Chapter-II

River and Cultural Life - A Conceptual Frame

Water is central to many beliefs and practices of world’s religions. Though the worldview of different communities with regard to the water may vary across cultures, it is represented as (i) a primary element of life and (ii) a purifier of pollution in rituals, thus occupies key role in folklife. Firstly, water as a primary element of life is ambivalent in its manifestation. It is represented both as giver and destroyer of life. Water as a river is redeemer and as a flood causes devastation to the living beings. Thus water functions as benign and malign factor in different cultural contexts. World’s major religions like Christianity, Islam and Hindu, both of folk and elite traditions had creation myths which uphold that the life had been emanated from waters.

According to Bible, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters”¹. Quran also attests to similar kind of creation myth with some deviations. The story of Creation is located in various places within the Quran, such as in Sura’ Al-Baqarah, Sura’ As-Sajdah, Sura’ Yassin and so on.² The Quran states that “God created the world and the cosmos, made all the creatures that walk, swim, crawl, and fly on the face of the earth from water”.³

According to Hindu sacred books, “In the beginning the universe was full of water. But in that water there emerged a huge egg (anda) that was round like a water-bubble. The egg became bigger and bigger and inside the egg there was Vishnu. This egg was called Brahmanda. And inside Brahmanda there were the mountains and the land, the oceans and the seas, the gods, demons and humans and the stars. On all sides, the egg was surrounded by water, fire, wind, the sky and the elements. Inside the egg, Vishnu adopted the form of Brahma and proceeded to create

¹ Genesis, Chapter 1: Ver. 1-2 (King James Version of the Bible)
² Chapter 2: Sura’ Al-Baqarah; Chapter 32 Sura’ As-Sajdah; Chapter 36 Sura’ Yassin.
³ Quran, Chapter 21 Al Anbiya Ver.30.
the universe. When the universe is to be destroyed, it is Vishnu again who adopts the
form of Shiva and performs the act of destruction. Let us therefore salute the great
god Vishnu\textsuperscript{4}.

Manusmriti (1; 4-31) gives an elaborate account of how life and the world got
emanated from waters. The origin myth of world is narrated below\textsuperscript{5}:

5. This (universe) existed in the shape of Darkness, unperceived, destitute of
distinctive marks, unattainable by reasoning, unknowable, wholly immersed, as it
were, in deep sleep.

6. Then the divine Self-existent (Svayambhudeva, himself) indiscernible, (but) making
(all) this, the great elements and the rest, discernible, appeared with irresistible
(creative) power, dispelling the darkness.

7. He who can be perceived by the internal organ (alone), who is subtile,
discernible, and eternal, who contains all created beings and is inconceivable,
shone forth of his own (will).

8. He, desiring to produce beings of many kinds from his own body, first with a
thought created \textit{the waters}, and placed his seed in them.

9. That (seed) became a golden egg, in brilliancy equal to the sun; in that (egg) he
himself was born as Brahman, the progenitor of the whole world.

10. The \textit{waters} are called narah, (for) the waters are, indeed, the offspring of Nara;as
they were his first residence (ayana), he thence is named Narayana.

11. From that (first) cause, which is indiscernible, eternal, and both real and unreal,
was produced that male (Purusha), who is famed in this world (under the appellation
of) Brahman.

12. The divine one resided in that egg during a whole year, then he himself by his
thought (alone) divided it into two halves;

13. And out of those two halves he formed heaven and earth, between them the middle
sphere, the eight points of the horizon, and the eternal abode of the waters.

14. From himself (atmanah) he also drew forth the mind, which is both real and
unreal, likewise from the mind egoism, which possesses the function of self-
consciousness’ (and is) lordly;

15. Moreover, the great one, the soul, and all (products) affected by the three
qualities, and, in their order, the five organs which perceive the objects of sensation.

16. But, joining minute particles even of those six, which possess measureless power,
with particles of himself, he created all beings.


17. Because those six (kinds of) minute particles, which form the (creator's) frame, enter (a-sri) these (creatures), therefore the wise call his frame sarira, (the body.)

18. That the great elements enter, together with their functions and the mind, through its minute parts the framer of all beings, the imperishable one.

19. But from minute body (-framing) particles of these seven very powerful Purushas springs this (world), the perishable from the imperishable.

20. Among them each succeeding (element) acquires the quality of the preceding one, and whatever place (in the sequence) each of them occupies, even so many qualities it is declared to possess.

21. But in the beginning he assigned their several names, actions, and conditions to all (created beings), even according to the words of the Veda.

22. He, the Lord, also created the class of the gods, who are endowed with life, and whose nature is action; and the subtile class of the Sadhyas, and the eternal sacrifice.

23. But from fire, wind, and the sun he drew forth the threefold eternal Veda, called Rik, Yagus, and Saman, for the due performance of the sacrifice.

24. Time and the divisions of time, the lunar mansions and the planets, the rivers, the oceans, the mountains, plains, and uneven ground.

25. Austerity, speech, pleasure, desire, and anger, this whole creation he likewise Produced, as he desired to call these beings into existence.

26. Moreover, in order to distinguish actions, he separated merit from demerit, and he caused the creatures to be affected by the pairs (of opposites), such as pain and pleasure.

27. But with the minute perishable particles of the five (elements) which have been mentioned, this whole (world) is framed in due order.

28. But to whatever course of action the Lord at first appointed each (kind of beings), that alone it has spontaneously adopted in each succeeding creation.

29. Whatever he assigned to each at the (first) creation, noxiousness or harmlessness, gentleness or ferocity, virtue or sin, truth or falsehood, that clung (afterwards) spontaneously to it.

30. As at the change of the seasons each season of its own accord assumes its distinctive marks, even so corporeal beings (resume in new births) their (appointed) course of action.

31. But for the sake of the prosperity of the worlds he caused the Brahmana, the Ksatriya, the Vaisya, and the Sudra to proceed from his mouth, his arms, his thighs, and his feet.

Even in the Kula Puranas (caste myths), creation myths are narrated. According to Jambapuranam, the caste myth of Madigas (Scheduled Caste community in Andhara Pradesh), “In Anantayuga, Parabrahma created water from
his right and left hands. In these waters, he created creepers of lotus and other flowers. In Adbhutayuga, amidst the waters, a water spring arose. This water spring when fallen into a lotus flower, Jambavanta is born. His head contained many plaited hair and body was fully covered by long hair. In appearance, he resembled to a ‘bear’. Then the ‘Adbhutayuga’ ended. In Tamanda yuga, when Parabrahma again chanted pranava, another water spring came up and fell into a lotus flower which resulted in the birth of ‘Adisakti’.6

Thus, almost all creation myths of the world view water as source of life.

Secondly, water as purifying object in rituals. It means that water washes away impurities and pollutants and makes an object look as good as new. Almost all Christian churches or sects have an initiation ritual called Baptism involving the using of water. Baptism is a public declaration of a person’s belief and faith in Christ and his/her initiation into the Church. In the Baptist and Charismatic churches Baptism was usually performed by dipping the person in water. This is also called immersion. In Anglican and Lutheran churches the rite is performed by pouring water over the head three times and sometimes by sprinkling water over the head. Water in Hinduism has a special place because water is believed to have a spiritually cleansing power. Hinduism encompasses different belief systems, among those that most Hindus do share the importance of striving to attain purity and avoiding pollution. This relates to both physical cleanliness and spiritual well-being. Water is used in puja (worship) and also used for holy dip known as theertha snana. In Islam water is important for cleansing and purifying. Several mosques have courtyards with pools of clean water. In Islam ritual purity called wudu (ablution) is required before carrying out religious duties, especially namaz (worship)7, before touching the Quran and it must also be performed on the dead before they are buried. In Islam, a believer is obliged to perform bath after sex which incurs a state of major ritual impurity and bath is also recommended before the Friday prayer. Hence, water acts an important role in all these religious practices.


7 Quran, Chapter 5 Ma-idhah: 7/8 ‘O you, who believe, when you prepare for prayer, wash your faces and your hand to the elbows; rub your head and your feet to the ankles.”
The communities on river banks attribute meanings to river through various cultural expressions both verbal and non-verbal. Almost all religions of the world and sciences underline the fact that life originates from water. It is believed that the universe had originated from water and the human civilization has originated on the banks of rivers. In ancient times, there were civilizations whose lives were much oriented towards one of their major rivers and hence they had come to be called as river valley civilizations. Mesopotamian Civilization along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, Egypt along the Nile, Indus Valley along the Indus River are some of them.\textsuperscript{8} The rivers have certain unique characteristics that have helped the growth of civilizations on their banks. Ancient civilizations first grew up on major river-systems and there could be two main reasons for the growth of these civilizations on the river banks. One is that river flood provided rich fertile soil renewal and the second one is that the river had a steady flow of water almost throughout the year. The nature of river constitutes different beliefs and practices on the river banks. This human meaning of geography begins to express in symbolic form of representation of river in various life occasions. After the nomadic life, humans settled in certain centres and these centres were often on the banks of rivers. Water was the backbone of agriculture, cattle feeding and their daily life. River bank is a fertile land and different folk live on the banks of river. Every group on the river banks has their own concept about the river in which it lives and it in turn becomes their ‘worldview’. Robert Redfield (1953, 85) has defined worldview as “the way people characteristically look outward upon universe”, which is part of the cognitive view of a group and they perceive it in their own view consciously or unconsciously.\textsuperscript{9} Many communities live on the river banks and they are related directly or indirectly to the river. This could be the reason for the existence of plenty of folklore about a single river. The cultural construction of river has revealed the existence of various beliefs, rituals etc.

**River and Religion**

Folk and classic traditions of the world have their own notions about river. The English word ‘river’ originates from the Latin word ‘rivus’ which means shore or


banks. Most of the religions of the world emerged as part of the civilization on the river banks. Water plays a key role in the belief system of many world religions. It has two symbolic qualities such as rebirth and purification. Purification quality of water has an important ritual in many religious ceremonies.

The valley of river Jordan is one of the famous places in Bible. Jordan River is mentioned 175 times in the Old Testament. There are many events in the Bible that take place in the banks of this river. After Joshua succeeded Moses as the leader of the people at the end of their wilderness journey, the Israeli people entered the ‘Promised Land’ after crossing the river Jordan.\(^{10}\) Jesus Christ was baptized by John in the Jordan river.\(^{11}\) There are beliefs that river Jordan has the power of healing. Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Syria, received word from the prophet Elisha that he should take bath in the Jordan River for seven times in order to cure his leprosy\(^{12}\). The reputation of river Jordan remains even today among the Christians.

In Islam, \textit{Hadith} (words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad) shows the prophecy that the river Euphrates itself dries and unveil the mount of Gold in the river. This will cause quarrel among believers for the Gold and many people will die in that fight.\(^{13}\) In Prophet’s journey to heaven (\textit{Al-Mi’raj}), he saw four rivers, two of which were coming out and two were flowing in to paradise. Gabriel explained to Prophet that the rivers which were flowing out from the paradise were Euphrates and Nile.\(^{14}\) There are many beliefs surrounding the concept of Euphrates River. A Muslim believes that if he dreams that he is drinking water from the Euphrates River which means that the person is blessed as a pious religious believer. If any one sees the Euphrates as being dried up in his dream it denotes the death of the ruler or loss of the country. The meanings attributed to rivers when appear in dreams as per the Islamic faith are as follows.

\(^{10}\) Bible, (King James Version), Joshua 3:15-17.
\(^{12}\) \textit{Ibid}, 2kings 5:14
\(^{13}\) Hadith of Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim (6922) and Sunan Abi Da’ud.
\(^{14}\) Sahih Al-Bukhari Hadith 4.647 and 7.514 narrated by Abu-Huraira and Ibn Abbas respectively.
## Table No. 2.1: Meanings of dreams associated with rivers in Islam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>River in Dream</th>
<th>Attributed Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>If river appears in the dream as visual phenomenon</td>
<td>The dreamer can become a noble and great person or undertake travel, or gets regular income</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Drinking from a dirty river</td>
<td>The dreamer may face trials</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Drinking from a clear river</td>
<td>Prosperity and happiness in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jumping from one bank of river to another</td>
<td>Escaping from danger, dismiss anguish, winning victory over enemy,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Swimming in a river</td>
<td>Working in the government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>River runs through the streets and people taking bath and ablution in it</td>
<td>Justice of a ruler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>River floods the streets and runs through peoples home and damages their property</td>
<td>Unjust ruler and enemy invades his territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>River flows from one’s house and cause no harm</td>
<td>One’s good intention or deeds</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>One becomes himself/herself as a river in dream</td>
<td>Causes death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Murky waters</td>
<td>Worries and fearing; hell fire</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Crossing from one side of a river into another</td>
<td>Dispelling one’s fears or worries</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Jumping from the middle of a river to the river banks</td>
<td>Escaping from the wrath of a ruler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Losing something in a river</td>
<td>Suffering/harm and damages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>River flowing inside one’s house</td>
<td>Prosperity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>One sees people drink water that flows in one’s own house</td>
<td>He is generous and imparts knowledge to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Drinking from Egypt’s Nile river</td>
<td>Receiving great wealth and power.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There are innumerable stories about the relation of Islam to Nile River. Egypt was conquered during the reign of the second Caliphs of Islam, Umar-Ibn- Khattab and he appointed Amru Al-As as the governor of Egypt. The Nile River used to dry at some point of the year and before the drying of the river the Egyptians had the custom of sacrificing a girl to the river in order to prevent the river getting dried up. People used to compel the governor to pursue the age-old custom but he was not ready to do it as he believed that this custom was against Islamic tradition. Amru, the governor, informed of the drying of the river to the Caliph Umar. Umar wrote a letter and asked the governor to throw the letter into the drying Nile. The content of the letter was, “O’ river of Nile, if the water is flowed on your will, behold that we do not need it. But if it
flows in the will of Allah, thus, we pray to Him let flow the water in the river”. After the letter was thrown into the river, the river was filled with water at night and the sacrifice ceremony for keeping the river always flowing was stopped for ever. Muslims keep a particular water known as ‘zam, zam’ in their houses and use it at the time of diseases.

Water has a significant role in Hinduism because of its life sustaining properties and its use in various rituals. In India, a river is called nadi. The Sanskrit word nadi derives from ‘nad’ which means flow, motion or vibration. The meaning of the word itself shows the nature of nadi. According to tantric texts, the human body contains 72,000 nadis and it is these nadis that channelize prana to every cell. Some are wide and rushing while others are trickled. When this systems flows freely in human body, it gives health and when the flow becomes weak it is believed that, humans get mental and physical problems. Likewise, the nadi (river) flows across different natural settings and the people living on the banks get varying benefits. Human beings believe that nadis are the nerves of earth and it nourishes the earth.

