Chapter VI

Interaction of various though currents and the association of Indus and Yamuna with different religions.

Many scholars believe that the Vedic Aryans were not the original inhabitants of India and that they had come from outside. There are others who repudiate this point of view and assert that the Aryans were the original inhabitants of this country, precisely speaking, of the Ganges-Yamuna Valley, which was the cradle of one of the earliest civilizations of the world.6

Whatever be the fact, most of the scholars hold the view that the Aryans were the successors of the Indus Valley people. The latter had left behind them a good deal of archaeological material which sheds profuse light on their religious beliefs. From their antiquities it can easily be surmised that they worshipped, among others, Prāṣamati-Siva, mother goddess, Tree deities, Sūrya, Sun, Goddesses including the river goddesses, etc. Phallus worship was also prevalent in their society.4

On the other hand, the Ṛgveda testifies the worship of the different forms of nature. In fact, the Ṛgvedic deities like Earth, Fire, Soma, Indra, Rudra, Marut, Parjanya, Sūrya, Varuna, Mitra, Puṣā, etc., symbolise one or the other aspect of Nature.5 The Ṛgveda mentions as many as 5000 deities.6 Of these 22 deities appeared
to be most important to Yāska. To the popular mind the best way to propitiate those gods and goddesses was the performance of sacrifices. According to the common belief, the eatables poured into the fire were carried to the gods and goddesses through it.

With the passage of time the non-Aryans and the Aryans learnt to live side by side peacefully. Their co-existence brought about the interchange of religious and cultural ideas. This intellectual interaction was bound to produce effect on the cult of Ganga and Yamuna also.

As stated earlier, the Indus people were not only familiar with the Ganga and Yamuna, but they used to worship them also, as suggested by the famous Mohenjodaro seal. The Aryans too referred to the Ganga and the Yamuna as sacred rivers in the Nadi-Sukta. Thus the combined testimony of the Indus Valley antiquities and the Ṛgveda goes to establish the importance of the Ganga and the Yamuna during the earliest period of Indian history.

In the early stage of the Ṛgvedic culture, Varuna was given the highest place of honour. It has to be noted that though Rudra has been referred to in the Ṛgveda, he was only a minor god. As the Aryans and the non-Aryans came closer to one another, the intermingling of their ideas transformed the concept regarding many of
the Aryan gods. Sometimes after the composition of the Śikhās of the Yajurveda and the Atharvaveda and before the composition of the Kājurveda many non-Aryan elements were accepted by the Aryans to recast the personality of Rudra. By the time of the Brāhmaṇas, the Vedic ritualism had become predominant and many of the Vedic gods receded to the background. They could easily be invoked by the worshipper through the recitation of the powerful hymns. It was only Rudra, and probably Vishnu also, who remained uncontrolled by the ritualistic efficacy of the priest. In fact, with the increase in the number of their worshippers, their importance also kept on increasing. Rudra was never a central figure in the ritualistic performances of the Brāhmaṇas. Gradually he became the god of the masses and came to be worshipped as Mahādeva. Later, he was accepted by the Brāhmaṇa priests in their Deva-mandala. The worship of Mahādeva was traced back to the worship of Rudra in the Vedic period. The personality of Rudra underwent a long evolutionary process before he became Mahādeva-Siva. He was first identified with Arni, as is evident from a story in the Kājurveda. The Kausitaki Brāhmaṇa goes to the extent of saying that Rudra was born of Arni, Vāyu, Āditya, Chandramas and ultimately Prajñāpati. The Satapatha Brāhmaṇa informs us that he was born of the union of Saivatsara and Ushā. Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa has it that Rudra was created with the
mough and tough elements of the deities. All these attempts succeeded in portraying Rudra as an Aryan god. The Purānic form of Śiva was considerably influenced by the Vedic form of Rudra. The word Śiva itself has been used as qualifying appellation for Rudra in the Yajurveda. Agni being born on upthuti in the ākāśa as well as in the antariksha, was believed to have had three fathers. That is what the word Trivābha (having three fathers) means.

