

Rivers in Ancient India

D.P. Tewari

1 Introduction

India is the land of rivers, which occupy about 329 million hectare of its area.¹ Some of these originated at the time of rise of the Himalayas, and some others are even older. These rivers can be divided into ten groups on the basis of their geographical locations:²

1. Indus river group
2. Saraswatī-Drishdvatī group
3. Gangā-Yamunā group
4. Brahmaputra-Meghanā river group
5. Lūnī-Chambal group
6. Narmadā-Tāptī group
7. Mahānadī group
8. Godāvarī river group
9. Krishnā river group
10. Kāverī river group

River Indus originates from the Kailas Mountain and falls into the Arabian Sea. It is mentioned in the Rigveda that River Indus was fast swift and noisy some flowing along the way fixed by the Varuṇa and is the holiest among the all rivers.³ It had 21 tributaries which originated from sky, *dyuloka*, and earth and were

¹www.ecoindia.com/rivers.

²Laha B.C., *PrāchīnBhāratkāBhugol*, 1972, pp. 48–64.

³Rigveda 10/75/2–3.

D.P. Tewari (✉)

Department of Ancient Indian History and Archaeology, University of Lucknow, Lucknow, UP, India

e-mail: tewaridplu@gmail.com

classified into three groups each containing seven rivers.⁴ Śutadri or Śatadru (Sutlej), Vipāśā (Vyās), Paruṣṇī or Irāvādī (Rāvi), Aksinī or Chandrabhāgā (Chināb), Marudvridhā, Vitastā (Jhelum), Ārjikiyā, and Suśomā join it from the east and Trishṭamā, Susartu (Surū), Rasā(Śevak), Śwetī (Gilgit), Kubhā (Kabul), Mehatnū (Savan), Gomatī (Gomal), Krumu (Kurram), Suswātu, Apāyā, Anatibhā, Yavyāvati, Vibālī, Śīfa, and Hariyūpiyā from the west. Other rivers of this region are mentioned as Svetayāvarī, Anjasī, Kuliśī, Vīrpatnī, Sarayū, and Adīnā which are not yet identified.⁵ Pliny has mentioned its 19 tributaries. Alberuni tells that it was known with three different names from its origin to meeting point with the Sea. It was famous as Sindhu from its origin to the confluence of River Chināb, further from this point up to Aror as *Panchanada* and from here to the confluence with the Arabian Sea as Mihran. River Indus is admired in the Rigveda in a very high tone. It describes that Sindhu is full of high quality of horses, chariots, cloths, golden ornaments, grains, and honey-yielding trees. It has a great role in fire sacrifices.

Svaśvā sindhuh surathā suvāsā hiranyamayī sukritā vājīnīvatī

Urṇāvatī yuvatiḥ śīlamāvatyutādhim vaste subhagā madhuvridham. (Rigveda 10/75/8)

It is clear from this narration that there were thick forests on the banks of this river which yielded quality wood for making chariots and sweet fruits to eat, extensive green grasslands for feeding horses, cotton for making cloths, crops yielding grains. On the banks of this river were gold mines too which provided gold for making ornaments. Rishis often use to perform fire sacrifices on its banks in this charming environment. They have prayed to God many times for the long survival of this river. The Rigveda 3/23/4 mentions the Sarasvatī group of rivers as the place of fire sacrifice of the Bharatas.⁶

The Rigveda mentions two other holy rivers such as Sarasvatī and Drishdvatī which originated from the Himalayas and flowing through Shimla, joined the Arabian Sea. Āranyak Parva of the Mahābhārata describes its origin from Plaksha.

Tato hi sāsarichhresthā nadīnāmuttamā nadī

Plakshaddevī srutāra janmahapuṇya Sarasvatī. (Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva 82/5)

Colonel Raghu Raj Singh is of view that the Sarasvatī originates from the hills of Mana Pass near Deva Tal on Indo-Tibetan border at the altitude of 18,400 feet from sea level (Itihās Darpaṇa, Vol. III, No 1, 1996, pp. 34–35.). There was another river, Apāyā, which flowed between Sarasvatī and Drishdvatī. B.B. Lal is of view that both the rivers Apāyā and Drishdvatī were tributaries of the Sarasvatī (Itihās Darpaṇa, Vol. XI, No 1, 2005, p. 37). Thick habitations and numerous hermitages

⁴Ibid, 10/75/1.