Purification is integral to Hindu ritualism. It is commonly held that mere dipping in sacred waters of a river would ward off the sins and purify the birth of the believer. During the Vedic period, there were seven rivers which were considered to be sacred and these rivers include the five rivers of the Punjab and the Indus, Sarasvati. But later, the Aryans moved the centre of their life to the Valley of Ganga River and as a result of this the river Ganga became prominent among other Indian rivers. It is widespread belief that river Ganga is a symbol of holiness, cleansing and life-giving among the other Indian rivers. Today, there are seven sacred rivers such as Ganga, Indus, Sarasvati, Yamuna, Narmada, Godavari and Kaveri. People observe a wide range of rituals on the banks of these rivers to confirm the sanctity of the rivers. According to Hindu cosmology, the river Ganga originates and flows from heaven into four quarters of the earth. Attributing heavenly character to rivers can be seen in the other religions of the world as well. For a Hindu it is mandatory to have a bath before enters a temple. Thus bath or sacred dip in waters emerged as customary and obligatory observance on the part of the devotees before they worship. Often the temples and pilgrim centers are constructed on the banks of the rivers. It is popularly held that running waters are the best sites for sacred bath and ritual purification. Stinky and stagnant waters are not supposed to be used for ritual bathing. If there is
no provision, the temples are annexed with a *tirtha* (sacred water tank) for ritual bath. If sacred dip is not possible, the devotees may wash their feet or sprinkle waters in the wells and tanks of the temples on their heads and thereby symbolically undergo cleansing ritual. Thus water cleansing becomes inevitable for the devotees to enter the sacred premises. The sacrality of rivers in Indian belief system is so high that one should not ask the origins of rivers (*nadi mulam*), woman (*sthri mulam*) and sage (*rishi*) for these three are always sustainers of the humankind from birth to death.

**Mythologies of prominent rivers of the world**

Water is essential for human life as it ensures their nourishment by fertilizing the land in which they live. In some cases, water is associated with sexuality. The Greek notion is that the heavens send rain, like seed, to the earth in an enormous outburst. In certain cultures, river attains either male or female qualities. In Greece, Rivers are strongly masculine.

In **Greek mythology**, Potamoi is the god of rivers and streams of the earth. The river god is depicted in three forms: a bull with a man’s head, a man with bull’s horn and a man with the body of serpentine fish from the waist down. In Greek mythology there exist several myths about the metamorphoses of men into rivers. Selemnos was a handsome boy who used to feed his animals on the shore of a sea. Argyra was a sea Nymph fell in love with Selemnos and used to come out of the sea to visit him. As time passed by, Selemnos no longer seemed handsome and the Nymphe stopped visiting him. Later the boy died and Aphrodite turned him into a river. This is the story from the people of Patrai region who often speak about the origin of Selemnos river. Selemnon continued his love for Argyra even when he turned into river.\(^\text{15}\) The origin myth of the Lykormas river is that, Idas, the son of Aphareus, kidnapped the daughter of Euenos called Marpessa, in a winged chariot. Euenos pursued him in his own chariot, but he failed to recover his daughter from Idas. He reached the Lykormas river, where he slew his horses and killed himself by throwing into the river. After this incident, the river god of Lykormas was called Euenos.\(^\text{16}\)


\(^{16}\) *Ibid*
There are several beliefs among the Greeks that river gods are the protectors of the young who used to dedicate their uncut hair to the local river-god. This belief is followed as a custom in the rivers such as the river Kephisos and the river Alpheios. There are evidences from the poetry of Homer, who makes Peleus vow that on the safe return of his son (Akhilleus from Troy), he will cut off the young man’s hair as a gift for the Sperkheios. After Akhilleus reached from Troy, he stood away from the pyre and cut a lock of his hair which he had grown long enough to give to the river Sperkheios. Gazing out over the wide wine-blue water, he spoke to the river Sperkheios that, his father Peleus vowed to you that, when I had returned home to the beloved land of my fathers, I would cut my hair for you and make a grand and holy sacrifice of fifty rams consecrated to the waters of your springs, which is your holy ground and smoking altar.\(^{17}\)

Greeks believed that one does not cross a flowing river afoot until one has prayed and gazed into the river water for some time. One must wash his hands in the river water before crossing the river and if anyone does not wash his/her hand, the river gods would be angry with him/her and bring trouble upon them afterwards.\(^{18}\) The people of Dion (Dium) believe that the river Baphyras flowed across a vast area throughout year. It is said that, once a woman who killed Orpheus, tried to wash off the blood stained hands in the river. Thereafter, the water disappeared from the river and did not allow its waters to cleanse manslaughter.\(^{19}\)

According to \textbf{Egyptian mythology} the river Hep or Hapi, the god of Nile River, is always depicted in the form of a man, but his breasts are those of a woman. They are indicative of the powers of fertility and of nourishment possessed by the god.\(^{20}\) When the Egyptian divided their country into two parts- the south and the north- they also divided the river gods. Thus, each part came to be the god of each side. That is the god of the South and the god of the North of Nile.

The god of the South Nile has a cluster of lotus plants on head while the god of the North Nile has a cluster of Papyrus plants. The former is called Hap-Reses and


the later Hap-Meht. When the two forms of Hep or Hapi are indicated in a single figure, the god holds in his hands the two plants, i.e., papyrus and lotus or two vases, from which he was believed to pour out the two Niles. By a pretty device, in which the two Nile gods are seen tying in a knot the stems of the lotus and papyrus round, the emblem of union, the Egyptians symbolized the union of the South and North. It is believed that there was a cut-up on the side of the thrones of some Pharaohs, from very early times, to indicate that the thrones of south and North had been united. It is also meant to signify the sovereignty of the monarch over both upper and Lower Egypt. The god Hapi held a unique position among the gods of the country. Without the water of Hapi, every living being would perish. The festival of the annual rise of the Nile was celebrated throughout Egypt with very great solemnity. The statues of the Nile god were carried through the town and village so that men might honour him and pray to him. When the inundation was abundant the people rejoiced on the banks in a great way.

The ancient Egyptian festival has its equivalence among the Muslims which is celebrated on June 17, called Leylet en Noooktah i.e., Night of the drop. Because, it is believed that on that night, a miraculous drop would fall from the heaven into the Nile and make it to rise. In its annual flow, this river deposits rich sediment which would make the plains on either side of the Nile fertile.

The Yellow River Huang Ho is China’s second longest river and the muddiest river in the world and it is also the birthplace of Chinese civilization. Over a billion tonnes of silt and sediment flow through it each year, giving the Huang Ho its distinctive yellow colour. The Yellow River is called China’s sorrow for its frequent flooding.

According to Chinese mythology, a man named He Bo tied heavy rocks to his back and jumped into the water as a supreme sacrifice to stop the flood of the Yellow river. Plunging into the river, he thus gained immortality. For his pains he was granted immortality and promoted to the status of the god of the Yellow River. He is spotted with a red moustache, dressed in white robes and wears a black crown. He rode a white horse and had twelve boy attendants. He Bo, the god of the Yellow river is the

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combination of ‘He’ literally means river and Bo means master or god. Following this act, it became a custom to throw a young virgin as a bride of He Bo into the river on the anniversary of his death (this ritual lasted until the end of the Zhou dynasty in 256 BCE). This ‘marriage’ was arranged by the local authorities. As a rule, when the date for ‘marriage’ approaches, a female Shaman was sent to visit families in the Ye village. When they find a beautiful girl, they would say, ‘She should be married to He Bo’. The people assert that, if the annual providing of a bride to the River god, He Bo, is not carried out it would result in the over flow of the river and the resultant death of many people.

After giving the family some money as bride-price, they would put the girl by force on a decorated bed on which is spread a mat of woven split bamboo. Carried by nine strong men to the river bank, the girl would be thrown into the water in the presence of two to three thousand people dressed in bright coloured clothing. In order to avoid this unreasoned custom, most families with girls escaped from this area. The masses were strongly against this evil custom, but they did not dare to oppose it openly for fear that their fields would be flooded if He Bo becomes angry.

**Mythologies of major rivers of India**

There are many myths about the origin of rivers in India. These narratives give an overview of the sacredness of the rivers and their association to ritual enactment. The following are the origin myths of major Indian rivers with versions and variations.

**Indus River**

According to Indian mythology, Indus valley civilization was originated on the banks of the river Sindhu. The word ‘Sindhi’ derive from the river Sindhu. Though this river is called Sindhu in India, it is called the Indus by Westerners. The word Sindhu means ‘stream’. The river is a pivotal water source for Sindh as it is the only

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source of freshwater that sustains the people, local environments, and the economy of Sindh.  

The river god of Indus is called as the ‘Jhulelal’ by the Sindhi people. His birthday cheti chand which falls on the second day of the chaitra month (march-april) is auspicious for Sindhis and is celebrated in high esteem. He is also known under various names such as Uderolal, Dulahlal, Amaralal, Khwaja Khizr, Darya Shah and is worshipped throughout Sindh and Punjab of India.

In Sindh, Mohamed Bin Qasim defeated Raja Dahar, the last Hindu Kings. Sindh was annexed by Khalife of Al Hilaj to his kingdom and was administered by his representatives. In the 10th Century, Sindh came under the rule of Sumras, who were converted from Hinduism to Islam. While they made Sindh free from the foreign rule, they were also tolerant to all other religions. There was one exception in Sumra reign. The province of Thatta being far from the capital, maintained its separate identity.

Its ruler Mirkshah was not only a tyrant but also a religious fanatic. Mirkshah too was surrounded by sycophants. These friends advised him one day: ‘Spread Islam and you will be granted ‘Janat’ (paradise) or eternal bliss after death’. Swayed by the promise, Mirkshah summoned the ‘panchs (representatives) of the Hindus and ordered them: “Embrace Islam or prepare to die”. The terrified Hindus begged Mirkshah for time to consider the ‘shahi firman’ or royal proclamation. The arrogant Mirkshah conceded and agreed to give the desperate Hindus forty days to plead with their god. Faced with imminent death, the Hindus turned to god Varuna, the god of the River, to come to their aid. For forty days, they underwent penance. They neither shaved nor wore new clothes, praying and fasting and singing songs in the praise of god Varuna. They requested him to free them from the hands of their persecutor. On the fortieth day, a voice was heard from Heaven: ‘Fear not, I shall save you from the wicked Mirkshah. I shall come down as a mortal and take birth in the womb of Mata Devki in the house of Ratanchand Lohano of Nasarpur’. The oppressed Hindus anxiously awaited the birth of their deliverer. After three months, the second tithi of Asu month, they got confirmation of the news that Mata Devki had conceived. The River god has incarnated himself in her womb. The Hindus rejoiced and praised the Lord. On Cheti Chand, two tithis from the new moon of chaitra, Devki gave birth to a boy. As if to proclaim the auspicious event, unseasonal clouds collected on the sky and brought down torrential rains to welcome the new avatar. The newborn infant also hailed his birth with a miracle. He opened his mouth and his parents saw therein river Sindhu flowing and also an old man sitting cross-legged on a Pala fish. The pala fish is a very tasty fish and its peculiarity is that it swims against the flow of water. Devaki went to the bank of Sindhu and performed Jado which means praying to water god. All Hindus celebrated the birth of the child with songs and dances.

The child was named ‘Udaichand’ (Uday in Sanskrit means moonbeams). Udaichand was to be the light in the darkness. An astrologer, who saw the
child, predicted that he would grow up to be a great warrior and his fame would survive many places. Udaichand was also called ‘Uderolal (Udero in Sanskrit means ‘one who has sprung from water). Inhabitants of Nasarpur lovingly called the child ‘Amarlal (immortal) child. The cradle where little Udero rested began to sway to and fro on its own. It is because of this that ‘Uderolal’ became popularly known as ‘Jhulelal’ or the swinging child. However, soon after the child’s birth, Mata Devki passed away. A little later his father Ratanchand remarried. News of the birth of the mysterious child reached Mirkshah who once again summoned the Panchs and repeated his royal threat. Hindus, now quite confident that their savior had arrived, implored him for some more time informing him that their saviors were none other than the Water god himself. Mirkshah mocked at the very idea of a child saving the Hindus. He jeered that, ‘I shall wait. When your savior embraces Islam, I am sure you will also follow suit.’

The sycophants pressed Mirkshah hard for settling the issue without any further delay. But the very thought of the child proving more than a match for him amused the ruler. He therefore told them to wait and watch. As a precaution, he asked one of his ministers Ahirio, to go to Nasarpur to see things first hand, Ahirio did not want to take any chances. So he took along a rose dipped in deadly poison and asked Ratanchand to take him to the newborn baby. At the very first glimpse of the child, Ahirio was astonished. He had never seen a child so dazzling or more charming. He hesitated, and then put on courage. He extended the rose to the baby’s lips. The child gave a meaningful smile while accepting the rose. He then blew away the flower with a single breath. The flower fell at Ahirio's feet. Then he saw that the child was no more in the cradle. Instead an old man with a long white beard was staring at him. All of a sudden the old man turned into a lad of sixteen years. Again the scene changed. He saw Uderolal on a horse back with a blazing naked sword in his hand and there were rows of warriors behind him. It was a scene of battlefield. A cold shiver ran down Ahirio’s spine and he bowed his head in reverence. ‘Have mercy on me Sindhu Lord’, he prayed ‘I am convinced’.

On his return Ahirio narrated the miraculous happening to Mirkshah. But Mirkshah was not convinced. He hardened his heart even more. ‘How can a little baby turn into an old man?’ he mocked. ‘It looks like you have been fooled by simple magic.’ But in his heart, Mirkshah was afraid. That night he had a dreadful dream. A child was sitting on his neck. The vision changed to an old man with a flowing beard and again to a warrior with a drawn sword confronting Mirkshah on the battlefield. Next morning Mirkshah called for Ahirio and gave him orders to counter the threat posed by the child. Ahirio, however, advised Mirkshah not to rush matters.

Meanwhile, the child Uderolal grew in stature and spirit performing miracles and comforting the sick. Residents of Nasarpur were fully convinced that god had come to save them. To earn money for the family, Udero’s stepmother would send him to the market to sell boiled beans. Instead of going to the market; Uderolal would go to the banks of the Sindhu. There he would distribute half of the beans among beggars, the poor and the sadhus. The other half, he would offer to the Sindhu. He would then spend the rest of the time speaking to little children and the elderly about
spiritual wealth on the riverbank. In the evening when it was time to go home, Udero would fish out from the river a container full of fine quality rice. This he would take home and give it to his stepmother. Growing suspicious about her stepson’s behaviour, the stepmother one day asked Ratanchand to follow him. When Ratanchand witnessed the miracle, he bowed to Uderolal from a distance and accepted him as the saviour.

