Chapter VIII

Comparison of art motifs with the literary images drawn by poets and writers.

River worship was prevalent in the Indus Valley Culture as also the depiction of river goddesses on seals in that culture. For instance, we find the portrayal of the seven rivers of Panjab and the Ṛṣa and the Ṛaman on a seal unearthed at Mohenjodaro. Thereafter we find a wide gap before the images of the river goddesses Ṛṣa and Ṛaman appeared in art. These rivers came to be regarded as sacred rivers in Indian literature much before their appearance in art. In folk religion also they had their importance. This is why they were associated with other gods and goddesses in Buddhist stupas. They were considered to be the symbols of fertility, prosperity and plenty.

Even Kautilya’s Arthasastra states that in case of drought, he (the adhyaksha) should cause worship of the Ṛṣa.

Hāriva attributes the prosperity of the Kurus region to these two rivers which ensure good harvests without much effort. We find the depiction of the two river goddesses on a stone slab at Amravati flankled on a Nārāyaṇa standing on the gāhara, carrying food and water in a tray and jug respectively. They are both Ṛṣa and Ṛaman on the gāhara assignable to the 2nd century A.D. This slab is housed in the British Museum. By that time the Kūmaṇa, the vehicle of the Ṛaman, had not come into vogue. A similar figure, assignable to the Kushāṇa period, is
found in the Bhūrat-Kāla Bhavan, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi. The river goddess is without the vehicle, having a tray and a water-pot in her hands. This attitude of the goddess suggests abundant water or a never-failing supply of it. The river-irrigated areas had plentiful harvest of splendid crops, raised without much effort. For the first time, we find the images of Gāṅgā and Yamuna standing on the makara and the kūrma respectively, having a water-pot in their hands at Udayagiri (Madhya Pradesh). There we find the descend of the Gāṅgā and the Yamuna on earth from heaven. They are shown in their river as well as anthropomorphic forms. In their river form they meet at Allahabad (Prayāra) and ultimately fall into the sea. In their human form they are shown coming down from heaven and the Lord of Ocean is standing in the sea holding the water-pot in his hand to receive them. The confluence of these rivers is very vividly described in the Rājyuvaṁśa which calls them the wives of the Ocean.

We find the myth regarding the descend of the Gāṅgā on earth from heaven by the efforts of Bhārīratha preserved in the Ṛṣikīya, Mahābhārata, Visamukha Purāṇa, and Bhāravata Purāṇa. They have it that Bhārīratha, after having entrusted the government to his ministers, retired to the Himalayas for penance. Ultimately, the great river Gāṅgā was pleased by his steadfastness and austerities and came to him in person. Bhārīratha entreated her to purify the ashes of his ancestors in
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the Netherlands. The Gāndā consented to oblige him, but
expressed her apprehension that her descend on earth
might not be contained by anybody else except Śiva. To
avoid the whole earth being flooded, she advised Bhādrattha
to please Lord Śiva by his remonances with a view to
persuading him to receive the Gāndā in his locks. There-
upon Lord Śiva, holding a number of weapons in his hands,
and surrounded by his mighty rāgas, appeared on the
Himālayas to receive the Gāndā. Thus Gāndā started
descending on earth, being watched by numerous sages, gods,
Sandhyavas, Vācasa and Yakshas. She was under the impression
that she would carry away Lord Śiva along with her
impossible flow. But she was soon to be disillusioned,
as Lord Śiva, angered by her haughtiness, completely
contained her within his locks, not allowing even a drop
of water to escape. It was only at the repeated
remonances of Bhādrattha that Lord Śiva set Gāndā free.
Now the Gāndā with numerous fishes, crocodiles and other
creatures in her water, followed by Bhādrattha, seated on
his celestial chariot, and other Dvas, Sandhyavas and
and Yakshas, etc., issued forth. In their great curiosity
the sages and sages, the Sandhyavas, the Yakshas and the
Nīdānas, mounting on their vīkūras, horses and elephants
hastened to witness the great descents of the Gāndā. On
her way to the Netherlands the Gāndā submitted the Kāmānī,
or saw Jahānu and carried it away. Stun by the audacity
of the river goddess, Jahnu reacted violently and sinned her whole water. However, being propitiated by the gods and the sages, Jahnu released Śaṅkā through his ear. This explains why Śaṅkā came to be known as the daughter of Jahnu. At last, Śaṅkā, following Bhārata, reached the spot in the netherland where sixty-four thousand sons of Sārvabhauma, the ancestors of Bhārata, were reduced to ashes by the wrath of the sage Kapila. Jahnu took compassion on them and purified their ashes, thus enabling them to obtain heaven. 12