⁵Reu FanishvarNath, Rigveda par ek Aitihāsik Drishti, 1967, P. 114–117.

⁶Rigveda 2/41/16; KatyāyanShraut Sūtra 12/3/20, 24/6/22; LātyāyanShraut Sūtra 10/15/1, 18/13, 19/4; AśvalāyanShraut Sūtra 10/15/2, 18/13, 9/4; Sāṅkhyāyan Shraut Sūtra 12/6/23.

of saints were on the banks of Saraswatī. Dr. S.P. Gupta was of opinion that these 8000-year-old settlements turned into the cities of Harappan Civilization.⁷ Later on, about 2600 year ago, this river started drying⁸ while others are of the view that due to reduced rainfall Saraswatī started drying after 3200 B.C. and Drishdvatī started drying in about 2000 B.C. and finally both dried in about 1750 B.C. (Itihās Darpaṇa, Vol. VI, No 1, 1999, p. 13 and 15; Vol. VIII, No 2, 2002, p. 37). The Mahābhārata mentions that it dried on account of curse of Rishi Utathya even though it survived at Chamasodbheda, Śirodbheda, and Nāgodbheda. The place where Saraswatī disappeared is mentioned as Vinaśana in Tāndya Brahman and Mahābhārata Śālya Parva (31/1-2). Those who take bath at Vinaśanātīrth located on the bank of Saraswatī gain the merit of Vājpeya sacrifice and live for a long time in the lunar world (*Chandraloka*).^{9,10}

Rivers Gangā and Yamunā were less important in the Rigvedic times than today. It seems that both of these were smaller rivers flowing in the east to Saraswatī group of rivers. Both are prayed with Sindhu and Saraswatī.¹¹ There are no separate sūktas addressed to them. The Rigveda 3/58/6 mentions River Jāhnavī. The main tributaries of Gangā are Mandākinī, Nuta, Rāmgangā, Yamunā, Gomtī, Tamsā, Sarayū (Ghaghara), Gandak (Sadānīrā), Kauśikī, Tons, Son, Punpunnā, Phalgū, Sakuti, Champā, Bhāgīrathī, Ajayā, Dāmodar, Rūpanarāyan, Haldī, Keśāī, Panār, Bari Yamunā, Padmā, Meghanā, Madhumatī, Ariyālkhāl, etc. Sudās and the Tritshus defeated their enemies on the bank of Yamunā.¹² It is mentioned as Kālindī in the Bhāgavat Purāṇa, where people performed ascetic practices.¹³

Brahmaputra is the main river in Brahmaputra-Meghanā river system which was famous as Lohitya (Lohita). It originates from the eastern part of Mānsarovar Lake and falls in Bay of Bengal. It is known as Tsangpo in Tibet. Lohita, Bari Dihinga, Disarā, Dhanashrī, Kalanga, Krishnāī, Mānas, Meghanā, Karatoyā, Dhaleshvarī, and Ichāmātī are the main tributaries of Brahmaputra. Other rivers of this system are Lakshyā, Suramā, Barāk, Manu, Padmā, Fenī, Naphā, Karṇafūlī, Hāldā, Mātāmūrī, and Suvarnarekhā.

River Lūnī, which originates from the hills of Ajmer, a part of Arāvalli Range, and joins the Arabian Sea, is the main river of Lūnī-Chambal river system. It has six tributaries among which Bandī, Banās, and Saraswatī are the most important. Several chalcolithic sites have been explored along the banks of Banās River.

⁷Gupta S.P., The Indus Saraswati Civilization an Over View of Problems and Issues, Itihās Darpaṇ, Year 4, No. 2, 1998, P. 51.