Mirkshah on the other hand was being pressurized by the flatterers to bring Hindu infidels into the fold of Islam. They gave him the ultimatum and ordered the Hindus to convert to Islam or be branded as kafirs (unbelievers). Fearing the wrath of the clerics, Mirkshah decided to meet Uderolal face to face. He asked Ahirio to arrange for a private meeting with Udero. Ahirio who had in the meantime become a devotee of Daryashah, went to the banks of the Indus and pleaded with the Water god to come to his rescue. To Ahirio's amazement, he saw the same old man with a white beard floating on a pala fish. Ahirio’s head bowed in adoration and he understood that Uderolal, the Water god, was in fact the other form of Khwaja Khirz. Ahirio then saw Udero leap onto a horse and galloped away with a sword in one hand and a flag in the other.

As decided, Mirkshah reached the meeting place, Udero appeared before Mirkshah and explained to the ruler that, ‘Whatever you see around you is the creation of only one god, whom you call ‘Allah’ and the Hindus call ‘Ishwar’. The sycophants urged Mirkshah not to pay any attention to the infidels’ talks and to arrest him. Mirkshah, dithering as usual ordered his soldiers to arrest Udero. As the officials of the court moved towards Udero, great waves of water leaped forth-inundating Mirkshah and his courtiers. Fire too broke out and the palace was consumed by the flames. All escape routes were sealed. Udero spoke again to Mirkshah that, ‘think it over. Your god and mine are the same. Then, why did you hound my people?’ Mirkshah was terrified and begged Udero, ‘My Lord, I realize my foolishness. Please save me and my courtiers’. Suddenly the water receded and the fire died away. Mirkshah bowed respectfully and agreed to treat Hindus and Muslims alike. Before they dispersed, Uderolal told the Hindus to think of him as the embodiment of light and water. He also told them to build a temple in memory of transformation of Mirkshah and light a candle in the temple with holy water always available.

Uderolal named his cousin, Pagad, as the first Thakur (Priest of the religious sect that believes in Water god). Pagad followed Uderolal wherever he went. Uderolal asked Pagad to continue the sacred work of building temples and spread the message. Selecting a place near village Thijahar, Uderolal gave up his earthly form. Both Hindus and Muslims were present in large numbers to witness this mysterious incident. Mirkshah’s representatives were also there. No sooner Uderolal’s soul left his body; they took charge and wanted to build a ‘Turbat’ or ‘Qaba’ at the site according to the dictates of Islam, while the Hindus wanted to erect a ‘samadhi’ according to Hindu custom. While the debate began, heavy rains came down and a voice said: ‘Behold, You shall make my shrine acceptable both to Hindus and Muslims. Let its one face be a temple and the other a dargah (Shrine). I belong to all
of you. It is performed with Sobha Yaatra (victory dance) of Jhulelal’s Bahrana Sahib. After the demise of Uderolal, Pagad followed the place wherever Uderolal went. They visited Rohiri by the riverside and a ‘ghat’ was built there, which later on came to be known as Udero-ghat.

Sarasvati River

1. Sarasvati was residing in the heaven with her husband Hari, his co-wives, Lakshmi and Ganga. Once Ganga was in a passionate mood and was eyeing Hari continuously. Hari realized this easily and responded by laughing at her. Sarasvati could not tolerate such behaviour from Hari and got angry. When Hari saw that Sarasvati was in such a mood, he went out of the room leaving Sarasvati, Ganga and Lakshmi inside. Then Lakshmi tried her best to appease Sarasvati with her polite words; but could not succeed in her endeavour. Sarasvati then cursed Lakshmi, to become a river. When Ganga came to know of it, she consoled Lakshmi by saying that Sarasvati herself should go to earth as a river where sinners resided. Again Sarasvati cursed Ganga as she had done to Lakshmi. While this was going on, Hari returned and heard of what had happened and at last, said that Sarasvati should go to earth in consequence of her quarrel with Ganga. But since she had already been cursed, Ganga should also have to go to the abode of Shiva. Since Lakshmi had remained innocent in all this unpleasantness, she should remain here in the heaven with Hari. Therefore, Sarasvati came down to earth as a river.

2. The King Pururava saw the nymph Sarasvati in the assembly of the gods, and asked Urvasi, to arrange for his union with her. Sarasvati consented to his desire, conveyed to her through Urvasi, and approached Pururava. These two then sported for many years and from them was born Sarasvan, who later produced Brhadratha. For this act of hers, Brahma cursed her to become a river. But, being afraid of the curse, Sarasvati went to the Ganga, who pleaded on her behalf in front of Brahma. Brahma said that Sarasvati would have to be a river, but she would be seen in some places and not seen in others. Thus, Sarasvati (river) was joined with the Ganga.


Ganga River

1. Sagara, king of Ayodhya, eagerly desired children. His elder wife was Keshini and the second wife Sumati. He went to Himalaya with his wives to practise penance. When a hundred years passed, the rishi Brigu, granted him his wish that one of his wife Keshini, shall bring forth a son who will perpetuate his race and the other wife shall give birth to sixty thousand sons. In due course Keshini bore a son and his name was Asamanja. Sumati gave birth to sixty thousand sons and the nurses fostered them in jars of ghee until they grew up to youth hood and beauty. But the eldest son, the child of Keshini, didn’t love them and cast them in the Sarayu river and watched them sink. For this evil disposition and for the wrongs he did to citizens and honest folk, Asamanja was banished by his father. But he had himself a son named Suman, fair-spoken to all and well-beloved. Many years had passed. Sagara determined to perform a sacrifice and the place he selected for the sacrifice was the region between the Himalaya and Vindhya. But he had lost his horse and Anshumat, a mighty chariot-fighter, followed to protect it. Then the Brahman priests informed the king, and commanded him to slay the thief and bring back the horse. Then Sagara sent his sixty thousand sons to seek the horse. They searched many places and finally they saw the horse near to the hermitage of sage Kapila. They rushed on Kapila in fury and attacked him with trees and boulders, spades and ploughs. But Kapila uttered a dreadful roar and flashed a burning flame upon the sons that burned them all to ashes.

King Sagara addressed his grandson Suman, to seek his uncles and learn their fate. He came in turn to many places and at last he came to the heap of ashes that had been his uncles and there he also found the horses. He desired to perform the funeral rituals for the uncles, but he could not find water anywhere. Then he asked Garuda who was passing through the air. Garuda explained all stories of his uncles and the great Kapila’s curse on your uncles. Later they returned to his home with the horse and Sagara’s ceremony was completed.

Sagara died after some years and Anshumat became king. He was a great ruler, and at last resigned the kingdom to his son and retired to dwell alone in the Himalayan forests. In due time he also passed away and reached heaven. Later, his son, King Dilipa, constantly kept on thinking about how to bring down the Ganga to purify the ashes. But after thirty thousand years he too died, and his son Bhagiratha, a royal saint, followed him.

Bhagiratha performed terrible penance for a thousand years to draw down Ganga from the skies. Then Brahma was pleased by his devotion, and appeared before him, granting him a boon. He prayed that the ashes of the sons of Sagara should be washed by the water of Ganga to which Brhma replied that only Shiva could bear the power of falling Ganga from heaven.

Then for a year Bhagiratha worshipped Shiva and he being well pleased, undertook to bear the mountain-daughter’s fall, receiving the river upon his head. But
when Ganga fell in Shiva’s tangled locks it was feared that she might not even reach the earth, for she wandered there unable to escape for many years. Then Bhagiratha again engaged in many hard austerities, till Shiva would set the river free and she fell in seven streams. Bhagiratha conducted the funeral ritual for the sixty thousand sons of Sagara and they finally attained salvation in Heaven.29

2. Once, King Sagar wished to become the emperor of the Earth. To achieve this he decided to perform an Ashwamedha Yaga (sacrifice of horse in Vedic fire-ritual). Indra smelt the danger of Sagar gaining more power and decided to disturb Yaga. He stole the horse brought for the Yaga (Vedic fire-ritual) and hid under a tree where sage Kapila was under meditation. The sons of Sagar, numbering 60,000, barring one, detected the horse. They mistook it was stolen by sage Kapila and threatened the saint. The insulted Kapila burnt them to ashes through the fire emanated from his third eye. The remaining one son of Sagar learnt of the incident and begged upon Kapila to release the souls of his brothers from the ashes. Saint Kapila said he has no power to release the souls and advised him to please Brahma with penances. If Brahma was pleased he would release Ganga from heaven to the earth for purifying the ashes as a requisite for getting the souls released. He undertook penances for many years but Brahma was still to be pleased. After many years Bhagiratha was born to king Sagar. He undertook penances and pleased Brahma. Brahma advised him to worship Shiva and so he did. The pleased Shiva withheld Ganga by spreading his hairs in the sky in order to avoid flooding of earth when Ganga descended on it. Shiva finally released a bit of Ganga’s water to the earth.30

3. Formerly Ganga the beloved of Krishna lived in the Goloka. When she was with Krishna, Radha, another wife of Krishna, came there. Radha didn’t see Ganga as she concealed herself in water but Radha came to know of the situation by her yogic powers and she started to drink the water to destroy Ganga. But Ganga then concealed herself in the feet of Krishna. Because of Ganga’s disappearance, all the water in the world dried up. Thereby, all the gods and goddess went to the Goloka and prayed to Krishna. He then advised Brahma to please Radha and accordingly Brahma prayed to her. Radha was pleased with them and thus Krishna drew Ganga out from his feet and she began to flow again.31

4. Ganga was the beloved of Shiva and he kept Ganga on his head (as a token of honour). Since Shiva’s wife Uma knew about this, it as a matter of great concern for him. Uma was unable to bear this and on seeing Ganga on the matted hair of Shiva, she spoke angrily to her Lord and asked him to send Ganga away. However, Shiva declined to send her away. Later Uma, in secret, spoke of this matter to Vinayaka, Skanda and Jaya. She said that the Lord would never abandon Ganga even if it was attempted by the Devas, Asuras, Yaksas, and Siddhas, including them, the kings or

others. She told them that either she should have to go to Himavan and perform penance once again or entrust the job to holy Brahmins who have already dispelled their sins by practicing austerities. Requested by them, there was a chance that Ganga may go to the Earth.

Then Vinayaka spoke to his mother, brother and Jaya that, the Brahmin Gautama is equal to Devas and has done many things which could be achieved by Devas only with effort. Gautama may thus be able to dislodge Ganga from the matted hair of Lord Shiva. During this time there was a drought in the entire world, except for in the hermitage of the Brahmin, Gautama. Thus, all the Brahmins came and pleaded to Gautama to allow them to live in his hermitage. Jaya assuming the form of a cow, went to the place where Gautama was present, eating the paddy plants near to the hermitage. When Gautama saw the cow, he tried to prevent it from eating the paddy by striking it with a blade of sharp grass. On hearing the cry of the Cow and on seeing the action of Gautama, the other Brahmins who resided in the hermitage of Gautama became very distressed. The Brahmins said that all of them should leave the hermitage because of Gautama’s sin even though they had all been nurtured by him as his sons. Gautama was struck down by the severity of the decision on hearing these words of the Brahmins who were determined to go from there. He fell down in front of them while touching their feet, said that their holinesses alone was his refuge.

Then Lord Vinayaka (Ganesha, the creator of obstacles) reached the place in the form of a Brahmin and stood surrounded by them. Whereby, all the Brahmins said that this intelligent Sage would speak in accordance to the opinion of all of other Brahmins and that his statement would be considered authoritative by all of them as well as Gautama. Vinayaka in the guise of a Brahmin thus spoke to all and told them that only by accepting his suggestion would they be delivered from this sin they had committed. He told them that the Ganga was staying in the matted hair of Lord Shiva and should be brought quickly down by performing the austerities and holy rites by the Brahmins. He asked them to bring the water of the Ganga and pour it over the dead cow that had fallen to the ground. And after that they all shall stay in Gautama’s house like before. After Vinayaka gave this suggestion, Gautama started his penance and pleaded to Shiva to let Ganga come down to the earth.\footnote{Brahmapurana Part iv-Gautanimahatyam, J.L Shastri (trans.), Delhi: Motilal Bansarsidas, 1986.}

5. It is said that, when Vishnu, in his form of the dwarf, crossed the earth and heaven in two strides, he reached the heaven of Brahma, called Satyaloka. Brahma received Vishnu and washed his feet with the water from a pitcher. From that pitcher it is said that the flow of Ganga was produced.\footnote{Skandapurana (1.1.19.10-15), G.V Tagore and G.P Bhatt (trans.), Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2007.}

Brahmaputra

1. There was once a sage named Santanu, who sometimes lived in Kailash, sometimes on the banks of the big tank (kunda) called lohita and sometimes on
the top of mount Gandhamadana with his wife Amoga. Once, while at Gandhamadana, the sage while gathering fruits and flowers wandered quite far away from his ashram. Meanwhile pithamaha Brahma, the creator, came on his way to his cottage in quest of Santanu and saw his wife Amoga, who was as beautiful as any celestial nymph. Brahma wished to have a child by her which would benefit the whole world. But the chaste Amoga not only refused to recognise Brahma, but also resisted his wishes. Brahma returned to Brahmalok after leaving his semen in the hermitage of Santanu. Santanu, on seeing the semen lying on the ground, learned of Brahma’s visit and his desire. He meditated and recognised the real intention of Brahma and thereby requested his wife, Amoga to drink the semen of Brahma for the benefit of all the three worlds and for the fulfilment Brhama’s desire. But Amoga requested her husband to drink the semen himself and sprinkle it into her womb. She conceived and in due course of time gave birth to a watery form which in appearance looked exactly like Brahma. Santanu placed this form, called Brahmakunda, in the middle of the four mountains- Jarudhi and Sambwarttaka, Kailash and Gandhamadana. After some years the stream grew in to a lake, swelling up to forty miles looking like a vast sea. Brahma thereafter, himself blessed his child and gave it the name of Brahmaputra (son of Brhama).34

Narmada

1. Once Shiva and Uma were sporting on the peak of Amarkantak and were both perspiring profusely. After which, the perspiration on the chest of Shiva mixed with the perspiration of Uma and a beautiful lotus-eyed girl was born. The gods and the Asuras were both enchanted by her beauty, and ran to get her. Shiva and Uma on seeing the plight of both, the Devas and the Asuras, said to the girl that, it is she who had given them erotic excitement (narma), and thus, will be known as Narmada thereafter. Then, while the Devas were still trying to capture her, she changed herself into a river and flowed onto Earth.35

