Siddha* according to Cappeller Sanskrit Dictionary.

⁷² A *cāraṇa* is a female celestial singer. Translation of *Cāraṇa* according to Monier-Williams Sanskrit Dictionary.

⁷³ Kantawala 1964: 299.

⁷⁴ Nauß 2007: 54.

⁷⁵ *sthivā tasmin vana caravadhūbhuktakuñje muhūrtaṃ*

toyotsargadrutataragatis tatparaṃ vartma tīrṇaḥ |

revāṃ drakṣyasi upalaviṣame vindhyapāde viśīrṇāṃ

bhakticchedair iva viracitāṃ bhūtim aṅge gajasya | | 19 | |

⁷⁶ my own translation. The Narmadā is believed to be descended from the moon as the source of the celestial nectar.

Translation *somodbhavā* according to Monier-Williams Dictionary.

⁷⁷ Kālidāsa mentions the Vindhya regularly in the *Raghuvamśa* (VI. 61; XII. 31; XIV. 8; XVI. 31).

holiest rivers of India and hosts many sacred places (*tīrthas*) on its riverbank. The majority of temples along the Narmadā riverbank are of Śaiva affiliation.⁷⁸

The cloud is subsequently requested to proceed on, having the bees, the deer and the elephants showing its path, while peacocks cries are the words of welcome addressed to the cloud when it enters the Daśārṇa country.

Daśārṇa and its capital Vidiśā on the Vetravatī

‘Ketakas bursting with white bud-needles will glow in the park-hedges of the Daśārṇas;
In their village shrines, house-crows will fill the trees with their new nests;
Their rose-apple groves will be tawny with ripe fruit at thy approach;
They will be hosts to haṃsā-birds that tarry for a few days.’⁷⁹

The *haṃsā*-birds or geese are accompanying the cloud messenger on its way to the Himālaya. They migrate on a yearly basis to lake Mānasa out of necessity for food and breeding. The name Daśārṇa means ‘ten (river-)forts’, its historical or mythological meaning is unknown to me because my research didn’t uncover anything about it. However, the name is mentioned several times in purāṇic texts. The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, for instance, records Daśārṇa in the list of names of rivers, but also the list of countries (*janapada*) contains this name. Although Vallabhadeva and Mallinātha keep silent on the geographical identification, according to Ali the Daśārṇa *janapada* is located on the long slope of the Vindhya towards the north-east.⁸⁰ Sircar supports this geographical position by explaining that Daśārṇa was one of the ancient names of modern East Malwa and the adjoining region.⁸¹

‘When thou comest to their capital, Vidiśā (the whole world knows that name),
Thou shalt straightway attain the perfection of a lover’s happiness;
For thou shalt taste as a beloved’s lips the Vetravatī’s sweet water
Purling rapturously along her banks, her brows knit in quivering waves.’⁸²

Vidiśā is located on the banks of the Vetravatī river, identified with the Betwā river, flowing in the north- eastern direction and is a tributary of the Yamunā. The identification of Vidiśā with

⁷⁸ Nauß 2007: 18, 42.

⁷⁹ *pāṇḍucchāyopavanavṛtayaḥ ketakaiḥ sūcibhinnair
nīḍārambhair gṛhbalibhujām ākulagrāmacaityāḥ |
tvayy āsanne pariṇatiphalaśyāmajambūvanāntāḥ
saṃpatsyante katipayadina sthāyihamaṃsā daśārṇāḥ | 23 |*

⁸⁰ Ali 1966: 159, 172.

⁸¹ Sircar 1971: 185-186.

⁸² *teṣāṃ dikṣu prathitavidīśālakṣaṇāṃ rājadhānīṃ
gatvā sadyaḥ phalam avikalaṃ kāmukatvasya labdhā |
tīropāntastanitasubhagaṃ pāsyaśi svādu yat tat
sabhrūbharaṅgaṃ mukham iva payo vetravatyaś calormi | 24 |*

Bhilsā is certain. Archaeological excavations proved that the two names refer to one and the same place. Vidiśā is a town near Besnagar in Madhya Pradesh.⁸³

During the time of Kālidāsa, Vidiśā was an extensive prosperous city and played a very important political role for the reign of the Gupta-Vākāṭakas.⁸⁴ After Candragupta II's victory over the Śakas, he ruled the Gupta empire for thirty eight years (AD 376-415), including the ancient metropolis Vidiśā. Candragupta II appointed his son Govindagupta as viceroy or *mahārāja*, in order to rule Vidiśā. When Kumāragupta came to power he choose his (half-)brother Ghaṭotkacagupta to reign the political centre Vidiśā. Ghaṭotkacagupta was also a son of Candragupta II. Candragupta II, or Vikramāditya, is generally accepted by scholars to have been the patron of Kālidāsa. He was the son of the Gupta king Samudragupta, and he married a Nāga princes named Kuberaṇāga. Their daughter, Prabhāvatīguptā, was given to marry a Vākāṭaka king, Rudrasena II. These marriage alliances can be interpreted as a strategic move and as an important political step. With these matrimonial bonds between the Guptas and the Vākāṭakas this period was marked by stability, peace and prosperity.⁸⁵

That Vidiśā was an important city in Kālidāsa's age can also be infered from his own work. The poet mentions Vidiśā not only in the *Meghadūta* but also in two other works namely the *Raghuvamśa* (canto XV, v. 36) and the *Mālavikāgnimitra* (act. V, v. 1). The *Mālavikāgnimitra* is a play which has Vidiśā's court as its main 'imaginary' context. Although this play is not a historical drama, it reveals some political elements of Kālidāsa's age. It shows among other things that Vidiśā is the political centre of the western part of the northern empire of the Gupta-Vākāṭakas and that the political stability is established by the marriage of a Vidarbha princes (daughter of Prabhāvatīguptā) with the viceroy of Vidiśā (Ghaṭotkacagupta), to consolidate the Gupta-Vākāṭaka relations.⁸⁶

As explained above, Daśārṇa country – Eastern Malwa –, with its capital Vidiśā, had important political significance in the course of Kālidāsa's time. This explains his geocultural *imaginaire* of Daśārṇa and Vidiśā and introducing the region and city in the route, as described in the *Meghadūta*.

While the Yakṣa instructs the cloudmessenger to leave Vidiśā, it is not to go far away, for it will be invited to settle and rest at a low hill in close proximity to the city.

⁸³ Mirashi 1960: 13.

⁸⁴ See Shastri 1997 and Bakker 1997 on the history of the Gupta-Vākāṭaka's.

⁸⁵ Bakker 2006: 169- 170.

⁸⁶ Ibid: 174-175.

Nīcair-hill

‘On Low-Lying Hill settle and rest; its kadamba trees
With luxuriant blooms will seem to thrill at thy embrace;
By grottoes redolent of the perfume of wantons in love-play
It proclaims the youthful vigor of the hot-blooded townsmen.’⁸⁷

Nīcairākhyā giri, ‘The hillock named *Nīcair*’ (*lit.* ‘low’) is generally accepted as Udayagiri, located roughly 3km north-west of Vidiśā.⁸⁸ The commentators Vallabhadeva and Mallinātha do not give a clear indication to the location of the hill, both describe it to be nearby Vidiśā.⁸⁹ Wilson seems to interpret it as a description of Vidiśā’s surrounding landscape and, just as Kale, does not recognize it as a specific location.⁹⁰ Mirashi, on the other hand, is confident with its identification with Udayagiri. Udayagiri is known for its caves with sculptures and inscriptions of the Gupta age. The collection of shrines at this place are partly rock-cut and partly stone-build. Two inscriptions are found at Udayagiri mentioning Candragupta II’s success, one of Vīrasena, his minister of ‘peace and war’ and one of Sanakānika, a feudatory chief.⁹¹

Udayagiri functioned as a center of imperial rule under the early Gupta kings. Further, it turned out to be an ideal location for timekeeping and it was used as a site of astronomical observation. Michael Willis did elaborate fieldwork and research on Udayagiri and I would therefore like to refer to his work *The archaeology of Hindu Ritual. Temples and the establishment of the Gods* in which he reconstructs how Udayagiri was connected to the festival of the Rainy Season and how the Gupta kings used this place to emphasize their unique relationship with Viṣṇu. As Willis writes, “Udayagiri was a place where the year was known, it became the preeminent place for scheduling, visualizing, and memorializing the sacrifice. The mythological ties that were developed between the sun, Viṣṇu and the sacrificial performance all heightened the potency of Udayagiri and drew ambitious kings inexorably toward it.”⁹²

Kālidāsa must have known the celebration of the rainy season observance or *varṣāmāsavrata* where Viṣṇu is “put to sleep” during the monsoon at Udayagiri, and it could be for precisely this reason that the cloud is depicted to pass Udayagiri. Kālidāsa mentions the beginning of the rainy season in verse two and four, naming the months *Āṣāḍha* and *Śrāvaṇa*, and towards the end of the poem in verse hundred seven he says:

‘When Viṣṇu has risen from his serpent couch, my curse shall end;
Close thine eyes and endure the four months that yet remain.

⁸⁷ *nīcairākhyāṃ girim adhivases tatra viśrāmāhetos
tvatsaṃparkāt pulakitam iva prauḍhapuṣpaiḥ kadambaiḥ
yaḥ paṇyatrīratiparimalodgāribhir nāgarāṇām
uddāmāni prathayati śilāveśmabhir yauvanāni* || 25 ||

⁸⁸ Mirashi 1960: 13.

⁸⁹ *nīcairīti* | | *he megha tatra vidiśāsamīpe*, ‘it is said [*iti*] o cloud, nīcais is in the vicinity of Vidiśā’ (my own translation).
Mallinātha in Kale 1969: 49.

⁹⁰ Wilson 1961: 26; Kale 1969: 49.

⁹¹ Majumdar 1954: 19 and 483 and Williams 1982: 40.

⁹² Willis 2009: 67.

Afterwards in the nights of full autumn moonlight, we twain shall enjoy
Divers heart's desires, imagined while we were parted.⁹³

Udayagiri must have been a magnificent place for experiencing the above mentioned religious ceremony and this was undoubtedly known to the people living in the surrounding area. Notably, in this verse Kālidāsa neglects to make a connection with the *varṣamāsavrata* celebration at Udayagiri which is not very far from his home city Ujjayinī. This is odd. Kālidāsa only mentions the caves of the Nīcair hill in combination with the love-play (*rati*) of the townsmen with female servants (*paṇyastri*). *Paṇyastri* means 'a woman [whose favours] can be bought' and is a synonym for prostitute. The earliest mention of prostitution in India occurs in the *R̥gveda*, and references of prostitution being recognized as a social institution are known from the eighth or seventh century BC. While the *Mahābhārata* imprecates prostitutes, the *Rāmāyaṇa* describes prostitutes as a symbol of prosperity. When townships sprout along trade routes, prostitution became a regular feature of these places.⁹⁴ This most probably was the case for Vidiśā and its surroundings as well, for the city has been an important trade centre in ancient times, located at a trade route between Tripurī (Tevar, south of Rupnath) and Ujjayinī or Ujjain.⁹⁵ Further, some prostitutes were attached to temples, while others presented themselves at holy places, to offer their services to pilgrims and visitors. This most probably happened in Udayagiri as well.

Willis rejects the identification of Kālidāsa's Nīcair hill with Udayagiri. He thinks it would be a 'curious denigration' of Udayagiri if it would be identical with Kālidāsa's Nīcair hill. Willis follows the scholastic tradition in identifying the Nīcair hill with Vāmanagiri,⁹⁶ just as Monier-Williams and Böthlingk and Roth do.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, none of them gives a geographical identification of the hill and Vāmanagiri was untraceable by me. For Cunningham and Dey Nīcair hill belongs to the group of low range hills south of Vidiśā, the Bhojapura hills.⁹⁸ But they do not mention any caves in these hills or in this area. According to Mirashi Udayagiri conforms to the description given in the *Meghadūta* of Nīcair hill⁹⁹ and in two other works of our poet – *Kumārasambhava* (VII. 42) and the *Raghuvamśa* (XIII. 8, 58) – Kālidāsa is said to have referred to Udayagiri which shows that he was very familiar with this place of religious and political importance, and therefore I think this identification is the most plausible.

⁹³ *śāpānto me bhujagaśayanād utthite śārṅgapāpau
māsān anyān gamaya caturo locane mīlayitvā|
paścād āvāṃ virahaguṇitaṃ taṃ tam ātmābhilāṣaṃ
nirvekṣyāvaḥ pariṇataśaraccandrikāsu kṣapāsu || 107 ||*

⁹⁴ Bhattacharji 1987: 32-33, 41.

⁹⁵ Chakrabarti 2005: 151-152.

⁹⁶ Willis 2009: 75.

⁹⁷ translation of *Nīcais* according to Sanskrit Dictionaries of Monier-Williams and Böthlingk and Roth.

⁹⁸ Bhattacharyya 1977: 73.

⁹⁹ Mirashi 1960:13.

