LAKES

From the number of lakes associated with the region of Kurukṣetra it would not be in appropriate to describe it as the country of lakes. The Ṛgveda itself records the name of one of its most sacred lakes called Mānuṣa together with the holy rivers Sarasvatī, Drṣadvatī and Āpayā. In brāhmaṇaliterature we here of the lotus lakes of Kurukṣetra. At one of these named Anyaṭahaplakṣa king Pururavā discovered his lost beloved Urvaśī. The name Sarasvatī is often derived from the word Saras meaning a lake or tank to justify the belief that there were a large number of lakes formed by this river in its journey from the hills to the western ocean.

Some notable tanks have survived the revages of time and nature as well as man even to this day. Among these are the great reservoir of water near Mānuṣa or the village of Manas, the Great Kurukṣetra and Sannihatī tanks in Thānesar and the Kapāla-Mocana and Ṛṇa-Mocana tanks near Bilaspur. We can take note of the lakes mentioned at various places in the Mahābhārata one by one.
BRAHMASARAS

It is situated near Thanesar. This lake is known by various names like Brahmasaras, Rāmahṛada, or Pavana-hāmada. This oblong sheet of water, 3546 ft. in length from east to west and 1900 ft. in breadth is towards the south of the town of Kurukṣetra and is now known also by the name of the town. King Kuru is said to have become an its bank. It is considered as a tīrtha and here brāhmaṇa raised a yūpa. At this lake all the rivers take their rise and Mahādeva is said to be always present and the Pāṇḍavas performed caturmasya sacrifices together with the great Rṣis. Here is also the world famous Akṣayāvata, where the donations made in the name of one's ancestors become imperishable. Those who went to this lake, offered oblations to his forefather and gods gets emancipation.

MĀNASASARAS

This lake finds mention in the Rgveda as Mānuṣa and it has been located near Mānasa village in Tehsil Kaithal of district Kurukṣetra. The Rgveda mentions that Agni gives welfare to the sacrifice of Mānuṣa and is the ruler of Mānuṣa. Agni is also invoked at Mānuṣa and on the holy rivers Drṣadvatī, Āpayā and Sarasvatī.
In the Mahābhārata another sacred lake of this name is mentioned in the region of Hātaka. The legend of a hunter and the black deer associated with this tīrthā is described briefly in the Epic. The Epic says that a brahmācārin after taking bath here becomes free from all sins and worthy of going to heaven. The Mahābhārata places it one Krosa away from the Āpagā river. It is also depicted in the purāṇas as a tīrthā, the right of which makes one free from all sins. The Vāmana purāṇa also narrates the story of the black deer shot by the arrow of the hunters who were transformed into human beings after they had immersed themselves in the lake at this tīrthā. The hunters came there in search of the deer and asked them about the animals. They replied that they themselves were the deer having been Brāhmaṇas earlier and that by virtue of their having bathed in the tīrthā they had become human beings. Then the hunters bathed in the lake, became pure and went to the heaven. The purāṇa states that even the listening of this legend with devotion leads to emancipation. According to Skanda purāṇa king Triśńku got rid of his cāṇḍālahood after bathing here.