2. Lord Shiva was wandering in the naked form at forest of Daruvanan. The wives of the sages living there got extremely frightened of the nakedness of Shiva but some of them while surprised approached him. Thereafter they lost self-control thinking that Lord Shiva was the most beautiful and attractive of all men. Meanwhile the sages came there and on seeing Lord Shiva engaged in perverse activities with their wives, became infuriated and asked him of his identity. But Shiva does not reply. As they failed to recognize Shiva and took him to be an ordinary man, they cursed him that his penis should fall to the ground. The moment the Lingam of Shiva fell to the ground, he disappeared immediately. The penis went all over the earth and never remained steady anywhere. The sages wondered about this maayaa, and approached Lord Brahma to find a solution for

stopping the wandering of the penis. Then, Lord Brahma explained to them on how to make steady the penis and the sages following the instructions of Brahma got the linga (penis) fixed at one place, called Daha Sira, in the mountains of Amarakantak where the semen from it turned into the river Narmada.\footnote{Skandapurana (vi.259.3-5). G.V Tagore and G.P Bhatt (trans.), Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2007.}

3. The river Narmada is also known as Maikal associated with such names as Maikalsuta i.e the daughter of Maikal etc., and can be attributed to it in many different ways. Maikal is said to have been a sage who used to practice penance at Amarkantak and therefore, Narmada is said to have originated as his daughter, as a result of his hard penance.\footnote{Sankaran Unni, Ecology of River Narmada, New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 1996.}

**Godavari**

1. Parvati would always feel jealous of Ganga, because Shiva held Gangaan his head. She expresses her agony in front of her sons Ganesha and Skanda and her attendant Jaya. They constantly think on how to come out of this predicament and meanwhile there comes a severe famine on earth. All sages come and take resort with Sage Gautama at his mountain abode and the adjoining fertile plane called Brahmsgiri. Ganesha knew too well that none except Gautama could bring Ganga down from Shiva’s matted hair. So Ganesa called Jaya and asks her to take the form of a Cow and go and graze in the field of Gautama which was full of crops and thereby she follows his instruction. Ganesha had instructed Jaya (cow) to fall down and pretend to be dead at the very touch of Gautama. When Gautama sees a cow grazing in his field, he follows and touches the cow and it suddenly falls dead. All the sages then get the news that Gautama has killed a cow. Gautama thus decides to relieve himself from the gohatya.

   Later, Ganesha disguises himself as a Brahmin and approached the sages. He tells Gautama to bring Ganga to earth (the great river that stayed in the matted locks of Shiva) as it is only with the touch of her waters that the cow would come to life. This was to be done to wash off the sin of the gauhatya. Gautama worships Shiva and requests him to let Ganga flow down to the earth to purify his hermitage. Shiva pleased with Gautama’s devotion lets Ganga flowed out of his matted hair to the earth. Since Ganga was brought down to Triambakeshwar, by sage Gautama. She is known here as Gautami. She is also known as Godavari because the river helped sage Gautama to relieve his sin from the killing of cow.\footnote{Brahma Purana, J.L Shastri (trans.), Delhi: Motilal Bansarsidas, 1986.}

2. Gautama practises austerities in the forest of Dandaka and receives a boon from Brahma in the form of high crop fertility and thereby huge production of crops. Now, in course of time there breaks out a severe famine which lasts for twelve years and that compels the sages, who lived in the forests, to approach
Gautama for food. Gautama supports the sages throughout the whole period and requests them to stay with him even when the famine is over. As a pretext to leave the place the sages create a cow by virtue of their power and put her in the hermitage. Gautama realizes that it is a magic cow and sprinkles water on her face. The cow drops down dead and thereafter the sages leave the hermitage. Then, Gautama began his austerities and Shiva being pleased with his devotion comes down and gives him a piece of his matted hair. Gautama brings the hair to his hermitage and this causes the Ganges to flow through the place where the magic cow lay senseless. The cow revives with the touch of water and consequently the river was named Godavari.\(^{39}\)

**Krishna**

1. Lord Brahma decided to perform a yajna. He prepares the place, materials and invites the gods, the rishis and the Gandharvas. The altar is ready and the auspicious time for the sacrifices has started. Meanwhile, Savitri, the wife of Brahma while wearing her clothes and jewels, forgets the auspicious moment of yajna and gets delayed in reaching the ordained place. Brahma starts the yajna with the consent of others along with Gayatri. When Savitri hears the sound of musical instrument and hymns of Vedas, she rushes to the sacrificial tent, and sees her husband performing the yajna with Gayatri. She gets angry and she curses Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesheswar and Gayatri. She said that since the Trimurtis took the help of Gayatri, they will be turned to rivers and will be known by feminine names. Gayatri should also become a river but people would ignore her presence. On hearing the curse, Vishnu becomes angry and gives a similar curse to Savitri. Because of these curses, Vishnu became the river Krishna, Shiva takes form of the river Vena and Brahma takes the form of the Kakudmati (the Koyna). The names Gayatri and Savitri remained the same.\(^{40}\)

2. There was an Asura called Jalandhara who became invisible due to his wife Vrindha’s devotion towards Vishnu. Jalandhar thus challenges the devas who were then defeated by him. After being vanquished, the Devas approached Vishnu and on seeing their plight he decides to wage war against Jalandhar. But Jalandhar emerged victorious in the war. Vishu, after being defeated, realised that as long as Jalandhar’s wife Vrindaa remained chaste to him, nothing and nobody could ever defeat him. Based on Shiva’s request Vishnu plotted Jalandhar’s downfall. One day Vrindaa becomes very sad in Jalandhar’s absence and goes for a walk in the forest where she is pursued by two Demons. Vrindaa get frightened and runs to a sage, meditating in the forest. She falls at his feet and asks him for shelter. Vishu, in the form of the rishi burns up the demons into ashes and thereafter makes love to Vrindaa. She thereby becomes unchaste and Vishnu wins his mission. This weakens Jalandhar and he gets killed


in the battle against Shiva. Vrindaa, later, gets the news of the death of her husband and realizes that the sage was Vishnu himself. She feels sad at having deceived by Vishnu and throws herself into a burning pit. Meanwhile the Devas celebrate the victory of Shiva over Jalandhar but they are shocked to find that Vishnu has become mad and is rolling in Vrindaa’s ashes. Seeing this, Lakshmi, Vishnu’s wife becomes jealous and curses Vishnu to be turned into river whose colour would be black. That is how the river Krishn comes out.41

3. At the place where the Krishna River now is, there was no rain or even any kind of drinking water source for the people of that land. There is now a big hill near Satara where the Krisna river origins. The people of this village had to go twenty five or thirty kilometres each time to get water. Once, an exasperated woman jumps from the hill and thereafter water is said to have sprung from that place. This spring, now grown into a full-fledged river is known as Krishna River.42

Kaveri

1. Long ago, a sage Kavera lived in Brahmagiri (the present source of the River Kaveri) mountain and meditated to Brahma, the Creator. Kavera’s devotion was so great and at last Brahma appears before him and blesses him by granting him his wishes. Kavera tells Brahma that he wanted children. Brahma to this replies that Kavera could not have any children of his own because of the sins he had committed in his previous life. But since Kavera shows exceptional devotion to Brahma, Brahma blesses Kavera with his adopted daughter Lopamudra (a manifestation of Parvati) for his own daughter. The sage was highly pleased with this boon. Later, Lopamudra informs Kavera that she regarded herself as his daughter, and she wanted to become a holy river someday. The girl lived with Kavera till the day he died. After their death, she met a great sage Agastya, who was visiting Brahmagiri Mountain to meditate to Shiva. Agastya falls in love with Kaveri, (as daughter of Kavera was called) and asks her to marry him. She agrees on one condition that she would leave him if she was ever left alone even for a little while. One morning Agastya wanted to bathe in Kanake, a river which rises in the Brahmagiri Mountain and thus, he puts his wife into a vessel and hands the vessel to one of his young Brahmin disciples for safekeeping. Kaveri, gets annoyed at being left alone and when the vessel stumble and falls from the hands of the disciples and rolls away on the ground, Kaveri escapes from it in the form of the River Kaveri43. Agastya returns after his bath and finds out about what had happened in his absence and runs


after his wife who swiftly keeps flowing away as a river. He catches up with her and expresses his regret at having left her alone and begs for her forgiveness. As a result of his entreaties, Kaveri decides to split her into two halves, one half flowing away as the River Kaveri and the other half becoming Lopamudra, the wife of Agastya.

2. Siddharta, the King of Matsyadesha, had four sons of which the youngest was Chandravarma. When he grew up, Chandravarma left his father and went on a pilgrimage to various holy places in the southern part of India. In the course of his pilgrimage, he went to the Brahmagiri Mountain where he meditated on Parvati, the wife of Shiva. When the goddess presented herself before Chandravarma and asked him what his wishes are, he replies that he wanted a kingdom, a wife of Kshatriya caste who would bear his children and a place in heaven after death. Parvati told him that owing to sins committed in a previous life, he could not beget children from a wife belonging to his own caste, but would have to get children from a Shudra wife. His wife would bear him eleven sons, who would be called the ugras. They would be courageous and righteous and respectful to the Brahmins and would be equal to Kshatriyas in every respect except one. They would not be entitled to the performance of Vedic ritual. They would also be devoted to the worship of Shiva and Parvati. The goddess assured Chandravarma that she would be born in course of time as the River Kaveri and confers prosperity and other blessings on the children (Coorgs) of Chandravarma. She asks him to go forth and clear the land of mlechchas (Muslims) and gives him a victorious sword, a white horse quick as the wind, and an army to drive the mlechchas out of the country. Chandravarma overcame the mlechchas and married a woman of his own caste according to Vedic rites. The coronation ceremony was performed by Brahmins to whom he gave houses and lands. He invited other castes to settle down in Coorg. He married a second time and had eleven sons from his Shudra wife, and Vedic rites were performed for each of them on occasions like the conferment of name, performance of tonsure, and investment with the sacred thread. In this respect, they were treated like Kshatriyas. When they came of age, the eleven sons married the hundred daughters of the King of Vidharbadesha. Chandravarma retired with his two wives to the Himalayas to meditate on Shiva and Parvati. Before his departure he told his children that Parvati would be reborn in Coorg as the River Kaveri and that they would be happy as long as they continued to worship Shiva and Parvati, and the Brahmins. Each of the sons of Chandravarma had more than a hundred sons. They were all very strong men, with nails as sharp and powerful as the tusks of boars. With their nails they levelled the ground and tore up the forests, and generally reclaimed land. Parvati appeared in a dream to Devakanta, the King of Coorgs, and ordered him to assemble his people in a place called Balmuri, where she would meet them. Accordingly, all Coorgs assembled there to greet Parvati in the form of the river Kaveri. The river, thus, came rushing down the valley, and such was the violence of the flood that it pushed the frontal knots
of the women’s saris to their backs and even now Coorg women push the frontal knot to the back in memory of their first bathe in the Kaveri.\textsuperscript{44}

3. According to one legend, a prince named Chandravarma worshipped goddess Parvati on the Brahmagiri hills in Kodagu. She promised to appear in the form of a river for the benefit of humanity. During the churning of the Kshirasagar by the Devas and Rakshasas for the amrita, the nectar of immortality; the Rakshasas seized the amrita from the Devas. In order to save heaven and earth from the wicked Rakshasas who would become immortal by drinking the amrita, Lord Vishnu incarnated himself as Mohini to recapture the amrita for the Devas. Goddess Lakshmi sends Lopamudra in the form of Parvati to help Mohini to carry out this delicate and difficult task. After recapturing and restoring the amrita to the Devas, Mohini changes herself into a rocky cave in the Brahmagiri and Lopamudra was brought up by Brahma as his own daughter.

The great sage Kavera resided at that time on the Brahmagiri and meditated to Brahma. He prayed to the Lord for a daughter. Lord Brahma, pleased with his devotion gives him his own Lopamudra as his daughter. Lopamudra gains the new name, Kaveri as the daughter of sage Kavera. The great sage Agastya once happened to meet Kaveri on the Brahmagiri where she was meditating. The sage attracted by the lovely maiden and asks her to marry him. The youthful Kaveri consented on the condition that if at any time she should be left alone even for a short while, she should go away. Agastya accepted her condition and married her. Even though the sage was a loyal and devoted husband, Kaveri patiently waited for an opportunity to transform herself into a river. One day, after cautioning his disciples to keep a watch over her, Agastya leaves Kaveri at the holy pond and goes to bathe in the river. This leads him to break his promise at the time of their marriage whereby Kaveri plunges from the holy pond and flows out as a stream. This stream becomes to be known as the river Kaveri.\textsuperscript{45}

4. King Kavera performs penance for a thousand years in the Himalaya whereby Brahma appears and promises him that his daughter, Vishnumaya, would be born as Kavera’s daughter. A daughter was soon born to the king and when she came of age, she begins to practice tapas in order to become a river that would purify all her sins. Vishnu promises her that she would have her wish and that she would be greater than the Ganges. Vishnu appears to Agastya in the south and tells him that he should take a wife. Vishnu overcomes all of Agastya’s objections and sends him to the Himalaya, where he finds Kaveri at performing her tapas. She thereby divides her nature, half of her entering his pot and the other half marrying the sage in a wedding as splendid as that of Parvati’s. The couple then go south after the wedding, where on reaching the mountain of

\textsuperscript{44} M.N. Srinivas, Religion and society among the Coorgs of south India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
Brahmagiri, Agastya leaves his pot and from there Kaveri flows out over the feet of Vishnu forming the river.\textsuperscript{46}

5. Agastya propitiated Shiva at Kailasa and gets the boon to keep some holy water in his pot. At the same time Kaveri has also been worshipping Shiva. Thus, Shiva fills Agastya’s bowl with Kaveri’s water. Agastya, on his way back from Kailasa curses the Raksasa called Krauncha and kicks the Vindya Mountain down. After overcoming various difficulties he reaches Southern India where he sits in meditation with the bowl of Kaveri water in front of him. Here, Ganesa reaches the place in the disguise of a crow based on Indra’s request and sits on the edge of the bowl thus toppling it and as the water in the bowl flows out it takes the form of a river which in present times is considered as Kaveri River.\textsuperscript{47}

From the above description of myths in brief one can find that some of the rivers in India are born out of body parts of the divine beings.

**Table No. 2.2: Rivers and Divine Beings Association**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Body Parts</th>
<th>Name of the River</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hair and feet</td>
<td>Ganga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sweat; Genital Organ</td>
<td>Narmada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>Godavari</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table it is evident that the Ganges is formed out of the plaited hair of Shiva according to one version whereas the other version states that the Ganges is created out of the feet of Vishnu. The river Narmada is born out of the sweat of Shiva-Parvathi as per one version and as per another it is created out of Shiva’s genital organ. The river Godavari is believed to have been formed out of Shiva’s head.