The land of Avanti and its rivers

After the cloud had its rest at Udayagiri, the Yakṣa instructs the cloud to continue its itinerary towards mount Kailāsa, flying to the fertile land of Avanti – district Malwa – with its many rivers and agricultural landscape. The Yakṣa leads it along the gardens on the banks of the *vananadī*, taken by Vallabhadeva and Mallinātha in the sense of ‘forest-rivers’.¹⁰⁰ Wilson, on the other hand, gives preference to another reading and identifies *naganadī* with Pārbatī, which rises in the Vindhya chain and flows north-west, between the Śīprā and the Betwā.¹⁰¹ Both options are suitable within the route of the cloud, but keeping to the reading of *vananadī* I will follow the commentators in their interpretation. Then, the cloud is convinced to have a sole encounter with the river Nirvindhya, for he tells his messenger:

‘Suffused with the moisture of love, attain Nirvindhya’s course and unite with her,
Whose girdle-string, a row of birds, resounds with the tremor of her waves;
She stumbles bewitchingly as she moves, revealing her whirlpool-navel;
For women’s first avowal of fondness is confusion before their lovers.’¹⁰²

At thy departure, the river’s [*sindhu*] thin stream would seem but a braid of hair,
Her color pale with sere leaves fallen from trees that line her banks,
So by her forlorn state attesting thy happy lot, fortunate lover;
Thou and no other must find the way to banish her slenderness.¹⁰³

In the first verse Kālidāsa compares the Nirvindhya river with a lady, who attracts the cloud with her amorous gestures. The river is identified by both Sircar and Singh with the modern Newuj, which is a tributary of the Chambal flowing between the Betwā and the Kalisindh.¹⁰⁴ Although Dey seems not to agree with this opinion and identifies the Nirvindhya with the modern Kalisindh – a south eastern tributary of the Chambal¹⁰⁵ – modern Newuj is, in my opinion, the most plausible identification of the Nirvindhya, in the light of the description given by Kālidāsa and the position of the river towards the city of Viśālā. In the following verse *sindhu* is translated by Edgerton as ‘river’ or ‘stream’ and this way referring to the Nirvindhya, mentioned in the previous verse. However, some scholars like Dey, Bhattacharyya, Kale and Rajan consider *sindhu* to be a name of a particular river and identify it with Kāli Sindh.¹⁰⁶ I think this can be a plausible

¹⁰⁰ Vallabhadeva comments: *vananadī kānanasarinnadīviśeṣo vā* ‘vananadī is a kind of river in a forest’ and Mallinātha writes: *vane śaṅgaye yā nadyastāsām tīreṣu* ‘which are on the banks of these rivers in the forest’ Chakladar 1963: 67.

¹⁰¹ Wilson 1961: 26.

¹⁰² *Vīcikṣobhastanitavihagaśreṇīkāñcīguṇāyāḥ*
saṁsarpantīyāḥ skhalitasubhagaṁ darśitāvartanābheḥ
nirvindhyaḥ pathi bhava rasābhyantaraḥ saṁnipatya
strīṇām ādyaṁ praṇayavacanaṁ vibhramo hi priyeṣu || 28 ||

¹⁰³ *veṇībhūtapatanusālilā sā tv atītasya sindhu*
pāṇḍucchāyā taṭaruhatarubhramābhīr jīrṇaparṇaiḥ
saubhāgyaṁ te subhaga virahāvasthayaḥ vyañjantī
kāśyaṁ yena tyajati vidhinā sa tvayaivopapādyāḥ || 29 ||

¹⁰⁴ Sircar 1971: 57.

¹⁰⁵ Singh 1998: 2.

¹⁰⁶ Dey 1927: 54 and 186; Bhattacharyya 1977: 85 and 205; Kale 1969: 56 and 86; Rajan 1989: 289 and 301.

interpretation for *sindhu* because it is a notable river to cross before reaching Viśālā (or Ujjain) and therefore also most probably known to inhabitants like Kālidāsa. After this river is traversed the cloud will be touched by the pleasurable breeze coming from the Śīprā:

‘There a breeze of the Śīprā’s stream, prolonging the cranes’ shrill passion-quavering cry,
Acrid from blending with perfume of dawn-opened lotuses,
Comforts the bodies of women, easing the languor of love-play
Like a lover plying blandishments as he entertains his mistress.’¹⁰⁷

The Śīprā rises in the Kakri Bardi Hill, 12 km south of Indore and flows in the north westerly direction. At the end it flows into the Chambal river near the village of Kalu Kheri.¹⁰⁸ The river passes through the celebrated city of Viśālā, the ancient capital of Avanti, and many pilgrims take a bath in this sacred river when visiting this holy place.¹⁰⁹

The city of Viśālā and the Mahākāla temple

‘Gaining Avanti-land, whose village elders know well Udayana’s story,
Go on to Ujjain-city [*i.e. Viśālā*], rich in glory – I told thee of it before;
It seems a bright fragment of heaven brought down by residual merits
Of heaven-dwellers fallen to earth, the fruit of their good deeds almost spent.’¹¹⁰

Viśālā, also called Ujjayinī or Ujjain, is unintentionally glorified by receiving ‘a piece of the splendid heaven’ by the gods. An ancient event explains its exceptional sacred status. The myth of this city tells that when the gods and the demons were both participating in the process of *samudramanṭhana* or ‘churning of the ocean of milk’, a fierce battle between them developed in heaven. Suddenly goddess Lakṣmī sprang from the foam of the ocean, taking with her precious things and holding the *amṛtakumbha*, the vessel with nectar, from which all of them wanted to drink to gain strength and immortality. During this intense fight Viṣṇu managed to fly away with the sacred elixir on his vehicle-bird Garuḍa and accidentally spilled four drops of *amṛta* on earth. One drop at Haridwar, one at Prayāga, one at Nāsik and one drop fell on the spot of Viśālā. Because of this accident these four places are believed to be very sacred.¹¹¹ The Kumbh Melā (literally ‘a vessel-gathering’) is held every three years for six weeks in one of these four places.

¹⁰⁷ *dīrghīkurvan paṭu madakalāṃ kūjitaṃ sārāsānāṃ*
pratyūṣeṣu sphuṭitakamalāmodamaitrikaṣāyaḥ|
yatra strīṇāṃ harati surataglānim aṅgānukūlaḥ
śīprāvātaḥ priyatama iva prārthanācāṭukāraḥ||31||

¹⁰⁸ Sircar 1971: 333 and Singh 1998: 3.

¹⁰⁹ Singh 1998: 3 and Dey 1927: 60.

¹¹⁰ *Prāpyāvantiṃ udayanakathākovidagrāmaṃ ddhān*
pūrvoddiṣṭāṃ anusara purīṃ śrīviśālāṃ viśālāṃ|
svaḥpībhūte sucaritaphale svargīṇāṃ gāṃ gatānāṃ
śeṣaiḥ puṇyair hṛtam iva divaḥ kāntimat khaṇḍam ekam||30||

¹¹¹ Samanta 1997: 106.

The next Kumbh Melā at Ujjain will take place in 2016. A bath in the river (in case of Ujjain the Śīpra river) is the central ceremony of this religious celebration.¹¹²

Ujjain was traditionally the capital of Western Malwa and is nowadays the headquarter of the district Malwa in Madhya Pradesh. Besides the Kumbh Melā, the city of Ujjain is especially famous on account of the Mahākāla temple, on the banks of the Gandhavatī (a small branch of the Śīpra river¹¹³). Kālidāsa must have known the city and this temple by heart. He devotes six verses in his poem on this particular place and summons the cloud to enjoy the abundance and glamour of this splendid city for more than a day. Kālidāsa describes the city as if it is paradise on earth with the extraordinary prosperity of the inhabitants and exceptionally beautiful women and because of the enthusiasm and affection he expressed in these verses about Ujjayinī we may infer that this city was the poet's birthplace.¹¹⁴

‘Though the way be indirect for thee when setting out northward,
Do not shun the friendly acquaintance of the palace roofs of Ujjain;
Unless thou enjoy there the restless corners of the townswomen's eyes,
Timorous of the dart of lightning-flashes, thou wert cheated.’¹¹⁵

Kālidāsa makes the Yakṣa apologise to the cloud for the path to be indirect, and requests it to make a detour to include the city of Ujjain with its main sanctuary the Mahākāla temple. The abode of the lord Mahākāla¹¹⁶, the form of Śīva in his character as the destroyer, is believed to be constructed by the divine architect, Viśvakarman. In this temple this particular form of Śīva is represented as a *liṅga* or phallus form and, although the numbers of *liṅgas* in Ujjain is uncountable, it is the only one believed to be ‘self-existent’ (*svayambhu*). It belongs to the twelve famous *vyotirliṅgas* (‘*liṅgas* of light’) of India. The temple was renewed, enlarged and enriched during the reign of Vikramāditya. Unfortunately, the temple was destroyed by the Sultan of Delhi in the thirteenth century, during which time the *liṅga* was also severely damaged. The present temple dates from the Marāṭhā rule (seventeenth century) and is believed to contain the original *liṅga*. During the years a number of temples were constructed around the main temple and now form the sacred complex.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Wikipedia ‘Kumbh Melā’, 15th of Oct. 2011.

¹¹³ Dey 1927: 61.

¹¹⁴ Mirashi 1969: 88-89.

¹¹⁵ *vakraḥ panthā yadapi bhavataḥ prasthitasyottarāśāṃ saudhotsaṅgapraṇayavimukho mā sma bhūrujjayinīḥ| vidyuddāmasphurita cakitaistatra paurāṅganānāṃ lolāpāṅgairyadi na ramase locanairvañcīto si| |27| |*

¹¹⁶ ‘Mahākāla’ means ‘mighty time’, it refers to the mythology of time explained in the Purāṇas. Periodically the universe is destroyed by Śīva and turns into a pure potential, then all phenomena reemerge again, created by Brahmā and is maintained by Viṣṇu, the preserver. Dimmit and van Buitenen 1978: 151.

¹¹⁷ Samanta 1997: 59-61.

After the cloud leaves Ujjain, it meets the Gambhīrā – a small river in Malwa district and an tributary stream of the Śīprā¹¹⁸– the Yakṣa supports his messenger in an amiable manner for saying:

‘Thy mirrored image, fair as its source, will find entrance
In the waters of the Deep river [*i.e.* Gambhīrā], as into a serene heart’¹¹⁹

But then the cloud needs to pursue its journey, although it will be hard to leave this river-lady. A cool breeze will gently blow the cloud to a certain distance and take it to Devagiri, upon which the god Skanda dwells.

Devagiri

Devagiri is one of the mysterious places Kālidāsa mentions in the *Meghadūta*. He spends four verses on this location, all devoted to Skanda Kārttikeya, which indicates its importance in Kālidāsa’s time. Both commentators Vallabhadeva and Mallinātha do not indicate a geographical identification and unfortunately there is very little evidence found in connection to the description given by the poet and, therefore, it is difficult to identify the hill topographically. According to the poem the hill is located between Vīśāla and Daśapura, which is between Ujjain and, as will be explained later, Mandasor. In the poem the Yakṣa tells the cloud that

‘As thou seekest to approach Devagiri Mountain, a cold breeze
Will gently blow for thee; sweet from blending with odors of the earth
Which thy showers have refreshed, and inhaled by elephants with pleasant sounds
In their water-spout trunks, it will ripen the mountain’s wild figs.’¹²⁰

‘That mount is Skanda’s fixed abode. O change into a cloud of flowers
And bathe him with a flood of blossoms moist from heavenly Ganges water.
For he was the shining seed, surpassing the sun, set in a mouth of Fire
By the Wearer of the new moon, for the protection of Indra’s hosts.’¹²¹

In this last verse he honours Śīva’s son Skanda Kārttikeya and encourages the cloud to bathe Skanda and bring flowers out of respect for the deity. Skanda was perceived as a military deity for royal support and the cult of Skanda receives great popularity especially during the reign of

¹¹⁸ Singh 1998: 3 and Dey 1927: 60.

¹¹⁹ *gambhīrāyāḥ payasi saritaś cetasīva prasanne
chāyātma api prakṛtisubhago lapsyate te praveśam* |40|

¹²⁰ *tvanniṣyandocchvasitavasudhāgandhasaṃparkaramya
srotorandhradhvanitasubhagaṃ dantibhiḥ piyamānaḥ
nīcāir vāsyaty upajigamiśor devapūrvaṃ giriṃ te
śīto vāyuḥ pariṇamayitā kānanodumbarāṇām* |42|

¹²¹ *tatra skandaṃ niyatavasatiṃ puṣpameghī kṛtātmaḥ
puṣpāsāraiḥ snapayatu bhavānvyomagaṅgājalādraiḥ
rakṣāhetor navaśaśibhṛtā vāsavināṃ camūnām
atyādityaṃ hutavahamukhe saṃbhṛtaṃ tad dhi tejah* |43|

Candragupta II's sons Kumāragupta and Skandagupta. Skanda seemed to be mainly a deity for the elite and royal circle and therefore he must have been well known to Kālidāsa, who was living at the royal court of Candragupta II. Royal and political groups took an interest in the cult to promote political purposes.¹²² Candragupta II or Vikramāditya, Kālidāsa's patron, established his second capital at Ujjain. Because of the connection of Skanda Kārttikeya to rulers and kings it would not be surprising to have a sanctuary or shrine of the deity near Ujjain, as the political centre of the Gupta dynasty in the age of Kālidāsa.

