Chapter III

Gañā and Yamunā as gleaned from other sources.

The vast mass of the inscriptions also contains some important references to the Gañā and the Yamunā. The Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta, for instance, describes Gañā as having descended from the locks of Śiva. It speaks of the "pale yellow water of Gañā flowing quickly from being liberated from confinement in the thickets of the matted hair of Paśunati."

Later the Mandasor inscription of Yasodharman again recalls that when Gañā was about to descend from heaven to earth, Paśunati, in order to break the force of its fall, received it in the matted hair coiled above his forehead and projected like a horn; and its waters wanderd there for a thousand years, before they eventually reached the earth.

The popular story that Gañā was persuaded by Bhāśīratha to descend on earth from heaven is preserved in a number of inscriptions also. For instance, the Kanyakumāri inscription of Vīra Rajendra Deva mentions that Bhāśīratha, having brought down from heaven the river Gañā to raise his ancestors (the sons of Sarara) to heaven from the ashes to which they were reduced by the fire of the anger of the sage Kapila, caused the celestial river to flow in the regions (i.e. heaven,
earth and hell); the men who touched its waters became immortal.

Several inscriptions like the Udaipur inscription, the Kondedda grant of Dharwarāja, the Ablur inscription of Vikramāditya VI and the Nālandā copper Plate of Devapāladeva mention Śiva with Gaṅgā. The Ablur inscription runs as follows:

"Om! Reverence to the god Sambhu (Śiva), who is made beautiful by a chaurī which is the moon that lightly rests upon his lofty head, and who is the foundation-pillar for the erection of the city of the three worlds! May that tree of paradise which is Sambhu, praised by the gods, - which is the abode of the beauty of clusters of flowers which are the rows of drops of water thrown up by the waves of the holy river Gaṅgā that flows through the coils of his hair; which has for fresh sprouts his dangling matted hair; which has as its growing fruit the ambrosiarayed moon (on his forehead); which is pleasing with boughs that are his arms; and which is embraced by a creeper that is the goddess Gaurī (Pārvatī)."

The Nālandā inscription mentions that Gaṅgā has her limbs (the currents of water) agitated by the extensive plaited hair of Śiva (Hara). The Tirucirāpalli Lātitanakura cave temple contains an inscription, which described Śiva as Naḍī-prīti. Here is a reference to
Ganga as one of Siva's wives

In Nanduru Plates of Velananti Rājendrachola, we find the mention of the origin of the Gaṅgā from the foot of Viṣṇu.11

Hulflur and Nomiattti inscriptions of Viśkramaditya Vi refer to the holy character of a number of places situated, on the banks of the Gaṅgā, namely Prayāga, Viṣṇugā, and Gaṅgā-Sāgara and Yamunā-Sahzana as sacred. The similarly Jaina epigraph found in a temple at Hunasi-Hadagali has mentioned, Viṣṇugā, Gaṅgā, Prayāga etc., as holy places and Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Narmadā, etc., as holy rivers. Two Pala plates from Belwa speak of the grant, made by the kings, on the occasion of a ceremonial bath taken by them in the waters of the Gaṅgā on the day of the Viṣṇuval-Sankrānti. These plates record the grants made by Mahipāla I and Viṣṇugāla III respectively. The utility of the ceremonial bath in the Gaṅgā and offering of gifts on the occasion of the Viṣṇuval-Sankrānti have been emphasised by Hindu scriptures. Two Kurusval inscription of Dharpā-Mahādevī of the time of Someśvaradeva have mentioned that Someśvara-Mahādevī, the peerless mother of the world, who was wholly sanctified by having bathed in the water of the Gaṅgā and the second queen Dharpā-Mahādevī granted a gift of land to the god Kāmesvara free of taxes and all encumbrances.

The practice of making gifts after taking a holy
dip in the sacred water of the Ganga is attested by Arasibidi inscription of the reign of Somesvara I, Banzeon Plate of Vighraphāla III, Allahabad Museum Plate of Govindachandra and Machhlishahar copper Plate of Harischandra-deva. The Malviya copper-plate inscription of Maharaja Dharasena II, of the family of the kings of Valakhi records the grant to a Brāhmaṇa. The inscription further adds that Dharasena's (II) sins have been all washed away by the torrent of the waters of the river Jāhnnavī. The same view has been described in the Alina copper-plate inscription of Śilāditya VII of the same family. The Chammak (the ancient Chamanika, in the Ilichpur District) and the Siwani (Siwani-Chhapara District, M.P.) Copper Plate inscription of Maharaja Pravarasena II mention that "he (Pravarasena II) was the daughter's son of the illustrious Bhavanāga, the Mahārāja of the Bhārasivas, whose royal line owed its origin to the great satisfaction of the god Śiva, caused by their carrying a linga of Śiva places as a load upon their shoulders, and who were besprinkled on the forehead with the pure water of the river Bhāgirathī that had been obtained by their valour, and who performed ablutions after the celebration of ten āśvamedha-sacrifices."25