In the analysis of the myths, is also found that some of the rivers in India are formed owing to the verbal expressions of the gods/goddesses. In the popular belief it is considered that the divine beings are bestowed with powerful tongues whose curse or blessings results in the creation of the rivers in India as shown in the table below:


Table No. 2.3: Origin of Rivers – Verbal Acts of Divine Beings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Verbal Act</th>
<th>Name of the River</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Curse</td>
<td>Sarasvati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Blessings</td>
<td>Brahmaputra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Curse</td>
<td>Krishna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Blessings</td>
<td>Kaveri</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table it can be found that some of the rivers owe their origin to the verbal acts of gods and goddesses. In the case of Sarasvati, the co-wife of Hari, Ganga cursed Sarasvati to be born as river on earth leaving Kailasa, the abode of Hari (Shiva). The lord Brahma blessed his son to grow as Brahmaputra. The river Krishna is born as the result of the curse of Savitri, the wife of Brahma. The origin of river Kaveri is attributed to the blessings of the lord Brahma who happens to be her father.

**Personification of River as God/Goddess**

The river is personified around the world as god/goddess. Each culture has depicted the river in iconic form or in figural form of human or super human being. The depictions are quite interesting to observe as in most cases the river is endowed with royalty or virginity or motherhood. For example the river Sindh (Indus) is depicted as a royal person with crown. Like wise the goddess Ganges is also attributed with a crown, whereas the goddess Kaveri is depicted as a virgin (young bride). The river is considered to be either a gift or a sorrow in different cultures and people are aware of their dependence on river for their lives. River Nile is called as ‘the gift of the Nile’ whereas Huang Ho or Yellow river in China is considered to be the ‘sorrow of China.’ Water deities are common in mythology and have important role in different civilizations.

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48 Likewise, in Bengal River Damodar known as sorrow of West Bengal and Kosi River is the Sorrow of Bihar.
Table No. 2.4: Name of Water Deities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mythology</th>
<th>Deities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aztec mythology</td>
<td>Chalchiuhtlicue goddess of lakes, rivers,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canaanite mythology</td>
<td>Yam, god of rivers and the sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celtic mythology</td>
<td>Acionna (Gaulish) water goddess of the Orleanais region; Boann goddess of the river Boyne (Irish); Sinann (Irish) goddess of the river Shannon; Sequana (Gaulish) goddess of the river Seine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese mythology</td>
<td>Gong Gong water god who is responsible for the great floods, together with his associate, Xiang Yao Mazu water goddess and protector of sailors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian mythology</td>
<td>Hapy god of the annual flooding of the river Nile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish mythology</td>
<td>Vedenemo a goddess of water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek mythology</td>
<td>Poseidon god of rivers, storms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lusitanian mythology</td>
<td>Nabia goddess of rivers and lakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesopotamian mythology</td>
<td>Enbilulu god of rivers and canals; Enki god of water and of the River tigris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga (Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe)</td>
<td>Nyami Nyami river god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igbo, African religion</td>
<td>Idemili goddess of river</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Mythology</td>
<td>Varuna the god of water, river and ocean; Ganga-goddess of river Ganga, Saraswathi-goddess of river Saraswathi; Jhulelal-god of Sindhu river</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feminity of Rivers

Generally, rivers are considered to be feminine (river names are attributed to daughters) and it is a fact of life in India. The names of rivers are almost all grammatically feminine (except Indus, Brahmaputra, and Bhrathappuzha) and they are used freely as the names of girls and women. Moreover, neither men nor women are generally given the names of mountains. This is because mountains never move towards any place. The feminine rivers are, on the other hand, often appearing as females in stories about them and are honoured than men. In relation to the ocean, which often is seen as masculine, the rivers that flow in to it are seen as wives rather than as sisters (Except Yamuna). Kaveri, Ganga, Krshna are depicted as the wives of

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the ocean. ‘Varuna’ is the god of water in Indian mythology. Thus, river names are grammatically feminine. People offer women’s clothes to rivers and consider them as women. In addition to it, a ritual rule hints that rivers are viewed as being physiologically female. The rule is found in Sanskrit literature in connection with the idea that rivers menstruate in the rainy season: the mud (rajās) is carried down with their currents and which make them menstruate (rajāswala). One should not bathe in them at this time, just as a man should not have intercourse with a menstruating woman. The origin place of rivers is considered as the head and the remaining part as the body. In India, river is called as nadi and the meaning of this Sanskrit word is feminine which shows its feminity. The narrativer ef origin myth, ritual and iconographic evidence show the feminity of Indian rivers.

Another kind of worship in terms of the feminity of the rivers is the custom of dressing a river in saris. In this ritual, saris are tied end to end stretched from one side to the other side of a river. This happens once every twelve years, during the period when Jupiter is in Leo and all people believe that it is part of the honour paid to the Krishna River when the Ganges comes to meet her. The names of rivers are grammatically feminine, stories make them in women’s familial roles and offerings made to them are made to women. The ritual rule hints that rivers are viewed as being physiologically female.50. Both wealth and poverty are personified as women. A number of rituals that are by tradition or preference to be performed at rivers involve feeding Brahmins, gods or ancestor.

River as Mothers

River is symbolically addressed as a ‘mother’. It points to the fact that in general, mothers provide food for their children. River also provides water on its banks and people use it for their agricultural purpose. So, river also acts as mother.51 It can be seen as a symbol of prosperity and of destruction. It has two faces, providing foods and at the same time create flood. In a story, wealth and poverty are personified as women (earth as the goddess of Lakshmi and poverty as herself). Rivers are also more often important than bullocks, seen as the promoting symbol of agricultural


prosperity and the good aspects of life in the world. Many festival calendars of river goddesses are directly connected with the celebration after the harvest. The earth is also considered to be a mother, because the earth gives grain. Water comes from the sky in the form of rain and it returns back as steam and again comes as rain. It shows the cyclical nature of life.

Connection between river and food also provides a further key to understanding the feminine imagery associated with rivers. Most of Indian rivers do not have organic birth. The river is not a mother in the sense of having children of her own, but is held to be a mother to her worshippers or to people in general. In this sense the reason for calling her people’s mother is not that she gave birth to them, but she protects them the most and provides them with food.

The role of rivers in providing food appears, then, to be the basic reason that rivers are thought of as mothers. The water of rivers certainly could be in India compared with the waters of the womb. The river provides water which is required to make crops grows and hence to feed people, just as mothers provides the new born with their body and later from their kitchen—the food necessary to nourish their children and make them grow. In India, food is most clearly related to the physical reality of a river and it is another value that it is traditionally thought of as a woman’s. Men may own land, plough the fields; but it is still women who are preparing their family’s meals.

In times of flood, rivers too have their violent and dangerous side. Streams that normally flow all too thinly can transform themselves into roaring torrents, overwhelming and destroying the landscape that they otherwise nurture. Women are symbolically identified or associated with nature. Their body and its function all are related with nature. In the coastal areas, people consider sea as their mother. The very first creature came from water and considered everything equally. It became a symbol of freedom and fraternity. Like the earth, sea receives everything in its deeper level as utterance.

In India, Rivers are centres of religious attention. There are many striking differences in style between folk and classical tradition in India and equally important, deep rooted agreement with this respect is at least one cluster of religious values. The religious values of the world such as success, prosperity, good health,
long life, food, beauty, love and the birth of the children are clearly associated with women or represented by goddesses like Sri (the auspicious), Lakshmi (wealth), Annapurna (food) and Jaya (victory). The connections with these values are expressed in terms of feminine symbol and female goddesses. Brahmaputra and Indus are the major masculine rivers in India.

As mentioned earlier, in the Maharashtra region, the various goddesses who are embodied in the rivers are called suvasinies (married women whose husband is alive). Many images of river goddesses are depicted with a wedding necklace (mangalyasootra). There are some rituals like asara, where green bangles are offered. The rite of ‘odibaranam’ is performed for the river goddess who directly reflects the feminity of rivers.  

But, actually no one has bothered about the question of river identity but they have often considered rivers as husbandless wives. There are many male gods who are often associated with river goddesses. But they are considered as brothers, not as the husbands of rivers. The answer to the question about the divinity and feminine nature of the river is that the people see them this way. They consider river as ‘apsaras’. Rivers are female because apsaras are female. They are tempted by and are opponents to the male ascetics. River banks are considered to be good places of asceticism. It seems that in India, major cultural imagery is often associated with women than with men. In many rituals, people put turmeric and kumkum into river. It indicates the feminine character of river.

From the mythologies of the Indian rivers as described earlier in this chapter some of the rivers are born as old, whereas some others are born as young or infant stage of human life. The following table illustrates this fact.

Table No. 2.5: River born as follows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Feminine Status</th>
<th>Name of the River</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Young Lady</td>
<td>Sarasvati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Grown up Lady (Mother)</td>
<td>Ganga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Brahmaputra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Young Lady</td>
<td>Narmada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Grown up Lady (Mother)</td>
<td>Godavari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Young Lady</td>
<td>Krishna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Young Lady

It is interesting to note from the above table that Ganga and Godavari are shown as grown-up ladies having the status of mother due to their perennial and lengthy flows of water cutting across different states. In the case of Brahmaputra, though is perennial and long, it is depicted as a child and masculine.

| Mother       | X | Child       |
|--------------|--|--|------------|
| Feminine     | X | Masculine   |

(Ganga and Godavari) (Brahmaputra)

When it is feminine they are shown as mothers whereas when it is masculine it is shown as child. This dichotomy is interesting to note in the world-view connected with the gender perception in India.

**Indian Rivers - Beliefs and Ritual Practices**

India is a subcontinent and is also the land of many rivers. Indian *Puranic* literature refers rivers as mothers and mountains as fathers. Generally, Indian rivers have been divided into two basic categories on the basis of their courses: the rivers flowing into the Bay of Bengal and the river flowing into the Arabian Sea.

River has a central place in the belief and practices of various communities living on the banks. There is a Marathi proverb which says, ‘do not look for the source of a river or the ancestry of rishi’. This means that a river or a sage may have sacred origin but it should not be judged by their origins. Most rivers are formed by the totality of small streams and none of them is obviously the source of the river. In India, most of the major and minor rivers have been identified as the sources of certain rivers in India and these origin places often become the sites of worship and pilgrimage. This is a form of cultural construction of landscape and these sources are agreed by everyone as the sacred places. It shows that in India, the sources of rivers have been made into places of pilgrimage and people construct temples there. The architectural arrangements are designed to welcome pilgrims to the place. The source of the Godavari on Brahmagiri at Trayambakesvar and the sources of the Krishna at Mahabaleswar, the source of Kaveri at Talakaveri, the sources of river Ganga at Gangotri are some of them. Most of these origin places of rivers are on the mountain tops and are associated with the myth of Lord Shiva and his consorts.
The banks of rivers are by tradition used for almsgiving, ancestor rites, sacrifices and pilgrimage. There are some general rituals stated below which is still performed on the banks of several rivers in India:

Alms-giving

Almsgiving (dana) take different forms such as donating gold, cows, and food to the Brahmans. The Brahmans, whether they are ascetics or householder are the recipients. Giving alms on the banks of river is considered sacred act. It is considered that feeding one Brahmin on the banks of Godavari is equivalent to feeding a thousand at other holy places. The merit one gets by donating a particle of food at Dakini kshetra on the Bhima river is greater than that from giving a heap of food the size of mount Meru as alms anywhere else and giving any food at the banks of Godavari river is equivalent to donating the whole wealth of a believer.

Ancestor Rites

Ancestor rites involve feeding one’s dead relatives preferably at pilgrimage places, especially at rivers. In classical, Sanskrit or Brahmanical literature, there are two principal types of rites that aim at satisfying, pacifying, freeing or feeding the dead, especially one’s ancestors (pitr). One called sradha or pindam has its focal point the setting out of balls of cooked flour or rice, called pind for the ancestors. Sradha is one of the death rituals performed everywhere in India. Preparing cooked rice (pindas) for the ancestors and offering it on the banks and tarpan is another type of ancestor rite which is performed in the water of the river.

The sradha is performed by preference on the bank. The tarpan ritual is performed in water itself. Standing in the water, one takes some water in one’s hands and pours it back into the river in which one is standing. This ritual is performed not only for the ancestors but also for gods and sages (rishis).

There are some special places for performing sradha especially some pilgrimage spots. The chief among these, for pilgrims from all over India, include Gaya, Prayag and Varanasi (Kashi) on the Ganges river in Northern India, Amarkantaka on Narmada river, Trambakeshwar and Ramkund on the Godavari at Nasik, Sri Rangam on the river Kaveri and so on. The confluence of the river is also a major place of pilgrimage in India such as Prayag at Allahabad where Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati bound together.
The ancestral worships like _sradha, tarpan_ are conducted on river banks. River is the basic source of food and it is fit for conducting such rites. In other words, rivers embody the generosity of humans to perform rites of generosity of their own.

**Sacrifice**

There are many famous sacrifices that were performed along river banks both historic and _Puranic_ past. The rich people can sponsor sacrifice and make great donations whereas people who cannot afford these expensive means can purify themselves through asceticism (_tapas_), pilgrimage (_tirtha-yatra_) and other ritual activities.

Besides this, pilgrimage can substitute for sacrifice. Some of the sacrifices in _Puranas_ and epics are famous. The story of King Sagara’s horse sacrifice which eventually necessitated the descent of the Ganges to revive the sixty thousand Sagaras⁵⁴ (son of Sagara) and the story of the sacrifice through which Rama’s father Dasaratha came to have his sons are famous.⁵⁵

Why is a river such a good place for giving alms and performing sacrifices and ancestral rites? What is the basis for the close association between rivers on the one hand and sacrifice, almsgiving and _sradha_ on the other? It could be that the sacrifice, almsgiving and _sradha_ are acts of feeding. Through sacrifice one feeds the gods, as in _sradha_ in which one feeds one’s ancestors and as in almsgiving in which one feeds ascetics, Brahmans or other worthy humans. Because rivers are important sources of food, they are appropriate sites for conducting such rites of feeding. The sacrifice on a river banks provide such thing as long life, good health, victory, sons, wealth, cows and food. The creativity of a sacrifice and the life giving power of water provide a clearer symbolic basis for the association between sacrifice and rivers. The riverside location enhances the creativity of the sacrifice.

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⁵⁴ The story of Sagara’s sacrifice can be seen in the section of Myths of Major Rivers in India’, and referenced by _Brahmapurana_, translated by Sriram Sharma Acharya, New Delhi: Sanskrit Sansthan, 1980.