Many of these details connected with the descent of Śaṅkā have been borrowed from literature by the Pallava artists who carved the scene of the descent of the Śaṅkā on a rock at Mahabalipuram.14 This piece of sculpture belongs to the 7th century A.D. This relief sculpture is considered to be one of the largest and the most elaborate in Indian art. The tableau measures twenty-seven metres in length and nine metres in height and is covered with hosts of gods, semi-gods, human beings, animals and creatures, all sculptured in a masterly fashion. This continuous narrative has been carved on the rocks with all its important phases. The descent of the Śaṅkā has been chiselled out in the central cleft of the rock. A serpent king, caught in the middle of the stream, is trying to move upward. From his mood it appears that he has immensely welcomed the descent of the Śaṅkā and is full of devotion for her. He is
accompanied by his wife whose expression of devotion and happiness is similar to that of her husband. Below her is another figure of a big serpent, having the features of an animal. It is also trying to move upward, vigorously lifting his body. All of them are surrounded by figures of gods, semi-gods, men and animals, who have hurried from different quarters to watch the descent of the celestial river.

To the left side of the cleft on the lower level is the figure of a saint sitting in front of his āśrama. He can easily be identified with Jahnu, who, as the story goes, had sipped the water of the Sāhā. In his front are sitting two other ascetics in vara-mudrā. Unfortunately their heads have been lost; probably they are pupils of Jahnu. On the top of the figure is sculptured Śiva on the Himalayas. He has four arms and is shown in the varada-mudrā. He holds a huge trisūla in one of his hands, which is only partially visible. As the story goes, Śiva, pleased by the entreaties of Bhaṭṭaraṇa, had appeared before him to give him boon. The Lord is surrounded by his bees. Besides, him is standing Bhaṭṭaraṇa performing austerities and standing on his one leg. He is shown as rudrasaṅku, and his lean and thin body betrays the effects of fasting and penance.

To the right of Bhaṭṭaraṇa are sculptured a god and a goddess, a large number of birds and a horned deer, all hurriedly coming to watch the celestial sight.
Similar is the case with other animals portrayed on the remaining part of the left of the relief. There is a flutter on the Himalayan range also which has been pictured on the upper level. It shows a lion and a lioness, a monkey and celestial couples, all coming out of their abodes to witness the descent of the Gānḍā.

On the lowermost level of the left side are shown some Brahmāpas on the bank of the river. One of them carries on his shoulder a pitcher filled with the sacred water of the river. His companion has just taken a holy dip in the Śāhā and has come out of it. Now he has been shown as drying the long tresses of his hair. On the opposite bank are the elephants and the bull with their young ones. The latter are shown taking shelter between the legs of their parents. Overhead are portrayed two monkeys looking at the flow of the water. On the higher level are shown the Līnparas in their Himalayan abodes.

On the highest level near the upper rim are sculptured a number of cows who have come to welcome the Gānḍā. Of these the Sun god with his solar disc can easily be identified.

The descend of the Gānḍā with its numerous details has also been sculptured on the Virupāksha temple at Pattadakal. The first panel contains the figure of four armed Lord Śiva standing with his right elbow resting on Kamāli. In his uplifted hand there is something
which is not clearly recognizable. With one of his left hands, he is holding his lock of hair, his lower hand being placed on his waist. To his left is seated Pārvatī on a raised platform. Her vehicle, the sīkha, standing beside her is looking at Gāṅgā standing near him. The Gāṅgā has been portrayed both in her human and stream forms. She bears an expression of extreme impatience to meet Lord Śiva. Her restlessness is reflected not only by her facial expression, but also by the mudrā of her hands. To the right of Lord Śiva is portrayed a tree near which the sage Bhāratā is shown engaged in austerities, standing on one leg. As the story goes, Śiva had released the Gāṅgā from his locks at the repeated entreaties of Bhāratā. Beside him is another figure of Gāṅgā, this time in human form with her left hand on her waist and the right one stretched in front.