'With thy thunder caught and magnified by the mountain, now incite Skanda's peacock,
Whose eye-corners gleam with the light of Śiva's moon, to dance;
Through love for her son, Bhavani adds its fallen tail-feather,
Ringed with streaks of light, to the lotus petal over her ear.'¹²³

'Having thus pleased the god born in a reed thicket [*i.e.* Skanda], pursuing thy way,
While lute-bearing Siddha-couples avoid thy path for fear of waterdrops,
Sink down then to pay respect to the Glory of Rantideva
Sprung from the slaughter of cattle, transmuted on earth in river form.'¹²⁴

The peacock is, in addition to being India's national bird, is also considered to be the vehicle of Skanda. The god of war is often depicted sitting on a peacock in iconographic images. Kumāragupta – who was named after Skanda – issued golden coins which show an image of Skanda Kārttikeya riding a fan-tailed peacock.¹²⁵ This emphasizes the popularity of Skanda with the royalties even more. The last verse mentioned above tells about Rantideva, who had his glory appear in the form of a river after sacrificing numerous cows. Rantideva is traditionally the famous king of Daśapura and is known for gaining great merit by his devotion to Brahmins.¹²⁶ The river, formed of blood flowing from the cows killed by Rantideva in a sacrifice, is a reference to the modern Chambal river.¹²⁷ The mountain 'preceded by Deva', which is generally accepted as Devagiri, is located near this river. Just like Rāmagiri, there are several places and hills that are referred to as the 'mountain of god(s)' in India, but not all suit the description given by Kālidāsa and the route of the messenger. Daulatabad or Devagiri in Maharashtra for instance is not to be confused with the Devagiri mentioned in the poem.¹²⁸ Daulatabad is located close to Aurangabad and is even more in the southerly direction than Rāmagiri, the starting point of the itinerary. Another Devagiri mentioned by Dey is part of the Aravalli range in Rajasthan, which is

¹²² Mann 2003: 252-254.

¹²³ *vyotirlekhāvalayī galitaṃ yasya barhaṃ bhavānī
putrapremṇā kuvalayadalaprāpi karṇe karoti |
dhautāpāṅgaṃ haraśaśirucā pāvakes taṃ mayūraṃ
pascād adrigrahaṇa gurubhir garjitair nartayethāḥ | 44 |*

¹²⁴ *ārādhyaiṃ śaravaṇabhuvam devam ullāṅghitādhvā
siddhadvaṇdvair jalakaṇabhayād vīṇibhir muktamārgaḥ |
vyālabethāḥ surabhitanayālabhajāṃ mānayaḥ syan
srotomūrtyā bhuvī pariṇatāṃ rantidevasya kīrtim | 45 |*

¹²⁵ Mirashi 1966: 64.

¹²⁶ Pargiter 1972: 41-42, 274.

¹²⁷ Kale 1969: 84.

¹²⁸ Dey 1927: 54.

too far in the north-western direction. This would leave Daśapura far behind, which needs to be the cloud's next destination after Devagiri.¹²⁹ Karmarkar locates Kālidāsa's Devagiri at Devagaḍ or Devagarh (Deogarh) a place south-west of Jhansi.¹³⁰ Mirashi does not agree with this identification for good reasons. After the cloud left Ujjain it meets the river Gambhīra and before crossing the Charmaṇvatī (modern Chambal) he arrives at the hill of the warrior god Skanda. The above mentioned Devagarh or Devagad is situated at the Vetravatī or modern Betwā river. Although this Devagarh had a temple of the Gupta age, it was dedicated to Viṣṇu and not devoted to Skanda Kārttikeya. This is indicated by the panels affixed to the remains of the temple walls.¹³¹

Wilson identifies Devagiri with Dewagur or Devagara, situated in the centre of Malwa, south of the Chambal.¹³² Pathak seems to agree with this identification of Wilson, but both do not give an exact location of the place. Mirashi denies it to be Kālidāsa's Devagiri. According to Mirashi there are no ancient ruins of any temple visible and its topographical location towards the Chambal river is not according to the description of the poem. Therefore Dewagur is unlikely to be the Devagiri of the *Meghadūta*.¹³³

Mirashi states that Devagiri is to be identified with Dev Ḍungari, a small hill in the vicinity of Unhel, 30km north-west of Ujjain, in the direction of Nagda. Mirashi writes: "There are at present two temples on the hill, one of Bhairava and the other of Devadharmarāja. The latter is shown as riding a horse, with a spear in hand. He represents Kārttikeya. (...) [This temple] probably marks an old site of a temple of Kārttikeya and may have been erected after the ancient temple of the god fell in ruin."¹³⁴

I think this identification is for now the most plausible for Devagiri. Unhel is a place which is situated between Ujjain and Daśapura, south of the Chambal river and it therefore falls within the trajectory of the cloudmessenger. The interpretation is suggestive, it would be splendid if traces of an ancient temple of Kārttikeya were present under the temple, which is nowadays devoted to this deity. But to be able to argue this identification with certainty the site would need to be archaeologically surveyed.

Daśapura

'Cross and go onward, making thy round form the target of curious glances
Of the Daśapura women, so practiced in seductive movements
Of their eyebrow-tendrils, sending dark and light gleams flashing upward

¹²⁹ Ibidem.

¹³⁰ Karmarkar 1960: 57.

¹³¹ Ibid: 61-62.

¹³² Wilson 1961: 42.

¹³³ Mirashi 1966: 61.

¹³⁴ Ibid: 62-63. It is very rare for a god to ride a horse and there are no examples known for Kārttikeya riding a horse, however, the image of Kārttikeya bearing a spear is quite popular.

As they lift their lashes, assuming the grace of bees swaying on white jasmines.¹³⁵

Daśapura completes the first part of the journey, which took place in the poet's residential and therefore familiar area. It is the last place belonging to the religio-geocultural *imaginaire* of Kālidāsa. Daśapura is generally accepted as being identical with the city of Mandasor, which is reached after leaving Ujjain, passing Devagiri and crossing the Chambal river. Mandasor is located in West Malwa and was during the time of Candragupta II an important city for the Aulikaras, a Mālava dynasty. This dynasty flourished after the extinction of the Śaka's by Kālidāsa's patron and reigned under the suzerainty of the Gupta emperors. The city became the most important vice regal seat of the imperial Guptas and therefore the city may have been well known to Kālidāsa.¹³⁶ According to inscriptions, the political control of Mandasor seems to have extended to the north for its artistic remains show a continuum with some regions in the southern part of Rajasthan.¹³⁷ The city of Mandasor was a rich cultural center¹³⁸ and was already a pilgrimage site since the second century AD.¹³⁹ From the Mandasor Stone Inscription of Kumāragupta is known that the silk-weavers of Lāṭa founded a Sun-temple in the city in 437-438 AD and restored it a few decades later in 473-474 AD.¹⁴⁰ Unfortunately the temple does not exist anymore and is replaced by a medieval temple dedicated to the god Śiva or Mahādeva on the bank of the Śiwana river. The Mandasor Stone Inscription, carved on a stone-slab, is built into a wall close to the river and in front of this temple.¹⁴¹ The city Daśapura was located on one of the traderoutes connecting Vidiśā and Ujjayinī with the Mewar plain in Rajasthan.¹⁴²

¹³⁵ *tām uttīrya vraja paricita bhrūlatāvibhramāṇām*
pakṣmotkṣepād uparivilasatkṛṣṇaśāraprabhāṇām |
kundakṣepānugamadhukara śrīmuṣām ātmabimbaṃ
pātrīkurvan daśapuravadhūnetrakautūhalānām || 47 ||

¹³⁶ Bhattacharyya 1977: 205-206.

¹³⁷ Williams 1982: 137.

¹³⁸ Ibid: 155.

¹³⁹ Williams 1973: 50.

¹⁴⁰ Majumdar 1954: 593.

¹⁴¹ Fleet 1961: 80.

¹⁴² Chakrabarti 2005:152.

Part II: Kālidāsa's mythological *imaginaire*: The itinerary of the cloud from Brahmāvarta to the city of Alakā

Introduction

When Kālidāsa continues his imaginary route, after leaving Mandasor behind, he seems to have based the rest of the itinerary on existing literary sources. There appears to be no connection to the locations in this part of the route with the poet's cultural and political context of his time. Moreover, while he writes forty-seven verses on the route between Ramtek and Mandasor, he devotes only sixteen verses to the rest of the itinerary, up to mount Kailāsa. He is clearly less detailed in depicting the North-Indian landscape after departing Mandasor.

In the the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, his main sources, geography and mythology are blended, which is common in Hindu sacred narratives. Attaching sacred narratives to landscapes and geography is a typical feature of Hinduism.¹⁴³ According to Jacobsen, in North India, an area or land – like Kurukṣetra – or natural objects – like the source of the Gaṅgā or the place where the river descends from the mountainous region and enters the plainland – are often deified. Horizontal space is deified and circumambulation (*parikrama*) of that sacred space has become important.¹⁴⁴ In the following the Yakṣa instructs the cloud to travel from Kurukṣetra to the holy river Sarasvatī – rivers are often personified as goddesses and play an important role in salvific aspects of Hindu religion, for they are believed to take away moral impurity – to Kanakhala, up to the source of the Gaṅgā, at Gangotri. This part of the cloud's itinerary is a section of the grand pilgrimage narrated in the *Mahābhārata*, namely the part of the route from Kurukṣetra to Naimiśa (modern Nimsar).¹⁴⁵ When the cloud is convinced to circumambulate a footprint of Śiva, an interpretation of this location turns out to be delicate, which also applies to the Himālayan crossing before reaching the sacred mountain Kailāsa, with its mythical city of Alakā waiting impatiently for the the cloud's arrival.¹⁴⁶

Brahmāvarta & Kurukṣetra

'Then plunging with thy shadow into the Brahmāvarta country,
Visit that field of the Kurus which recounts the battle of warriors
Where he whose bow was Gāṇḍīva [*i.e.* Arjuna] deluged the faces of princes
With a thousand piercing arrows, as thou the lotuses with showers of rain.'¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Jacobsen 2009: 381-382.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid: 394.

¹⁴⁵ Bhardwaj 1973: 50.

¹⁴⁶ See Appendix D for a map, which shows the itinerary of the cloud from Brahmāvarta to Alakā, Mount Kailāsa.

¹⁴⁷ *brahmāvartaṃ janapadam atha cchāyayā gāhamānaḥ
kṣetraṃ kṣatrapradhanapiśunaṃ kauravaṃ tad bhajethāḥ
rājanyānāṃ śītaśaraśatair yatra gāṇḍīvadhanvā*

Brahmāvarta is the mythic land sacred to Brahmā, which, according to modern geographic boundaries would be located in the Indian state of Haryana. The commentaries of Vallabhadeva and Mallinātha follow, in this case, the writing of the *Manusmṛiti*.¹⁴⁸ According to *Manusmṛiti* (M.S.2.17), the classic Aryan lawbook, it is built by the Gods and situated between the two heavenly rivers, the Sarasvatī and the Dṛṣadvatī.¹⁴⁹ The area was equated with the *Uttara-vedī* (or *Brahmā-vedī*), the northern altar made for the sacred fire for worshipping Brahmā. It was also considered to be the altar for sacrifices performed by the gods and ṛṣis.¹⁵⁰ It is said that anyone who visits the place out of a desire for release of impurities will continually see Brahman within himself and gain the ultimate goal of liberation.¹⁵¹ According to the *Skandapurāṇa* (SP 32.149) “that land is known as Brahmāvarta, because he (i.e., Brahmā), performed the holy act of circumambulating Hara.” Brahmā stopped at this place for the performance when he was on his way to Bhadreśvara¹⁵² to install a liṅga, after which he went to heaven.¹⁵³

It is clear that Brahmāvarta is connected to the mythology of Brahmā and Kālidāsa was obviously aware of the narratives connected to the place. Brahmā is the first member of the Hindu triad and seen as the supreme spirit and active creator of the universe.¹⁵⁴ When the whole world was lost in a terrifying ocean, Brahmā sprung from the Cosmic Egg, which was the source of the seed of all creatures and caused the world to exist. He is therefore called Prajāpati, ‘lord of creatures’. According to the *Vāmana Purāṇa*, this Golden Cosmic Egg had its origin at Brahmāvarta, and thus it is the location where the worlds were created.¹⁵⁵ For this reason Brahmāvarta is described as the most holy area in the world.¹⁵⁶

The names Brahmāvarta and the ‘field of the Kurus’ or Kurukṣetra are often used interchangeably. They can be considered to be two names of the same sacred land, north-west of Hastināpura.¹⁵⁷ The *Mahābhārata* gives two descriptions of the locality of the ‘land of the

dhārāpātaḥ tvam iva kamalāny abhyavarṣan mukhāni | 48 |

¹⁴⁸ Hultsch 1911: 27; Kale 1969: 87.

¹⁴⁹ Cunningham 1871: 281; Law 1954: 101; Dey 1971: 110; Sircar 1971: 49 and 99; Singh 1972: 67; Dimmit and van Buitenen 1978: 328.

¹⁵⁰ Bharadwaj 1991: 8 and 10. A ṛṣi is considered to be a singer of sacred hymns, a sage who alone or with others invokes the deities in rhythmical speech or song of a sacred character. Later these sages or saints were seen as a peculiar class of beings in the early mythical system, as distinct from gods. Translation ṛṣi according to Monier-Williams Sanskrit Dictionary.

¹⁵¹ Dimmit and van Buitenen 1978: 328.

¹⁵² Bhadreśvara was an important Pāśupata holy place, located close to Haridwar.

¹⁵³ Unpublished chapter of the *Skandapurāṇa*. *Skandapurāṇa* 32, p. 14, note 71.

¹⁵⁴ Dowson 1972: 56.

¹⁵⁵ Bharadwaj 1991: 60.

¹⁵⁶ Bhargava 1964: 94.

