

QUR'ĀNIC SIDR, ITS IDENTIFICATION AND MEDICINAL USES

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ABSTRACT

The Qur'ān has been revealed for the guidance of mankind and it will be till the day of resurrection. Man is striving its best to reach the meanings of the holy Qur'ān. Some people use lexicons to interpret, others take the assistance of scientific knowledge. While, there are still others who also co-relate its teachings with Biblical knowledge. Sometimes such people go beyond the established knowledge in their effort. In the holy Qur'ān many animals and plants have been mentioned. To reach the exact meanings of the word used people have used scientific as well as Biblical accounts. Similar is the case with the word sidr used in the holy Qur'ān. Dr. Iqtedar Farooqi while accounting the word sidr has called it as Cedrus that is against the lexical as well as exegical meaning of the word.

Key Words: Sidr, Qur'ān, Zizyphus, Cedrus, Prophetic Traditions, Medicinal use

The Holy Qur`an is a book of guidance revealed by Almighty Allah upon the Prophet Muhammad (upon whom be peace and greeting). It was the Prophet who comprehended it fully and elaborated it to his companions so that they may act upon its commandments. After his demise, the companions and their successors interpreted the Qur`an to the succeeding generation respectively. A number of commentators wrote exegeses of the Holy Qur`an for its easy understanding ۞ the ummah.

In the holy Qur'ān, 23 plants have been mentioned at various places. These are mentioned as the sign of God's omnipotence or as the blessings of God to be given to the believers in the paradise. Sometimes they are referred to particular happening.

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Like many other plants, Sidr has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān. There are three references of Sidr pointing to three different themes. which are as under:

It refers to the flood of Erum that came in Yemen. The Qur`an has underlined it as:

فأعرضوا فأرسلنا عليهم سيل العرم وبدلناهم بجنتيهم جنتين ذواتا أكل
خبط واثل و شيء من سدر قليل (سبأ، ١٦:٣٣)

“But they turned away (from Allah), and we sent against them the flood (released) from the dams, and we converted their two “gardens” producing bitter fruit, and tamarisks, and some few (stunted) Lote trees” (sidr)

Historically, Shebean people lived in Yemen. They were the progeny of Ya'rab bin Qahtan: Their reign is from 950 to 115BC. Their reign can be divided into two parts.

1. From 950 BC to 650 BC. During this period, their chiefs were called as Mukrab-i-Saba. During this age the kingdom of Mu'in was also surviving side by side. The Mu'm kingdom devastated and its territory came under the reign of shebean people and then started the new era.
2. From 650 BC to 115 BC. Their capital was the city of Ma'arib.

Yemen is a hilly area. They constructed a dam to irrigate their lands by stopping the rain water. It was at the place of Ma'arib and hence termed as Sad-i-Ma'arib. Frist they worshiped Almighty Allah and hence God blessed them with his favours. That's why God says:

لقد كان لسبأ في مسكنهم آية جنتين عن يمين وشمال كلوا من طيبات ما
رزقناكم واشكروا له بلدة طينة ورب غفور (سبأ، ١٥:٣٣)

But as the time passed on, they started worshiping gods other than Almighty Allah. Their rulers became ignorant of their responsibilities about the kingdom Among their rulers one was the Queen of Sheba who encountered the Prophet Sulayman (upon whom be greeting). Her anecdote has been explicated in the Holy Qur'ān.

After this Queen, they again started worshiping other gods. Then the Dam was ruined by Allah's Commandments This incident has been narrated in the Qur`an as:

فأعرضوا فأرسلنا عليهم سيل العرم وبدلناهم بجنتيهم جنتين ذواتي اكل

خبط واثل و شيء من سدر قليل (سبأ: ٣٢:١٦)

“But they turned away (from Allah), and we sent against them the flood (released) from the dams, and we converted their two “gardens” producing bitter fruit, and tamarisks, and some few(stunted) Lote trees”

Due to the flood water, their dwellings were ruined, their fields and agriculture destroyed and only useless and low value plants survived. Before this they were enjoying all the blessings. Discussing their prosperity P.K. Hitti has observed:

“The fertility of that felicitous rain favoured land, its proximity to the sea and its strategic location on the India route were all determining factors in its development. Here were produced spices, myrrh and other aromata for seasoning foods or burning in the ceremonials of the church: foremost among these was incense, that most valuable commodity of ancient trade. Thither did rare and highly prized products such as pearls from the Persian Gulf, condiments, fabrics and swords from India, silk from China, slaves, monkeys, ivory, gold and ostritch feathers from Ethiopia find their way in transit to Western marts.” (1)

Three plants that survived have been mentioned in this verse namely:

- a. Khamt
- b. 'Athl
- c. Sidr

The second reference of Sidr is in the Surah al Najam. While accounting the Ascension miracle of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) it is underlined:

عند سدرة المنتهى (النجم ٥٣: ١٢)

اذ يغشى السدرة ما يغشى (النجم ٥٣: ١٦)

The third account of Sidr is in Surah al-Waqiah in the elucidation of paradisaal blessings:

فِي سِدْرٍ مَّخْضُودٍ (الواقعه ٥٦: ٢٨)

These are the three references of sidr in the Holy Qur'ān. Dr. Iqtedar Hussain Farooqi is of the view that the plant mentioned is Cedrus Lebani (Deodar). In this paper it will be tried to underline the exact meaning of the word and also botanical its identification.

Lexical Meanings of Word Sidr

First the lexical meaning and characteristics given by lexicographers be taken into account for better comprehension of the word.

Wortabet and Pooter have mentioned it as “a species of lotus. (2)

E.W. Lane calls it a species of lote tree. He has added that it is of two types, thorny and thornless or having few thorns which do not hurt. He has also mentioned that the best variety in Arabian Peninsula is in Hejer appropriated to the Sultan. (3) It means in Arabic language it has very clear meanings without any ambiguity.

G.P. Badger in his Dictionary has underlined that lote tree in English is termed as sidrah in Arabic language. (4) Al-Jawhrī underscores that it is شجر النيق (lote tree). (5) Ibn Manzur also held the same view and further added that its leaves are round in shape. (6) Zabīdī has enumerated in the Taj al-Arus all the details of this tree and called it as شجر النيق (lote tree). (7)

Prophetic Traditions about Sidr:

Sidr has also been pointed out in various Prophetic traditions. It manifests that sidr was found in Arabian habitat that is why the Prophet advised his followers to use it for various purposes. The holy Prophet (S.A.W) ordered to ablute the dead body odd times with water having leaves of Sidr. (8) Qays bin 'Āsim was ordered to take bath with water mixed with sidr leaves. (9)

Umm-i-Qays was asked to wash monstrous cloth with water mixed with leaves of Sidr. (10) In another tradition the Prophet (SAW) advised to bath with Sidr leaves mixed water. (11)

In one of the Prophetic traditions he allowed a lady of deceased husband during her prescribed period ('iddah) to wash her head with the water containing leaves of sidr. (12) The holy Prophet (S.A.W) has narrated about the tree of sidr is in the 6th sky, everything ascending or descending stops at this point.(13)

Elucidating its characteristics he (S.A.W) has added that its fruit was like the pitchers of Hejer and leaves like the ears of elephant.(14) It has also been given in Hadīth, it has been told that a rider may spend hundred years to cover its shade.

In another tradition it is given that there was sidr tree in the yard of helpers and the Prophet (SAW) and companions stayed near sidr tree during Tā'if expedition. (15)

Sidr in various Qur'ānic commentaries:

All the Qur`ānic commentators describe sidr as the lote tree. Some of the quotation of the commentators are given bellow:

Al-Nisaburi (728 AH) has called it a well-known plant of desert areas.(16) Jawhrī Tantavi underlines it as a well-known plant.(17)

Allama Zamakhsharī (528 AH) calls it the lote tree that was to some extent more beneficial as compared to the other trees mentioned in the verse.(18)

Sidr (Lote tree) شجر النيق (Sidr)

Sidr/Cedar has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān four times:

فأعرضوا فأرسلنا عليهم سيل العرم وبدلناهم بجننتيهم جننتين ذواتي اكل

خبط واثل وشيء من سدر قليل (سبأ، ١٦:٣٣)

عند سدرة المنتهى (النجم ١٢:٥٣)

اذ يغشى السدرة ما يغشى (النجم ١٦:٥٣)

في سدر مخضود (الواقعه ٢٨:٥٦)

Botanical Identification

If Sidr is considered as Cedar, it belongs to the family Pinaceae having 10 genera and 250 species.(19) If considered as lote tree then it belongs to family Rhamnaceae including 58 genera and 900 species. Engler and Prantle included 45 genera and 550 species.(20)

Dr. Iqtedar Husain Farooqi has given that the sidr/cedar basically is of Lebanon origin by presenting the following points.