⁵⁵ Dasaratha, the king of Kosala, had three wives, Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra and he had no heir to succeed him. He performs a sacrifice known as Putra-Kameshti Yaga in order to be blessed by the gods. As a result of the sacrifice his wife Kausalya gave birth to Rama. Later the same day, Kaikeyi gave birth to Bharatha and Sumitra to twins Lakshmana and Shatrugna. Valmiki, _Ramayana, Balakanda_, translated by B.R Kishore, New Delhi: Diamond Pocket Books Ltd, 2005. p. 9-13
Tirtha – Yatra (Pilgrimage)

The custom of pilgrimage is widely prevalent among Indians. In Indian tradition, tirtha is sacred. There are hierarchies among the tirthas and many tirthas is often related to god Shiva. This hierarchy is related to the sacredness of the region. Bathing ghats in tirtha (river) is known as upa-thirtha.

The Vedic word ‘tirtha’ originate from the ter, tarate which means ‘step to a river’. The word tirtha was used at first refer to a bathing place on the banks of a river or a pond. Generally tirthas are held to be holy based on three grounds: (a) on account of natural characteristics of the locality, (b) on account of peculiar dignity of some watery place, (c) on account of the fact that some holy sages resorted to them for bathing, or for performing austerities. In a sense, tirtha means a locality or spot or expanse of water which gives rise to the accumulation of merit owing to its own peculiar nature without any adventitious circumstance. The thirtha has come to mean a holy place or bathing place for religious purposes. In India, a pilgrimage to a sacred bathing site has from early times been considered the part and parcel of one’s religious life. Each bathing place showers its special benefits up-on the pilgrims.

Ancient Indian literature, especially Vedas (Rigveda and Atharvaveda) refer to rivers as divine and deified. Water is considered as holy and purifying. It also heals various diseases and helps to attain prosperity. The Smritis and Dharmasatras and Puranas give sanctity to the confluence of rivers and valleys of mountains. The Puranas (Skanda and Padma and Narada Purana) narrate the pilgrimage to holy places, such as mountains, holy rivers. According to Budhist literature, Mahaparinibhana Suttanta, there are four holy places namely Lumbini, Gaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar. The places such as Rajgriha, Vaishali, and Mankul Paravata are described as holy places where Budha used to spend the rainy season every year. The places where Budha performed miracles such as Sankasya (where he is believed to have descended from heaven); Vaishali (where monkeys offered him honey); Rajgriha (where he subdued a mad elephant) and Sravasti (where he performed the miracle of


reduplicating himself are also considered holy). Budhists all over the world visit these holy places, especially where the relics of Budha are kept and stupa erected. In Jain scriptures, the Jain Shasana (dharma) is itself the real tirtha. The one who creates thirtha is thirthankaran. The places attached to the birth, contemplation, nirvana of twenty four thirthankaras are holy.

In the major cultural traditions of India, the concept of tirtha is sacred. Pilgrimage to sacred spots is the most effective means of expiation for all sins. According to Purana (Brahma, Matsya and Yamana) and Mahabharatha, the number of tirahas is countless and cannot be enumerated in detail even in hundred years. Brahmapurana58 classifies tirhas into four divisions:

1. **Daivatirtha**- this kind of tirha originates from the divine act of gods such as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The holy thirtha Kashi, Pushkara and Prabhasa (Somnath) are sanctified by the act of the thrimurthies. River Sarasvati connected with Brhma, river Ganga from Vishnu and river Narmada from Shiva.

2. **Asuratirtha**- it is not the creation of demons or asura but these tirhas are associated with asuras. The sanctity is given by the act of gods who destroyed the demons. Eg: Gaya. Vishnu subdued the demon Gaya. The place, known in the name of the demon Gaya and Vishnu is the presiding deity of Gaya.

3. **Arsatirtha**- the tirhas created by the actions of Saints and sages through their austerities. eg: Naimisa tirtha in Uttar Pradesh.

4. **Manusatirthas**- this kind of tirhas created by kings such as Ambarisa and Manu in association to temples.

The following charts show the number of holy places in various geographical locations.

**Table No. 2.6: Tirthas and their geographical locations in India.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On River Bank</th>
<th>At River Source</th>
<th>Place of Confluence of River</th>
<th>Coast</th>
<th>Hill Top</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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In the above table/chart water-associated with pilgrim sites are 84 (59 %) which means that flowing water is more important in Hinduism, especially for ritual bathing. From the above table it is evident that 60 (42%) pilgrim sites are located on the banks of the river whereas the remaining 24 (17%) pilgrim sites though are connected with the river, they are negligible when compared to the banks. Bathing at sacred places is not simply an act of physical purification; it is an act of symbolic purification of the soul. This could be seen in case of Ganga river. Ganga river is physically polluted even though the devotees are bathing without considering the physical condition of the river. It also means that hygiene and ritual purification by bathing are two entirely different concepts.

Among the various communities in India, there are specificities to certain tirthas. Brahmins and Rajputs gave much importance to Haridwar than any other
community. They know the origin myth and the rituals and concepts in Haridwar are based on Brahmanic belief.

_Puranas_ and Mahabharatha have placed various _tirthas_ in hierarchy of merits. Naimisa is the best _tirtha_ on the earth and Pushkar in the aerial region (Anthariksha), Kurukshetra is the most distinguished in all the three worlds. But Sarasvati is holier than Kurukshetra. The water of the Sarasvati purifies after one bathes for three days; that of the Yamuna in seven days; that of the Ganga at once, while the water of the Narmada purifies a man at the mere sight of it.

There are four main holy _tirthas_ that are located in the confluence (prayag) of rivers. The _triveni_ at Prayaga, where the rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati meet together is considered with special merit. There are five _prayag_ in Himalayas, each at the confluence of two rivers. Devaprayag is the confluence of Bhagirathi and Alakananda; Karnaprayag is the confluence of Alakananda and Pindara; Rudraprayag is Alakannanda and Mandhakini; Nandhaprayag is Alakananda and Nanda and Vishnuprayaga is Alakananda and Vishnuganga. They are collectively referred to as _Panchaprayaga_. Likewise, there are five rivers such as Bhagirathi, Godavari, Krishna, Pennar and Kaveri known as _Pancha_-ganga. There are seven Ganges and seven Godavaries. The _Sapta_-Ganga includes Ganga, Godavari, Kaveri, Tampraparani, Sindu, Sarayu and Narmada while the _sapta_ Godavari refers to the seven origin place of Godavari which is sacred as seven sages named Kashyapa, Atri, Gautama, Bharadwaja, Viswamitra, Jamadagni and Vashistha.

There are cultural diversities of _tirthas_ and this diversity shows the ritual performance on these _tirthas_. People perform various ritual associated with life crises, spiritual and worldly desires. Each region has developed its own river concept based on local myths but these myths have been linked by establishing a main _tirtha_. Those who are unable to go on pilgrimage by travelling long distance conceptualise their own ideas of sacredness with regard to their local rivers and attribute variations of the main _tirthas_ to these rivers. Hence, there is Dakshin Kashi in South India, Uttarakashi in the Northern Himalayas, Gupta Kashi in the east of Bhubaneshwar, and Western Kashi in Nasik in Maharashtra as pilgrim spots. Pilgrimage to each of these places is endowed with the merits of the sacred journey attached to the Kashi in Uttar Pradesh. Therefore, people attribute the features of Ganga river to their local rivers. There are several Ganga Rivers, each flowing through different area and thus covering the
whole of India. Those who are physically incapable of bathing in the Ganga may
drink its water in order to be freed from sin. The practice of flowing asthis (bones) of
the dead in all major rivers throughout the country is a common practice.
Remembering one’s ancestor by performing sraddha in different tirthas spread all over
India is another extension of sacredness of rivers.⁵⁹

The basic intentions of a pilgrimage are purification of sin and attainment of
salvation. A Hindu pilgrimage known as tirtha-yatra denotes undertaking journey to
the river bank. Most of the sacred spots in India are situated on river banks or at the
confluence of rivers. Badrinath (Badri), Mahakala (Ujjain), Vadava (Jwala Mukhi) are
examples of sacred spot which points to the fact that the purification value of water is
an important factor in locating tirthas. Purifying oneself at a tirtha by bathing is to
symbolize one’s passage from the profane to the sacred. There are some common
practices in every tirthas. That is bath, vow, prayer worship, godana, tarpana and
prayshchitha. The Sun merges in the water and raises again everyday. It seems to be
the death and rebirth. So this could be the reason for people choosing holy places as
cremation sites especially on the river banks. They flow the ashes of the dead man in
the river and doing so will get a rebirth to the deceased.

Table No. 2.7: Deities and tirthas in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shiva</th>
<th>Vishnu</th>
<th>Brahma</th>
<th>Mother Goddess</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁵⁹ Purposes of Pilgrimage are: (a) Accumulation of merit and removal of sin (b) Life cycle purpose- It is believed that, whose bones/ashes have been laid within river waters will go to heaven. One may live as a sinner and yet ends his life beside the sacred river, he will go to heaven; sraddha and pinda ceremonies for the dead, upanayana, purificatory bath for the bride and groom (c) Personal desire-desire for male offspring’s, marriage, higher profits, better crops and settlements (d) Social merit-social value to certain castes. In India many castes are associated with specific pilgrim places.
Graph No 2.2: Deities and tirthas in India

In the above table/graph, most of the tirthas are associated with Shiva. It could be because Saivism is a wide spread cult than Visnavism. River Ganga originated from Shiva’s hair and many tirthas have some association with Shiva.

The kumbh mela (Urn Fair) is the most sacred of all pilgrimages in India and there are different kumbh melas are being performed in different parts of India. The normal kumbh mela is celebrated every three years by rotation in accordance with the position of the planet of Brahaspat (Jupiter) and the sun. The ardh kumbh mela is celebrated every six years, the purna kumbh takes place in every 12 years and the maha kumbh mela is held in every one hundred and forty four years at Alahabad60.

The origin of this ritual can be seen in the Samudra Madhanam episode (churning of the Ocean of Milk) mentioned in the Bhagavatapurana, Vishnupurana, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana61.

The myth is that the god approached Lord Vishnu once seeking the gift of immortality. The lord Vishnu spoke to them about the primeval ocean in which the secret of life and death was hidden. The gods sought the help of demons to churn the

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ocean to produce the nectar of immortality, and agreed to share it afterwards. The Mandara Mountain was used as a churning rod and Vasuki, the king of serpents, became the rope for churning. They began to churn the ocean and a pot of nectar was eventually produced. However, both the Devas and Demons were anxious. The gods were afraid of the eventuality if the demons drank their share of the nectar of immortality. The divine physician, Dhanvantari was holding the Kumb (pitcher) of amrit (the elixir of life). Dhanvantari transformed himself into a bird and flew off to the heaven with the pitcher. During his journey, which lasted twelve years, he rested at five places (Prayag, Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nasik) which have been consecrated by drops of nectar that fell. Hence, these places are considered holy. The major event of the festival is ritual bathing in the river. The devout believe that by bathing in the river during kumbh mela, one is freed from their past sins and is eligible for liberation from sins. The roots of the mela has been seen during the river festival of the past when pots of grains were soaked in the river water and the seeds being put along with the rest of the grains during sowing time.

In addition to the general ritual practices on the banks of Indian rivers, each community living on the banks have their own belief and manifestation related to the river. Like the rivers on the other parts of the world, Indian rivers are not merely material object but are also parts of culture. Throughout history, there has been a custom among people to name their daughter as Ganga, Padma, Gomathi, Kaveri and Yamuna. Their naming seems to be the value of a river in the life of these people. One of the interesting things related to Indian rivers is that they symbolize Indian culture. Rivers have had a mythological or Puranic association in the mind of every community on the river banks. People chant the name of rivers while bathing for the sake of glory. Rivers also play a vital role in the prosperity of a region. It not only provides the immediate requirements of life, but also acts as channel for the communication between different parts of a country.

Water is also associated with supernatural beings. One of the best manifestations of water worship would be found in certain people’s belief in magic or holly wells. The practice of throwing coins into a fountain for good luck, which is

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obviously a rudiment of ancient well worship, is a worldwide phenomenon.\textsuperscript{63} Most legends around the world indicate that animal and human sacrifices are done for the protection of buildings and dam especially those adjacent to water. During the construction of dam, people performed \textit{puja} at the water of a river. This ritual is intended to placate the river and prevent any obstacles while the construction of dam. Before the construction of Dhom dam in 1966 (which is located on the upstream of the Krishna river), \textit{puja} was done. Two Brahmin priests were invited to perform \textit{puja} and to recite Vedic hymn, the \textit{sri sukta} and sprinkled water (\textit{abhishek}) to the material and handed the material to the constructor to be placed in the river. The same ritual was also performed while constructing a dam at \textit{Kambalesvar} in 1988.

In a sense, water and fire are contradictory one. But lightning and rain may appear at the same moment on the sky. People also believe that after sun setting the sun lives on water or sea. The relation between sun and water could be found in myth as well. The Indian concept of \textit{apsaras} and \textit{gandharvas} are related to sun and water. The \textit{apsaras} means ‘to have been born from water’\textsuperscript{64}. The \textit{apsaras} are female and the earth received the light of sun and became pregnant. Earth’s reception of the light of the sun was the base of the story of those virgins who became pregnant in mythological stories. In addition to it, many communities perform ritual for rain and consider rain as semen of sun which would make the earth pregnant\textsuperscript{65}.

\textsuperscript{63} R P, Masani, \textit{Folklore of Wells- Being a Study of Water-Worship in East and West}, Bombay: D B Tarapokevala Sons Co Ltd, 1918.


