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## The *Kalika Purana* and the *Yogini Tantra* : A Comparative Study in Reference to Great Indian Rivers

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### Abstract

In an interview the famous Japanese historian Noboru Karashima once said 'if literature is to be used as a method of analysis, comparative literature of same period should be studied to understand various types of social formation' [1]. But here, the two treatises, the *Kalika Purana* and the *Yogini Tantra* that we are selecting for this comparative study are not contemporary to each other. Even the nature of composition of these two treatises is also not same – one is known as an *Upa-Purana* and other being considered as *tantra*. But there are factors like same regional background i.e. both are regarded as composition of Assam and both have vivid geographical descriptions which inspired us to make the proposition of this comparative study. In this regard it is interesting to note that these descriptions are categorically mean to speak specially about rivers. More than fifty rivers of divergent identities have found their mention in each of these two compilations of Kamrupa origin. Though, majority numbers of such references are about the rivers of Assam but it is interesting that the treatises are also speaking about the rivers beyond the territories of the traditional boundaries of Assam and such references of rivers are the core concern of the study. Inspired by the ideal of *nadi stuti* of *Rg Veda*, the study here intends to go with comparative methodological approach to understand different phases of cultural connectivity that Kamrupa had enjoyed through the ages.

**Keywords:** Archaic, *Nadi*, Merchant, Geography

### Introduction

The *Kalika Purana* and the *Yogini Tantra* have popularly been regarded as two of the primary resources of the history of Kamrupa. The *Kalika Purana* is considered as a composition of 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and said to have been composed somewhere in or very near about Kamrupa [2]. On the other hand the *Yogini Tantra* is a compilation which supposed to have been composed not earlier than 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D [3]. Like many other treatises of their rank they also tried to endorse the concept of geography mainly in terms of topography. However, regarding geographical description, the *Kalika Purana* looks to be mature enough as it tried to conceptualise geography not only in the name of topography but also in terms of cosmology and climatology.

### Statement of Problem

As both the treatises are of Kamrupa origin, they have naturally tried to be loyal mainly to the geography of ancient Assam. However, in doing this composer of the treatises did not forget to mention about some important geographical features of other Indian land. Among those features, they emphasised more on rivers which itself is a significant clause to note about. River is an apt metaphor for life and settlement [4]. Accordingly, their references in the treatises like the *Kalika Purana* and the *Yogini Tantra* certainly have some mean to state about the settlement pattern of our ancestor. Further, those references of rivers, beyond the traditional boundaries of Assam may have the prospect to think about the modalities of changing cultural domain of the people of Assam. Thus, the references of such rivers in turn may also have explained the value of intra-regional connectivity that our ancestor experienced at different stages of their development.

Accordingly, the study proposes to move around two perennial problems that come out of the river rime description of these two treatises a) What are the real identities of these rivers b) Are they suggest anything significant to the cultural history of Assam?

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### Methodology

The study is empirical in nature with a comparative historical approach. Further it is coupled with primary literary evidences collected from the *Kalika Purana* and the *Yogini Tantra* and thus proceed with some secondary observation to define its critical stand with a philosophical thought.

### Core resources from the *Kalika Purana*

The sequence of our rivers can be read in following way *Ganga, Yamuna, Mahakosi, Jambunadi, Baitarani Akasganga, Sipra, Chandrabhaga, Sita, Mandakini, Cuvery, Gomti, Devika, Sarayu, Iravati, Karatoya* and *Drisadvati*. Apart from *Ganga, Yamuna* and mysterious *Jambunadi* and *Akasganga*, the identity of other rivers may be made on the basis of their synonymous existence in some other Pauranic composition as tried by the scholars in following way.

### Mahakosi

This river has found mention in the *Kalika Purana* in reference to a romantic incident in which lord *Siva* tried to explain before his newly wedded wife *Sati* that like many other places of the world, the beautiful bank of Mahakosi river also had the latency to be her abode if she choose for [5]. Scholars have tried to identify the river as *Kosi* [6], one of the most violent tributary of the northern bank of river *Ganga*. This river *Kosi* is formed by seven important Himalayan streams (*Sapta Kosi*) in eastern Nepal and now meets *Ganga* little below Kargola [7].