1. In the Holy Qur'ān, its tree has been mentioned, not the fruit.
2. In sūrah al-Najm and al-Waqi'ah it has been mentioned with reference to the heavens, so it should be some majestic tree, not the lote tree.
3. It has been mentioned in the holy Bible as Erez which in Greek and other European languages has been translated as Kedros, Cedrus, Cedro and Cedroe.
4. With the passage of time sidr was applied to Ziziphus (Lote-tree), basically it was for Cedrus lebanii.
5. In the tradition of the Holy Prophet(S.A.W), it has been referred to as bad practice, the cutting of sidr tree.
6. Sidrah has not been mentioned alongwith other fruit trees like grapes, dates and fig etc. It has no fruit value instead its tree has been considered as worth mentioning.
7. Sidrah tree is either a shrub or a small tree.
8. The tree of Sidrah on the 6th and 7th skies was the one which was the tallest of the area and one of the most beautiful creation of God.
9. Due to the flood of Eram at Ma'ārib only three trees Khamt, Athl and Sidr escaped devastation. So Sidr should be a deep rooted tree.
10. Sidr cannot occur in cold climate of Yemen at a height of 4000 ft.(21)

To reach the exact identity of Sidr, let the Lexical meaning of Sidr be considered again Ibn-i-Manzūr says that Sidr is a lote tree having two types; Thorny and Thornless or thorns are, but do not hurt. Thorny is called Dhal and the other one is called ubriyyu. In Arabian Peninsula, the best jujube is found in Hejer, a property of sultan. They are all delicious and fragrant, the mouth of a person who eats it and the garments on which they fell also become fragrant.(22)The same is confirmed by Fīrūzābādī and al-Jawhrī.(23) In the Dictionary of Persian, Arabic and English; Sidr is given as a lote tree bearing fruit called nabik. A species of lote-tree.(24) Steingass, J. Milton Cowan and E. W. Lane also call it a lote tree.(25) As in all the Dictionaries, the meaning of Sidr is given as a

lote-tree. In this preview, it may be confirmed that the plant is the lote tree not the Cedar (*Cedrus libani*). Now, whether the plant existed in the area, the first audiences of the Qur'ān belong to or not.

Zizyphus is a genus of about 40 species of spiny shrubs and small trees in the buckthorn family *Rhamnaceae* distributed in the warm temperature and subtropical regions throughout the world...The best known species is *Zizyphus zizyphus* (Jujube), other species include *Z. spinachristi* from southwestern Asia, *Z. lotus* from the Mediterranean region, and *Ber* (*Z. mauritiana*) which is found from western Africa to India.(26)

If the arguments presented by Dr. Iqtedar Farooqi are analysed the following points come forth which negate the theory presented by him.

1. The point that tree has been mentioned, not the fruit, is a fuzzy idea as it is the need of the context whether to mention a tree or the fruit e.g. Fig and Olive have been mentioned as plants not as fruit but they do have the fruit value, sometimes a fruit is mentioned and plant to be identified and vice versa.
2. The references of *sūrah al-Najm* and *al-Wāqi'ah* depict that it should be some majestic tree, it is observed here in Pakistan, that there exist two varieties of *zizyphus* tree. One is round called *Katha Ber* in local language and the other is oval shaped called *Seu Ber*. The tree of *Seu Ber* is a majestic one, a shady tree. It forms a canopy and from canopy towers to the surface of the earth it spreads its twigs in such a manner that people take shelter under it in rain and sunshine. It is observed that at occasions, the people living under it are safe from rain or sunshine. So, *zizyphus* tree may also be considered as the *Sidr* mentioned by the Holy Qur'ān.
3. Bible's *Erez* has been translated in the European languages as (*Cedrus libani*), *Kedros*, *Cedrus*, *Cedro* and *Cedros* etc. Dr. Iqtedar Farooqi himself has cited that in Arabia the same tree was named as *Arz al Rab* and *Shajaratullah*, then why the name *Sidr* be used instead of its actual name in the Arabic language. None of the lexicographers has given the origin of the word as non Arabic, so the word should be applied to the tree for which it was in vogue in Arabic i.e. *Zizyphus* tree.