⁸Chaturvedi Rekha, AmbitamenadītameditameSaraswatī, VaidikSanskritiAurUsakāSātatyā, Editor SitārāmDubey, P. 70.

⁹Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva, 80/118, 82/96; Laha B.C., 1972 as above, pp. 51–52.

¹⁰Tāndya Brāhmaṇa 25/10/16.

¹¹Rigveda 10/75/5 Imam me GangeYamuneSaraswatiShutudristomamsachataParushnyā.

¹²Rigveda 7/18/19.

¹³Bhāgavat Purāṇa 3/4/36, 4/8/43, 6/16/16.

Another river originating from Arāvalli Range is Chambal which is a tributary of River Yamunā. Kālī Sindha, Pārvaṭī (PaurāṇicPārā), Kunu, Meja, Berāch (Barṇāsā), Gambhīr, Vetravaṭī, Ken (Kainās of Arian), Daśarṇa, and Śīprā join it. River Śīprā bears historical as well as religious importance. Ujjain, the capital of King Vikramāditya, was located on its bank. Sanskrit poet Kālidās has repeatedly mentioned this river in his writings. Its beauty has been described in verse 31 of Pūrvamegha and 6/35 of Raghuvamsa. The great temple of Mahākāleshvara is built along its bank. Māhi, Sābarmatī, and Begavatī and Bhādar are other important rivers of this system which join the Arabian Sea.

Narmadā is the oldest river of Narmadā-Tāptī river system which originates from Amarkantak Hills of Maikāl Range of mountains and falls in the Arabian Sea. The oldest human fossil is found from its deposit at Hathanorā. It has been mentioned as Revā, Samodbhava, and Mekalsutā in ancient Indian literature. It has seven tributaries. The other river flowing parallel to it is famous as Tāptī which is said to be the oldest river in the 41 chapter of Padma Purāṇa. It has eight tributaries among which Pūrṇā, Gīrnā, Borī, and Panjhā are important.

The principal river of the Mahānadī river system is Mahānadī which originates from the hills near Barār and joins the Bay of Bengal. It has five tributaries. Other rivers of this system are Devī, Prochī, smaller Mahānadī, Vansadharā, Lāngulinī, Rishikulyā, Trisāmā, Barabalanga, Salandī, Vaitaranī, Kumārī, Palāsinī, Koyal, and Brāhmaṇī. These all join Bay of Bengal. River Godāvarī originates from the hills of Nāsik and flowing through Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh falls in Bay of Bengal. It is principal river of Godāvarī river system. Pūrṇā, Kadam, Prāṇhitā, Indrāvatī, Manjīrā, Sindafanā, Maner, Kinarsinī, Baingangā, Vardā, Paingangā, etc. are its tributaries.

River Krishnā in south India is an old river of Kishnā river system. It originates from the Western Ghats and flowing through Maharashtra, Mysore, and Andhra Pradesh joins the Bay of Bengal. It has 19 tributaries. Dhon, Bhīmā (ancient Sahya), Palār, Munar, and Tungabhadra are important in them.

River Kāverī in south India has 18 tributaries. It is the main river of this river system. It originates from the Western Ghats and flowing through Tamilnādu joins Bay of Bengal. Urappur, the capital of Cholas, was situated on its banks. Other rivers of this system are Kritamālā, Tamraparṇī, Pushpajā, Sūtpalāvatī, and Vaigāī.

It is very important to discuss the view of ancient Indians about rivers. The Indian intelligence had a special outlook about the water. It is called Aap in the Rīgveda which was considered as mother-like element and which bears pregnancy being in touch of Purushatatva.

Āpo ha yad bṛiṭrviśvamayā garbham dadhānā janayantiragnim

Tato devānām samvartatā surekah kasmai devāy havishā vidhem.