The Bhāgā-chāt-stone inscription of Narasiṃha (Kalachuri) reads: "May those founts of religious merit, the lines of the curving, lovely, tortuous waves of the heavenly river meandering on Śiva's head protect you!"
(the waves) about which heavenly being have such doubts, 
-- Are these wreaths of white lotuses, or digits of the moon, or sprouts of religious deeds, or sloughs of snakes, or ashes emerging (from Śiva's body): "27

The water of the Ganga was considered to be very holy, so much so that suicide through drowning into it was considered to be of great merit. Ancient Indian literature as well as inscriptions contain a number of allusions to such suicides. The Śabdakalpadruma,28 (S.V. Ganga), quotes the following verses from the Kūrma-Purāṇa:

"-------Gangayām jñānatō mṛtyu muktim ānūtī 
manavah/ a-jñānād-brahma-lōkañ-cha yatindūśty- 
atra saṃśayah/Gangayān-cha jalē mokṣēvarāgasyāhū 
jalē sthatē/antarikshē cha Gangayām Ganga-sāgara- 
śaṅgamē ///"

Verse 29 of the Sundkila Tal inscription imparts the sad news that "the builder of this temple, Nandana, after having made endowments for the maintenance of proper worship of the installed deities, breathed his last at the holy place, called Saukara on the banks of the sacred river Bhār-Trathi."29

The Aṃhāsad inscription of Adityasena informs us that Kumāragupta entered into fire of cow-dung cake at Prayāṇa. Similar instance of Dhruva drowning himself
at Prayaga is preserved in the Baroda plates of the Lashtrakuta King Karka Suvaranavarsha. The Chandella king Dhanza had also committed religious suicide by entering into the holy water at the confluence at Prayaga meditating on Siva verse 12 of the Jabalpur inscription of Yasodhama says that Kalachurin Sangeyadeva Vikramaditya attained mukti, i.e., committed religious suicide, at Prayaga together with his hundred wives. The Adbhutasagara seems to say how King Ballalasena of Bengal gave numerous gifts at the time of committing religious suicide, together with his queens, in the waters of the Ganges. King Kalasa of Kashmir, "knowing in his helpless condition that his life was about to escape, hurried to proceed to a tirtha to die" and there at Prayaga he dedicated a gold image of the god worshipped at the place.

These acts of religious suicide at Prayaga were in conformity with the Puranic injunctions. To quote the Matsya-Purana, "one who departs from his body near the Akshaya-vata in Prayaga goes straight to the region of Siva. At another place it is said that a religious suicide at Prayaga insures moksha for a person.

The Dharmaśtras recommend the practice of residing on the holy banks of the Ganges. That such a practice was actually followed is proved by the case of a king named Jhola who renounced his state and went to live on the
bank of the Saṅgā.²⁷

In the Kanyakūmārī inscription of Viśva-Nājendradēva, we find that, "conquering hostile kings by the power of his arms, he made Kānyā-khetā a sporting ground for his army. He caused the kings of the Kulūta and Utkula countries to be defeated by his generals; the kings of Kaliṅga and the Viṁśendrā (?) were also vanquished by his generals, who reached the Saṅgēs (Saṅgā), whose banks slipped down the river through the battering of his elephants' brigade; the water of the holy Saṅgā was carried in pails on the heads of kings to his capital city Saṅraikonda-Cholasūravam."²⁸

The Asankhālī Plate of Narasiṃha II informs us that, "the grant was made when king Viśva-Naranasimhadēva, endowed with a string of titles beginning with 'the lord of fourteen worlds', was staying at the Bhairavapura Patañā (City, Camp or residence). The passage "Saṅgādayi-
mandir-antar-vijaya avasara" used in this connection suggests that the occasion of the grant was a royal visit to the temple of the goddess Saṅgā at Bhairavapura."²⁹

That Saṅgā was considered to be the holiest of all rivers is attested by the Purāṇas. For instance the Mātya and the Khamba Purāṇas state that the mere

*remembrance of the Saṅgā even from a distance of a thousand yojanas was good enough to wash away all the
sins of an evil-doer and ensure him emancipation. 41

This popular belief could not escape the notice of even the foreigners. Megasthenes has described Gāṅgā as a holy river of India. 42 Strabo also mentions Gāṅgā as one of the deities worshipped by the Indians. 43

Yuan Chwang speaks of Gāṅgā as 'Fu-Sheu' meaning 'the water of religious merit'. He has given a somewhat detailed description of how at the confluence of the Gāṅgā and the Yamuna at Prayāga, "every day a number of people arrived to the sacred water hoping to be reborn in heaven." 44