\textsuperscript{65} The earth is considered as womb for it provides vegetation. Rain is the fertilizing force from the sky and is symbolically equivalent to semen. So rain is a mediating element between sky and earth. It falls from sky. See for John Monaghan, \textit{The covenants with earth and rain: exchange, sacrifice, and revelation in Mixtec Society}, Norman, USA; University of Oklahoma Press, 1995; A.T Jones, \textit{The Two Republics or Rome and the United States of America}, University of Michigan: Herald Publishing Co, USA, 1891). The Annual Odisha Rain Festival is to seek the blessing of the deities. In Rajastan, if the monsoon is delayed, the women folk of the village assemble at night, catch some frogs, and keep them in an earthen pitcher. Then they parade through the whole village, stopping at the door of each house from which a bucket of water is poured over the head of the participants. (for further details see, Chabey Ganesh, “Rain Compelling and Stopping Rites in Bihar”, In \textit{Rain in Indian Life and Lore}, Ed. Sankar Sen Gupta, Indian Publications, 1963: 34; Jogenda Saksena, “Some Rain Ceremonies of Rajasthan”, In \textit{Rain in Indian Life and Lore}, Ed. Sankar Sen Gupta, Indian Publications, 1963: 67; Ilhan Basgoz, “Rain Making Ceremonies in Iran”, In \textit{Iranian Studies}, 40:3, 385-403, 2007. The native Southwestern American tribes such as Chichimeca, Apalachee, Zuni, Osage and Quapaw make rain dances. See for further details Julia Seton Butree and Ernest Thompson Seton, \textit{The Rhythm of the
Water is also considered as the dwelling place of spirits and demons. The name of the spirits and the descriptions of their misdeeds vary from region to region. Many of these demons are the spirits of those who have met death by drowning or an accidental death.\textsuperscript{66} It is believed that the spirits resides in the well near the Bombay gymkhana and the drowned person disturbs the people/villagers in the evening. In the lake of Movaiya village in Gondal taluk of Rajkot of Gujarat, a Pinjari (a female cotton carder) is said to have been drowned and turned into a ghost. Another lake in Vadhwan village is haunted by a ghost called mahda. Every three year one human being drowns in this lake. In Mirzapur, there is a famous water-hole, known as Barewa. According to the story,

“Once, an old man was grazing his buffaloes near Barewa. Suddenly the water rose and carried him along with his cattle. Later, the drowned buffalos were turned into a dangerous demon known as Bhainsasura. None dare to catch fish there, until he has propitiated the demons with the offerings of a fowl, eggs and goat. The Bengalis believe that a water spirit in the form of an old woman called Jate Buddi haunt tanks and ponds and bind with an invisible chain to the feet of persons who approached her territories. Another Bengal spirit called Jakh is believed to reside in tanks.”\textsuperscript{67} Till date the name of this witch is taken to frighten naughty children.

Crossing a river without any purpose is prohibited. When a train crosses a bridge across a river, it is desired that passengers throw coins into the river. People of the Deccan never went out in their vehicles without carrying coconuts and cloths to throw in any river they might have to cross on their way. A Hindu neither crosses a river without removing his shoes nor can he take bathe in it naked. He cannot spit into it and if he spits he is supposed to first spit on his palm and then wash his palm. When a Brahman bathes in a river he normally turns his head to its source and bows and before he enters the water he sips some water and also applies water on his forehead.


\textsuperscript{67} R.P. Masani, \textit{Folklore of Wells- Being a Study of Water-Worship in East and West}, Bombay: D B Taraporevala Sons Co Ltd, 1918.
The village folk throughout India attach religious sanctity to rivers. So, as an integral part of their life, people develop many beliefs and rituals. All these are related to river in one way or another.

**Beliefs and Practices in Various States in India: An Overview**

All the beliefs, rituals and its various manifestations throw light on the importance of river on people’s daily life. River provides water for agriculture and it prospers their entire life. Water has the power to purify the sins which is a common notion in the world. The purificatory power of water and its power to carry away pollution are frequently seen as essential to religious significance in India. In past days, Indians conceptualization and evaluation of human life and social arrangements rested up on the concept of purity and pollution.

In India, river is not only a natural object but it decides the life and culture of its banks as well. River Ganga in **Rajasthan** is surrounded by many beliefs. Those who carry Ganges water in a bottle are not supposed to put down it on the ground but is carried reverently on the head or in coloured decorated basket and handed over to the *grihalakshmi*, the wife who places it with utmost respect in a suitably high spot. The formal opening of the bottle necessitates religious ceremonies (*puja*) to be followed by a community dinner, according to one’s resources and desires. The Ganges is also the river where the ashes or a portion of the ashes of the dead are immersed to be carried to the ocean and ultimately to the heaven. If one cannot take them immediately to the river, it is usually tied in a cloth or silk piece and will be sent to the Ganges with someone who is going on a similar mission sometime sooner or later. There is another ritual of giving Ganga water to those who are about to die.

The state of **Punjab** is also known as a land of five rivers. The people there collect coconut, grass and tie golden rings around a buffalo’s neck and send it to the other side of the river. If the buffalo reaches the other side safely, it is considered to be a good omen and if it comes back to the starting point, it signifies uncertainty and the arrival of flood. Before the construction of well, people conduct *puja* and offer *naivedya* (gift) to the god.

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In **Sindh**, a Muslim will not cross Indus river if his body is unclean. A fisherman will not row boat if he is unclean. It is also believed that a pregnant woman should not cross a river and a menstruating woman is not supposed to wash clothes in a river. If a Hindu bride crosses a river it is obligatory that she should offer a coconut to the river and a pregnant woman offers turmeric, vermilion powder and a coconut. A woman awaiting her delivery cannot wash clothes in a river. After a woman’s delivery she cannot cross a river or wash clothes for forty days or so, which varies according to caste. Before she does it she must take a bath of purification. During her menstrual period, the Hindu woman must bathe first in river water carried by others in a pot. When she crosses a river she must throw in it betel leaves and a coin. In Sind, water is associated with the water god, Jhulelal. Woman often go to the river at Sukkur Island where the shrine of the saint is located, drink water from the river and pray for children. In the seventh month of a woman’s pregnancy, miniature boats about two feet long are offered to Jhulelal. This is also done on the fortieth day after a woman’s delivery.\(^{71}\)

Water is also associated with fertility. In **Karnataka**, a woman desiring children is required to go to a river, fill a pot with water, worship it, bring it home and add it to the water of daily bath. Another practice is also done in the form of going to a deep pool in a river bed, wearing wet clothes and saying ‘let there be a child in my family and I will light a lamp in your waters’. She makes a vow that she would offer the river a **paridy** (combination of seven compartments of curds, milk and fruit). In Sirsi taluk of Kranataka, the devotees bathe in a river and go to the shrine of Vadiraj Swami with wet clothes and eat cooked rice from the shrine. In Kalghatgi taluk, there is a **nullah** (small stream) where women take bath and worship an image of Shiva which they make from the sand. They also offer dates to the image of Shiva and eat the seeds of dates for productiveness.

The barren women in Mahar community of Satara should go to a river and place five stones in a line on the bank to become fertile. On each stone she then places a piece of bread, red **sindur** and turmeric. Then she says ‘may the river water come and be my child’. On five **amavasyas** (new moon days) childless women with their husbands will sit near river and get another married pair with the same issue to pour

water over them so as to fall on the couple. Before sunrise, women bathe in a river and make five balls from the river sand which they place in a line and worship with coconuts and plantains, promising to give charity if their mundane problems are resolved.

During the *pani tola* ritual in **Assam** (which is held before few days of a person’s marriage), the mother of the bride and bride groom conduct periodic and ceremonial trips to *Brahmaputra* river bank and fetch water for bathing the bride and bridgroom. Some tribes, who live on the banks, do not eat certain fish because they believe that their race originated from them and consider that fish as the symbol of fertility. During the day of *Gaur* or cattle *Bihu* festival, domestic cattle are ceremonially taken to the river bank and their heads and horns are rubbed with turmeric, black grain paste. Primitive tribes of Assam worshipped *Brahmaputra* and offered virgins to river gods. Every year, one girl would be chosen and decorated like a bride and laid on a bridal bed. This bed would then be launched on the water and is allowed to sink. Thus the selected girl would get married to the river. It is also believed that all sins will be removed after a bath in the *brahmakund* (dip). People offer betel nut to the river god and pray for protection from natural calamity. On special occasions, the banks of *Brahmaputra* get special attention. People, irrespective of caste, creed, sex or age, wash off their sins and purify them. In *asokastami* day, anyone who drinks the water with eight buds of *Asoka* flower and takes a dip in the *Brahmaputra* will be able to get rid off their grief (soka) in the coming year. After the matricide, *Parasurama*, the Hindu saint washed his hand on the water of *Brahmaputra* (Lauhitya- ancient name of *Brahmaputra*) and the river became red. In rainy season, the river carries red soil to its banks and it gives a red colour to the river. This is the reason behind the red colour of the river. But the communities on the river banks attribute a myth to it. During the time of flood alert, people also conduct animal sacrifice.

In **Bengal**, *snana* (bathing) is a common practice performed in every river. The worship of Ganga as deity in more than one form is peculiar to the people of this delta. People sacrifice pigeons and lamb in the festival occasion and throw pigeon eggs into the river. This rite is connected with the performance of ancestral worship.

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After the death burial of a person, the descendents take bath and collect the bones from the cremation grounds and they are immersed in Ganga. An image of Ganga riding on a *makara* (a mythical aquatic animal with an elephant’s body) is offered as worship at the beginning of rainy season when the river is in a furious and threatening mood. A river deity in Bengal is also known as *Dariyapir* who is supposed to be a deified Muslim saint having some control over the whims of the rivers. Members of all communities offer worship in his name in the hope of having a safe journey by boat on the rivers. In the coastal region, the names of goddess Ganga and Badruddin Ghazi (name of a Muslim saint), along with reference to five *pir* (holly saint) are chanted by Muslim boat men, before starting the journey into the big river. The 13th lunar day of the fortnight of the waning moon in the month of *chaitra* is known as ‘*varuni*’. On that day, the river of Bengal assumes the sacredness of the river Ganga. Therefore, any dip in any river on that occasion is considered a holy act. People conduct animal sacrifices and offer rituals to the river deity *Varuna*. The newly married husband and wife take some ceremonial bath for the goodness of their future life. The flowing water of rivers is often used for ritual purification and the pouring of water may accomplish the same aim instead of the absence of flowing water. It implies that bathing in the flowing river is a way to purify not only the sins of this birth but also those of many previous births. In some villages in Bengal, the Ganga is not only a river but also goddesses. They make an image made by clay and a mud hut is also erected for this purpose in every year as a temporary arrangement. People reach there for worship either on foot or in bullock cart. The women prepare small floatable boat, lighted candles and these boats are floated down to the rivers. This ritual is part of *bera* festival. In Amarkundu village, there is a temple and an idol known as ‘*gangadity*’ which means Ganga and Aditya. During the festival, two idols are brought out from the temple and are smeared with sandal wood paste, milk, *kumkum*, perfumes and the water. On the occasion of *Ganga sagar mela*, people take holy dips near the place where the Ganga meets the sea. There is a shrine in the Maldah district with the idol of Ganga, depicted as a beautiful lady riding a *makara*, a legendary aquatic creature. The idol is worshiped daily and in the Bengali month of *Magha*, a two day fair is held every year. People take bath and offer social worship to the deity. In another village in the same district worship of Ganga is held annually.

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with an image made of clay. A mud hut is erected every year for this purpose as a temporary arrangement. Both these villages can be reached from Rajgunj area either on foot or by bullock carts. In Kanchubian village, a popular belief is that mother Ganga appears on the occasions of baruni and asokastami in the month of chaitra and resides in the local river.

In western Uttarpradesh, many people sing the songs for the auspiciousness of Ganga. At the time of Vaisakapurnima and Karthikapurnima festivals, the departed souls of a dead person get a chance to enter the heaven. The people there celebrate ‘gangashtami’ on the month of May and June. They believe that Ganga reached the earth on that day. The first hair tonsure ceremony of new born babies is also held during this festival on the banks of river Ganga.\(^{74}\)

It is believed that, those who bathed in the Yamuna River or tasted its water need not be afraid of Yama (the god of death).\(^{75}\) On some occasions people throw sari to the Yamuna River with the belief that the river will wear the sari. River Yamuna is considered as the sister of Yama, the god of death and visits Yamuna on ‘Bhai Dooj’ ritual day. It is considered as an act of religious merit by the sisters and they offer food to their brothers. They in turn honour their sisters by offering presents in cash and clothes. Bhaiya or Bhai means brother, and Dooj means two days after new moon, i.e., two days after Deepavali (Diwali) in kartik month of Hindu calendar. It is a day to pray for the long life of one’s brother, who is referred to as ‘bhaayya or bhai’.

The legend behind the festival of Bhai Dooj has the story of Yamaraj, the custodian of death and his sister Yami or Yamuna:

Surya, the god of Sun, was married to a beautiful princess called Samjna (Sangya). In the course of a year, she presented him with twins. The twins were called Yama, and Varni or Yamuna, and they grew up together. However, Samjna, after some time, being unable to bear the brilliance of her husband decided to go back to earth. However, she left her shadow, Chaya, her exact replica, behind so that it would appear for Surya that she was still there. Chaya turned out to be a cruel stepmother and was very unkind to the twins. She soon gave birth to her own children, and then convinced Surya to drive out Samjna’s twins, Yama and Varni, from the heavens. Varni fell to earth and became the river Yamuna and Yama went to the underworld (hell) and became the Lord of Death. Many years passed since this incident. Varni married a handsome prince and was content and happy in her life. But she missed her brother and yearned to see him. Yama, too, missed his sister and

\(^{74}\) Ibid.

decided one day to visit her. Overjoyed by news of her brother's visit, Varni prepared a great feast in his honour. She applied tilak on Yama’s forehead and performed arati on him. Since it was two days for Deepavali, her home was already decorated with lamps. She lovingly prepared a feast, including all the sweets and delicacies that her brother loved. Her husband, the handsome prince, was very happy seeing Varni so dedicatedly preparing a welcome for her brother. Yama, too, was delighted by his sister’s loving welcome, and the brother and sister spent a pleasant evening in each other’s company, after their long period of separation. When it was time for Yama to leave, he turned to his sister and said, ‘Dear Varni, you have welcomed me so lovingly. But I did not bring you a gift. Ask, therefore, for something and it will be yours’. Yama was persistent. ‘You must let me give you a gift’, he insisted. Varni said, taking a moment to think that all brothers should remember their sisters on this day and visit them if they can, and that, on this day, all sisters should pray for the happiness of their brothers’. ‘So be it’ proclaimed Yama, ‘And I grant all brothers who give their sisters a loving gift on this day a long and healthy life’.

Since then siblings have been religiously celebrating Bhai Dooj. On the day of Bhai Dooj brothers visit their sisters to have meals with them. On this day, brothers and sisters also take a dip in the holy waters of river Yamuna. Sisters also chant a mantra as they perform the ceremony: ‘Bhratus tabaa grajaataahaham Bhunska bhaktamidam shuvam Preetaye yama raajasya, Yamunaah Visheshatah (I am your sister, eat this sacred rice, for the pleasure of ‘Yam Raj and ‘Yamuna’).

The people of Orissa celebrate Chandrabagha festival which is held on the bank of Chandrabhaga river. In the view of the folk, one who bathes in the river can get rid off their impotency and leprosy. The rituals in Chandrabagha festival includes people decorating small boats with lamps and throwing it to the river. They commemorate their fore-fathers who died while going to southern countries for trade.