¹⁵⁷ Bharadwaj 1991: 328. Bhardwaj (1973: 11-12) identifies Brahmāvarta as a *tīrtha* within the holy land of Kurukṣetra, p.49-50. Parui (1976) writes that according to the *Manusmṛiti* Kurukṣetra lies just outside Brahmāvarta, on the eastern part of the tract between the Sarasvatī and Dṛṣadvatī, while the *Vāmana-Purāṇa* seems to identify Kurukṣetra with Brahmāvarta. At the same time Parui (1976: 80) mentions that the *Vāmana-Purāṇa* tells about two Brahmāvarta-tīrthas situated within Kurukṣetra. The *Vāyu Purāṇa* considers Brahmākṣetra to be the same as Kurukṣetra (and Vāyupura), founded by Brahmā and a place where gods, sages and *munis* dwell (Patil, 1973). According to Kale (1969:

Kurus.' Firstly, it situates Kurukṣetra between the Sarasvatī on the north and the Dṛishadvatī in the south and, secondly, it places the land in the middle of the four villages Tarantuka, Arantuka, Macakruka and Rāmahrada. These four places bound the area and are believed to be the abodes of Yakṣas functioning as *dvārapālas*, gatekeepers or guardian deities of Kurukṣetra.¹⁵⁸ Yakṣa worship was at one time a fairly widespread cult in this region.¹⁵⁹ Parui and Bharadwaj follow Cunningham's identification of the places; Tarantuka as Ratan, near the town of Pipli, close to Thanesar in the north-east corner of Kurukṣetra with Ber or Baher for Arantuk (close to Kaithal) in the north-west corner. Macakruka is identified with the village Sinkh and situated in the south-east corner and Rāmahrada as Ramray (Ramrai) in the south-western corner of Kurukṣetra.¹⁶⁰

There are several other names known to denote Kurukṣetra which can cause confusion. One of these names is Dharmakṣetra – 'land of religious merit'¹⁶¹ and another name of Kurukṣetra is Sāmantapañcaka, mentioned in the *Skandapurāṇa*. One of the many *tīrthas* in Sāmantapañcaka or Kurukṣetra denominated in this text is Sthāṇutīrtha, situated on the banks of the Saravati river. It is believed to be established by Sthāṇu, which is a synonym of Śiva.¹⁶² According to the *Mahābhārata* (9.41-46) Sthāṇutīrtha is the place of Skanda's birth and consecration.¹⁶³ But Kurukṣetra most probably denominates a city, namely Thanesar¹⁶⁴ which can be regarded as the centre of Kurukṣetra.

Geographically the region is situated in the middle part of the valleys of three rivers; the Sarasvatī (in the north), Dṛṣadvatī (in the south) and the (now defunct) Āpayā¹⁶⁵ although Kurukṣetra more recently denotes only the Thanesar *tīrtha* complex.¹⁶⁶ Wilson and Kale both situate Kurukṣetra to the south-east of Thanesar.¹⁶⁷ This is supported by Dey, for he identifies Kurukṣetra with Thanesar but states that the war between the Kurus not only took place at Thanesar but also in the country around it. This area formerly included Sonepāt (Sonaprastha), Āmin, Karnal and Panipat (Pāṇiprastha).¹⁶⁸ According to Cunningham the lake is the most important of this region, it attracts many pilgrims per year. The ground around it is holy and there are many sacred places connected to the great battle of the *Mahābhārata*. This lake has

87) Brahmāvarta is the holy land north-west of Hastināpura and contiguous to Kurukṣetra, which is situated to the south-east of Thanesar.

¹⁵⁸ Parui 1976: 10-11.

¹⁵⁹ Bharadwaj 1991: 132.

¹⁶⁰ Parui 1976: 11; Bharadwaj 1991: 125.

¹⁶¹ Beal 1958: 215; Dey 1971: 194.

¹⁶² *Sthāṇu* is a name of Śiva, who is supposed to remain as motionless as the trunk of a tree during his austerities.

Translation *Sthāṇu* according to Monier-Williams Sanskrit Dictionary.

¹⁶³ Bisschop 2006:187.

¹⁶⁴ Bharadwaj 1991: 11.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid: 32.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid: 11.

¹⁶⁷ Wilson 1961: 47; Kale 1969: 87.

¹⁶⁸ Dey 1971: 110; Law 1954: 101.

several names including Brahmā-Sar; Rāmahrada; Vāyu; Vayava-Sar and Pavan-Sar¹⁶⁹ now known as Brahmāsarovara Lake, although it seems to be an enormous water tank rather than a natural lake, and is to be found in the centre of the city Thanesar.¹⁷⁰

Although the name Kurukṣetra is absent in the Ṛgvedic literature, the term ‘kuru’ is as old as the composition of the Ṛgveda. It means a particular tribe or race. In later Vedic literature Kurukṣetra is known as ‘the land of the Kurus’ and the epico-purāṇic tradition gives another explanation of the origin of name. It tells about Kuru, who travelled to *Brahmā-vedī* with the object of cultivating *tapas* by ploughing the field. Lord Viṣṇu was highly pleased by his devotion and he honored Kuru by naming this place after him. It became the most sacred *tīrtha* in the world famous by its name Kurukṣetra.¹⁷¹

Kurukṣetra is especially famous as the site of the great battle between the two sets of cousins, the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, on the sacrificial ground of their common ancestor Kuru (Bharata). The *Mahābhārata* narrates this famous event on the vast plain of Kurukṣetra in its sixth (out of eighteen) book ‘Bhishma’, which includes the *Bhagavad Gītā*.¹⁷² Just before Arjuna – ‘whose bow was Gāṇḍīva deluged the faces of princes with a thousand piercing arrows’ – joins the fight, he is in serious doubt about continuing this battle between relatives. He says “Kṛṣṇa, at the sight of my own kin standing here ready to fight, my limbs feel tired and my mouth has gone dry, my body is trembling and my hair is standing on end. (...) For how could we be happy having killed our family, Mādhava?” And then he casts away his bow and arrows and proclaims “I won’t fight!”¹⁷³ Arjuna’s hesitation involves moral codes, for being a Kṣatriya, and having obligations towards his family. In a long, philosophical sermon Kṛṣṇa explains this dilemma, from both the absolute and relative standpoints. He tells Arjuna that “from the ultimate or absolute standpoint, the self is immortal, while the body of any human being will be destroyed sooner or later; hence mourning over those bodies killed in battle is futile. The soul, on the other hand, is immortal; it transcends birth and death. From the relative standpoint, he, Arjuna, belongs to the warrior caste and it is his duty of a soldier to fight.”¹⁷⁴ The *Bhagavad Gītā*, Song of the Lord, is one of the most well-known Hindu texts and the described event is believed to have taken place at Kurukṣetra. Since the narrative of the *Mahābhārata* was originally orally transmitted over an extended period of time from the fifth century BCE to the fourth century CE¹⁷⁵, it is very likely that Kālidāsa was aware of the importance given to this place when he composed his poem in the second half of the fourth, beginning of the fifth century CE.

Besides the mention of Kurukṣetra in the *Meghadūta*, Kālidāsa uses the land as the stage for his play *Vikramorvaśīya* which is his interpretation of the ancient tale of Purūravas and Urvaśī. In

¹⁶⁹ Cunningham 1871: 279.

¹⁷⁰ <http://maps.google.nl/maps?q=brahmasara..>

¹⁷¹ Parui 1976: 8-9.

¹⁷² Cherniak 2009: XV.

¹⁷³ Ibid: 177-183.

¹⁷⁴ Gupta 2006: 380.

¹⁷⁵ Brockington 2003: 116.

the story the nymph Urvaśī was cursed to a life on earth where she encounters king Purūravas. The two fall in love and live together happily until an unfortunate event causes their separation. King Purūravas, in a state of madness, wanders around looking for his beloved one in all directions and finds her finally at Kurukṣetra in a pond full of lotuses. After successfully accomplishing several tasks and after offering numerous fire sacrifices he attained the heaven of Nymphs and Gandharvas and is united with Urvaśī at last.¹⁷⁶ It is interesting and important to note that Kālidāsa may have intended this play to glorify his patron Vikramāditya – an epithet of king Candragupta II, – if we consider the use of the word ‘vikrama’ in the title to be a reference to the king.¹⁷⁷

Kurukṣetra is home to several rivers is one of them is the famous river Sarasvatī. The sanctity of this river can be traced back to the time of the *Ṛgveda*. In several hymns of the *Ṛgveda* the soma oblations offered on the bank of the Sarasvatī are believed to be most endearing to gods.¹⁷⁸ Besides being a river goddess, Sarasvatī is Brahmā’s wife and goddess of wisdom and science, mother of the Vedas and the inventor of Devanāgarī letters.¹⁷⁹ Kālidāsa makes the Yakṣa to lead the cloud to this holy river in the next verse.

Kurukṣetra, with its sacred river Sarasvatī, is a paradigmatic setting for the events narrated in the purāṇas (*Vāyu Purāṇa* and *Skanda Purāṇa*). It is not uncommon for such narratives to emphasize this *tīrtha* as a site where great Vedic rituals are performed. By the mention of Brahmāvarta, and Saravatī in the succeeding verse, Kalidāsa would have evoked such themes in the minds of his listeners /readers, for both of the sacred places are related to Vedic ritual activity. According to Hegarty, *tīrthas* generally, and Kurukṣetra specifically, are markers for events in the past.¹⁸⁰ The place is described as the site *par excellence* for the ritual activity of kings and therefore must have been well known at the court of Vikramāditya as well. Kālidāsa shows, also in the subsequent verse that his main source of inspiration for writing this part of the journey are the epics *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. In the following he refers to the myth of Balarāma¹⁸¹ and his pilgrimage to the river goddess Sarasvatī. It is believed that Sarasvatī, the goddess of poetic speech, inspired the poet Vyāsa to compose the great epic *Mahābhārata*.¹⁸²

Sarvasvatī

‘Making thy approach, my friend, to those waters of the Sarasvatī

¹⁷⁶ Dimmit and van Buitenen 1978: 272-273. The love story of Purūravas and Urvaśī is very old, it occurs in a different form in the *Ṛgveda* X.95, according to Mirashi 1969: 242.

¹⁷⁷ Mirashi 1969: 241-242. ‘valour’ occurs twice in the play.

¹⁷⁸ Arya 2004: 163.

¹⁷⁹ Wilkins 1974: 107.

¹⁸⁰ Hegarty 2012: 154-156.

¹⁸¹ *Lāṅgalin* ‘plough-holder’ is a description of Balarāma, also named Saṃkarṣaṇa.

¹⁸² Cherniak 2009: 573.

Haunted by the plow-bearer [*i.e.* Balarāma], who abstained from battle for love of his kin,
Forgoing the liquor whose taste he loved since it reflected the eyes of Revatī,
Thou too shall become pure within, black only in outer colour.’¹⁸³

In this verse the Yakṣa tells the cloud to ‘drink’ from the sacred river Sarasvatī, flowing north-west of Kurukṣetra. The Sarasvatī is purifying and releases all sins but, as the poem says, the water-carrier will remain black on the outside, since he is a monsoon cloud.

The Sarasvatī river figures prominently in the Śalyaparvan of the *Mahābhārata* (cantos 35-54), which gives an account of Balarāma’s pilgrimage to the sacred sites along the river Sarasvatī. This section of the great epic has clearly inspired Kālidāsa to write the above mentioned verse. Balarāma, also called Saṃkarṣaṇa – believed to be an incarnation of Śeṣa, the cosmic serpent on which Viṣṇu is said to rest during his cosmic sleep – went on a pilgrimage to the Sarasvatī and to other *tīrthas* when the great battle took place. Balarāma had an argument with Kṛṣṇa in which he unsuccessfully tried to dissuade his elder brother from favoring one faction over the other. This quarrel motivates him to leave the battlefield and to take up acts of worship. The *tīrthayātrā* of Balarāma is a form of purification for the horrible events of the war at Kurukṣetra.¹⁸⁴ Balarāma was very fond of wine and – as the poem tells – every time his exceptionally beautiful wife Revatī filled the cups with liquor, he would catch her glance through the reflection of her eyes in the wine.

According to myths, this magnificent immortal river Sarasvatī springs from the sacred fig tree and enters the forest Dvaita in Kurukṣetra. It flowed geographically from the Himālaya range in almost south-westerly direction through present day Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat and emptied finally in the Gulf of Kachh. The now vanished river Sarasvatī played an important role in the history of the Hindu civilization, and likely even served the people of the Harappan culture.¹⁸⁵ Today a small river running along Thanesar is called Sarasvatī and it most probably flowed there during Kālidāsa’s time.¹⁸⁶ The Sarasvatī rises in the hills of Sirmur, in the Himālaya range called the Sewalik, and emerges into the plains at Ād-Badri, in Ambala.¹⁸⁷ Findings of artifacts and traces of Hindu ritual sites at Ād-Badri indicate that it has been an important historic and religious site.¹⁸⁸ Ambala lies 38km north of Thanesar.

¹⁸³ *hitvā hālām abhimatarsām revatīlocanārikām
bandhuprītyā samaravimukholāṅgalī yāḥ siṣeve |
kṛtvā tāsām abhigamam apām saumya sārāsvatīnām
antāḥśuddhas tvam api bhavitā varṇam ātreṇa kṛṣṇaḥ |* [49] |

¹⁸⁴ Meiland 2007: 23-24.

¹⁸⁵ Valdiya 2008: 3.

¹⁸⁶ Remark by Bakker in a conversation on the subject at 13th of April 2012.

¹⁸⁷ Dey 1971: 180-181.

¹⁸⁸ Kalyanaraman 2008: 62.