### Baitarani

The *Kalika Purana* describes the sacred river *Baitarani* as the creation of the tear of lord *Siva*, drip out of a deep sense of sorrow at an unexpected death of his wife *Sati*; this river flew toward the eastern sea [8]. The *Kalika Purana* described the river as being in the middle of the *Puskardwipa*. This creates a great confusion in identifying the river as the land of *Puskardwipa* said to have covered the whole region of Japan, Manchuria and south eastern Siberia [9]. Leaving aside the confusion, if we concentrate only on the name of the river it appears that still there is a river of the same name in the state of Orissa of Indian federation. This river rises in the hills of the southern part of the district of Singhbhum and flows through the Bolasor district of Orissa from north west to south-east and ultimately merged with the bay of Bengal near Dhamra [10].

### Sipra

According to the *Kalika Purana*, the *Sipra* river originates from *Sipra* lake situated on the western side of Himalaya to fall into the southern sea. The water of this lake become sacred as it received water once poured by Hindu trinity on sage *Vasistha* and *Arundhuti* while solemnizing their marriage and that water later emerged on earth as *Sipra* river at the initiatives of lord *Vishnu* [11]. Ujjain, the capital city of an ancient janapada *Avanti* said to have been situated on the bank of river *Sipra* [12]. Ujjain, a region of eastern Malawa [13] is now in Madhya Pradesh. Though the *Kalika Purana* described it as an independent river, it now survived only as a tributary of river *Chambal* [14].

### Chandrabhaga

According to the scripture, *Chandrabhaga* river originates from *Chandrabhag* mountain. In the treatise the river was describe as a girl born out of the sight of Lord *Brahma* from *Manas-Sarobar*; later she was married to the lord of the sea at the consent of *pitamaha Brahma*; lord *Chandra* helps her to

flow through the earth by breaking a portion of *Chandrabhaga* mountain with the tip of his *gada* (mass) and water of this river describe as holy as that of *Ganga* [15]. This river has popularly been identified as *Chenab* [16]. At present *Chenab* drains through two major Indian states – Jammu-Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh and ultimately merged with the Arabian sea [17]

### Sita

This river of the *Kalika Purana* said to have been originated in the *Chandrabhaga* mountain at the graceful word of lord (?); the secretion of ambrosils from the body of lord *Chandra* made the water of this river sacred. The story of sacredness of the water of the river *Sita* is related to a curse imposed by lord *Dakshya* on his son in law, lord *Chandra* due to latter's too much affection to one of his wife *Rohini* and ignorance to the others (all these wives of lord *Chandra* were the daughter of *Dakshya*) [18]. This has been identified as river *Yarkhand* [19]. *Yarkhand* is a tributary of famous *Tarim* river. In China *Tarim* and *Hwangho* are considered as one river and thus *Yarkhand*, *Tarim* and *Hwangho* in alternate sense can be considered as ancient *Sita* river [20].

### Mandakini

River *Mandakini* [21] of the *Kalika Purana* may be identified as one of the tributaries of *Alakananda* an upper course of river *Ganga* [22].

### Cuvery

Describing the origin of the river, the *Kalika Purana* states that a few strips of bathing water poured by Hindu trinity on sage *Vasistha* and *Arundhuti* on the occasion of their marriage also fall on *Umakshetra* which creates *Caver* lake there and it was from that the river *Cuvery* emerged on earth [23]. Popularly known as *Ganga* of south India, the *Cuvery* river rises in *Brahmagiri* hill of western ghat *parvat* and drain the south western part of Karnataka and middle part of modern Tamilnadu [24].

### Gomti

According to the *Kalika Purana*, this river emerged from *Gomat* mountain on the southern side of Himalaya; the beginning point of this river is near the place known as *Siva* [25]. This is a left bank tributary of river *Ganga* and one of the chief river to drain through Uttar Pradesh. The famous Indian city Lucknow stands on the bank of this river.

### Devika

The mythology propounded by the *Kalika Purana* states that the river initiates from a place where wife of the king of mountain (Himalaya) *Menaka*, gave birth of a child known as *Mainak*; soon after its emergence, lord *Mahadeva* send her to the sea [26]. This river has been identified as *Deeg*, one of the right bank tributary of *Ravi* [27]. Some scholar however, tried to identify it with *Deva* or *Devika*, a tributary of the southern bank of river *Sarayu* [28].

### Sarayu

*Sarayu* [29] has been identified with *Ghogra* [30], a tributary of *Ganga* who merged with her near the Chapra district of Bihar.

### Iravati

This great river said to have been originated from *Ira* lake; like *Jahnvi* this river also full fill day to day necessities of the people around her; it flows towards western sea; she along with six other rivers considered to be the *Mahanadi* to bestow

upon human being three fold *Moksa* (*Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama*)<sup>[31]</sup>. This river is identified with *Ravi*<sup>[32]</sup>. It drain through three Indian states Himachal Pradesh, Jammu-Kashmir and Punjab. The river has a strategic importance as being a part of Indo Pakistan boundary. It runs all along the Gurdaspur and Amritsar district of Punjab.