On the second panel is the scene of Jahnū containing the Gāṅgā in his Kamandalu. His emaciated body, with his ribs and the hollow of the stomach clearly visible, reminds us of his figure at Kāliṣṭhēnā. A little later a stream has been shown emerging out of his right ear. The release of the Gāṅgā was effected by Bhāratā, propitiating Jahnū by his penances. Bhāratā, in this panel, has been shown standing on one of his legs and is all skeleton. Beside him is standing Gāṅgā in beautiful female form, she is shown in the tribhāṇa-mudrā.
Out of the hollow of a tree portrayed in the vicinity comes the front part of a monkey. His companion is sitting on the ground below. Yet another figure of Brahmā is sculptured near the tree.

On the third panel is shown sage Kapila in dhyanamudrā with the sacrificial horse behind him. Mistaken to be the thief of the horse, sage Kapila is shown as being attended by the sons of Sāgara (represented only by one of them in the sculpture here). The netherland has been suggested by a Mūrgaī supporting the earth. The Gaṅgā has been portrayed in her stream as well as female form.

According to the principles laid down in the Adiṣṭhāna of the Karmikālī, the Karamāla and Śilabhadra, the Gābhāṣṭra of Lord Śiva should be sculptured in a standing pose with his right leg placed vertically on earth and the left one bent a little. He should be shown embracing Pārvatī, his consort with his left front arm, while his right front hand should be placed near her chin. The back right hand lifted up to the uṣṇīśa, should be portrayed as holding the lock of his matted hair. His back left hand should be shown as carrying a mace. On his head should appear the figure of Gaṅgā.

The artist should be able to bring out the feeling of jealousy in the expressions of Pārvatī at the sight
of her husband favouring another lady, Pârvatî. The figure of Pârvatî should be sculptured with her left leg straight and the right one slightly bent. Her left hand should hold the flower, while her right hand may be shown either hanging down or holding a few folds of the cloth about her thigh.

To the left should be portrayed Bhairâvata along with a number of sâivas with an unmistakable impression of adoration and devotion for Lord Siva. The central figure of Siva may be in the Pândi-visarâjanaûrûti form.

There are a number of panels which contain the Bahjâdhana form of Siva. In a panel discovered at Bajâôra, Bihâr, Lord Siva is holding the locks of his hair with his stretched left hand. Bahjâ, shown on a panel, in an Gâjâli-sandhâ has come to meet Lord Siva. The figure of Pârvatî, however, is not found on this panel. This piece of sculpture is somewhat different from the others of its kind, in so far as Bahjâ here has been shown as making approach to Lord Siva. The portrayal of a garland held by two flying roses in their hands is symbolic of Bahjâ's success in winning over Lord Siva.

The Bahjâdhana panel at Elephantâ is equally beautiful. The artist has portrayed the figures of Siva-Pârvatî and Bahjâ with her three faces. The last one represents the tribhûta form of Bahjâ. Over their
head are carved the figures of several gods, who had come to witness the miracle of the descent of Lāhā. The middle of the panel is flanked by some other figures. To the right of Śiva below is sculptured a beautiful lady with a chāmara in her hand. Beside her is another lady in aṇḍalimudrā with her head bent down. In front is seated a male on his bent knees.

From her expression Pārvatī appears to be annoyed with the conduct of her husband favouring another lady. Śiva, however, has been shown making efforts to placate her. The lady in the aṇḍalimudrā with head bent down appears to be Śivāni flanked by her female attendants. The figure facing down in front seems to represent Bhairavā. Behind Śiva and Pārvatī is a figure of Lord Śiva. This panel reminds us of the description of a similar scene in the aṇḍābhāsa where Śiva is shown trying to conceal Śivāni from Pārvatī's sight.

