Chapter IV

The origin and antiquity of the image of Ganeśa and Yamunā.

The origin and antiquity of the image of the Ganeśa and the Yamunā can be traced back to the Indus Valley Culture. While conducting excavations at Mohenjodaro, Mackay had unearthed an important seal with some female figures on it. He refers to "the horned goddess in the midst of a pīval or sacred fig-tree, before which another horned deity is kneeling and doing obeisance. Both the goddess and her worshipper wear long plaits of hair, have their arms adorned with bangles, and, in the case of the latter and possibly of the former as well, there is a floral or leafy sprays springing from the head between the horns .... A row of seven spirits or deities ... occupy the lower register of the seal-amulet, each figure wearing a string on the hand, a long pin-tail behind, but no horns." Sir John Marshall describes it thus: "One of the most interesting of these (i.e., the seals) is that reproduced in Plate XII, Figure 18, in which the ephihany of the deity in the tree is portrayed in a half realistic, half conventional way. The tree itself at the right-hand top corner of the seal is represented by two branches only springing from a circle on the ground, and treated in a formal fashion. Between them appears the deity, a standing nude figure, with long hair, trisula horns and armlets .... In front of the tree is a half-kneeling figure of a
sural iant is a composite animal .... In the field below is a line of seven small standing figures, with dresses reaching to knees, with a long plait of hair falling down the back, and a plume on the head.  

Dr. C.H. De A. Vijeckera has discussed this seal. But he has restricted the discussion to, 'the identification of the female figures only, particularly the seven in the lower register, the other objects on the seal being referred to only by way of elucidation of the former. He has identified the lower seven figures of the seal with seven rivers. To quote him, 'it would be reasonable to assume that the seven figures in the lower register of the Mohenjodaro seal are symbolic representations of seven deified rivers of the Indus Valley. In our opinion also these seven figures on the Mohenjodaro seal are the seven rivers of the Panjab of which the westernmost was Sindhu or the Indus and the easternmost was the Sarasvatī called the Saptāthi or the seventh river. The other five streams were the Vītastā (Chelum), the Asiknī (Chenab), the Prushnī (Ravi), the Vīnāś (Beas) and the Sutudrī (Satula). For this reason this territory was called Sānte-Sindhu or the land of the seven rivers. Dr. Vijeckera has also identified the standing female figure on the top corner and the half-kneeling figure. To quote him, 'it may seem only natural to find in the half-kneeling female figure just above the seven
The representation of Sarasvatī, ... the figure between the branches of the potted tree in the right extreme of seal must be the procreative and virile deity (Vṛṣṇi, Vṛṣabha, Śushmin, etc.) of the Īśvara, whose manifold aspects are depicted in the characters of Indra, Varuṇa, Arni, Soma, Pūshan, Rudra, Parvata and such other gods. The standing figure at the top corner cannot be identified as male deity. Sir John Marshall has expressed that, "the nude deity appearing between the branches is very small and roughly portrayed, but the absence of any evidence of male sex, coupled with the fact that tree deities in India are usually female and that the ministrant figures on this seal also appear to be women, all point to its being a goddess rather than a god." Dr. Wijesekera has also pointed out that, "when Sarasvatī is mentioned as separate from and above the seven, the term might rather refer not to the so-called river of the Panjab Valley but to the more primitive deity of waters and floods, ... the counterpart of 'Sarasvān' which too was applied not only to the Mountain as the source of 'rivers, but also to the Sun floating in the waters of the atmosphere.'

In our opinion, it would be proper to identify the figures standing as well as half-kneeling as the river goddesses, Gaṅgā and Yamunā respectively. The Indus people were also aware of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā and they had tried their best to represent them along with the seven rivers of the Panjab. In the Indus Valley
seals the tree-goddess generally has been shown as standing under a tree within a particular symbol ( \( \cap \) ) conventionalised into the form of an arch surrounded by leaves and the river-goddess within the symbol ( \( U \) ). It has already been seen earlier in chapter II that the water of the atmosphere produced by the rays of the Sun at a particular place in the atmosphere is called the Yamuna. This is why she is called 'Sūryanukrī'. Therefore, it would be more probable to identify the half-kneeling figure as the Yamuna instead of the Sarasvatī, when she has already been represented in the lower register of the seal among the seven rivers of the Panjab. The standing figure at the top right corner might be identified with the Gaṅgā, symbolising the divine water 'Ap'. It will not be a far away possibility that the name of the deity is also written on the seal as 'Gañā'.