Kanakhala and the holy river Ganges

‘Near Kanakhala visit the daughter of Jahnu [*i.e.* Gaṅgā], where she descends
From Himālaya to form a stairway to heaven for Sagara’s sons;
With her foam she seemed to laugh at the frown Gauri’s face displayed
As she seized Shiva’s hair, her waves like hands clinging to his moon-diadem.’¹⁸⁹

In this verse the cloudmessenger is about to have a magnificent encounter with the sacred and pure river Gaṅgā. The riverbasin of the Gaṅgā is described as being the ‘cradle of Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage culture.’¹⁹⁰ There are numerous important pilgrimage centers and countless shrines and other sacred spots along the river Gaṅgā, which testify to the great reverence many Hindus feel for this river. Devotees show their respect to the goddess and perform worship rituals (*pūjā*) on the banks of the river. They recite verses of the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Purāṇas* in order to praise her and to commemorate the symbolic history of the Gaṅgā.¹⁹¹ Kālidāsa was most likely inspired by these texts when composing this verse of the *Meghadūta*.

Kanakhala is a village close to Haridwar situated on the east side of the city¹⁹² at the confluence of the Gaṅgā and the Nīladhāra.¹⁹³ Vallabhadeva writes in his commentary: *tasmāt sarasvatīdeśād anukanakhalaṃ kanakhalākhyatīrthasamīpe himavataḥ prasṛtām jāhnavīm yāyāḥ* ‘from there’ (*tasmāt*), that is to say from the area of Sarasvatī, ‘you should proceed nearby Kanakhala’ (*anukanakhalam*), that is to say in the vicinity of the sacred site called Kanakhala, ‘to the daughter of Jahnu (*jāhnavīm*), which has sprung forth from Himavat (*himavataḥ prasṛtām*).’¹⁹⁴ He considers this sacred place to be near the river Sarasvatī and in the vicinity of the Gaṅgā. For Mallinātha Kanakhala is the opening in the Himalāya mountains through which the Gaṅgā descends on the plains.¹⁹⁵ Wilson follows this identification of Mallinātha and, just as Kale, he applies the name ‘Gaṅgādvāra’ to Kanakhala.¹⁹⁶ Bisschop, on the other hand, does not consider the two to be identical, according to him Kanakhala is situated near Gaṅgādvāra or at Gaṅgādvāra.¹⁹⁷ Mirashi argues that Kanakhala is still known by its ancient name and is to be found near modern Haridwar.¹⁹⁸

¹⁸⁹ *tasmād gaccher anukanakhalaṃ śailarājāvatīrṇām
jahnoḥ kanyām sagarataṇḍayasvargasopānapanāktim |
gaurivaktrabhrukuḥīracanām yā vihasyeva phenaiḥ
śambhoḥ keśagrahaṇam akarod indulagnormihastā | 50 |*

¹⁹⁰ Alley 2009: 571.

¹⁹¹ Ibidem.

¹⁹² Kale 1969: 91. Dey 1971: 38; Arya 2004: 24, Bisschop 2006: 189. Nowadays it can be considered to be a part or a suburb of Haridwar, on the south side of the city-centre, according to Bakker.

¹⁹³ Arya 2004: 24.

¹⁹⁴ Hultsch 1911: 28.

¹⁹⁵ Kale 1969: 91.

¹⁹⁶ Ibidem; Wilson 1961: 49.

¹⁹⁷ Bisschop 2006: 189. According to Cunningham (1871:297) Gaṅgādvāra is to be identified with Haridwar.

¹⁹⁸ Mirashi 1961: 296.

Kanakhala is considered to be the site of the destruction of Dakṣas sacrifice, a story found both in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* and it is mentioned also in the *Skandapurāṇa* (SP.32.1-32.201). The story tells that King Dakṣa was performing an *Aśvamedha* sacrifice without inviting Śiva for his share of the offerings made during the ceremony. Therefore, Śiva, being insulted, disrupted Dakṣas sacrifice. Dakṣa realizes his tremendous mistake, having disrespected the supreme lord of the universe, and asks Brahmā what he should do. Brahmā advises him to dedicate himself to Śiva, for only then he will be able to complete his sacrifice and reach the heavenly abodes. Dakṣa then erects a *liṅga* at the location where this sacrifice had taken place, at Kanakhala.¹⁹⁹ The present suburb/village “has a Dakṣeśvara temple, which according to local tradition marks the spot where Dakṣa performed his sacrifice”²⁰⁰ and is a major tīrtha which attracts many pilgrims to Kanakhala and to Haridwar, for Haridwar is known as the place where the celestial river Gaṅgā descends and flows from the Himālaya onto the northern plain. Haridvāra, means Viṣṇu’s gate, because it is believed to be the entrance to the abode of Viṣṇu. This sacred bathing-place is also called Gaṅgā-dvāra, ‘the door of the Gaṅgā’, because it is the place where the Gaṅgā leaves the mountains for the plains of Hindūstān.²⁰¹

‘Near Kanakhala visit the daughter of Jahnu [i.e. Gaṅgā], where she descends from Himālaya to form a stairway to heaven for Sagara’s sons.’ The imagery of this verse refers to the story of the birth of the Gaṅgā and her appearance on earth which is narrated intriguingly in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as well as in the *Mahābhārata*. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* the story is told by the hermit Viśvāmitra to Rāma (Rām.I. 37.20-42.1).²⁰² He tells Rāma that once there was a mighty king of Ayodhyā named Sagara who had sixty thousand and one sons. At a certain time Sagara is determined to perform the *Aśvamedha* and reach the status identical to Indra, the lord of the gods. Indra fears that this Sagara would obtain great merit by successfully fulfilling the sacrifice. He therefore tried to manipulate the ritual by carrying off the sacrificial horse. The horse was released and allowed to wander freely for an entire year. The sacrifice is only completed if the horse returns.²⁰³ After roaming and tearing up the whole earth, the sixty thousand sons of Sagara find the horse. The horse is found grazing near the hermitage of Kapila – Viṣṇu in disguise – and because of their destructive acts and fury, Kapila reduces the sons of Sagara to a heap of ashes by uttering the syllable ‘Hum’. Only Gaṅgā, as the purifier of the world, can purify these men. Many years passed until Brahmā was so pleased with Bhagīratha – descendent of the last son of Sagara – for practicing such impressive asceticism for a thousand years, that he let him choose a boon. Bhagīratha asks for his ancestors to be purified by the river Gaṅgā and, therefore be able to go to heaven.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ Unpublished chapter of the *Skandapurāṇa*. *Skandapurāṇa* 32, p. 1 and 15.

²⁰⁰ Bisschop 2006: 189.

²⁰¹ Translation of *Haridvāra* and *Gaṅgādvāra* according to Monier-Williams Sanskrit Dictionary.

²⁰² Goldman 2009: 191-209.

²⁰³ Wilkins 1974: 463-467.

²⁰⁴ Goldman 2009: 191-209.

The river Gaṅgā was still flowing through the sky and to protect the earth from the enormous force of the river when falling down, Śiva promised to intercept the Gaṅgā on his head. Unfortunately, she got lost in his matted hair and it took her many years to find her way out.²⁰⁵ This story informs Kālidāsa's elegant description of Gaurī or Pārvatī in the lines above: 'with her foam she seemed to laugh at the frown Gaurī's face displayed as she seized Shiva's hair, her waves like hands clinging to his moon-diadem.' Gaurī frowns when another woman, the personification of Gaṅgā, comes into physical contact with her husband Śiva, when he catches the female river in his matted hair. Pārvatī is none too pleased by this situation. Then, when the celestial river finally comes down, her waters accidentally flooded the sacrificial flame of the saint Jahnu. Out of anger Jahnu drinks up all the waters of the Gaṅgā, which makes the effort of Bhagīratha fruitless. But Brahmā intervenes and Jahnu allows the water to flow from his ear.²⁰⁶ Therefore the river Gaṅgā is also named Jahnu-kanyā or 'Jahnu's daughter'.²⁰⁷

Himālaya and the Source of the Ganges

'When thou hast come to the source of that river, the mountain white with hoarfrost,
Where seated deer perfume the rocks with musk, settle on its peak
To relieve the weariness of thy journey, and thou shalt assume
Beauty that matches clay cast up on himself by Śiva's lustrous bull.'²⁰⁸

The Yakṣa summoned the cloud to go to the source of the Gaṅgā, which is called Gangotri. Gangotri is situated at the middle range of the great Himalayan chain, the Garhwal region, in the state Utteranchal. Geographically the Gaṅgā River starts at the confluence of the two rivers Bhāgīrathī and Alaknandā, in the Himalayan foothills of northern India. The Bhāgīrathī emerges from the Gangotri glacier at Gomukh and the Alaknandā from a glacier near Alkapuri. The Gaṅgā flows across the fertile soil of the great Indo-Gangetic plains. As is written before, the most upstream site is located at Haridwar, where the foothills meet the plains.²⁰⁹

Ritual purification by bathing is extremely important in the Hindu religion. The reason for Gangotri to be an extraordinary place for rituals and devotion is because of the symbolic meaning associated with the source of this river. The Gaṅgā is not just any river to perform the act of spiritual purification, but procures its sanctity because it is believed to come forth from the locks of Śiva's matted hair. By reaching the origin of the Gaṅgā one reaches the abode of

²⁰⁵ Goldman 2009: 191-209.

²⁰⁶ Wilkins 1974: 467

²⁰⁷ Dowson 1972: 109.

²⁰⁸ *āsīn ānām surabhita śīlaṃ n ābhigandhair mṛgāṅām
tasyā eva prabhavam acalaṃ prāpya gauraṃ tuṣāraiḥ |
vakṣyasy adhva śramavinayane tasya śrīge niṣaṅgaḥ
śobhām śubhratrinayanavṛṣotkhātapaṅkopameyām | | 52 | |*

²⁰⁹ Alley 2009: 576.

lord Śiva. The abode of Śiva is the Himālaya, or more specifically mount Kailāsa – the final destination of the route of the cloud –and is considered to be a mountain (-range) of major sanctity.²¹⁰

Śiva's footprint

'There in insolent pride, resenting thy release of thunder, Śarabhas
Will leap at thee, the unassailable, only to shatter their own bodies;
Cover them with the laughter of a violent shower of hail;
Who that essays a fruitless task does not meet with contempt?'²¹¹

'Bowing in devotion, pass around the footprint of the Half-moon-diademed
Manifested there on a rock, where the *siddhas* heap their offerings evermore;
The sins of believers are abolished by that sight; when they leave the body
They are fitted to attain eternal station as His attendants.'²¹²

In the second verse, the cloud is asked by the Yakṣa to circumambulate the footprint of the 'Half-moon-diademed' (*i.e.* Śiva). As is mentioned earlier a footprint is a visible trace on earth of a divinity and the cultus of footprint worship is a tradition within Vaiṣṇavism as well as within Śaivism. The place containing the footprint of lord Śiva has been identified as Mahālaya by Bisschop. According to him "the tradition of the worship of the footprint at Mahālaya must have been in existence already in the Gupta period."²¹³ Bisschop is one of the few scholars, according to my research, who identifies the footsteps mentioned here with a topographical location.

Other geographical interpretations for *Śivapada* are given by Wilson and Kale. for Wilson, the place with the footprint of Śiva may have some connection with a hill close to Haridwar called Harkā pāiri – 'the foot of Hara.'²¹⁴ Kale agrees with this interpretation of the location of these marks of Śiva.²¹⁵ But this identification would imply that the cloud turns around after Gangotri and travels towards the south again, which does not seem very probable. Further, Kale does not give a specific identification for this sacred spot. Dey fails to make an connection of the footprint with Mahālaya, but identifies the location of Mahālaya with Oṃkāranātha or Amareśvara in the

²¹⁰ Bhardwaj 1973: 86.

²¹¹ *ye tvāṃ muktadhvanim asahanāḥ svāṅgabharigāya tasmin
darpotsekād upari śarabhā laṅghayisyanty alaṅghyam |
tān kurvīthās tumulakarakāvṛṣṭihāsāvakīrṇān
ke vā na syuḥ paribhavapadaṃ niṣphalārambhayāt nāḥ | 54 |*

²¹² *tatra vyaktaṃ dṛṣṭi caraṇanyāsam ardhendumauleḥ
śaśvat siddhair upacitabaliṃ bhaktinamraḥ parīyāḥ |
yasmin dṛṣṭe karaṇavigamād ūrdhvam uddh ūtapāpāḥ
kalpante 'sya sthiragaṇapadaprāptaye śraddadhānāḥ | 55 |*

²¹³ Bisschop 2006: 179.

²¹⁴ Wilson 1961: 55.

²¹⁵ Kale 1969: 99.

Vindhya mountains on the Narmadā, which Bisschop rejects.²¹⁶ Considering the route of the cloud, being on its way to the north, it does not seem to be a plausible identification.