4. With the passage of time Sidr was applied to the Zizyphus tree has been quoted without any reference. Dr Farooqi himself is of the view that the Sidr as lote tree was recognized by the very first audiences of the Qur'an and remained unfamiliar for centuries. Then there was no need to mention such a plant which was quite unfamiliar among the masses. The Qur'an is a book to be understood, if God Himself is going to mention such things which are unconceivable by the community, then how it will be acted upon?
5. In traditions of the Holy Prophet(S.A.W) it has been referred to as bad practice (Bid'at), the cutting of the Sidr. (27) It does not mean that it can't be a lote tree. The reason has been given that in the desert of Arabia people took shelter beneath it in the warmth of the Sun.(28) Similarly, the wood of Cedar (Cedrus lebani) is used for timber which is a common practice all over the world, so it cannot be a bad practice. If it was due to the danger of scarcity, then the Holy Prophet(S.A.W) should have encouraged its plantation.
6. Zizyphus is a shrub or a small tree. So it should be Cedar. But it cannot be postulated that a shrub or small tree cannot be mentioned in the Qur'an only the majestic tree can be mentioned seems to be a baseless idea.
7. The tree of 6th and 7th skies should be the most beautiful creation of God. Obviously it should be but it does not mean that the word should change its meaning. The heavenly bodies are matchless in comparison to the worldly objects. Secondly the plant of oval shaped Zizyphus (Seu Beri) of Indo-pak sub continent is also much splendid one. Even so congested its leaves are that the passage to and from the sides is very difficult. So when God refers to a plant which is a transit place for downcoming and upgoing things, it should be like a Zizyphus tree (Seu Beri).
8. Erum flood could not uproot this tree. It is a common observation that the Zizyphus tree (Seu Beri) cannot be uprooted by the floody water. Secondly it is not obligatory that God has mentioned it due to its long and firm roots. The possibility exists that God has mentioned it as a plant of very low food/fruit value. Destruction of their gardens and residual

of only such spiny and low nutritional value plant was a great punishment. Khamt and Athl which were saved after the flood are also of that kind.

9. Sidr can't occur in cold climate. But it should also be kept in mind how Cedar may occur in desert areas of the Arab that has been mentioned in Prophetic traditions.(2) Cedar is a tree of cold climate and it is impossible to find it in the desert area. Sidr was on the hilly areas, this argument has no proof. It may be around the gardens that were planted by the sabaths. The punishment happened in the manner that the gardens were destroyed and spiny and of low nutritional value food trees were left in the area. Apart from it, in sūrah al-Wāqi'ah, God mentions Sidr which is thornless. This depicts the fact that sidr and thorn are closely related to each other. Thorns are found in the Zizyphus tree, not in the Cedar. (*Cedrus lebanii*). So it may be concluded that the Sidr mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān is the Zizyphus tree. Diversity of *Z. spina christi* as given in *Flora of Pakistan* is as:

“*Z. spina christi* distributed in N. and East Africa, Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, S. Iran, Eastern Afghanistan, Pakistan and N.W.India. It is a medium size tree.”(29)

In Saudi Arabia *Zizyphus spina Christi* is found in northern & southern region, Nefud region, Eastern region and in al Ruba' al-Khālī.(30) Wensinck has mentioned twenty Prophetic traditions in which sidr has been mentioned.(31)

Sidr in Local Tradition

In the Purans, it is tated that there was, in former times, a celebrated place of pilgrimage called Badarica Srama (now Badrinath), which abounded with the Badari or jujube trees, and the devotees of sages of those times lived upon its fruits, Still, today the Hindus on the festival of Shivratri offer its fruits to Siva. Besides, in Assam, its branch is left at the burial place under the belief that the evil spirits of the deceased person would not harm the close relatives. (32)

Lote tree commonly called Beri in vernacular language of the Punjab. It has two types one bearing oval shaped fruit and other,

round. The plant bearing oval shaped fruit is very majestic tree, forming a magnificent canopy with its branches descending downwards. Its characteristics are as:

“Zizphus Zizyphus, Z. Jujuba, Rhannus Zizyphus, commonly called jujube, Red Date, or Chinese Date, is a special of Zizphus in the buckthorn family Rhamnaceae used primarily for its fruits. It is a small deciduous tree or shrub reaching a height of 5-10 m, usually with thorny branches. The leaves are shiny-green, ovate-acute, 2-7.cm wide and 1-3-cm broad, with three conspicuous veins at the base, and a finely toothed margin. The flowers are small, 5-mm wide, with five inconspicuous yellowish-green petals. The fruit is an edible oval drupe 1.5-3-cm deep; maturing dark red to purplish-black and eventually wrinkled, looking like a small date. There is a single hard stone similar to an olive stone” (33)

Al-Biruni has highlighted its features as:

“It is the fruit of nabaq, and is known bayr in Hindi. The author of Al-Mashanir says that dal is wild jujube, while dalah is singular. According to Ibn Durayd, the kernel of the jujube stone is called sullam; Abu Mu`adh says that the leaf of the jujube is sidr, while ‘Abari is the jujube growing on the banks of rivers. The author of the Al-Yaqutah says that the intermediate variety is ashkalah. According to Abu Hanifah, Sidr-i-abari is without spines, while dal is spiny.(34)

Ibn Sina has also accounted sidr as follows:

“It is a large tree having fruits like bandaq having sweet smell. It grows in the countries of hot climate and the name in these countries varies according to their language differences.”(35)

Medicinal uses:

Lote tree has medicinal importance. Its leaves, twigs and even the bark is used for various purposes. Anil Kumar Dhiman discussing the medicinal importance of lote tree has highlighted:

“Lote trees are known as astringent and diaphoretic and their infusion is used as eye lotion in conjunctivitis and paste of its leaves and twigs is applied externally to abscess, boils, and carbuncles to promote suppuration and internally in stragury. The bark of its stem is considered astringent and its powder or decoction is used in diarrhea; also used in dysentery, colic and inflammation of the gums. The juice of the root bark is used as purgative and externally, is applied to gout and rheumatism. A decoction of its roots is given in fever and their powder is applied to old wounds and ulcers. The fruit are mucilaginous, pectoral and styptic and are eaten to purify the blood and to aid the digestion. The dried fruits are eaten as mild laxative and expectorant. The seeds are antidiarrhoeal and their kernels are used for abdominal pain in pregnancy, as also given with buttermilk in bilious affections. Besides, an ointment made from its seeds with some bland oil is used as a liniment in rheumatism.”(36)

Simpson in “Economic Botany” has given its importance as below:

Fruits are edible. The fruit is used fresh, dried or preserved. The bark is used for tanning and the leaves are used as fodder. Large-sized fruits which have just begun to turn yellow are chosen for candying. Fruits of wild trees are considered cooling, anodyne and tonic. They enter into the preparation of joshanda, a medicine used in chest troubles. Kernels are sedative used as a soporific and to stop vomiting. Seeds are given in diarrhea. Badari is mentioned in old literature in the list of contraceptives. Seeds yield a fatty oil. Leaves eaten with catechu as an astringent.(37)

Simpson has further told that

Syed Riaz Baquer emphasizing the efficacy of Lote-tree has pointed:

“Occurs in Baluchistan, Sindh Punjab and NWFP, Bark is used in diarrhea. Leaves are used to make a plaster in strangury. Fruit styptic, mucilaginous and pectoral; useful for the purification of blood and for digestion. Powdered root is applied on wounds and ulcers as poultice. The decoction of root is used in fever;(38)

Conclusion:

The Qur`anic Sidr as portrayed by the lexicographers, and commentators is Zizyphus. It cannot be misunderstood as Cedrus. It occurs so commonly in Prophetic traditions that it cannot be assumed to be an unknown plant. Its existence in Arabian desert depicts its identification as Zizyphus because Cedrus cannot occur in desert area. This plant also has too many depictions in the literature of the world. It is used as medicine in various systems of pharmacy as a remedy against various diseases. It is also found in Indo-Pak, hence better understood by the populace. Its wood is used as timber, its leaves as decoction, its powdered roots are applied on wounds and ulcers as poultice.

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