Since Rudra and Agni were identified, the epithet Trivābha, which was originally used for Agni, came to be associated with Rudra. In due course, the original meaning of the word Agna (father) was forgotten. It came to mean "eye". This change in meaning led to the concept of Śiva having three eyes. Similarly, the Vedic epithets of Rudra, namely Ulaśiṅkhanda and Milaśriva, led to the story of Śiva drinking the poison. The other Vedic epithets like hārabind and hāsin used for Rudra in the Vedic literature lay at the root of the concept of Śiva with locks of hair on his head. The Vedic literature associated Rudra with Kesins and anus. This association was responsible for Śiva emerging as a Mahāyoga in the Purānic age. The Vedic Rudra was described as living on the northern mountains. This allusion gave birth to the new belief that Śiva lived on the Mount Kailasa. The Yajurveda calls the bow of Rudra as 'Pināka'. This name was given to the bow of Śiva at the later stage. The Vedic literature uses the
word Krtivasa for Inno. It was on the basis of this description that Puranic Siva came to be known as Krtidevi.

The Indus Valley people were phallus-worshippers. This non-Aryan practice influenced the Aryan religion also. The Aryans believed in the fertility cult. Their god Rudra was essentially a fertility god. On this account, the Aryans were not averse to adopting the non-Aryan phallus cult in one form or the other. It was the intermingling of the non-Aryan and the Aryan ideas that established phallus-worship in Saivism.

The same intermingling of the Aryan and the non-Aryan ideologies was responsible for the growing popularity of goddess-worship in the Aryan society. In the Indus Valley Culture the worship of a god appears to have been linked with that of a goddess. The Aryan god Rudra too was associated with a goddess Ambika. As the Aryans came closer to the Indus valley people, the Mother Goddess of the Indus culture produced a great impact on the Ambika worship of the Aryans. Ambika, who in Vedic literature, was the sister of Rudra, came to be regarded as his wife, probably under the impact of the mother goddess cult of the Indus people. It is also to be remembered that "Ambika" means mother and that the chief female deity in the Indus Culture was also assumed to be a mother goddess.
The female deities of the Vedic times had weak personalities. They had not developed their independent entities. Rather they were known as the wives of some gods. However, quite different was the case with Ambikā. She had come to be regarded as an independent deity and was as important as Vādra himself. This explains why the cult around her was an independent cult which gave birth to Saktism and Tantricism in India. But it can safely be accepted that the mother cult in the Aryan society originated from the Indus Culture.

The Vādra cult gained importance during the later Vedic period. The Śvetāvatara-Upanishad describes Vādra as Śiva and Īśā. He had become the object of worship in that section of society which was responsible for the emergence of Samkhya school in the later period. To them Vādra was the Lārābrahma. The Banārānā-lpHishad tells us that the gods received Vahana-īśāna from Lārā-Haimavatī who may be identified with Pārvatī. As a result of her association with Vādṛa, this Pārvatī came to be regarded as Lārā. The word Haimavatī probably meant 'golden' in its original form. In due course, the wife of Śiva came to be regarded as the daughter of Haimavat. The word Pārvatī also means the same thing.

This Śhānti-Upānīṣad speaks of two other gods. One of them was Vīṇāyaka who came to be known as Īśana in later periods. The Śhānti-Upānīṣad-Aranyaka refers to a god
named Vaktra-tunda or Danti. Sometimes he has been called Skadanti, Hastisukha, Lambodara, Athula or Vishnu. All these nomenclatures go to prove that this god was the Ganesa of the later period. The second god mentioned in the Baubhavana Dharma-Sutra was Skanda. He has been called Shadaksha, Javanta, Visakha, Suhrahana and Mahasena. These names of Skanda leave us in no doubt that he was the Kartika of the later period.

In later religious tradition Jyeshtta and Durva assumed great importance. It is just possible that the former was the female deity representing popular belief of the Vinayakas. As Uma-Haimavati was transformed into Parvati, Jyeshtta helped the evolution of the personality of Gauri. The Gaimavanta avers that Gauri was the elder daughter of Himavanta, whereas Uma was his younger daughter. Like Parvati, Gauri too came to be regarded as the wife of Siva. The acceptance of Gauri as the wife of Siva seems to have been influenced by the conception of Jyeshtta.

The Arthasastra of Kautilya and the Aghabhasha of Patanjali testify the worship of Gauri.

The cult of Siva is encountered in a more developed form in the Bahaavana than in the Sutras. Therein he is generally described as Siva, who was the most popular god during that period. The worship of Devi was closely associated with that of Siva. This worship of Siva and
the Devi formed the cradle of Śaivism in post-Vedic period. The age of the Ātṛyana also witnessed the beginning of those mythological stories associated with the worship of Śiva and Pārvatī, which constituted an important part of the Śaiva literature.