Rīgveda 10/121/7

There are many references in Brahmanas, where the entire world, stars, all living creatures, men, and animals are said to be originated from the water.¹⁴ Water is one among the five elements. It was regarded a highly pure element which bears the capacity to give purity.¹⁵ The Sukta 23 of Chapter “Landscape of the Indus River” of second Kand of the Atharva Veda describes it as free from magical deeds. It is entreated to make it free from such deeds. Therefore, the rivers were regarded as Goddess and later their images were prepared with in female form. Due to the sacred values of water *Ishta-Purta* were given religious importance and construction of water sources like digging of well, ponds and Tanks (*Vapi, Kupa and Tarak*) were regarded of great religious importance. The donation of water was regarded a great donation as mentioned in Mahabharata Anushashan Parva 65/3.

Pānīyam paramam dānam dānānām manurabravīt

Tasmat kupānscha vspīścha taṇḡāni cha khānayet.

Those who destroy it were penalized by death.¹⁶ Rivers being the source of water were regarded very important. Indian culture accepts it like life which protects the lives of all creatures who drink it. It was base of punyatma and sukarma. It was believed that sinners cannot cross water. All the religious rituals, marriages, social rituals, and oath in judicial practices are performed after getting water in hand. It was assumed that one gets purity after taking bath in water. Therefore, the rivers were regarded solvent of bad deeds and provider of Punya. The Mahabharata declares that if a sinner takes bath in the Ganga, he becomes absolved of all of his sins.¹⁷ The Āranyak Parva of the Mahabharata 82/31 mentions that the person, who takes bath on the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna, attains the benefit of 10 Ashvamedha sacrifices and shares it with his family.

Gangāsangamyōśchaiv snāti yah sangame narah

Daśāśvamedhamāpnoti kulam chaiva samuddharet.

Besides, the person taking bath in sangam at Prayāg gets the benefit of Rajsāya sacrifice, reading of all four Vedas and reward of telling truth (Mahabharata, Āranyak Parva 83/76-80). Such type of concept was behind taking bath at confluence of Ganga and Saraswatī. (Mahābhārat, Āranyak Parva 82/34). The person who touches the water of the Yamunā gets the benefit of Ashvamedha sacrifice and gets honor of being worshiped in the heaven (Mahabharata, Āranyak Parva 82/39). The person who passes five nights on the bank of the Indus gets a lot of gold (Mahabharata, Āranyak Parva 82/41). A bath at confluence of Ganga and Gomti at Markandeyatīrth gives the benefit of Agnishtoma sacrifice, and bath taker makes

¹⁴Gopath Brāhmaṇa 1/1/29; Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa 1/140; Kaushītaki Brāhmaṇa 25/1; Śatapath Brāhmaṇa 11/1/6/1; ShuklaVimal Chandra, Vaidik Samskriti Me JalTatva, Vaidik Samskriti aur Uskā Satatya, Editor SitārāmDubey, p. 77.

¹⁵Rigveda 10/17/10; Atharva Veda 1/1/4-5, 15, 17; 1/6/ 33/1; 3/3/13.

¹⁶Manushmriti 9/279

¹⁷Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva 85/88-97

free his family from all type of sins (Mahabharata, Āranyak Parva 82/70). Bath in Gandaki River gives the benefit of Vajapeya sacrifice and goes to reside in Sun world (*Suryaloka*) (Mahabharata, Āranyak Parva 82/97). Those who take bath in Kampanā River get the benefit of Pundarik sacrifice and become authorized for Sun world (*Suryaloka*) (Mahabharata, Āranyak Parva 82/99). Bath in River Viśālā gives the result of Agnishtoma sacrifice and heaven (Mahabharata, Āranyak Parva 82/100). A bath in the streams of Māheśvarī enables for Aśvamedha and Pushkaranī sacrifices and protects one from bad results (Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva 82/101-102). A bath in Kausikī authorizes for Rajsūya (Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva 82/113) and who take bath in Kumārdhārā becomes free from sin of killing a Brahman (Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva 82/129-30). A bath at the confluence of the Kālikā, Kausikī and Arunā with penance of three days makes free from all type of sins (Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva 82/135). Kartoyā bathing with three days of penance gives the results of Ashvamedha (Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva 83/3), while bathing at confluence of Ganga with sea earns merit of 10 Aśvamedha (Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva 83/4). A bath in Vaitaranī makes men pure like moon makes him free from all sins and he gets the religious benefit of donation of 1000 cows. He also makes pure his family and gets rebirth in higher family. A bath and water offerings to deceased relatives at the confluence of Śoṇa and Jyotirathyā rivers give the result of Agnishtoma sacrifice. Same type of faith about bath in rivers Narmadā and Godāvarī is described in Matsya Purana 186/10-11 and Brahmānda Purāṇa 124/93. It was believed that a bath at the origin of Śoṇa and Narmadā as well as in river Mandākinī gives result of Aśvamedha sacrifice. Kośalā River and Gangā at Śṛīngaverpur give benefit of Vajapeya sacrifice. Pushpāvatī, Vardā, and Kāverī rivers give the benefit of donation of thousand cows. Bennā gives chariot with peacock; Godāvarī gives result of Gomedha sacrifice and Vāsukī world.