Rāmahṛada

Rāmahṛada is named after Bhārgava Parāśurāma who
is said to have constructed five lakes here and filled them with the blood of tyrant Kṣatriyas. Rāmahrada has been rightly identified with the town named Rāmrai situated about 10 Kms from Jind on the road to Hansi. The evolution of the name Rāmahrada to Rāmrai is too obvious to need explanation. Dr. V.S. Agrawala tries to identify Rāmahrada with Vedic Śaryanāvata which was also called Brahmasara after some time. The equation appears rather for-fetched. Cunningham also seems to justify the identification of this pool Rāmahrada with Vedic Śaryanāvata and the present Kurukṣetra tank also called Brahmasaras. The ancient seer Dadhyaṅka who got a horse head from the Āśvins, as said in the Rgveda had been the terror of Asuras, who, after his death, multiplied and overspread the whole earth. Then Indra, inquiring what had become of him and whether nothing of him had been left behind, was told that the horses head was still in existence, but no one knew where. Search was made for it and it was found in the lake Śaryanāvata on the out skirts of Kurukṣetra. He finds that this is only another name for the great tank of Kurukṣetra and consequently the sacred pool is as old as the Rgveda itself. It might be in order to reproduce briefly the story of the name Rāmahrada. According to the Mahābhārata, once Kārttavīrya, king of Anūpadeśa visited the
hermitage of Jamadagni and in the absence of his heroic sons, destroyed the trees of the hermitage and stole the cows. When Parsurama son of Jamadagni, came to know it, he killed Kārttavīrya; but in his absence, the sons of Kārttavīrya killed Jamadagni. Rāma lamented the death of his father and in anger he killed the sons and associates of Kārttavīrya and also other Kṣatriyas twentyone times and filled up the five lakes of Samantapancaka with their blood in order to gratify his father and forefathers who therefore granted him a boon, that his ascetic merit should again be increased, that he should be free from his sin of having exterminated the Kṣatriya race and his lakes should be celebrated as tirthas all over the world. Those who bathe there and offer oblations to the Pītṛs, will get their desires fulfilled and attain eternal heaven.

The abode of a famous yakṣī too was situated near Ramahrada. Thus it is a pool of considerable religious importance and of undoubted antiquity. It is said in the Vāmana purāṇa that if anybody give his daughter in marriage at this place in the month of Kārttika, the gods became pleased with him and fulfil his desires. The Kūrma Purāṇa says that Mahādeva is said to be established there for the welfare of all, including believers and
non-believers. As a snake rejects his old skin, so a pious man can be free from sins here quickly.

PAVANAHRADA

This lake named after god Pavana is equated by Cunningham with the modern Pāpanada or Pabnawa on the Aughvatī river, 11 miles to the south-west of the Thānesar. Pavanada as a contraction of Pavanahrada or a "Breezy Tank." In the Mahābhārata, Pavanahrada is described as a sacred place of great antiquity. The Epic also calls it the holy place of Maruts and says that by having a bath in this holy water one goes to Vāyuloka. In the Padma Purāṇa, the sage Dadhicī is associated with the Pavana-tīrtha. On the basis of this legend which is associated with Dadhyaśc, we may well define the antiquity of this tīrtha. Here Sārāsvata became the king of Siddhas. According to the Vāmana Purāṇa Pavanahrada is associated with the wind-God. By taking bath in this hrīḍa and worshipping the God Śiva, one becomes free from all sins and gets the blessing of Śiva.

KAPILAHRADA

The Kapila-hṛada is identified with the modern town of Kalait or Kaloyat. In the Epic, it is mentioned as a tīrtha, while Vāmana purāṇa named it as a Pitṛ-tīrtha.
and an abode of Mahādeva. The name is traced to Kapilā, 'the brown cow'. Mahādeva is placed there as an embodiment of Kapilā. But in the Mahābhārata Śiva is not associated with this tīrtha. The pilgrims visiting this place achieve the merit of donating one thousand Kapilā-cows and attain heaven.

NĀGA-HRADA

Nāgahṛada is located of the modern village of Nagdu, 11 miles to the South-South-West of Thānesar. Here Bhiṣma, the general of the Kaurāvas army, was killed and his body was burned on the bank of the pool. Vāmana purāṇa mentions another lake of the Nāgas called Puṇḍarīka. The Mahābhārata also mentions it. One obtains the merit of a Puṇḍarīka sacrifice by taking a dip at this place on the tenth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Caitra. It is now called Puṇḍarī, a village situated 18 Kms east of Kaithal and 45 Kms west of Karnal.

SANIHITA-SARA

It is situated at a mile's distance from Kurukṣetra Railway Station on Pehowa-Road. This small lake of glistening waters has a length of about 457 meters and
a breadth of 137 meters. It is smaller as compared to Kurukṣetra tank. The most famous temples of Śrī Dhruva Narāyana and Śrī Laxmi Narāyana are situated near this lake. There are Ghāts on its three sides only.