In the Nadi-Sūkta of the Rāṣṭraveda, the mention of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā comes first. The Rāṣṭravedic people also knew them and accepted their role in the development of the country. As they precede the rivers of the Panjab in the Nadi-Sūkta, they might have been considered to be more important than the latter.

The worship of female deity in India appears to be of great antiquity. Though there is no definite proof of its worship in prehistoric times, it may be presumed on the basis of its continued popularity during the later periods.
that it was in vogue in the hoary past as well. That the worship of the female deity was very popular in the proto-historic period is attested by the Indus Valley female figurines which are definitely the most ancient representations so far available of the Indian deity. The female deity came to be worshipped under different nomenclatures - Mother Goddess, Earth Goddess, Lakshmi or the Goddess of prosperity, Durgā, Pārvatī, Sarasvatī, Gaṅgā and Yamunā.

Considering the importance and sanctity attached to water by the Indus Valley people, as suggested by the Great Bath and the elaborate bathing arrangements, we may even presume that river worship too constituted an important aspect of their culture. Such a thing is quite natural for a people who depended so much on rivers for their prosperity. In fact, river worship was a common feature in all valley civilisations of the world. For instance, the ancient Egyptians considered their country as the 'gift of the Nile' and worshipped it as Kōpī. Dr. Pusalker's observation that the "Great Bath has been suggested as the temple of the river god" and that the "crocodile probably represented the river Indus" is very plausible.

The present Kohenjodaro seal undoubtedly throws light on this subject. It seems that the people of the Indus Valley were also aware of the importance of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā. Both are represented on this seal in an
anthropomorphic form as well as in river form. Gāṅgā stands on its confluence with Yamunā; Yamunā comes in her human form to meet her on the back of a fabulous animal like river horse and pays her regards to Gāṅgā by half-kneeling in front of her. The river form and the fertility aspect are shown by two lines indicating the river and plant with twigs and leaves. It is a very old conception that the divine noumenon had its abode in the leaves and twigs of sacred trees. The association of the nīnal tree with the Mother Goddess in India is well known. "In the 3gua the vegetation deities, addressed as "Plants" and called the ["mothers, the goddesses"] - which doubtless identifies them with River- goddesses - (aṣadhir iti mātārah ... devīn), are said to have the holy nīnal (āsvattha) as their home and its foliage as their abode.

This seal may be regarded as containing the prototype image of the river goddesses Gāṅgā and Yamunā, as the Indus seal containing the figure of Pasupati Śiva is considered to be depicting the prototype image of Śiva.

In Kautilya's Arthasastra, we find that on festival days the worship of mountains and rivers was in vogue. The worship of the Lord of Śachi, the Śaṅgā, the mountains and Mahakacchana was also performed in times of drought. Thus we find that before the time of Aśoka, Gāṅgā had found her place in the list of popular religious festivals,
which formed part of the cult worship in ancient India. We find a very long list of these obscure but popular cults providing the background against which the popular religious scenes and forms are depicted on the Bharhut and Sānchi Stūpas. To quote Dr. V.S. Agrawala, "This also throws light on the reason why the builders of the Stūna gave such wide welcome to the cult of Yakshas, Nāgas, Trees, Chaityas, etc. As a matter of fact, the Stūna worship was one of this divine fraternity, a part of the extensive pantheon universally accepted and adorned. Just as in the later temples any one of the main deities enshrined in the sanctum had the other gods and goddesses amongst his Parivṛtta Devatās, similarly the Stūpa cult gave free admittance to the other folk deities as parts of its Vyūha." This explains why Gaurī and Yamunā have also been sculptured, in one form or the other, on the Buddhist Stūpas at Bharhut, Sānchi and Amarāvatī. This intermingling of the members and concepts of different religious pantheon has very aptly been hinted at by Aśoka in his Minor Rock Edict I wherein he says -

'Amīsā daevā ēvasu te dānī misā katā'.