Another Chinese pilgrim I-tsing who visited India in the seventh century A.D., records that he had seen many people drowning themselves every day at Prayāga. 45

Alberuni writes that the law of the country forbade the Brāhmaṇas and Kshatriyas to commit suicide by burning themselves, but that there was no such restriction on the Vaiśyas and the Śudras. From his description it becomes clear that the Brāhmaṇas and the Kshatriyas could kill themselves by throwing themselves into the Gāṅgā on auspicious occasion, such as on eclipse days. He had also seen Brāhmaṇas and Kshatriyas committing religious suicide by climbing up the tree and throwing themselves into the Gāṅgā. 46

Dionysios Periegetes writes that, "the fair-flowing Ganges (Gāṅgā) is wondrous spot of holy ground..."
greatly honoured." Pseudo Kallisthenes tells that, "this river Ganges, in our opinion is that which is called in scripture as Phison, one of the rivers which is said to go out from Paradise."

To quote Dr. R.S. Tripathi," when Sihabuddin was about the return to Ghazni, the Chauhan king, assisted him with a mighty army consisting of 200,000 horse and 30,000 elephants. Sihabuddin turned to meet him on the historic field of Narain or Tarain near Thanesvar, where a deadly encounter took place. The Moslems were completely overwhelmed by the huge Hindu hosts, and the Sultan himself would have met death on the battlefield, but for the courage and alacrity of Khilji retainer who rescued him from the furious charges of the Chauhanas. This great debacle constantly troubled Ghori, and the very next year, in 1199 A.D., he again proceeded towards Hindustan (India) with a reorganised force of 1,000 horse to avenge it. War was the very element of Prithvirāja, and he "wrote for succours to all the neighbouring princes," to repeat, as it were, the anniversary of his victory. The Rajput chiefs to the number of one hundred and fifty enthusiastically responded to his appeal "having sworn by the water of the Ganges (Ganga) that they would conquer their enemies, or die martyrs to their faith". According to another version of the story "Jayachandra was not killed in battle, but
in order to avoid the disgrace and dishonour of defeat
he met a "death congenial to the Hindu by drawing himself
in the sacred Ganges." 43

The account of Curtius Rufus Quintus also informs
us about the origin of the Gaṅgā as mentioned earlier in
Chapter II. The Gaṅgā, which is the greatest of all
rivers in the East, flows down to the South Country, and
running in a straight bed washes great mountain-chains
until a barrier of rocks diverts its course towards the
East. 50 This reminds us of the story of Jahnu.

Quoting from the Avesta, N.N. Ghosh has pertinently
observed that "the great river Tigris, hitherto idolized
and worshipped at sight, as the river Sarasvatī was being
idolized and worshipped in a similar manner at about the
same time in the Panjab, and the Gaṅgā of the post-vedic
Indians later came to be worshipped in the valley of
the Gaṅgā - the river goddess got etherealised, so to
speak, into the utterly mythical Ardvi Sūra Amānītā,
the guardian goddess of all the fertilising, strength-
ving and cleansing waters of the universe." 51

We find the sculptural representations of the
Gaṅgā and the Yamunā from the very beginning, i.e., on a
seal of Mohenjodaro, later on the Sāṇchi Stūna No.II,
Bharhut Stūna, Mathurā and Amaravatī Stūnas. We also
find their depiction on the doorways of Ajantā,
Barb, Udayagiri and ellora caves. From the Gupta period onward their representations became a usual feature for the decoration of the temple doorways. The mythical stories, regarding the origin of the river goddess Ganga, have also their important place in the art history of the country. The twin river goddesses have occupied their position in the Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina art.

The figure of the Ganga appeared on the Bhārasiva-Nāga coins suggesting that it was their royal emblem. On them the Ganga has been portrayed with a kaśāsa in her hands. It is a well known fact that the Bhārasiva Nāgas were ardent devotees of Lord Śiva. The popular notion that Ganga was the wife of Lord Śiva might have greatly promoted the Bhārasiva-Nāgas to adopt her effigy on their coins.

The Vakataka king Pravarasena I has also issued coins bearing the symbol of Ganga.

Unlike the Bhārasiva-Nāgas the Gupta monarchs were staunch Vaishnavites. But since Ganga was intensely associated with the Saivite as well as Vaishnavite pantheons, she was given a high place of honour by them as well. To this extent they carried on the Bhārasiva-Nāga tradition of depicting the figure of Ganga on the coin. On the Tiger-slayer type of Samudraguptas coins, we find the figure of Ganga.
standing on a makara holding a full blown lotus in her left hand. Kumāragupta I also portrayed Baṅgā on his Tiger-slayer type of coins, as well as on his swordsman type of coins.55