Another panel containing the figure of Bhāgādhara Śiva has been obtained from Bāntakallī. This panel, however, does not contain the figure of Pārvatī. Śiva has been portrayed as holding out his locks of hair to receive the ūtā in aṇḍalimudrā. Her lower part of the body merges into a cloud line. The artist at Allorā also produced sculptural representation of Bhāgādhara scene. In one of such scenes, Śivāni is shown as lost in the locks of Śiva. Later, she is seen released by Śiva,
pleased with the presence of Bhūmīdrā. On the upper
level to the left there are two figures of Bhūmīdrā.
In one of them he is performing austerities, standing on
one leg. In the other figure he is shown sitting on his
knees in abhāya mudrā. On the upper level to the right,
is portrayed Kapila. Kapila, in the form of a stream, is
shown as coming out of the locks of Śiva. Above it is a
figure of Śaṅkara deva, who has a female form above the
waist. The lower part of her body is represented by a
stream. In the middle of the panel to the right of the
Śiva, is seated Śiva sitting with a stream coming out of
his ear. The stream is shown flowing towards the
netherland. The corner of the lower portion of the panel
representing the netherland has sage Kapila seated there.
There is also a figure of an elephant being attacked by a
lion. Below, to the left of Śiva, is the figure of
Pārvati. Thus, this panel also contains all the important
constituents of the hālāvaṇapṛta motif, which has been
sculptured with great skill.

Gaṇapati-dācholakarn has yielded a beautiful
image of Gaṇapati Śiva. Śiva here holds his locks with
his uplifted right hand. Gaṇapati has the female form above
her waist portrayed on the locks. Pārvati, extremely
enraged at the sight of her husband's association with
another lady, has turned her face away from Śiva. Śiva
has been very artistically been shown as elevating his
enraged left.
Thus, there is a close similarity between the art - motifs of Śiva and the literary images drawn in the ārāmāra, the ānāthaśūla, the ārī-verga, etc.

The ancient Indian artists have demonstrated great enthusiasm in sculpturing Śiva's representations in Nātha forms in accordance with the iconographical principles laid down in the Ājñagadhālaśūla and Āttarākṣaśūla. According to them, Śiva's locus on the right side should contain the figure of Śāri. Her upper half should be in the form of a woman and the lower half in that of a strana. She should be portrayed in āṅgitalaśūla.

A statue of Ānanda Śiva sculptured in Kailaśamātha temple at Kanyakūpalai comes very close to his description in the above mentioned two works.

The Āśrama Āmāra contains the description of the iconographical features of Katarāja Śiva. According to it, Śiva should be portrayed, on the back of Śāngī, as performing his Nāṭya. He should be ten-armed and should be surrounded by other deities. Some Nāṭya images of Śiva are preserved in the Gacca museum. In one such image is depicted the nut brand at the bottom with a number of Śāhas (half man and half serpent) and Śaṅgas with folded hands. Śiva is flanked by Śāngī and Śaurī on their respective vahanas, the Gaṅga and the Śiva. Between them is figured Śāngī in dancing pose looking haughtily at his lord. The Śiva is performing the
The Dacca Museum has another important image of Nataraja Śiva. Unfortunately, its upper part is lost. However, the lower part contains the figures of Nandi, the makara and the lepa, the vehicles of Śiva, Śaṅkara and Yamuna respectively. When intact, this panel would have contained the figure of Śiva flanked by the two rivers on either side.

The Dacca Museum contains a statue of Nilakantha Śiva which appears to have been sculptured in accordance with the iconographical features as described in the Śanadī-Tilaka. In this motif, Śaṅkara is shown standing on the makara to the right of Śiva, whereas Saurī on her vehicle, the simha, is shown standing to his left. Their right hands are sculptured in the abhayamudrā, whereas their left hands hold a lotus flower each, Nandi is portrayed crouching at the bottom looking wistfully at its Lord.