The Rigveda mentions River Saraswatī purifying all three Bhuvanas.¹⁸ Manu describes Saraswatī and Drishdvatī as divine Rivers.¹⁹ There are many examples where saints immersed themselves in the water and crossed the worldly sea. Ram buried himself into the water of Sarayū as described in Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, Uttar Kāṇḍ 110/7-28, and Mahabharata, Āranyak Parva 82/63-64. There was a tradition of ending life by jumping into the water of River Yamunā from banyan tree at Prayāg during the reign of Harsha. Kumār Gupta ended his life there according to the religious manner.²⁰ Dhanga also followed this pattern.²¹ The Kālikā Purāṇa 24/139 describes Sarayū as a holy river. Saraswatī has always been famous as a holy river. People use to offer Piṇḍa to their dead relatives on its bank.²² Epics and

¹⁸Rigveda 7/95/1

¹⁹Manushmriti 2/17

²⁰Apasadha Inscription of Adityasena, Line 8-9 Śauryasatyavratdharo yah prayāgagatodhane, Ambhashīvakarīshāgnaumagnahsapushpapūjitah. B.L. Rajpurohit, PrāchīnBhartīyaAbhilekh, 2007, P. 187.

²¹EpigraphiaIndica, Vol. I, P. 146; PāthakVishuddhānand, Uttar BhāratkāRājñaitik Itihās, 2002, P. 397; Alexander Cunningham, The Ancient Geography of India, 1975, P. 328.

²²Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva 80/79-80; 80/119, 130-32; 81/3-4; 81/91; 82/34, 59.

Purāṇas mention Kāverī as a holy river. The Mani Mekhalai 1/9-12, 23-24 mentions its origin from Agastya's vessel for attainment of super position to the sons of Sun. Shrirangam-tīrth is located on its banks. The Purāṇas describe Vaitaranī as a holy river, and it was carried down to earth by Parasurām. It is described as the river of Yama in the Padma Purāṇa, Chapter “[Damodar River Basin: Storehouse of Indian Coal](#)” and Sanyukta Nikāya 1/21.

