Gradation of sacred rivers of India and glory of river

Dr. N Venkatesha Rao Ganga and Sri Vadiraja

Abstract

In our Indian culture rivers are not just considered as storages of water. They are respected and worshipped by all with great reverence. Starting from respecting of small amount of water in a vessel as kalasha, even pools, rivers and seas are respected. The term “nadimata” (नदीमाता) refers to its nature of nourishing all irrespective of caste, creed and gender. It quenches our thirst and facilitates cultivation. Relevant mantras are uttered to pass on from generation to generation. Our study is confined to gradation of sacred rivers and glory of river Ganga as seen in a stotra done by Raghavendra tirtha and in Tirthaprabandha composed by saint poet Vadiraja.

Key words: Tirtha prabandha, Importance of rivers, characteristics of big rivers, gradation of rivers with respect to its purification time, by its volume of propitiation, origin

Introduction

Sri Raghavendra Thirtha (1595-1671) was a great scholar, theologian and saint. He was also known as Sudha parimalacharya. Among 25 commentaries written on Nyayasudha his commentary stands unique and it earned him the title “Tippanyaacharyachakravarti”. His mastery in Mimasa earned great honors from kings and the royal scholars of that time. His mastery on Grammar made his preceptor Sudhindratirtha to give him the title “MahabhashyamVenkatanatacharya”. His works include commentaries on the works of Madhva, Jayateertha, and Vyasateertha, interpretation on main upanishads, and a treatise on poorvamimasa. He served as the pontiff of monastery from 1624 to 1671. His commentary on tatparyachandrika of Vyasaraja named “Prakasha” proves his excellence on writing treatise on Vedanta. He has authored more than 50 works. we are referring to his verses titled “Naditaratamya Stotram”. Here gradation of rivers are well depicted and sourced from Brahmanda purana. In Brahmanda purana’s third volume we come across several chapters on the description of rivers.

Sri Vadiraja was born in 1480 AD in Hoovinakere near kumbhashi in South Canara of Kundapur district of Karnataka state. He lived up to the ripe age of 120 years. He was ordained to an ascetic order and became pontiff of Sri Krishna Matha in Udupi at the tender age of 8 years. His preceptor was Vaagishatirtha. Vadiraja led the life of a saint for hundred twelve years which is a record of sorts in world history. He was a great devotional poet, a prolific writer in Sanskrit, Kannada and Tulu languages. He has authored more than hundred works., His works display a combination of fine poetry, sharp wit and humor, a combination of rhythmic verses and philosophical deliberations. His literary works comprise of kavya, khandana, mandana, teeka, tippani, gadya, padya, etc. He visited several pilgrimage centers and composed Tirthaprabandha. It comprises of 235 shlokas with four prabhandas in all four directions clockwise. They give us valid information on Puranic and historical back grounds of the pilgrim centers he visited.

Vadiraja’s compositions are noted for forcible expression, irony, subtle humor, ornate poetic style, unshakable devotion towards lord Vishnu. He refuted other schools of thought with unrivalled mastery of logic. His razor like straight forwardness, sword thrust like logic, penetrating perceptions have earned him title Vadiraja. Each one of his opponents without exception faced defeat in metaphysical encounter with him.
Five characteristics of a Mahanadi are described in the above shloka.

1. The river should originate from a mountain.
2. It should have capacity to wash of sins.
3. It should flow for at-least hundred yojanas (thousand kilometers).
4. Finally it should flow into an ocean.
5. Water should be perennial.

Ranking of the rivers by its capacity of purification by time,

शिवपापप्रणावशनी ।
या सा महानदी ज्ञाया सिवपापप्रणावशनी॥
शतयॊजनमागत्य
शैलाविशवत
सागरम्॥
याम्बुसन्तवतरॆ  तािं प्रिदब्न्त
महानदीम्॥

Shastras prescribe that a clean body should be accompanied by pure mind. One should think positively and avoid negative thoughts. Time needed by rivers for purification has been mentioned. Just a dip in Ganga and Narmada river purifies a person. The river Saraswati takes three days to purify a person whereas the river Yamuna takes five days. The above observation places river Ganga and Narmada on high pedestal.

Ranking of the rivers by its capacity for purification

अधॊपिासफलदा स्मृता सुरतरिंवगणी।
मन्दावकन्यधवफलदा स्मृता गॊदािरी शुभा॥
सरस्वती सूयवसुता जह्नुकन्या च नमवदा
एताश्चतुमवहानद्यॊ महानद ् युत्त
मॊत्तमािः॥

Whatever one gets benefit of fasting for a year, Ganga grants it by a single dip in her river. The river Godavari gifts half of the same benefit of the river Ganga who take bath in her river. In this sense Ganga ranks first and Godavari ranks second. Among all the rivers, Saraswati, Yamuna, Ganga, and Narmada are considered as Mahanadis.