The Mahābhārata describes the story of Vasu. According to it, the curse of Brahmā forced Mahābhishka to take birth as a son of Pratīṇa. This son came to be known as Gāntonu. As a result of another curse by Vasistha, Vasu was also forced to take birth on earth in human form. Śaṅkara agreed to become their mother on earth. While Pratīṇa was performing austerities on the bank of Ganges at Harīvīra, Śaṅkara appeared before him and
he wrested the right thigh. Pratīsa refused to accept her as his wife saying that the right thigh was meant not for the wife but for the daughter. He, however, agreed to accept her as his daughter-in-law. At a later stage, when Sāntana, the son of Pratīsa, had gone hunting, Gaṅgā in a beautiful female form appeared before him. Being enamoured of her, Sāntana expressed his desire to marry her. Gaṅgā accepted his request on the condition that he would not stand in her way, no matter what she did. Gaṅgā gave birth to seven sons, who were, in fact, the seven Vasus in human form. However, she threw all of them into the Gaṅgā. Sāntana was extremely grieved at the sight of his wife performing such a cruel deed every time, but he would not object to her in accordance with the assurance given to her. However, he lost his patience when Gaṅgā attempted to throw his eighth son in the water. Gaṅgā obliged him by not taking the life of their eighth child. However, after telling him the whole story of how she had given birth to the eight Vasus on earth, she disappeared. The Devībhāgavata tells us that she had gone away taking with her the eighth child who was destined to be Bālśana in future. However, pleased with the entreaties of Sāntana, Gaṅgā reappeared to give her son to him. This story has been represented on stone on the walls of Virunākṣha temple at Pāṭṭadakal with a good deal of artistic excellence.

The Virunākṣha temple contains a detailed
description of the story of Vasus. The panel containing the story is divided into two parts. On the upper part of the panel to the left is seated King Pratīva in the company of Gāṇḍā sitting in front of him. From her expressions it appears she is trying to explain him her point of view.

In the next scene is the figure of Gāṇḍā again. She is sitting, while Sāntanu shown in the aṅgaliṇḍu is standing in front of her with his left knees slightly bent. As the story goes, he had entreated Gāṇḍā to marry him. From her expressions she looks like telling something to Sāntanu. Thereafter the sculptor has carved the couple as going together.

In the next scene, Gāṇḍā is seated on a raised platform looking aside. Behind her are seated three ladies looking attentively at Gāṇḍā. Their looks contain an element of surprise and probably of disapproval in regard to Gāṇḍā's cruel act of disposing of her seven sons.

In the lower part of the panel to the right are grouped together seven Vasus. Close to them is seated Gāṇḍā on a platform with a child (sixth Vasu) standing beside her. He holds something in his one hand, while with his other hand he is holding the finger of the raised hand of the Gāṇḍā. It appears that he is demanding something from Gāṇḍā whose face bears an expression of satisfaction and happiness. The sculptor had drawn a sort
of curtain to separate the next scene from the rest of the panel. This scene portrays Sántanu as performing penance. According to the story, this penance was performed the 1st time once more his son from Santrá. Thus, on a small piece of stone the artist has described with great skill all the salient features of the story as described in the abhijñāyana and Drvī-Thāzavāta Purāṇa.

The motif of Santará and Yamuna holding chāmaras in their hands had become popular in literature also. For instance, these divine rivers with chāmaras in their hands have been significantly referred to by Kālidāsa in the following words:

"Munte cha Santarā-Yamunā tadānīm "
Sahāparas Deyamāsāvishātām."

Ramanasaṃbhava, VII, 45.

Describing the iconographical features of the Santará and Yamunā the smruti Purāṇa states that the fair complexioned Santará holding a pitcher in her hands should be portrayed on the yamākara, whereas the dark-complexioned Yamunā, holding a pitcher in her hands, should be mounted on the lūkha.

Somewhat similar features have been attributed to Santará and Yamunā in the Vīshṇuparbottās Purāṇa. When these twin rivers were sculptured in their human forms, they were to be shown on their vehicles. With their thighs slightly bent, they were to hold, in their hands,
pitchers, full of water.

According to the Skanda-Purāṇa, Gaṇeś has been described as four-armed, three-eyed and attended on by smaller rivers and streams. The figure of Gaṇeś should be so artistically carved that her body should appear to be submerged in the ocean of beauty. She should hold a pūrṇa-kalāsa and a white lotus in her hands. Her hands may be depicted in the varada and the abhayamudrā. Almost similar description of Gaṇeś is found in the Brahmānādīya-Purāṇa also. According to it, Gaṇeś should have four arms and three eyes. Her limbs should be beautifully carved holding the jewelled pitcher and a white lotus. She should be portrayed in the abhaya-mudrā. Dressed in white clothes and bedecked with ornaments, her expression should give a clear idea of her immense compassion and placid nature. She should be shown as standing in the ocean of nectar, being prayed to and worshipped by three lokas. At another place the same work describes Gaṇeś being flanked by the chīmāras and encomiaded by the white chickas. Bedecked with jewels and garlands, she should be shown as being worshipped by the Divas.