The general concept for getting religious merit was in performing fire sacrifices but those who were unable to perform them were suggested to attain it by pilgrimage (Mahabharata, Āranyak Parva 80/38). Although the tīrthas are found located in the forests, on the hills, in the field, caves, and on the banks of lakes and ponds, the number of tīrthas located on the banks of rivers is greater. Pippalāda, Plaksha-Prashravan, Kedār, Gandharva-kūpa, Bhūteśvar, Rudrakoti, Kurukshetra, Virātnagar, and Gopāyan śikhār²³ were located on the bank of Saraswatī; Naimish on the bank of Gomti;²⁴ Badarikāshram, Devaprayāg, Rishīkesh, Haridwār, Shṛīngaverpur, Prayāg, Varāṇasī, Bharadwāj ashram, and Gangāsāgar on the bank of Ganga; Ayodhyā on the bank of Sarayū; Vrindāvana and Bateśvar on the bank of Yamuna; Bhuvaneshvar adorned by Lingarāj, Paraśurāmeshvar, Ananda-Vāsudeva temples on the bank of Baliyānti; Virajā Devi on the bank of Vaitaranī; Panchavatī, Trayambakeśvar, Kuśāvarta,²⁵ Daśāśvamedhic tīrth,²⁶ Govardhan tīrth²⁷, Sāvitrī tīrth,²⁸ Vidarbha, Mārkanḍeyatīrth, and Kishkindhā tīrth on the bank of Godāvarī; Gokarṇatīrth where Bhāgiratha worshipped²⁹ on the bank of Sindhu; Gokarṇeśvartīrth on the bank of Brāhmaṇī River in Orissa. Kāncīpurī, the capital of Cholas and also a religious center, is located on the bank of Palār, where great temples of Kamakshī, Kailāśnāthswāmin, and Rajsimhavarmeshvar are located. A big center of Buddhist studies was located there. Champā located on the bank of Gangā was a famous tīrtha.³⁰ The Padma Purāṇa, Chap. 11, is also of same view. It was a holy place of Jains and 12th JinaVāsudeva was born here. Yuan-Chvang visited some Viharas located here. The hermitage of Rishi Shringa was also there. Gayā located on the bank of Falgu River, where Gayāsur worshipped, is described as a tīrth in the Vishnu Purāṇa 11/105. Footprints of Vishnu are here on the top of a

²³Skanda Purāṇa, Prabhāsh Khand; Mahābhārata, Shalya Parva and Vana Parva; Padma Purāṇa, Shriti Khand.

²⁴Padma Purāṇa, Uttar Khand, Verse 77; Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva 82/53-55 refers that Brahmā, surrounded by Siddha rishis resides always at Naimishāranya. It is shelter of all tīrthas. Those who goes to Naimishāranya become free from all type of sins. The Gods perform fire sacrifices here. Yama also performed a sacrifice here. The river Gomtī flows through this forest (Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva 85/5-6).

²⁵Brahma Purāṇa, Chapter 80.

²⁶Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva, 81/52; 83/30; 86/2.

²⁷Bhattacharya N.N., The Geographical Dictionary, New Delhi, 1991, P. 140.

²⁸Ibid, P., 272.

²⁹Vālmiki Rāmāyan, Bālkāṇḍ, 42/12

³⁰Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva, 82/114; 83/142.

hill.³¹ Chapter 219 of the Agni Purana describes a hillock of Gayāśhiśa as a tīrth. The advait āchārya vaiṣaṇava worshipped on the banks of Gangā in Nadia district at Śāntipur, where many temples have been raised. There is Chandikātīrth at Amarkantak on the bank of Narmadā.³²

As rivers were regarded as a holy unit, people started performing fire sacrifices on their banks. Daśarath performed Aśvamedha on the bank of the Saryū,³³ Rām on the bank of the Gomti.³⁴ Daśarath raised sacrificial posts (*Yagnya-Yūpas*) on the bank of Tamsā (Raghuvamsa 9/20). Its bank was always full with saints.³⁵ Gradually, the saints built their hermitages on the banks of rivers and started reading, teaching, and research there. Ultimately, rivers became centers of knowledge. The Rigveda regards them as symbols of knowledge. Saraswatī is said to be Goddess of Mantras, and later, she became the Goddess of wisdom too. It is supposed that the hymns of the Rigveda were revealed to the seers on the bank of Saraswatī. The Ashramas of saints located on the banks of rivers became center of education. Mārkaṇḍeya ashram was located on the confluence of Gangā and Gomtī³⁶ where Rishi Mārkaṇḍeya worshipped for a long, Shaktipītha of Naimishāraṇya located on the bank of Gomati, where many ancient literary texts were rewritten, Ashramas of Siddhas on the bank of Śailoda,³⁷ Ashram of Vālmīki on the bank of Gangā at Bithūr, ashram of Rishi Shringa on the same river at Champā where a Buddhist education center flourished are worth mention. King Prasenjit and Bimbisār donated it and many institutions continued here. These all were *Dharmaśāstriya* institutions, where Brahman boys were admitted as students.³⁸ There was Jahnu ashram on the bank of Gangā in Bhāgalpur of Bihār, where Gaivināth Mahādeva temple was famous. Traditionally, it is believed that Jahnu felt disturbed due to roaring of Gangā currents and he drunk all of the water but after the request of Bhagīrath he cut his thigh and made Ganga free to flow. Therefore, Gangā is known as daughter of Jahnu or Jāhnavī.³⁹ At the end point of Gangā, on an island, there is Kapilāshram.⁴⁰ Kulanch tīrth located on the bank of Gangā in eastern India was a center of Brahmanas of Śāṇḍilya Gotra, who were expert in performing sacrifices.⁴¹ Vikramśilā located on the bank of Gangā was a great education center during eleventh century A.D. There were many Buddhist Viharas. Philosophy, grammar, and rituals