According to Bisschop, Mahālaya is a sanctuary located on a peak of the Himālaya, which is considered sacred because of this footprint. Just as the *Viṣṇupada* at the Rāmagiri, this footprint represents God's descent on earth. It suggests a transition from the supramundane to the mundane sphere.²¹⁷ By worshipping the footprint of Mahādeva, all men will be released from their sins. Kālidāsa was most probably inspired by the *Vāyupurāṇa*, wherein this merit, obtained by presenting offerings to the footprint, is mentioned.²¹⁸ Mahālaya may have been a Paśupata site, it is mentioned in the list of mundane sanctuaries and in the list of *avatāras* in the *Skandapurāṇa*.²¹⁹ The above mentioned verse also suggests that Mahālaya was regarded as a Paśupata place. Bisschop remarks "This can be inferred from a number of details: the reference to Siddhas residing there, the rewards of becoming a Gaṇa if one sees the footprint and Śiva being a Paśupati. In addition, the compound *karaṇavigama* possibly echoes PāSū 1.25 (*vikaraṇaḥ*), in that *vikaraṇaḥ* appears to be used in this technical sense ('absence of the body') only by the Paśupatas."²²⁰

According to the *Skandapurāṇa* some sort of temple existed at Mahālaya for it tells that 'a powerful Mahāgaṇapati at the door prevents the entry of sinners.'²²¹ It may have been the sanctuary in which the footprint of Śiva was worshipped.²²² Bisschop thinks Mahālaya could be identified with Rudranāth, in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. Rudranāth is referred to as Rudrālaya, as Mahālaya and as Mamālaya 'my [i.e. Śiva's] abode.' The identification of Rudranāth with Mahālaya is supported by the fact that Rudranāth is situated to the south of Kedāra, described in the *Skandapurāṇa* in the following way: 'More holy is Kedāra, which lies to the north of it [i.e. Mahālaya].'²²³ It is one of the places en route from Kurukṣetra to Naimiśa in the *Mahābhārata*, where Pulastya explains the rewards of a pilgrimage and says to the seer "Going on to Brahmāvarta, continent and attentive, he [the pilgrim] obtains a Horse Sacrifice and goes to the heavenly world. Then having gone to the source of the Yamunā and having bathed in the river's water, he acquires the reward of a Horse Sacrifice and glories in heaven. (...). Dwelling at Mahālaya for a month and eating once every third day, one will find, his soul cleansed of evil, the reward of much gold."²²⁴

²¹⁶ Bisschop 2006: 177.

²¹⁷ Bisschop 2006: 13.

²¹⁸ Ibid: 22.

²¹⁹ Ibid: 34, 42.

²²⁰ Ibid: 179.

²²¹ Ibid: 66.

²²² Unfortunately I could not find Kālidāsa's source for this imaginary description of Śiva's footprint, it is not mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*.

²²³ Ibidem.

²²⁴ van Buitenen 1975: 388-389, MhB 3.81: 35-50.

The identification of Mahālaya with Rudranāth by Bisschop appears to be the most plausible. It is situated close to Gopeshwar, circa 15-23km, and can be reached by a trek. Unfortunately, there is no footprint found (yet) and known of at this sacred place. Since footprints on stone slabs were a common image at the time Kālidāsa composed the poem, it can still be another place in the same area. At Rudranāth the contemporary main sanctuary is a cave-temple with a *liṅga*. However, the *Skandapurāṇa* does not mention a footprint being worshipped in a cave at Mahālaya. To me it is even not clear if the footprint should be understood to be located here on earth, given the following line of the *Skandapurāṇa*: ‘A great peak of the Himavat is Mahālaya. Gandharvas, Apsaras and Cāraṇas roam around the footprint of Paśupati there. (...) The Paśupatas who have reached that venerable footprint go to Bhava’s world. Greedy people do not see it. It is reached by *tapas* [alone(?)].’²²⁵ This postulates an image of a divine sanctuary and presumes a place of Kalidāsa’s imagination, if the footprint is at Mahālaya. However, Bisschop is convinced that Mahālaya is a geographical location in this world, because it is described in the *Skandapurāṇa* (167.36d) to be south of Kedāra. This suggests a mundane place and seems to correspond to the location of Rudranāth. Further, the *Skandapurāṇa* mentions Rudranāth in combination with two places, namely Madhyamaheśvara and Kedāra, and these three places belong to the tradition of the pañca-kedāra.²²⁶ Although Rudranāth seems a reasonable identification for Mahālaya, and Mahālaya a plausible interpretation for the place of the footprint mentioned in the *Meghadūta*, it is not conclusive and needs more evidence to ascertain these interpretations.

Before the cloud reaches this footprint of Śiva, it will have an unpleasant but harmless encounter with a *Śarabha*. *Śarabhas* are fabulous animals, which suppose to have eight legs and are of colossal strength with sharp fangs. The monstrous creatures are represented as being stronger than lions and elephants and are said to inhabit the snowy mountains.²²⁷ They are considered as mighty as the peaks of the incredible Himālayas. Animal forms were often associated with the demonic and are therefore regarded with suspicion.²²⁸ The description of this mythical animal confirms Kālidāsa’s mythological *imaginaire* in this part of the route.

‘Bowing in devotion, pass around the footprint of the Half-moon-diademed manifested there on a rock’. The Yakṣa instructs the cloud to pay homage to the *Śivapada* by circumambulating the footprint of Śiva and to observe the devotional siddhas, when flying across the Himālayan range, close to reaching mount Kailāsa. Circumambulating a deity marks profound respect and is enjoined as a religious duty. After this respectful performance, the cloud need to proceed his itinerary to Alakā, on one of the peaks of the Himālaya.

²²⁵ Bisschop 2006: 76.

²²⁶ Bisschop in email-correspondence, at 25th of April 2012. Pañca-kedāra are five important places of interest to pilgrims devoted to Śiva, and by visiting the five places (Kedarnāth-Tungnāth-Rudranāth-Madhyamaheśvara-Kalpeśvara) the pilgrim is released from all sins (Nigam 2002: 18).

²²⁷ Monier-Williams’ translation of *Śarabha*.

²²⁸ Granoff 2004: 111-138.

Himālaya and the Krauñca Pass

‘Passing over various places along the Snow Mountain’s slopes, by the defile
Through mount Krauñcha, the Gateway of Haṃsas, the Bhṛgu-lord’s path of glory,
Pursue thy way northward, beautiful in thy sloping elongation
As the dark foot of Viṣṇu striding forth to punish Bali.’²²⁹

In this verse Kālidāsa is referring to three different myths. The first refers to the story about Trivikrama – another name of Viṣṇu – taking his three steps to re-conquer and save the earth from the evil demon Bali. Then, he mentions the glorifying path of the most prominent of Bhṛgus, Paraśurāma, who cleaved the mountain with his axe and created a pass through which the birds now fly on their way to Mānasa. The third myth refers to the creation of the ‘gateway of Haṃsas’ of mount Krauñcha, formed by an arrow of Kārttikeya. The context of these myths is the nearly impenetrable mountain system of the Himalayas, literally the ‘abode of snow.’ In the poem *Kumārāsaṃbhava*, one of his other works, Kālidāsa gives a beautiful description of the Himālaya, the abode of Śiva:

‘There is in the northern quarter, the deity-souled lord of mountains (*lit.* the immovable ones), by name Himālaya (the mansion of snow), who stands, like the measuring-rod of the earth, spanning (...) the Eastern and the Western oceans. Who bears, on his peaks, a richness of metals, appearing like an untimely twilight, with his colours reflected upon patches of clouds, and the cause of the amorous decking of the heavenly nymphs.’²³⁰

I will first discuss the location of Krauñca within the so-called ‘mansion of snow’ after which I will review the three myths in further detail.

Geographically mount Krauñca is difficult to identify, for there is not much research been done on this particular place. Vallabhadeva and Mallinātha are not more specific than to situate Krauñcha on the slopes of the Himālaya. The *Rāmāyaṇa* (Kiṣkindhyākāṇḍa, Ch. 44) situates the Krauñcha mountain on that part of the Kailāsa mountain on which lake Mānasa is located. Although Krauñcha is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* (book VI, 12.20-12.25)²³¹, in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (I, 31.2) and in the Kūrmavibhāga section of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, a specific description where the mountain is situated is not given. Pargiter argues that the mountain appears to have been part of the Maināka mountain (Swalik range) in the Himālayan range. Wilson and Kale both do not give an identification of Krauñcha. They argue only that the

²²⁹ *prāleyādreḥ upatatam atikramya tāṃs tān viśeṣān
haṃsadvāraṃ bhṛgupatiyaśovartma yat krauñcharandhram |
tenodīcīṃ diśam anusares tiryagāyāmaśobhī*

śyāmaḥ pādo baliniyamanābhudyatasyeva viṣṇoḥ | 57 |

²³⁰ Kale 1967: 1 (Canto I: 1 and 4).

²³¹ Meiland 2007: 97 and 589. Krauñcha is besides called a mountain also called a continent in the MBh.

mountain must be at some distance from the plains of Hindustan and in the vicinity of the Himālayan range.²³²

Dey identifies Krauñcha with the Niti pass in the district of Kumaon, as does Rajan.²³³ The *Mahābhārata* (vanaparva, ch. 144, 156) includes the Kumaon mountains in the Kailāsa range²³⁴ which is a section of the Himālaya that borders Nepal at the extreme north-west. The Krauñcha pass is a passage way from India to Tibet.²³⁵ The identification given by Dey is, according to my research, the only one, for I did not come across an alternative. For the location of Krauñchrandhra in our itinerary, the identification of Niti pass is convenient. The Niti pass is to be located near mount Kamet at the border between India and Tibet. Another name for the Niti pass is Kiunglang La.²³⁶

The route which is undertaken these days by the Indian pilgrims to Mount Kailāsa, goes along the Nepalese border and crosses the Lipu Lekh pass. For the Indian pilgrims Lipu Lekh is the only border crossing to Tibet, for political reason. It is located close to Taklakot, which accommodates the headquarters of Chinese military might of Western Tibet. It is the closest point both to Lipu Lekh, for the Indian pilgrims, and Tinker pass, for the Nepalese travelers and therefore a strategic place to control and regulate pilgrims coming from these two countries. According to Sarao, prior to 1959, when pilgrimage from India to Tibet was prohibited as a result of Sino-Indian hostilities, pilgrims could cross into Tibet via other passes such as Mashang Dhura, Lampiya, Untadhura, Hoti, Bomlas, Damjan, Jelukhaga, Thaga, Mana and Niti pass.²³⁷

Kālidāsa describes mount Krauñcha as ‘the Gateway of Haṃsas,’ ‘the Bhṛgu-lord’s path of glory’ and compares the beautiful elongated form of the dark raincloud – proceeding northwards after visiting the footprint of Śiva – with the dark foot of Viṣṇu, striding forth to punish Bali.

Trivikrama is a name of Viṣṇu used in the *R̥gveda* and refers to the three steps taken to stride over the whole universe. The steps represent the strides taken by an incarnation of Viṣṇu, Vāmana or the dwarf. Vāmana places one step on the earth, a second in heaven and a third in the netherworld. Viṣṇu’s help was needed to restore the power and dignity of the gods, being defiled by the demon king Bali. Admitting his defeat and seeing that Vāmana needed one more place for his last step, Bali offered his head as a stepping-stone. After Vāmana managed to win the three worlds, the demon king was sent to the netherworld for all time.²³⁸

Paraśurāma, or ‘Rāma with the axe’, cut fissures with his axe into mountain Ghāts, and mount Krauñcha is believed to be one of them.²³⁹ He opened mount Krauñcha during an act of rage that

²³² Kale 1969: 102; Wilson 1961: 57.

²³³ Dey 1971: 104; Rajan 1989: 294.

²³⁴ Law 1968: 8.

²³⁵ Ibid: 8-9.

²³⁶ International Travel Maps. *Himalaya. The roof of the World*. Richmond, Canada.

²³⁷ Sarao 2009: 81.

²³⁸ Dimmit and van Buitenen 1978: 81-82.

²³⁹ Dey 1971: 104; Rajan 1989: 285-286; Kale 1969: 102.

culminated in his clearing the earth of Kṣatriyas twenty-one times, after his father was killed by a member of a Kṣatriya-clan. Paraśurāma is described as a Brahman, and his story typifies the contests between the Brahmans and Kṣatriyas. Although he is an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, he is considered a follower of Śiva and protected by Him. Śiva taught him *Dhanurveda*, or the science of archery on mount Kailāsa, and gave him the *paraśu* or axe, which he is named after.²⁴⁰

The last myth Kālidāsa may have referred to is about Kārttikeya, who was famous as the piercer of the Krauñcha mountain. In the *Mahābhārata* (Book IX, Śalya II, 46.95-47.1) the story goes that when the gods were threatened by the mighty son of Bali, Kārttikeya and his army attacked him. In his fear of this god of war, Bali's son took refuge in Krauñcha. Skanda then furiously cleaved Krauñcha – which echoed with the distinctive mournful sound of curlews²⁴¹ – with the spear he had been given by Agni and slaughtered the son of the demon king.²⁴²

With this last bloody act, the above mentioned verse comes to a close and is it time to move on towards the centre of the universe or the 'navel of the earth.' The precious, snowy mountain is considered a resting place of the gods and a major pilgrimage site for various (world-)religions. The cloud will be assigned to ascend to the magnificent mount Kailāsa.

Mount Kailāsa and Lake Mānasa

'Ascended, be the guest of Kailāsa, mirror for divine nymphs,
On whose table-land Rāvana's arms opened yawning crevices;
With lofty peaks gleaming as the white lotus, its stands pervading the sky,
Like the loud laughter of Śiva raised high on every hand.'²⁴³

'As thou sippest the water of the Mānasa lake where grows the golden lotus,
Creating at will the fleeting pleasure of a head-cloth for Airavaṇa,
Shaking the garments on the wishing tree with water-dappled breezes,
Enjoy that mountain, varying the gleam of its crystals with shadow.'²⁴⁴

Kailāsa is a mysterious mountain, surrounded by myths and legends. It has often been called the centre of the universe, the navel of the earth and a resting place for the gods. The near perfect canonical summit of Kailāsa – resembling a white lotus – must be a spectacular sight from every angle. This snowcovered mountain has been a central pilgrimage site for Hindus, Buddhists and

²⁴⁰ Dowson 1972: 230-231.

²⁴¹ The Sanskrit word for curlew is Krauñcha, which explains the mountain's name (Meiland 2007: 407).

²⁴² Meiland 2007: 211-213.