Ranking of the river according to its origin:

The river Ganga originated from the feet of Vishnu during his Trivikramavatar.

Ranking of the rivers by its final destination

Rivers are ranked according to the place where it finally reaches. If river reaches another river, but not ocean ultimately, a dip in that river grants the merit of performing the sacrifice for three days. When river reaches an ocean, it grants the benefit of observing sacrifice for a fortnight. A dip in an ocean grants the benefit of performing sacrifice for a month.

Ganga is superior to all rivers. Then Godavari comes as second. Krishnaveni river flowing near Shrivailakshetra born from Sahyadri mountain comes third.

In the work “स्मृतिमाणिक्यसंग्रहः”, author Anandatirthasunu mentioned as below. )

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Ganga born from Hari’s feet is greatest. Standing closer to her in supremacy is Godavari. She is fifty times lesser to ganga in merits. Later comes Krishnaveni which is thousand units lesser in merits compared to Ganga. Thus Sarasvati river is inferior to krishnaveni by hundred units. Thus, supremacy of Ganga is established.

Surprisingly all these divisions would not clash with each other. In all these aspects Ganga stands first among all rivers.

"If river reaches the ocean then the auspicious merits gifted by river will be hundred times more than other rivers” says a commentary as told by Lord Varaha to Dharnai.
The gradation of rivers is as follows according to the above verse.

1. Ganga river
2. Godavari
3. Krishnaveni (Swamipushkarani and Chadrapushkarini are equal to this river)
4. Kaveri and Sarasvati
5. Sarayu (Tungabhadra is equal to this river)
6. Yamuna
7. Narmada and Sindhu (Bhavanashini is equal to both rivers. Bhavanashini river is nearer to Ahobilam pilgrimage centre)
8. Kumudavati
9. Malapaha (Another branch of river Ganga)
10. Tamraparni, Bhimarathi, Manjula, Pinaikini)
11. All rivers directly joining the oceans are equal to Bhimarathi)
12. Minor Rivers
13. Pushakarini (Pools)
14. Pools at temples or bath ghats.
15. Vapi (Bathing reservoirs enabling to bath with steps to alight into it.
16. Wells are lower than all water storages in gifting auspicious merits.

Arghya (offering holy water with a mantra to the river with respect) Should be given to great rivers if one is taking bath in them. While taking bath in high ranking rivers arghya should not be given to low ranking rivers.

Raghavendrathirtha has composed this stotra giving information about the ranking of rivers. The source for this is Brahmandapurana. This is a collection of the theme spread out in various chapters.

A commentary on Sadaccharasmruti titled “Dipika” composed by Vaishvanatha Narayana pandita tells the same topic with minor variations.

Some rivers coming in contact with the presence of Ganga on some occasion of the year may enhance its status at that time.

Timely restriction for bath in ocean,

Bath in an ocean is restricted to only certain days like parvakala ie, last days of fortnights, samkramanaday of the month or during eclipse day. But bath is allowed in river Ganga during any time of the year. A commentary on sadacharasmruti further mentions that, Bath in ocean is not recommended on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Twelve names of Ganga

Vedavyasa declares in Bhagavata that even the names of rivers and a dip in them purifies the people. This can happen only when names are meaningful and powerful.

While bathing in them, people should contemplate all the names of Ganga mentioned below. Nandini, Nalini, Sita, Malati, Malapaha, Vishnupadasambhoota, Ganga, Tripathagamini, Bhagirathi, Bhogavati, Jahnavi, Tridasheshawari,

The lord’s form to be remembered while bathing in Ganga

Vadilpa appealed to sage Vasishta, to guide on forms of lord to be remembered while bathing in rivers. For this, Vashishta replied,” oh king, while bathing InGanga one should remember lord Madhava who is bearing conch, disc, mace and the shining lotus”.

Description of river Ganga by Vadiraja in Tirthaprabhandha.) Ganga, you are enhancer of our virtues

गंगी तं शुभसंचयय जयजय दोषादनां नित्यति।
ज्ञातं यक्षुन्तकोतिलभयुक्तत्वाध्रं यस्यसिः॥

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Oh Ganga, I learnt that you are favorable to good souls but not for others. Whatever merits await persons performing one crore sacrifices same benefits you pass on to your pious devotees and keep the wrong doers away. When people look at your flow with devotion, drink water from river, taking holy bath in the river, meditating on you in their mind, singing devotional songs in your honor you make them purified and prosperous.