In Maharashtra, during the times of drought, men carry water from a river to local Shiva temple and fill the temple sanctuary with water until the Shiva linga submerged. Men perform this ritual in the hope of bringing rain. They use small gourds or plastic bottles to hold the water. Many carry Godavari water at various specific times including daily and during the month of Sravan (July-August) for the gods Hanuman and Shiva and village gods as a matter of village custom. Most of the men carry water in two containers and tied loosely together and slung over one shoulder or suspended from opposite ends of a pole that rests on one or both shoulders. The practice of carrying water and the men who carry it is referred to as kavad (plural kavadi). This water is carried on foot. When a water carrier needs to

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urinate or defecate, he ties the kavad to a tree or has another water carrier hold it for him. The man bathes in the Godavari and fills his water container and he should not allow anyone else to touch him. The water is supposed to arrive at the village for the morning worship (puja) of the god/goddess for whom it has been brought. In many villages, a man of the household responsible for bringing the water on a given day may go himself that day or the household may hire another man to bring the water on the basis of the month of Sravan. In respect and reverence of river goddess the ‘odibharanam’ ritual is performed and is seen as a sign of femininity of rivers. The odibharanam means filling the lap. It is a ritual which consists of offering a coconut, some grains of rice or wheat, turmeric powder, kumkum powder, a blouse piece, a betel nut and dried dates, whole almonds, pieces of turmeric root and fresh fruit. This rite is preferred to married woman and they accept the offering in the part of her sari that hangs directly over her womb as an expression of good wishes for fertility. When people perform odibharanam to a river, they place offerings on the water or drop them in to the river. In some places, on the banks of Godavari river, people of Nanded say that a hand would emerge from the river’s water to accept such offerings. The hand disappeared forever when some people had tried to grab it. This ritual is also done for fertility and is often done during flood season as well. The wife of the headman of a village would put into the water a coconut, a blouse piece and other articles used in odibharanam. They also do puja before they come back. In Maharashtra, people toss a bit of yellow turmeric powder and red kumkum powder into the river. Married women put these two powders on their forehead. Thus putting turmeric and kumkum to the water of a river implies their recognition of the river’s feminity.

The Narmadajayanti is one of the prominent fairs that are held in magha month. Narmada is tied around many Shiva stories and it is considered to be purer than Ganga River. People believe that to bath three years in River Sarasvati, seven days in Yamuna, one day in Ganga are equal to just seeing the Narmada River. River Ganga reaches once in a year to meet Narmada River. People make small boats and throw them into the river to commemorate their ancestors. In many Shiva temples, it is common to see a water pot with a small hole in its bottom and which hangs above

the linga in the sanctum sanctorum, allowing the water to drip continuously on to the god. Moreover, in Maharashtra, at the time of drought, men carry water from a river to a local Shiva temple and fill the temple sanctum sanctorum with the water until Shiva linga is submerged. Men perform this rite for the arrival of rain.\footnote{78} At the time of heavy floods, the village headman should go in procession to propitiate the river with flowers and coconuts in order to quench the floods. Women offer a vessel containing a ghee lamp, afloat on the river.

Godavari and Krishna are the main rivers in \textbf{Andhra Pradesh}. Rivers are visible goddesses. Their banks afford trysts and the farmers in Andra Pradesh perform some reverence songs to the river goddess before the preparation of paddy field. The rivers are believed to be propitiated with this ritual act and so that there is no flood in the rivers. Rivers are the wives of sea and people offer banana, flowers and toddy to the goddess. At the time of \textit{Durgama} festival in August or September month, they sacrifice buffalo to the river. Buffalo is given a bath in the river and makes a procession with the help of music. The very next day they conduct the sacrifice of the buffalo.\footnote{79} Hermitage of sage Gautama was on the banks of Godavari. When planet Brihaspati (Jupiter) enters the \textit{simha rasi}, the Ganges goes to the Godavari and remains there for one year. During that year, all the gods are beloved to bathe in this river. In the \textit{kapilashashti} day, on which six conjunctive incidents occur simultaneously, the virtue of all \textit{tirthas} or holy places is believed to be concentrated in the Godavari at Nasik.

Krishna River has black colour and the \textit{puranic} view behind this is that after the curse of Savitri, lord Vishnu became the river Krishna.\footnote{80} It carries black waters in some areas and the notion is that lord Krishna is in black colour.\footnote{81} So the river also has black colour. But in actual, the river bank carries black mud and at the time of rain it becomes black.

\footnote{79}{B.Rama Raju, \textit{Folklore of Andrapradesh}, New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1978.}
\footnote{80}{The origin myth of Krishna river can be seen in the following section ‘Myths of Major Rivers in India’, and referenced by Skandapurana, G.V Tagore and G.P Bhatt (trans), Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2007.}
\footnote{81}{Anne Feldhaus, \textit{Water and Womanhood- religious meanings of rivers in Maharastra}, NewYork: Oxford University Press, 1995.}
In Tamil Nadu, rivers are goddesses in common peoples’ admiration and are worshipped with offerings. After a person’s death, the ashes of the cremated body are dissolved in river. Many of the towns and villages of Tamil Nadu are on the banks of rivers. The people there maintain that Kaveri river is an alternative to the Ganga River. The importance of Ganga can be seen in the Sangam literature. People keep Ganga water in their house. Some families collect waters from the Ganga rivers for use at the 61st and 81st birthday bathing rituals. Special festivals are held in linking up the rivers. One such is the Saptasthana festival at Thiruvaiyaru, where deities of seven nearby areas assemble. 82 The bathing ghats of river are crowded with pilgrims at the 30th day of the month of aippasi to purify bath. While bathing in the river, people throw shells, silver and gold replicas of fish, coconut, and ear rings as offerings into the river. The ancient temple town of ‘talakad’ is on the banks of Kaveri and the holy festivals panchalinga darshana is held in every twelve year. The story of lame man who became desperate at his inability to be in time to have a bath at least on the last day of the month is related in a legend at Mayavaram. The lame man was blessed by god for his devotion. He had his dip on the first day of the following month, Karthikai and attained spiritual glory. Since that day, the dip in the Cauvery at mayavaram has been known as mudavanmuchukkan or the lame man’s dip. Humans consider river water as pavitra (holy, sacred, pure) and that’s why they carry it from one place to another.

Mountains are the origin places of many rivers. People all over the world consider mountains and rivers as the places of revelation and vision, divine dwelling places or as a geographical manifestation of the divine. The attitudes of people around the world towards mountains have varied widely. It may be the linking factor between the heaven and the earth. In India, there is an important connection among mountains and rivers. The religious notion in India is that, the origin place of river is the vicinity of Shivalinga in the mountains. It shows that, the origin spot of rivers is invisible or is in hidden form. The heavenly Ganges in its descent to earth first touches the top of Meru and then divides into four rivers that run down along the four cardinal directions to water on the earth. 83

Kerala is the land of forty four rivers\(^4\). The Iruvazhanippuzha is the main water source of Mukkam village of Kozhikode district. Thrikudamanna Shiva temple is situated on the banks of this river. The kanjipaarcha is one of the main offering of this temple. During the revathi days of Meenam (March-April) month, the ladies prepare fire-place (aduppu) in the sand heap of the river. By using river water, people prepare kanji (rice soup) and puzhukku (mixed vegetable curry). They offer this to Shiva and after that; they conduct communal feast (uchayootu) to the people of Mukkam village.\(^5\) For the gratification of ashtamachal Bhagavathi (Bhagavathi means goddess) in the Payyanoor of Kannur district of Kerala, the Chaliya community (weaving community) in the Payanurtheru area offer meenamrthu (fish) to ashtamachal Bhagavathi in the kalasha festival. In the early morning of the fifth day of the kalasha festival of ashtamachal Bhagavathi, the male members of Chaliya community take bathe with white lower garment and go to the shrine. They offer betel leaf and areca-nut to Bhagavathi. The priest of the shrine receives it. They make circumambulation in the shrine. After the circumambulation, they come out from the shrine and the relatives of the male members receive them by giving sweets. Then the priest gives notice to the meenamruthu (fish offering as prasadam) offering. The entire male in the community carry stick (choorakol) and net in their hand. The priest gives prasadam to everyone. After the circumambulation of the shrine the males run to the Kavayikayal to catch the fish. They arrive to the shrine in evening with musical instruments and put the fish in the leaf of coconut tree. This procession is called meenamrthuezhunallathu. After offering to Bagavathi, they distribute the fish to all the members of the community. They conduct this ritual for the protection of Bhagavathi during the time of their voyage in the river.\(^6\)

To surmise from the above discussion, the world view connected with the rivers in the world in general and in India particular can be extracted from the lore of the folk found in their expressive verbal and non-verbal traditions, behaviours and practices. As seen above the mythologies, beliefs and practices related to rivers reveal

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\(^4\) See for details in the Chapter Number III.


overtly two conceptual frames. The one is the natural phenomenon of the river as experienced by human cultures, the other, the cultural phenomenon through which humans appropriate rivers in their daily lives.

In the natural phenomenon of river course in south India in general one can find river in three forms based on seasons. During the monsoon the river flows with full vigour wherefore appears with life. Antithetical to this phenomenon, during the summer seasons the river almost dries-up denoting the death of the river. In between these two seasons river is also found in stagnant stage wherein the water never flows but remains in small pockets of low lying beds of the river indicating the state of ‘onto’ which means being or in existence. In the following diagram this phenomenon is shown as ‘Rivus Triangle’

**Diagram No 2.3: Rivus Triangle: River as Natural Phenomenon**

![Diagram No 2.3: Rivus Triangle: River as Natural Phenomenon](image-url)
As per the above diagram the natural phenomenon of river depends on the presence or absence of water in the river. Flowing with water represents life and without water represents dry/death. In between the river is also found in stagnate form (Onto form). From stagnate form river can come to life with flow of water or evaporation of water can cause dry/death of the river. Therefore, flow and dry are oppositional and this symbolically is equational to life and death as binary.

\[
\text{Flow} \times \text{Dry} : \text{Life} \times \text{Death}
\]

\[
\text{Mediation} : \text{Stagnate (Onto)}
\]

In the natural phenomenon of the river the first stage is two opposite’s i.e. flow and dry without any mediation which is the core of the structural feature of the river. The next process is that this binary is replaced by a triad of two opposite poles i.e. flow and dry and mediation as stagnate. In the next stage one pole and the mediation are replaced by another triad i.e. life and death which comprises two opposites and its mediation is ‘onto’ (or being or in existence). Thus, there are very many mediators; mediators of the first order second order and so on. This can be illustrated in the following manner:

**Diagram No 2.4: Structural Scheme of Rivus Model**
As shown above the river can be found in three different forms or in combination of these three forms. Through the analysis one can go from the different order of triads into the deep structure where the core of the binary system that regulates the whole human knowledge system can be found. The same binary structural feature is reinforced even in the cultural phenomenon of the river. The following ‘Rivus Triangle’ exemplifies this phenomenon.

Diagram No 2.5: Rivus Triangle: River as Cultural Phenomenon

The cultural phenomenon of the river reveals human attitude towards rivers in India as depicted in the above diagram. The belief related to rivers show that the rivers are revered as they have ability to deliver the soul from sin and rebirth. This
idea is pervaded in almost all religions in India and people therefore use river or river waters for purification. Dipping in the water would attain purification which eventually would lead to moksha and binary to this act would result in pollution causing rebirth. Pollution can be caused by drowning one own self in the river (suicide/accidental death) thereby the belief is that the soul gets polluted and wander as demon (evil spirit). If the cultural phenomenon of ‘rivus triangle structure’ is superimposed over the natural phenomenon of ‘rivus triangle structure’ the following diagram emerges.

At the ideational level both ‘nature and culture’ structures are congruous and infact not antithetical as viewed by Claude Levi-Strauss but reinforces the idea of binary structure prevalent in nature as well as in culture. The human mind understands nature through sensory organs by conceptually placing the phenomenon in binary oppositions and mediations. This forms the basis of human knowledge. What is true of human understanding is true of human creation i.e. culture. As the binary opposition and its mediation to understand nature is the basis of knowledge, all human creations also follow the same paradigm to construct culture. Binary opposition and mediation get different transformations and manifestations in culture resulting in complexity of culture. To get a clear understanding of culture one has to go deep into the process of finding out the basic binary opposition and its mediation. The following diagram attest to this fact.

87 By studying the culinary practices of human being, the structuralist anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss describes the concept of culinary triangle. He follows the concept of binary opposition of Roman jackson. The base of this triangle is the binary oppositions such as normal vs. transformed and culture vs. nature. The triangle is the totality of three types of cooking such as boiling, roasting and smoking. In the process of roasting the meat is into direct contact with the agent of conversion i.e. fire without the intervention of any cultural elements such as water. In a way this is a partial-roast meat and partly cooked. Boiling is a process which needs the mediation of both water and vessel which is the element of culture. Smoking is a process of complete cooking and without the mediation of any cultural apparatus. In a way roasting and smoking are natural process of food and boiling is a cultural one. But humans consider smoked foods are the part of culture not roast and the boiled food is attached to nature. For further details, Claude Levi Strauss, “Le Triangle culinaire,” L’Arc(Aix-en-Provence), No 26(1965), translated by Peter Brooks as “The Culinary Triangle,” Partisan Review 33, no. 4 (Fall 1966): 586–95. See for further details see the four volumes Mythologiques by Claude Levi-Strauss, translated to English from 1969-1981 by John Weightman and Doreen Weightman and Jack Goody, Cooking, Cuisine, and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology (Cambridge, 1982), chap. 2, 10–39.
Diagram No 2.6: Structural Reinforcement of Nature-Culture Rivus Triangle

The above diagram can also be seen in the following formula.

\[
\text{Flow} \times \text{Dry} : \text{Life} \times \text{Death} \\
\text{Mediation: Stagnate (Onto)}
\]
\[
\text{Purity} \times \text{Pollution} :: \text{Moksha} \times \text{Rebirth} \\
\text{Mediation: Birth}
\]

Natural phenomenon of river

Cultural phenomenon of river
In both the triangles water becomes an essential feature for demarcation. This signifies the role of water not only in the physical realm but also in the cultural sphere. That is why it is found in different genres of the lore of the folk such as mythologies, tales, proverbs, beliefs, rituals and practices etc., as discussed in this chapter. Thus, the study on rivers as cultural phenomenon is as important as the study on the physical phenomenon for it sustains not only the life on earth but also the life that is emergent. The forthcoming chapter concentrates on the Bharathappuzha River as a part of cultural and natural landscape denoting the worldview of the folk that are living on the banks.