²⁴³ *gatvā cordhvaṃ daśamukhabhujocchvāsitaṃ prasthasaṃ dheḥ*

kailāsasya tridaśavanitādarpaṇasyātithiḥ syāḥ |

śṛṅgocchrāyāiḥ kumudaviśadair yo vitatyā sthitaḥ khaṃ

rāśībhūtaḥ pratidiśam iva tryambakasyāḥ | 58 |

²⁴⁴ *hemāmbhojaprasavi salilāṃ mānasasyādadānaḥ*

kurvan kāmāt kṣaṇamukhapaṭapṛītim airāvaṇasya |

dhunvan vātāiḥ sajalapṛṣṭatāiḥ kalpavṛkṣāṅśukāni

chāyābhinnasphaṭikaviśadaṃ nirviśes taṃ nagendram | 62 |

Jainas. Kailāsa is 6714m high and lies just northwest of the Indian border with Tibet and north of the Mānasa lake. By reaching the mountain and the lake one has entered the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, a region known as Ngari (West Tibet). For the Hindu pilgrim mount Kailāsa (also called Hemakūṭa) is the seat of Śīva and Kubera.²⁴⁵ A myth tells that the king of all mountain-ranges, Himalaya, had a son called Maināka and a daughter Pārvatī. Pārvatī would win Śīva for her husband, which was foretold by the sage Nārada. Śīva was practicing penance on mount Kailāsa and did not pay any attention to her. This changed when Pārvatī, already deeply in love, practiced austere penance. These austerities made Śīva fall in love with her and he took her as his wife.²⁴⁶ One day Rāvaṇa, the demon king of Lankā, was wandering around in his chariot and ends up in the Himalayas, for his vehicle could not move any further. Here he met a monkey-faced dwarf Nandikeśvara, one of Śīva's *gaṇas* or attendants, who told him that Śīva and Pārvatī were sporting on mount Kailāsa and nobody was allowed to cross it. This angered Rāvaṇa and he started to ridicule Nandikeśvara, who was no other than Śīva in disguise. Śīva then cursed the demon so that powerful monkeys would be produced to destroy Rāvaṇa and his family. Rāvaṇa then decided to uproot the Kailāsa mountain in order to intimidate Śīva. He tore Kailāsa off from its foundation, the whole mountain was shaking and the birds, deer, bears, yaks and all the forest animals were frightened. Pārvatī, being fearful, asked her husband to stop the shaking. Śīva just pressed down his toe and Rāvaṇa was about to be crushed. Rāvaṇa then appeased Śīva and was released. Śīva gave him his name Rāvaṇa, from the cry (*rāva*) he uttered forcefully when being crushed.²⁴⁷

During his stay in the Himalayan range, Rāvaṇa is said to have bathed every day in a lake, southwest of mount Kailāsa, before worshipping lord Śīva. This lake is called Rāvaṇahrāda and is situated west of lake Mānasa. Lake Mānasarovar (Mapam Yumco) is almost 25km in length (east to west) and 18km in breadth (north to south). According to the mythical account, the river Gaṅgā has its source at this lake, but in reality no river issues from lake Mānasa.²⁴⁸ Its holy significance attracts many visitors per year. Pilgrims circumambulate the lake and the mountain to dispel all sins. Bathing and drinking the clear water of the lake is believed to be purifying.²⁴⁹

When Airāvaṇa (*i.e.* Indra's elephant) – referred to in the above mentioned verse – drinks from the lake, the Yakṣa asks the cloud to appear like a head-cloth, and provide a pleasant shadow for Indra's elephant. The Yakṣa further describes Mount Kailāsa's peak being formed of crystals and its transparency serves like a mirror to the divine nymphs. The snow on these magnificent mountains is of such intense whiteness, similar to the white teeth of lord Śīva, shown when he is laughing out loud. But, as mentioned earlier, mount Kailāsa is also an abode for Kubera, god of

²⁴⁵ Pritchard-Jones and Gibbons 2007: 15 and 31.

²⁴⁶ Kale 1967: XVI.

²⁴⁷ Wilkins 1974: 187; World Heritage Series 2007: 30.

²⁴⁸ Dey 1971: 123.

²⁴⁹ Pritchard-Jones and Gibbons 2007: 31.

wealth and lord of the Yakṣas. It is his city, the city of the Yakṣas, situated on the top of this sacred mountain, the cloud is about to enter.²⁵⁰

The celestial city of Alakā

‘Once seen, thou, who movest unrestrained, wilt not fail to know Alakā again;
Her Ganges-garment falls on that mountain’s lap, as on a lover’s;
At your season she wears on her tall mansions as mass of clouds shedding water,
As a loving woman wears her tresses confined by a network of pearls.’²⁵¹

‘You will not fail to recognize the celestial city Alakā, on top of mount Kailāsa’ is what the Yakṣa tells the cloud. For it has palaces with towers reaching the sky, with jeweled floors and highly decorated walls, there is music everywhere and the gardens resemble paradise. Alakā is a mythical city, beautiful and perfect in every detail. In this verse mount Kailāsa is equated to a lover and Alakā to a woman sitting on the lap of her lover. She wears a lovely white silk sari, which is imagined with the water of the Gaṅgā falling from its slope.²⁵² The poet compares the palaces with the beautiful faces of young women, the mass of dark clouds to be their black hair and the raindrops an ornament of pearls.²⁵³

The cloud then receives characteristic signs to identify the Yakṣas dwelling and meet the lonely, weeping, miserable spouse, who is still counting the days to his return. The cloud is instructed to comfort her with his deep-sounding tones and deliver the message of love and hope, for the curse is to end within four months, when the rainy season is over, Viṣṇu awakens, and the year of exile will be completed.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ Kale 1969: 103 and 107.

²⁵¹ *tasyotsaṅge praṇayina iva srastagaṅgādukūlāṃ*
na tvam dṛṣṭvā na punar alakāṃ jñāsyase kāmācārin |
yā vaḥ kāle vahati salilodgāram uccairvimānā
muktājāgrathitam alakaṃ kāmīnīvābhraṃdam | |63| |

²⁵² Kale 1969: 108-109.

²⁵³ Edgerton 1964: 86.

²⁵⁴ Kale 1969: 11-12.

Conclusion

In a lyrical narrative like the *Meghadūta*, it is fascinating to discover political, geographical, and historical information, besides mythological descriptions. On the face of this poem, it appears to be a poetical fairytale about a lovelorn Yakṣa, banished from the glorious city of Alakā, residing at some hill of Rāma and desperately longing for his distant beloved wife and therefore sending her a message by a cloud during the monsoon. Under the surface Kālidāsa tells us more than 'just' a nice, poetically written lyrical narration.

In the preceding two sections, the route of the cloud has been reconstructed by analyzing and identifying the geographical data introduced by Kālidāsa in the *Meghadūta*. The poem showed that Kālidāsa was influenced by the geocultural framework given in the epics *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, in which landscapes and geography are attached to sacred narratives. While the last section of the itinerary – namely the route from Brahmāvarta to Alakā – originated in Kālidāsa's mythical imagination, the first section reflects Kālidāsa's regional identity and shows cultural and political aspects of his time. It is only in this part of the poem, which describes the route from Rāmagiri to Daśapura, that we find answers to the central question posed in this thesis: '*is there a historical geography underlying the route of the cloud in the Meghadūta?*'

The analysis shows that Kālidāsa describes his own residential area with much more detail in comparison to the second part of the journey. Besides this, the greater part of the route from Rāmagiri to Daśapura follows existing trade routes, and Kālidāsa must have had common knowledge of these places. He may have even passed the sites Amarakaṇṭaka, Vidiśā, Ujjain and Mandasor along the existing trade routes and visited the state-sanctuary of the Vākāṭakas, Ramtek Hill, regularly while being connected to this dynasty as a court-poet. During the lifetime of Kālidāsa, Amarakaṇṭaka was already a unique place for devotion especially because of its spectacular landscape and its prominent appearance in this geographical region of India. Vidiśā, on the other hand, was a city with political significance, while Udayagiri, in the vicinity of Vidiśā, had major influence in political and religious affairs. The trade route linked Vidiśā with the splendid city of Ujjain, famous for the Mahākāla temple, dedicated to lord Śiva. Devagiri was another important religious place, especially for worshipping Skanda, son of Śiva, well known to Kālidāsa, but difficult to identify. 'Kālidāsa's religio-geocultural *imaginaire*' is completed with the city of Mandasor, which had political connections to the imperial Guptas and was a rich cultural center in the course of the poet's time. A historical context is difficult to acquire from verse 48 onwards, when Brahmāvarta or Kurukṣetra is described. It is astonishing that Kālidāsa lacks depicting the landscape of modern state Rajasthan, which has an extremely different character compared to Malwa, just north of Narmadā river. Because he bases the rest of the itinerary mostly on the epic *Mahābhārata* for describing the route to Alakā, I conclude Kālidāsa most probably never travelled north of Mandasor to visit the modern states of Haryana and Utterakand but did have local firsthand knowledge of the above mentioned sites.

When Kālidāsa leaves Mandasor behind and narrates the itinerary from Brahmāvarta to Alakā, he leaves his imagination free scope. Thus, everything is possible, even penetrating the majestic Himālayan mountains. In contrast, Kālidāsa's descriptions of the route between Rāmagiri and Mandasor suggest that he did not travel to these places himself, nor that he had local knowledge about any of the places mentioned in the verses 48-63. The stories of these sites are based on mythology rather than personal experience and/or local knowledge. However, this does not mean that his knowledge of this part of Indian topography was inaccurate. On the contrary, it appears that Kālidāsa had carried out thorough research using the literary sources available to him at the royal court of Vikramāditya. But his descriptions of this part of the route indicate that he did not have local knowledge of these places and may have not been aware of the existence of some of the locations such as Mahālaya or Krauñcarandhra, thus making their identification problematic. It is interesting to note that the usual order of the contemporary pilgrimage route to the Himālayan *tīrthas* follows closely the order of locations constituting the route of the cloud in this area. As is described in the previous pages, the cloud is summoned to go from Kurukṣetra to Kanakhala (Haridwar), Gangotri, possibly via Rudranāth to the Niti pass with its final destination on mount Kailāsa. In comparison, pilgrims nowadays travel from Haridwar to Rishikesh, Yamnotri, Gangotri, Kedarnāth, Badrināth and back to Haridwar.²⁵⁵ While Rudranāth is located between Kedarnāth and Badrināth, all three being part of the *pañcakedāra*, Badrināth is situated close to the border crossing from India to Tibet via the Niti pass. Since the Chinese authorities closed this pass, Indian pilgrims enter Tibet via Lipu Lekh.

'Kālidāsa's mythological *imaginaire*,' or the itinerary between Brahmāvarta and Alakā, starts with describing Kurukṣetra as the site of the great battle between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, famous as the central story of the *Mahābhārata*. Also the verse on the location of the river Sarasvatī narrates an epic story of Balarāma, who went on pilgrimage on behalf of his fighting family. Kanakhala is mentioned together with the story of Gaṅgā's descent, also told in the *Mahābhārata*. The verse which describes Śiva's footprint seems to be an exception, since the epic does not mention a footprint in connection to Mahālaya. Nevertheless, the place is located at the trajectory to mount Kailāsa in the Himālayan range, and mentioned in the grand pilgrimage route in the *Mahābhārata*, from Kurukṣetra to Naimiśa, just like the previous sites. The Krauñcha pass, the next location after the worship of Śiva's footprint, does have a mythological description told in the great epic, while Kailāsa is a mountain surrounded with myths and portrayed as the abode of the gods, especially of Śiva. Alakā, the final destination, is the perfect celestial city, glorified and spectacular. Although the itinerary between Brahmāvarta and Alakā is less detailed in geographically describing the journey, it is rich in mythological narration and therefore I have called this part of the route of the cloud 'Kālidāsa's mythological *imaginaire*.'

²⁵⁵ Bhardwaj, S.M. 1973, p. 50.