There is another river of the same name in Myanmar which naturally creates confusion in ascertaining the identity of this river. But considering the point of emergence of this river as suggested by the *Kalika Purana*, this river should better be identified as Indian *Ravi* instead of *Iravati* of Myanmar.

### Karatoya

For number of occasion, the river *Karatoya* has found its mention in the *Kalika Purana*. This sacred river said to have been on the eastern side of river *Ganga*<sup>[33]</sup>. Scholars have tried to identify the river with modern *Teesta* or *Trisrota*, means three stream, the first one is modern *Teesta*, second one seem to be a less celebrated river somewhere near modern Goalpara district of Assam and third one may be identified with *Dhirai* river near Tezpur; of them the first one i.e. *Karatoya* was the most celebrated one and popularly known as *Ganga* of *Dvapara*<sup>[34]</sup>.

### Drisadvati

The *Kalika Purana* described it as being a river in the middle of *Brahmavarta*; a famous city known as *Karavir Nagar* said to have been situated on the bank of this river; its water is a holy as the water of *Ganga* and had the capacity to remove sin.<sup>[35]</sup> According to Alexander Cunningham this river constitutes the southern boundary of Kurukshetra region now in modern Harayana<sup>[36]</sup>. Later it being identified as *Chitang*, a tributary of *Ghaggar*, flows between *Yamuna* and *Sutlej*<sup>[37]</sup>.

### Core resources from the *Yogini Tantra*

Like the *Kalika Purana*, the *Yogini Tantra* is also a region centric compilation. However, the ideal of regionalism have acquired a more acute exposition in the *Yogini Tantra* than that of the *Kalika Purana*. This effort of regionalism that we have in the *Yogini Tantra* has their explanation mainly in terms of topographical description of Assam. Thus, the treatise though emphasise more in describing the topographical features of Assam, it however did not forget to mention about the rivers beyond the traditional boundaries of Assam.

As it is a product of much later age, it seems to be very natural to have the accommodation of more numbers of rivers in the *tantra*. The list of the rivers in the *Yogini Tantra* had attained an extensive look with some interesting addition that we have not found in the *Kalika Purana*. As for example the *Yogini Tantra* recognised the existence of two great Indian rivers, *Narmada* and *Godavari* when the *Kalika Purana* interestingly remained salient about them. Similarly, the *Yogini Tantra* was aware of the mythical existence of rivers like *Jahnavi* and *Saraswati* while the *Kalika Purana* did not feel it necessary even to mention about them. Again, the great *Ramayani* river *Sarayu* of the *Kalika Purana* had found its appearance in the *Yogini Tantra* with its modern real identity as *Ghogra*.

In this way, the list of the rivers in the *tantra* though have an extensive look with the inclusion of more numbers of rivers it however, does not mean that by mentioning their name the *tantra* actually intended to recognise them with their real identity. Rather, the *tantra* tried to impose their name upon some local rivers and stream. This is probably an effort to inculcate a sense of sacredness in some regional rivers for local availability. As for example the *tantra* tried to identify

the stream touching *Chandrasaila* as *Jahnavi*<sup>[38]</sup>, stream touching *Indrasaila* as *Saraswati*<sup>[39]</sup> stream flowing from *Pandukuta* as *Narmada*<sup>[40]</sup>, stream from *Kamakhyia* as *Ganga*<sup>[41]</sup>, stream from *Vyaskunda* as *Chandrabhaga*<sup>[42]</sup>, stream from *Somkunda* as *Vaitarani*<sup>[43]</sup>, stream from *Yamsaila* as *Godavari*<sup>[44]</sup> etc. The names and the mode of description itself indicate that all these mountain and *Kunda* from where the great Indian rivers said to be originated are situated mainly around modern Guwahati. The location of some of those mountains has already been identified like *Chandrasaila* as a mountain in *Sinduri Ghopa Mouza* in modern north Guwahati region, *Indrasaila* as *Kshetraparvat* around Guwahati, *Pandukuta* the popular mountain on the southern bank of river *Brahmaputra*<sup>[45]</sup> etc. However, this effort of the *tantra* is exuberant not only in case of the rivers; in describing every topographical features of Assam the *tantra* had adopted this unique allegorical approach. So to say, the *tantra* is habituated enough in using the name of those important topographical identities of Indian repute to describe geographical features of this great tantric land.