Sannihita is supposed to signify an assembly of the entire range of tīrthas. It is said that on every Amāvas particularly on a Somavatī Amāvas, all tīrthas assemble at Sannihitā lake. Pilgrims reach first at this holy spot at the time of Solar-Eclipse. The performance of Śrāddha here on the day of Solar Eclipse is said to give the benefit of a thousand Aśvamedha sacrifices and those who take bath in it and drink its water get heaven. The merit of taking bath in this lake is equal to the performance of a thousand Aśvamedha yajñas. So all get free from sins by having a dip in its holy water and go to Brahmaloka. According to the Vāmana Purāṇa Sannihita lake is the very spot where the cosmic Egg was deposited. It is imagined that the water in the Sannihita lake is comparable to the fluid from the Navel of Brahmā and the Vata Vṛkṣa marks the centre of its extension.

STHĀNU-HRADA

Sthānuhrada is a tank of great importance in Thānesar. It is situated half a mile to the north of
the town on the side of the high road leading to Ambala. Sthānu is one of the names of Śiva in the form of the lingam. Linga worship is a special feature of the Sthānu-tīrtha. There is a purānic legend that Lord Sthānu or Śiva performed here a sacrifice, worshipped Sarasvatī and established her there in the form of a linga. The lake was filled with clear water stored in the novel of Brahmā. In the middle of the lake there was a mighty baniyana tree which is thought to be an embodiment of Sthānu.

KAPĀLA-MOCANA

This sacred lake is about 15 Kms north-east of Jagadhari on the eastern bank of the Sarasvatī and about 3 Kms from the town of Bilaspur. This pool is more than 100 ft in length and 400 ft in breadth. To the south of Kapāla-Mocana, there is another holy tank called Rnāmocana. But Kapāla-Mocana is bigger than Rnāmocana. In the Epic Kapāla-Mocana is known as Auśanasa or Śukra tīrtha. On account of its association with the sage Uśana who is said to have planned the Devasura Saṅgrāma at this place and worshipped Śiva here. He attained perfection and acquired the position of a planet.
There are many stories regarding the origin of the name Kapala-Mocana. According to a story in the Mahābhārata, once Rāma cut off the head of a wicked demon in the Dandaka forest, go stuck to the sage of Rahodara, because of which he found it difficult to move. He was told by Rṣis to go to the Auśana tīrtha where he would be relieved of his hurdle. Rahodara came to the holy place and had a dip in the pond there, when the Asura-head got severed from his body and fell into the waters of the tank, Rahodara became free from sin. The tank came to be known as Kapala-Mocana because the sage was relieved of the skull here. According to another legend Lord Śiva was purified by Brahmahatya after a bath in this tank for the sin he had incurred in cutting of the head of Brahmā to rescue Sarasvatī from his lustful assault. In this story is also interwoven the tale of a calf who with the approval of his mother killed his master, a brāhmaṇa to avoid being castrated. The cow and the calf both turned black on account of Brahmahatya of which they were cured by a bath in Kapala-Mocana. Cunningham found four weather-worn stones resembling human skull at the four-corners of the pool.
To the south of Kapāla-Mocana there is a sacred holy tank, called Ṛna-Mocana or the "Debt-freeing" pool, because the Brāhmaṇas of the place affirm that whoever bathes in it becomes at once free of debt. The tank is a square of nearly 500 ft. each side, the north and west banks being faced with stone steps of Kapāla-Mocana. According to Cunningham a number of people bathe in it daily in the vain hope that something may turn up to relieve them from their debts. The pool of water is probably an old one. It is mentioned in the Vāmana purāṇa under Kurukṣetra.