The deities of cults that at one time were excluded from, or unmixed with (Buddhism), became now mingled under the new policy of the Emperor.
Patañjali has mentioned that the Gaññā was considered to be very sacred. He has also testified to the holding of celebrations in her honour, which were called Gaññāmaṅga.10

We find two Yakshi figures named Chandra and Sudarśanā on the Bharhut railing. One one of the entrance pillars we find Chandra, a divine lady of rare beauty and modulation. She stands on a horse-headed makara, holding a branch of a tree in the Sālabhaṅgikā rose in one hand and a bunch of flowers in the other. Her Vahana, a composite makara, makes her a river goddess. Sudarśanā Yakshi is carved on the other railing pillars of the Bharhut Stūpa. The swaying figure on her makara-vahana, and the petals and buds of the lotus devices on top and one leg of the figure have been remarkably portrayed. The figures of Yakshinis standing on makara are also found at Sāñchi and Mathurā. In the opinion of Dr. A.K. Coomaraswamy, from these Yakshini figures, we may trace the origin of the image of Gaññā of the Gupta age.20

Vasudeva Upadhyaya has expressed his view that from these Yakshinis the origin of the image of the Gaññā of the Gupta period cannot be traced, because they are depicted on the Stūpa railing pillars as the guardians of the door, whereas Gaññā and Yama have their place in the Gupta temples as Puruṣa-devatā.

He has shown the probability of Gaññā and Yama figures being associated with Vārūṇa as described in the
Visnudharmottara Purana. This view does not explain the origin of the image of Gaṅgā and Yamuna, as the Visnudharmottara Purana was written much after the images of Gaṅgā and Yamuna came into existence.

Percy Brown has seen in Gaṅgā and Yamuna figures, "an adaptation of the Yakṣhī motif which festoons the projecting architrave to the Buddhist torana, but transmuted in the Gupta temple to suit the Brahmanical texts."

We find representation of Gaṅgā on aakṣara as early as the second century A.D., on a slab at Amaravati. Here two women on their akṣaras flank the Nāga slab carrying food and water in a tray and a jut (water-pot) respectively.

It appears that the origin and development of the cult of Gaṅgā and Yamuna was inspired by a variety of ideas current in the country through the ages. For instance, Śrī-Bhū was personified as the goddess of plenty. Madīdevatās too were considered to be the sustainer of life. Later, these characteristics of Śrī-Bhū and the Madīdevatās were borrowed by ancient Indian sculptors to give shape to the personality of Gaṅgā and Yamuna. The sculptures of female figures found at Natarāja and Amaravati holding a tray of corn (Pāpya) in a raised hand and water-jar in another may easily be considered to be the prototype of Gaṅgā and Yamuna.
It is also very interesting to note that the concept of पुर्ण-कलेश्वर, which was in vogue ever since the यावतिक period, also contributed to the development of the cult of श्रीरावण and यमुना. As is very well known, the पुर्ण-कलेश्वर or पुर्ण-शक्ति was considered to be an auspicious symbol. It became clear from a number of literary sources as well. To quote from the यावतिक, "with her blue lotus like eyes, running to the road, she sees you come, with her pair of beasts like to auspicious water-pitchers placed at the doorway."

The Amaravati stupa testifies to the practice of sculpturing the पुर्ण-शक्ति on either side of the doorways. This practice seems to have inspired the ancient Indian sculptors of carving the images of श्रीरावण and यमुना on the doorways of the temples. Like the पुर्ण-शक्ति the twin rivers became the symbolic representations of the goddesses of fertility, plenty, prosperity and auspiciousness.