The Vedic gods were replaced by the Trimurti comprising Brahma, Vishnu and Śiva. Even among them Brahma could never acquire the same importance as was done by his two associates. In times of crisis for the Devas, Brahma is generally described as entreating Vishnu and Śiva for help. However, there were no signs yet of the rivalry between Vishnu and Śiva. Though Ātṛyana is basically a Vaishnava work, yet it does not fail to describe Śiva as the best and the highest among the gods. He was Daivadēva or Sahādeva and was worshipped in the Amara-loka. The Devas looked up to him as their saviour in times of difficulties. On one occasion, even Vishnu is shown as seeking refuge unto Śiva in the company of other Devas. Śiva's association with yoga practices, which is first encountered in the Upanishads, became more concrete in the Ātṛyana. Austerities came to be regarded as the best method of pleasing Śiva. Bhrātratha had won his blessing through austerities. Even the Devas had to perform penances to seek Śiva's favours.

The Ātṛyana contains references to Gaṇēś also. It describes Śiṃa's elder daughter Saṅrā joining to Svaraloka.
for the performance of Devakārya. The same Gārhī later descended from heaven and was contained by Śiva in his locks. Thenceforth Gārhī came to be looked upon as the wife of Śiva.

The Rāmāyaṇa describes the birth of Skanda, consequent upon the marriage between Śiva and Pārvatī. According to another story in the Rāmāyaṇa, when the Devas did not have any son owing to the curse of Pārvatī, they entreated Śiva to produce an offspring from Gārhī. It was how she gave birth to Skanda who was abandoned on the Himalayas in the form of an undeveloped embryo. This embryo was brought up by the Kṛttikās. This explains why Skanda is known as Kārtikeya also.

The Mahābhārata describes the birth of Kārtikeya in a similar manner. It too does not betray any hostility between Vishnu and Śiva. Rather, it has described them as equals at one place. However, the worshippers of Śiva naturally started treating him as the highest among gods. Even Kṛṣṇa, the incarnation of Vishnu, is shown as worshiping Śiva. But in due course, the Vaishnavites also started describing Vishnu as the highest god. The common point between the Śaivites and the Vaishnavites was their faith in monotheism. The only difference was that whereas the Vaishnavites took Vishnu as Parāmaśīvara, the Śaivites regarded Śiva as the highest god.

On this background it may be inferred that the cult
of Ganges and Yamuna was greatly influenced by divergent ideas coming from different directions - the Pasupati Siva Cult as well as the Mother Goddess cult of the Indus people, the Kudra cult of the Vedic period and the Vedic ritualism, etc. Ganges came to be regarded not only as the wife of Siva but also the mother of Skanda-Kartikeya. With the emergence of the Hindu trinity during the epic age Ganges came to be associated with each of the three gods. Ganges is said to have originated from the Kamandalu of Brahma, from the foot of Vishnu and from the locks of Siva. She has been described in human form in various contexts. She is described as having descended on earth to marry Santanu, who in fact, was Mahabhishaka born on earth. She gave birth to Vasus to emancipate them. The last Vasu known as Bhishma came to be regarded as Gangesputra. The importance of Ganges in the popular mind can easily be learnt from the fact that she produced in Kartikeya the commander-in-chief of the Devas as also Bhishma, the greatest and the most respectable hero of the Mahabharata are. She combines in herself the main traits of the personalities of Siva, Vishnu, Parvati and Sakti.

As stated earlier, Skanda-Kartikeya came to be regarded as the son of Siva and Ganges. The Puranic literature describes Ganges as a god around whom an independent cult had developed. The Puranas include numerous references to his birth as well. The Matsya Purana informs us that Parvati after having massacred her
body, made a doll out of the remnants of the massaging powder. The doll had the head of an elephant. She dipped it in the sacred water of the Ganga and, to the great surprise of all, the doll was turned into a live child. The child was adopted by both Parvati and Gahru as their son. Later, Brahma consecrated him as the leader of the Vinayakas.

The Puranas throw ample light on the relative importance of Śiva and Vishnu. The Brahma-Vaivarta Purana states that Śiva was born of Vishnu and that he was a devotee of the latter. At another place in the same work, Śiva is shown as singing the glory of Vishnu and blessing the devotees of the latter. At yet another place, Vishnu-loka has been considered to be higher than Śiva-loka.