Satapatha Brāhmaṇa describes how wailing with sorrow Pururava the lover of Urvaśī wandered through out the whole of Kurukṣetra region and ultimately found his beloved i.e. Urvaśī at the lake Anyatahplakṣa in Kurukṣetra. It was on this lotus lake that the nymphs were swimming about in the forms of swans. It has not been possible to identify this lake although in all likelihood, it might be referring to the great Kurukṣetra or Brahmasara lake itself but that would be nothing more than a conjuncture.
GANGA-HRADA

A lake Ganga-hrada is mentioned near the Koti-tirtha. It was on the river Sarasvatī, where Gaṅgā bathed. Gaṅgā-Sarasvatī Saṅgama is considered to be very sacred place. The Vāmana Purāṇa also mentions it in Kurukṣetra.

BINDU-SARAS

It is located on Maināka mountain near Badari. Here on this lake Bhāgiratha, Indra and Nara-Narāyana practised sacrificial sessions. Śiva bathed in it and the Kapāla of Brahmā that had stuck to his hand dropped from it and it became Kāpala-mocana tirtha. It is so called because Rudra collected drops of water from all holy places and filled it there with.

It will be seen that the Vāmana Purāṇa has mostly taken its material from the Mahābhārata in the case of lakes also. Due to hoary antiquity of the tradition prevalent in the land and due to its association with great personages of ancient Indian history. Most of these lakes have been turned into Tirtha as a result of holiness attached to them. Even now at many of these lakes including the Rāma-hrada, Brahma-sara Sannihatī, and
Kapāla-mocana people gather for a holy dip on important occasions and fairs attracting huge crowds are regularly held. While this speaks of the veneration in which these lakes are still held it also indicates the importance of Kurukṣetra in the religious history of the country.
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मानुषस्य तु पूर्णा क्रोधानं तदौऽपि।
अपि नाम विवक्तता नदी तितिभिन्निताः।

Pu. VI.23.5-14.


18. Mbh. I.2.5.

19. तेन तेदुः संधिरामः: तु हुदे श्रोतुर्मृदिनः।
पितुज्ञानाप्रामाण्य संधिरामाः न: दुःखन॥

20. ASI. Vol. XIV, P.104.

21. Agrawala, IHQ, Vol. XXXI, 1955; PP.6-7, See also


23. Macdonell op. cit. PP,141-42.


अद्वैतव विना रामः जमदार्ग्नयाद्रवः।
ते तें जमदार्ग्नयाध्रवः तवस्निवन्न॥

स द्रुकमथा तपतर्व दीर्घस्या मृत्युधाताम॥
अन्यत्रं तथाभवतं विलाप तु:॥
तस्य तपस्याः पूर्णाः तत्वाः निःश्चित्राः प्रभुः।
सम्भवेत-परदर्शितं वक्तार संपरिश्वरसाहु॥

तद्वस्त्र पापानुसारस्य कर्मिभिः व भावतः।
हृदाश्रयं तत्र तार्क्याः गर्भीव्ययति न लोकाय॥

32. Mbh. III.81.31-33. See also Vmn. Sm. 14.12-15,
Padma Purāṇa, III.12.40-41,
हृदेष्टेष्ठुषुः यथा स्नात्सवा गैरूपनिविध्यति।
विकारस्यं है प्रीतः द्वायनं सुधाः हुल्लम॥
ईत्तत्त्व मेत्यस्य: कामं स्वर्गलोकं यो गृहार्थतम॥
स्नात्सवा हृदेष्ठुष्ठ रामस्य भ्रमयार्थी शुभतः।
रामस्यायां राजेन्द्र लम्बडः तुव्रणिक्षम॥

33. Mbh. III.81.19.
तात्रेत यह महाराज यथा लोकपरिश्रुतपः।
तात्र धार्मिकमस्य राजेन्द्र शुभाभुतानात्मापवनाद॥

34. Vam. Sm. 13.43.
37. Mbh. III.81.88.
पत्त्वस्त्र हृदेष्ठुषुः महात्मा तौरीयमुत्तमयः।
तत्र स्नात्सवा नरवाप्रव वायुलोकं महीस्ते॥

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कपिलानिः भ्रमयार्थी स्नात्सवार्था समाहितः।
तत्र स्नात्सवायांश्च व दैत्यात्म गैरूपस्याद॥

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