³¹SamyuktaNikāya, BauddhaBhārti, Varāṇasī, 2008, 4/19; Mahābhārata, Āraṇyak Parva 82/84; 85/8; 93/9-10; Alexander Cunningham, Archaeological Survey of India Reports, 1962–63-64-65, P. 2.

³²Laha B.C., 1972, as above, P. 433 and 505.

³³Vālmīki Rāmāyan, Bālkāṇḍ, 14/1-2.

³⁴Vālmīki Rāmāyan, Uttar Kāṇḍ, 91/15-17; 92/2

³⁵Kālidās, Raghuvamsa, 9/72

³⁶Mahābhārata, Āraṇyak Parva 82/70; Padma Purana, Chapter 16.

³⁷Vālmīki Rāmāyan, Kishkindhā Kāṇḍ 43/37.

³⁸Laha B.C., 1972, as above, P. 347.

³⁹Ibid, P. 375.

⁴⁰Bṛihaddharma Purāṇa, Chapter 22; Mahābhārata, Āraṇyak Parva, Chapter 106.

⁴¹Laha B.C., 1972, as above, P. 453.

were taught as a special course in this University. The University had six gates, where extremely learned teachers were appointed.⁴² The ashram of Rishi Bhrigu was located on the confluence of Sarayū and Gangā in district of Balliā, where Parasurām regained his powers.⁴³ Dadhīchi ashram was located on the bank of Saraswatī, where he gave up his life for the welfare of people (Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva 98/9-24). Kaṇva ashram was situated on the bank of river Mālinī, where he brought up Śakuntalā as his daughter. Kām ashram was located on the confluence of Gangā and Sarayū, where Śiva burnt Kāmdeva alive with a glance of his third eye.

The tasks such as cleaning, bath, nourishment, and education given by mother to her children started to be done on the bank of rivers, and rivers got the position of mother. Saraswatī is worshipped like a mother for feeding milk by her breasts,⁴⁴ and the milk never stopping to flow from them.⁴⁵ She is referred as protector of generations⁴⁶ and creator of embryo.⁴⁷ As the rivers were humanized, the Sanskrit poets started to use them as simile. Their fast flow was compared with a swift mare, and beautiful ladies were compared with River Saraswatī. They compare the slim waist and movements of ladies with the wavy currents of rivers.

The boats were first invented in India during Neolithic period. Pots of the Indus Civilization bear paintings of boat on their exterior. Rivers became the means of transportation and trade. Big cities developed on the banks of rivers during the second urbanization like Hastināpur, Kampil, Kannauj, Prayāg, Pātaliputra on the bank of Gangā; Mathurā on the bank of Yamunā; Ujjainī on the bank of Śiprā; Kāñchī, Daśapur, on the bank of Kāverī; Bhilsā and Deogarh on the bank of Betavā; Chitrakūt on the bank of Mandākinī; Māhishmatī on the bank of Narmadā; Sravastī on the bank of Achirāvati; Padmāvati on the bank of Pārvatī; Nagarjunaṇḍā on the bank of Krishnā etc. Ports such as Bhrigukachchha, Avanti, and Deval were developed on the banks of rivers, and international trade started through these ports.