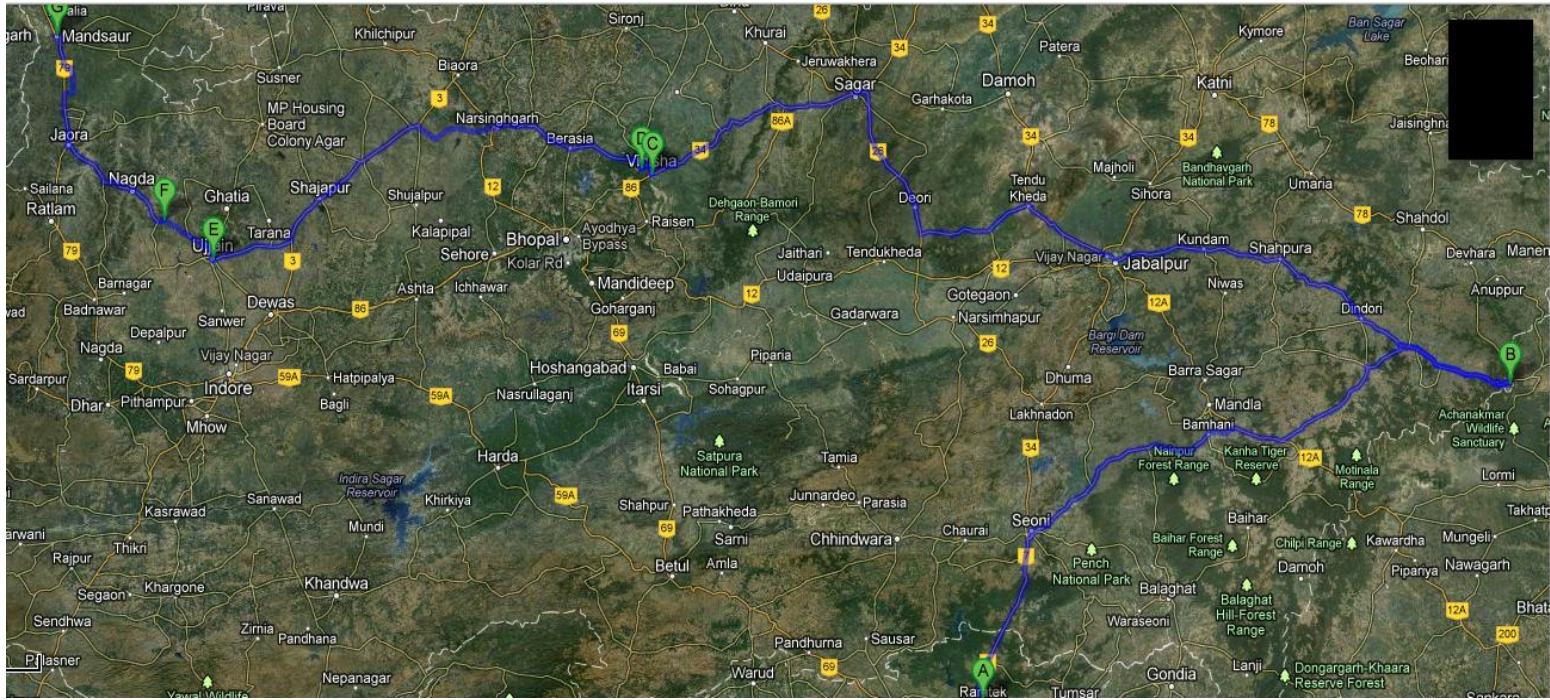
During my visit of some of the places mentioned in the poem, the amount of ancient archaeological artifacts still visible was striking, even though unfortunately much remains unprotected from unfavorable climatic conditions. Visiting Ramtek hill, Vidiśā, Udayagiri and Ujjain inspired me even more in writing this dissertation and made me realize how much there is out there to explore and investigate. What will be discovered if the area of Unhel, the suggested identification of Devagiri, will be excavated and archaeologically researched? And would fieldwork at Rudranāth lead to convincing evidence for locating the footprint of lord Śiva? What more can we find on (the existence of) Krauñcharandhra? These interesting questions can only be answered after further research is accomplished on this topic.

Appendix A: list of Geographical data of the Meghadūta²⁵⁶

Rāmagiri	(Mount)	MeD. 1, 9, 102.
Land of Māla	(Landscape, table-plateau)	MeD. 16.
Āmrakūṭa	(Mount Amarakaṅṭaka)	MeD. 17, 18,19
Revā	(River Narmadā)	MeD. 19.
Vindhya mountains	(Mountain range)	MeD. 19.
Daśāṃṇa	(Region/country)	MeD. 23, 24.
Vidiśā	(City)	MeD. 24.
Vetravatī	(River Betwā)	MeD. 24.
nīcairākhyā giriṃ	(Low Mount/caves of Udayagiri)	MeD. 25.
Vananadī	(Forest rivers)	MeD. 26.
Ujjayinī	(City Ujjain)	MeD. 27
Nirvindhya	(River)	MeD. 28.
Sindhu	(River Kāli Sindh)	MeD. 29.
Land of Avanti	(Region/country)	MeD. 30.
Viśālā	(City Ujjain)	MeD. 30,32
Śiprā	(River)	MeD. 31.
Gandhavatī	(River)	MeD. 33.
Mahākālaṃ	(Temple of Ujjain)	MeD. 34, 35, 36.
Gambhīrā	(River)	MeD. 40.
Devagiri	(Mount close to Unhel?)	MeD. 42 (on Skanda 42-45).
Daśapura	(City of Mandasor)	MeD. 47.
Brahmāvarta	(Kurukṣetra)	MeD. 48.
Kurukṣetra	(Region/country)	MeD. 48.
Sarasvatī	(River)	MeD. 49.
Ganges	(River)	MeD. 50, 52.
Kanakhala	(Haridwar)	MeD. 50.
Himālaya	(Mountain range)	MeD. 50.
Yamunā	(River)	MeD. 51.
Śivapada	(Mahālaya, Rudranāth?)	MeD. 55.
Krauñcarandhra	(Mountain pass, Niti pass?)	MeD. 57.
Mount Kailāsa	(Mount)	MeD. 58.
Lake Mānasa	(Lake)	MeD. 62.
Alakā	(Mythical city)	MeD. 63.

²⁵⁶ verse numbers according to Hultzsich' edition.

Appendix B: The itinerary of the cloud from Rāmagiri to Daśapura

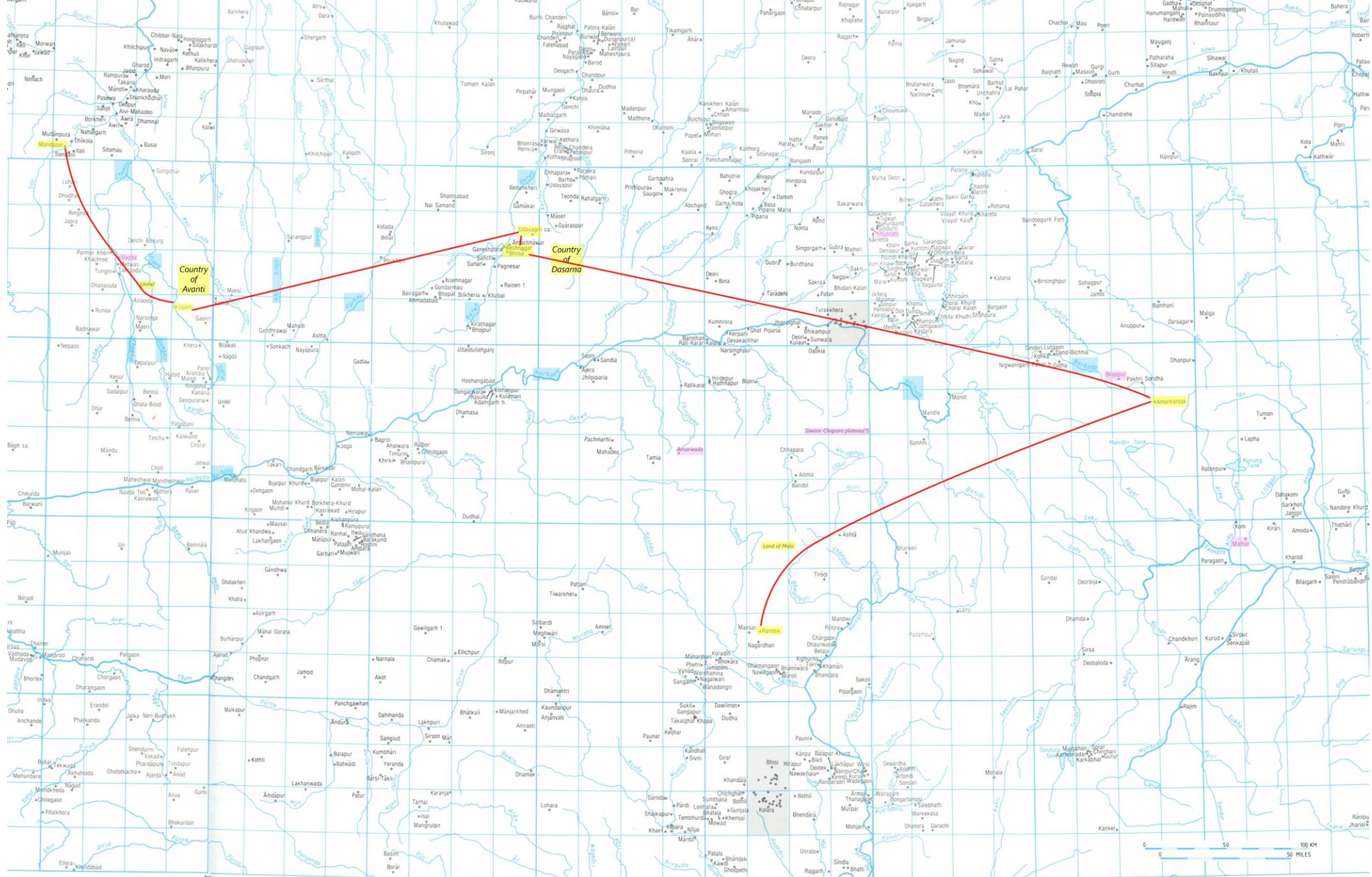


- | | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| A. Rāmagiri | (Ramtek) |
| B. Āmrakūṭa | (Amarakaṇṭaka) |
| C. Vidiśā | (Bhilsā/Besnagar) |
| D. Nīcair hill | (Udayagiri) |
| E. Viśālā | (Ujjain) |
| F. Devagiri | (Unhel?) |
| G. Daśapura | (Mandasor) |

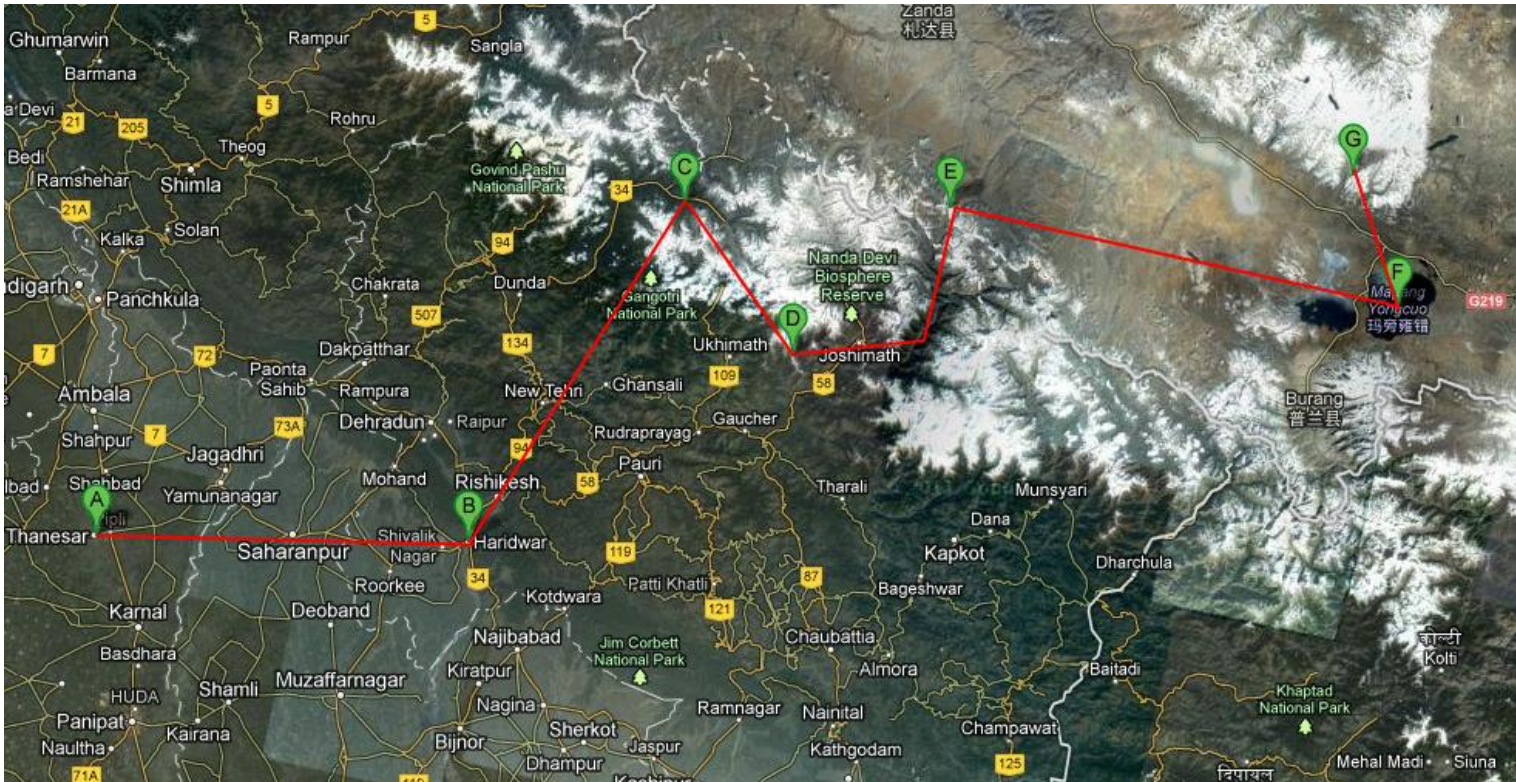


Appendix C: Detailed map of the itinerary of the cloud from Rāmagiri to Daśapura²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Source map: Pollet, G., P. Eggermont and G. van Damme. 1990. *Corpus Topographicum Indiae Antiquae II. Archaeological Sites*. Leuven. Modified by M. Westra.



Appendix D: The itinerary of the cloud from Brahmāvarta to Alakā, mount Kailāsa



- A. Brahmāvarta & Kurukṣetra (region around Thanesar)
- B. Kanakhala (Haridwar)
- C. Source of the Ganges (Gangotri)
- D. Footprint of Śiva (Mahālaya>Rudranāth?)
- E. Krauñcarandhra (Niti pass)
- F. Lake Mānasa
- G. Mount Kailāsa



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- Source photo front cover: personal collection. *View from the top of Ramtek hill, Maharashtra, India. Starting point of the cloud's journey.*
- Source photo back cover: <http://www.mychinatours.com/shigatse-travel/shigatse-attractions/mount-kailash-pilgrimage-hiking/> *View of Mount Kailāsa, Tibet.*