It was quite natural that the Indian sculptors were not able to copy, on the limited space on the stone at their disposal, all the features of Gaṇeś at one and the same place. Yet the study of the sculptural representation of Gaṇeś and Yamā will clearly show that
the sculptors were very well acquainted with iconographical principles and have applied them to their best to the portrayal of these twin rivers. For instance, the figures of Sāhā and Yamūnā at Deorānī have been sculptured with chāmaraś in their hands. They are standing on their respective vāhanas, the makara and the kūmaṇa. A statue of Sāhā, holding the chāmara in her hand, is preserved in the Lucknow museum. Similar statue of Yamūnā with a chāmara in her hand has been obtained from Varanasi.

The doorways of the Gupta as well as early medieval periods with the Āśā-Yamūnā motifs carved on them have been referred to in Chant. vii. Their portrayal is associated with one or the other iconographical features of Sāhā and Yamūnā as described in Sanskrit literature.

In conformity with the literary descriptions of Sāhā in the Purāṇas, the sculptors at Pavna, Thān, and Korākha have depicted Sāhā with her four arms. She has been shown with the third eye also at Ahichchhatra.

The iconographical features attributed to Sāhā and Yamūnā in Indian literature have been adopted by the Indian artists in their portrayal of the twin rivers. At Mathura and Amaravati we find the two rivers with nūrga-kalasā in their hands. On the Bhārāsiva-Nāga coins also, Rūnpkalasā appears in the hands of Sāhā.

Sāhā and Yamūnā both mounted on makara, are
found in the caves of Ajanta, Badami and Udayagiri.

Cave No. IV at Udayagiri depicts the descent of the Deity and the Yamuna on earth from heaven; later they are seen joining Prayâra and falling into the sea. Here, they are riding on their respective vahanas, the makara and the kara. This panel contains the gods, the Indra-thoras and the Annapurnas curiously looking at the descent of the Deity and the Yamuna.

In the temple at Pindoshi are the beautiful figures of Sahayâ and Yamuna, profusely ornamented, standing in tribhanga-mudrâ. In the Pârvati temple at Nachanâ-kutâna, Sahayâ and Yamuna are portrayed with chhatra over their heads. At Deogarh we find these river goddesses holding châmanas in their hands. The Deh Parbatia temple has the figure of Sahayâ being worshipped by a lady sculptured with her knees bent and hands folded. They have a garland each in their hands.

In the Parasurâmanâvara temple, Sahayâ and Yamuna are shown standing in water represented by wavy lines. At Udayagiri in Olissa the figure of Sahayâ has been carved in the company of sages and two geese.

In the Sahya temple at Than is carved Sahya with her four arms. It has to be remembered here that several Sanskrit authors have also described Sahya as four-armed.

Similar figure of four-armed Yamuna has been found in the Jitesvarâ temple in the Himalayan Hills.
The Paharpur temple in Bengal has on its wall the representation of Yashoda standing on kūma holding in her right hand a full bloom lotus with the goose perched on it.

Such illustrations of Gaṅgā and Yashoda sculptured with some of their well-known iconographical features can easily be multiplied.

Sanskrit literature associates river goddesses with Trivikrama form of Lord Vishnu. From Khajuraho we have obtained a lovely representation of Trivikrama flanked by two river goddesses standing on ankara on the pedestal. They hold a dhūpa-kalasa each in their hands. They are separated by another goddess seated on kūma.

Sanskrit literature describes Gaṅgā as the consort of Vishnu or Pārīvāra also. The Mathura Museum has in its precious collection an image of Gaṅgā in the company of Lord Vishnu.

Thus the comparative study of the art motifs of Gaṅgā and Yashoda and their literary descriptions reveals a close similarity between the two.