Manu prescribed knowledge, penance, fire, meal, soil, heart, as well as water as the means of purifying body. He describes that river becomes pure through its flow (nadivegeṇśudhyati-Manushmriti 5/105). He was of the opinion that water purifies body, truth purifies heart, learning and penance purify Jivātmā, and knowledge purifies wisdom.

Adbhirgātrāṇi śudhyati manah satyen śudhyati.

Vidyā tapobhyām bhutātmā buddhirgyānen śudhyati. Manushmriti 5/109

He opined that one should offer water to Devas, rishis, and pitrās after taking bath, and Agnyādhān should be performed also after taking bath.⁴⁸ Keeping in view

⁴²Ibid, P 453.

⁴³Mahābhārata, Āranyak Parva 3/99, 86/50; Laha B.C., 1972, as above, P. 122.

⁴⁴Chaturvedi Rekha, Ibid, P. 73.

⁴⁵Rigveda 6/61/1-14

⁴⁶Rigveda 10/30/12.

⁴⁷Rigveda 10/184/2.

⁴⁸Manushmriti 2/176.

the purity of water of rivers, he strictly forbade the voiding of excrements on the bank of rivers.

Na Mūtram pathi kurvīta na bhasmani na govraje
 Na fāl kribhate na jale na chityam na cha parvate
 Na jīṛṇadevāyatane na bālmīke kadāchan
 Na sasatvesu gartesu na gachchhannapi cha isthitah
 Na nadītūrmāsādyā na cha parvat mastake
 Vāyvagnivipramādityamāpah paśyansthaiva gāh
 Na kadāchan kurvīt vṛiṇmūtrasya visarjanam. Manushmriti 4/45-48

Manu again prohibits for throwing urine, stool, and poisonous things into the rivers.⁴⁹ He further says that one should not think about passing urine in the water.⁵⁰ He prescribes Uttamsāhas Daṇḍa and death penalty for those who destroy the water bodies.⁵¹

Ancient India gave different names, fame, forms, and honor to the rivers which are not found in any other part of the world although most of the ancient civilizations originated and developed in the river valleys. But now the modern India has changed its attitude toward rivers. Elders respect the rivers; they use to take bath in the water of it. They go for pilgrimage on the tīrthas located on the bank of rivers, but now neither the water of rivers is pure nor does it have merit of purifying things. However, not only Gangā but almost all the rivers have become polluted and nobody feel sorry for it. We have become habitual of throwing garbage, fecal matters, dead animals and joining drainages and sewer drainage into the rivers. There was a time in ancient India when there were only three sources of water: rain water, water from the rivers and tanks, and groundwater. But due to non-availability of suction pumps, the groundwater could not be much utilized. Rain water was under the control of climate or Gods. Therefore, the human society was aware of the purity of water of rivers, tanks, and lakes. They gave them respect like mother and entreated them never to dry up. Strong suction pumps are greatly responsible for the growing disrespect and negligence toward rivers. The lack of groundwater in future will certainly revive the respect and honor to the river and other natural water resources.

Reference

Laha BC (1972) Prachin Bharat Ka Aitihasik Bhugol. Uttar Pradesh Hindi Granth Academy, Lucknow, p 49; Rigveda 10/75/5

⁴⁹Manushmriti 4/56

Nāpsumūtrampurīshamvāshthīvanamvāsamutsrijet
 Amedhyalīptamanyadvālohitamvāvishanivā.

⁵⁰Manushmriti 4/109

Udake Madhya rātrechaivaviṇmūtrasyavisarjanam
 Uchchhishtahsrāddhabhukchaivamansāpinachintayet.

⁵¹Manushmriti 9/279-81.

<http://www.springer.com/978-981-10-2983-7>

The Indian Rivers

Scientific and Socio-economic Aspects

Singh, D.S. (Ed.)

2018, XXI, 551 p. 211 illus., 188 illus. in color.,

Hardcover

ISBN: 978-981-10-2983-7