Thus, the discussion has further left two sets of question 1) Why the *Kalika Purana* remain silent about the existence of river like *Narmada* and *Godavari* when the another treatise of same regional background mention about them? Can those mentions in the *Yogini Tantra* be regarded as an indication of ever expanding horizon of the people of Assam? 2) If it is so, then why the *Yogini Tantra* was metaphorical enough in using the name of those great Indian rivers merely in locating some local rivers?

### Our observation

From time immemorial the experience of crossing over rivers fascinate the human mind. It was probably because of that fascination we have found in the scripture like *Rg Veda* a complete chapter dedicated to rivers known as *Nadi Stuti*. The presence of this chapter in the *Rg Veda* is nothing but a salutation to the gracious presence of the rivers. It can further be said that the *Nadi Stuti* is an attempt made by our ancestor to solemnise their pleasant experiences of rivers that they cross over when they tried to open up new settlement in different corner of Indian subcontinent.

Accordingly, rivers in the *Kalika Purana* might have defined the domain of geographical reach of the people of this region in terms of their intra-regional contact. From time immemorial, the frequencies of such intra-regional human movement were largely dependent on mercantile activities. Whatever might be the avenues of such contact, the references of those distant rivers in the *Kalika Purana* looks to be an effort of our ancestor to memorize their pleasant experience while coming from or going over those rivers on different purposes. If we look those references of rivers in terms of their real geographical existence an interesting domain appear before us where *Ravi* is situated in the north, *Cuvery* in the south, *Sipra* in the west and *Sita* in the east. Thus, a vast tract of land stretching from Jammu-Kashmir to Tamilndu and from Ujjain to Chinese main land come up which once probably fall within the domain of commercial as well as cultural activities of Kamrupa.

Similarly, the rivers in the *Yogini Tantra* also look to have suggested a domain of bigger dimension as the *tantra* has recorded more numbers of rivers than that of the *Kalika Purana*. But the unique allegorical approach that the *tantra* had adapted created a problem in considering the fact. There is no doubt that the *tantra* was not only aware of more numbers of rivers from Indian heartland but its composer also had a good sum of idea about the importance of those rivers to the religious life of the

people of India. The efforts of the *tantra* to explain only the religious sanctity of those rivers rather than highlighting their real geographical existence itself prove the fact.

Now the question is that why the *tantra* tried to be allegorical when using the name of those great Indian rivers? When we are trying to understand the problem the first point that comes to our mind is that there is a gap of more than five hundred years between the date of composition of these two rivers. In the courses of these years lots more has been changed. During 13<sup>th</sup> century the great *Ahom* had opened up their rule in the eastern frontier of Assam and by the time of the composition of the *Yogini Tantra* they emerged as the paramount political power of Assam. A significant character of *Ahom* rule was their 'close door' <sup>[46]</sup> policy which in turn hampered the frequencies of intra-regional connectivity that the people of this region had enjoyed during the days of the *Kalika Purana* and even after. Under such circumstances, the *tantra* when intended to mention the name of those great Indian river it had to be dependent only on those memories that survive in society form the days of their forefather. On the other hand the *Yogini Tantra* is a tantric composition. The *tantra* by virtue of their nature emphasised on short cut route to *moksa*. Not only to the *moksa*, in every aspect of life had the *tantra* advocated the cause of an abbreviated effort. Accordingly the *Yogini Tantra* here possibly tries to inculcate a sense of religious sanctity of those distantly located rivers in some local rivers and stream so to make them easily available to the people of Assam.

Thus, the discussion may be sum up in following words that there was frequent people's movement between Kamrupa and other parts of India from time immemorial and traces of such intra-regional connectivity survive in the form of the record of rivers in the *Kalika Purana*. With the passes of time it had assumed more vibrant look and more new region came in contact with Kmarupa. This is why the memory of some new rivers from those distant regions has found their mention in the treatise like the *Yogini Tantra*. But, the changing political scenarios suddenly created a restriction and disrupt free movement of people between regions. Under such circumstances it might not have been possible for a treatise like the *Yogini Tantra* of regional background to record anything about those distant river without the help of those pleasant memory that survive here from the days of society's great forefather. Further, the allegorical approach that the *tantra* had adopted while mentioning about those rivers can be appropriated in terms of its tantric affiliation; that to say that the *tantra* possibly tried to revive the sense of sanctity of those great rivers readily available to the people of this land.

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