That the पुर्ण-शक्ति and the twin rivers kept on interchanging places is proved by the sixth century Chalukyan temple at Aihole which again reverted to portraying the पुर्ण-कलेश्वर on either side of the doorway instead of श्रीरावण and यमुना.

From the evidences at our disposal we can easily see that it took quite some time for the image of श्रीरावण and यमुना to be associated with the शक्ति and the शक्ति respectively. At Amaravati we find both श्रीरावण and
Yamuna standing on makara on either side of the slab separated by the figure of a Naga between them. The same vehicle is associated with both Sañcā and Yamuna at Ajanta. In Udayagiri caves Nos. III, V, VI and IX Sañcā and Yamuna have again been shown as standing on the makara on either side of the doorway. In Cave No. IV at Bher also we find the representation of Sañcā and Yamuna standing on makara on either side of the door in niches of the pilaster. Shortly after, the Indian sculptors thought it fit to impart distinguishing features to their art pieces of the twin rivers. Since the Sañcā was considered to be a mightier river than Yamuna, she continued to enjoy the privilege of riding over the makara, the mightiest of the creatures of the water. But now the Yamuna too was given a vehicle of her own, a kūrma which though not so mighty as the makara, was all the same a celebrated creature of the water. The Īvara image at Udayagiri contains, for the first time, the plastic representation of Sañcā and Yamuna on their separate vehicles, the makara and the kūrma respectively. The association of Sañcā and Yamuna with makara and kūrma, respectively, sank deep into the minds of the artists so much so that it is difficult to find sculptures of Sañcā and Yamuna without their respective vehicle in medieval art.

The Bhārāsīva kings gave a new impetus to Saivism.
with it they introduced the figures of Siva and Uma into Indian art. The figure of Uma is also found on their coins with a vessel in her hand. Dr. Layard is of opinion that the figures of Siva and Uma became political and national symbols in their temples architecture.

Dr. J.J. Benedek has mentioned that in the Phraekut relief depicting the joy and exultation of the gods after Mara's defeat, the divine figures of the four Apsaras as Jiwaksri, Akshobhir, Subhadra and Dasaivati are the prototype of the river goddesses Sita and Uma shown on the temple doors of the Gupta and the early medieval periods.

After what has been said so far about the figures of Siva and Uma, it is tempting to suggest that the soul unearthed by Siraj in 1909 at Ahomjodhpur contains the prototype form of the image of Siva and Uma of later periods. In the popular belief the very sight of the teva is to be considered auspicious. It was for this reason that Chakhek Siva had a prototype Sudarshan-Yakshi sculptured on the Phraekut pillar standing on makara. On the pillar, Pillar of the same sthala is sculptured Chandra Yakshi standing on the horse-headed makara holding a branch of the tree. This figure might be taken to be the four-armed Uma on the makara of the later times. This horse-headed makara may remind us of the strange animal portrayed on the Ahomjodhpur seal discovered by me. Thus originating at Ahomjodhpur the figures of Siva and Uma underwent a radical transformation in the course of time. The figures of Sudarshan Chandra
Haksinta at Bharhat seems to have played an important part in this transformation.

On a pillar in Bhandara No. II, we find in the centre a woman standing on the nagaś, holding a stem of flowers in her left hand in front and putting the right one on the hip. This deity is difficult to identify, though it is probable that one is the Śri Bāudhāya. However, this deity is flanked by the other two female figures on either side. The standing figure on the left side has a tray by her left hand near the shoulder and her right hand is touching the breast. The other deity, this time sitting on the animal's back, is holding a water-jar by her right hand and a chāna in her left hand. Beneath these deities are sculptured two lotus-crophyers carrying out of the jaws of a gāhara in each case. The association of the tray (full of Sasya) with one female deity and of the water-jar and chāna with the other may suggest their identification with Gāhara and Gāhara respectively. The portrayal of these figures seems to have influenced the artists to sculpt the twin figures in association with the gāhara, the tray and the cakra-kumbha at Amravati.