B) You are compassionate towards the distressed:

Oh Ganga, Now we have learnt that you are compassionate towards unfortunates. Because, to begin with, you took shelter in four faced Brahma’s hand. Then contact with Sri Hari’s feet made you gain much respect. Then you flowed in heaven for a while, before your sojourn at golden Meru mountain. You Stayed in kailasa on Rudra’s head before entry to Vaikunta? If not for these reasons, then why you have not come nearer to me? Instead of pleading her directly to enter our mind and remove sins the poet used paryaya(deviation) path and presented his pleadings. Thus, by use of paryayalankara poet has said she has no way to escape from purifying the devotees. Just a prayer or pleading to make us sinless looks not attractive either for a devotee or for the God. Divine entities like Vishnu, Shiva and Ganga are benefactors of knowledge. They bestow knowledge to true devotees.

Poet questioning Ganga, for not purifying him

Hey Ganga why have you rejected me? You have travelled from satyaloka till our earth. That can be considered as distant but not my mind which is nearer. You have cut across impregnable mountains and reached this earth. Wicked thoughts of my mind shiver when they hear your name. Do you think my mind is so impregnable that you cannot penetrate? hey Ganga, just your touch was enough to sanctify Sagar’s sons. Have you lost that power now since you headed towards earth to fulfill our intentions. c)You are the beloved daughter of lord Narayana:

Oh, Ganga, your father Narayana does not tolerate separation from his daughter. That is why there are so many temples of shri Hari on banks your river. He is as Narayana in Badarikashrama, as Rama in Prayaga, as Gopalakrishna in Alakabharagirthi confluence, as Govinda in Hastinapura, as Sri Vedavyasa in Vyasashrama, as Hari in Haridwara, as Shvetavara in Sookarakshtra, as Venimadhava in Prayaga, as Bindumadhava in Varanasi. Not this much. Hari has his permanent abode in your husband’s residence too. (Sea)

Poet questioning delay in arrival of Ganga to the mind

Though it is natural, poet has used this with upreksha-alankara and beautifully highlighted the theme. Thus,a rthalamkara is seen in this description. Vishnu rests in ocean is the theme which is proved in Vedas and puranas.

Poet questioning delay in arrival of Ganga to the mind
Hey river from heaven, why are you indifferent towards me? Is it because my knowledge is inadequate or have I hurt the good or with my false notion have, I made baseless allegations on noble persons? Not the first reason. Did remnants of Sagars sixty thousand sons knew off your existence before? Not the second reason. Did not Sagars sons insult Hari during his Kapila incarnation. Not the third reason. Did not Sagars sons falsely implicate Kapila for theft? Hey Ganga just like you are you are considerate towards Sagara’s sons please forgive our sins.

Conclusion
With the observation of the above facts we must be aware of the divine nature of rivers. They are not insentient and they are goddesses. Their compassion and love for knowledge should be put into practice by us at all times. Their sanctity should be protected by us always. While recognizing river. their origin, their greatness should be borne in mind. Thus, the river basins can be taken care of to maintain the cleanliness.

Foot notes
1. Smrutimuktavali-Jalashahedabhaga shloka 4
2. Smrutimuktavali.nadisnanaphalabhaga,shloka4-5.
3. Smrutimuktavali.nadisnanaphala-1-3
4. Smrutimuktavali..Tirthamahima--shloka,2
5. Bhagavata-05-17-10.
6. Naditaratamyastotra-shloka,1
8. Smrutimauktavali.shloka 6
9. Sadacharasmruti 5th shloka’s vyshv. Smrutimauktavali anatachrya vyakhyana
11. Sadacharasmruti 5th shloka’s vyshvanatachrya vyakhyana
12. Smrutimauktavali –shloka 9
13. Sadacharasmruti 5th shloka’s vyshvanatachrya vyakhyana
14. Bhagavata-05-17-01
15. Sadacharasmrutivyakhyana -Translation-
gurusarvabhouma-Nov.-1973-page31
16. Smrutimauktavali –shloka 2,3.(Snalale mutriopopa)
17. Tirthaprabandha-uttaraprabandha- shloka 22,
18. Tirthaprabandha-uttaraprabandha- shloka 15
19. Tirthaprabandha-uttaraprabandha- shloka 21
20. commentary of Narayanacharya.
21. Ambbruni sookta.Rigveda-x mandala-125 sookts -07shloka
22. Tirthaprabandha-uttaraprabandha- shloka-18
23. Tirthaprabandha-uttaraprabandha- shloka-19

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5. Anandateerthisunu-Smrutimanikyasamgraha-Edit-Nagasampige-Poorna prajnasamshodhana mandiram-Bangalore-2005