The simultaneous development of the Śaiva and the Vaishnava cults and their peaceful co-existence led to the intermingling of the ideas of the twin cults. To illustrate, the Brahma-Vaivarta Purana calls Bhairav as the devotee of Vishnu as well. He is shown as worshiping Krshna. The work avers that it was at the request of Tīrtha that Gahru agreed to descend on earth. Not only that, there are references in this work which describe Gahru as having originated from Rādhā and Krshna.

In the temples of Northern and Southern India the figure of Gahru was very frequently sculptured in the company of Śiva, specially on his lokas. At some places,
we come across the figure of Siva being flanked by those of Gānā and Gaurī on either side. At some other places the figures of Gānā and Yamunā are sculptured as flanking Siva on their respective vāhanas.

As mentioned earlier, Gānā assumed an important position in the Vaishnava cult as well. This explains why Gānā was sculptured on the walls of the temples dedicated to Lord Vishnu. She has also been sculptured in the company of Vishnu in several art pieces. To quote a typical example, we find Gānā portrayed along with Vishnu in a statue from Mathura.

The cult of Gānā and Yamunā became so popular that it permeated even heterodox religions in one way or the other.

The Gānā and the Yamunā are included among the five important rivers of the Buddhists. The Bhāishā- niṣṭhā, however, speaks of the seven rivers in Madhyadesa, namely, Bihuk, Aśāvīkā, Gayā (Silguri), Sundarika, Sarasvatī, Prayāśa (Gānā and Yamunā) and Bahūmati.

The Viśuddhi-mārga describes somewhat differently the seven sacred rivers, namely, Gānā, Yamunā, Jayñī, Sarasvatī, Mahā and Mahānadi. It is thus clear that the Gānā and the Yamunā were held to be sacred by the Buddhists as well.

This explains why the Buddhist artists also
sculptured the twin rivers on the doorways of their temples. On the doors of the Ajanta caves, we find the images of Gaṅgā and Yamunā. The Gaṅgā-Yamunā motif has been freely imitated by the Buddhists in Ellora caves No. VI and VII. The presence of the river goddesses in Buddhist cave-doors shows the influence of Hinduism on Buddhism. Gaṅgā stands for purity and Yamunā for devotion.

Like the Hindus, the Jainas also regarded the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā to be sacred. A Jain temple at Hunsis-Hadarali contains an inscription on a stone slab written in the old Kannada script of the 11th century A.D. Besides mentioning Vāraṇasī, Prayāra and Kurukshetra as holy places, it mentions the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā among a number of other rivers as sacred and destroyer of sin.

Among the Jaina literary sources, mention may be made of Mahāśākumāra. In its Adipurāṇa of the tenth century A.D. Bharata, arriving on the bank of the river Gaṅgā, is shown as being blessed by the holy river who appeared before him in human form. A number of Tirthankaras had chosen to take birth in the holy towns on the banks of these rivers. Vāraṇasī, for instance, had been the centre of the activities of Tirthankara Chandraprabha. Similar was the case of Śri Jinaprabha.

Like the Buddhists, we also find, the images of Gaṅgā and Yamunā carved on most of the door-lintels of
the Jaina temples of the Nārāya style in North India up to the late medieval period. For example, we find the figures of Gāhā and Yamunā on the door-frame of the Chaturmukha Sehaśrūṭa Jina temple of Banpur, a village in Jhansi district of U.P. We also find the twin rivers on the door-jambs of the Pāraganātha-kāśīyā in Bijnør district of Uttar Pradesh.

Gāhā entered into the Tāṇtrika cult also. Dvārtasāra establishes Gāhā' s association with both Śiva and Viṣṇu. She has been called Sukhadā and Mokshadā. The Āramasāra of the Śaktas refers the Matsya-tattva as situated between the Gāhā and the Yamunā symbolically Ida and Pingalā in the human body. This reference demonstrates the importance of the Gāhā and the Yamunā in the religious thought of the country so much so that they were adopted as symbols by the Tāṇtrikas to explain the intricacies of their cult.

From the foregoing discussion it becomes abundantly clear that the cult of Gāhā and Yamunā underwent a long and continuous process of evolution. Originating in the Indus Valley culture, it exhibited immense power of adaptation and assimilation. It did not develop into a narrow sectarian cult. Rather, it freely adopted the thought currents of different orthodox and non-orthodox sects and found a place of honour in almost all of them. Being associated with a number of gods of the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain pantheons, it played an important part in bringing various thought-currents closer to one another.