

INDIVIDUALITY OF THE INDIAN RIVERS: UPANISHADIC EVIDENCE

Introduction: There are generally, four sources from where water is available to this world; viz. rain water, underground water, river water and sea water. The rain water is nature's seasonal cyclic arrangement for which the sea water is the source; (since clouds are mostly formed from the sea water).

Of these, we depend upon the rains for dry crops and drinking water. It also falls on forests, mountains and open spaces. The source for ground water is principally rain water. In fact rains are the means which carry water all over the world and gives a good shower-wash to our earth planet. The river water and sea water are also the sources of ground water in their vicinity. The ground water is available for use only with efforts. We have no control over that. The river water is sweet and palatable to drink. For over populated cities and wet crops, the river water supply is arranged with the help of dams, canals and pipes. Sea water is saline. It is directly neither used for crops nor for drinking purpose. Its use is for navigation and fishing. It is the biggest reservoir of water, controls mostly ecological conditions of the whole world which controls the temperature of the earth's surface. Of these water resources, man has no control either on sea or rain water or ground water. He can only manipulate with rivers for his water problems here and there.

The water covers over 70% of earth's surface. It is considered to be universal solvent. Water is essential to life since it makes up 60-70% of substance in the human body. Water is a colourless and odourless liquid; but not tasteless. It is wholesome and palatable. It has its own taste. Since drinking of water gives a lot of satisfaction to all the living beings. All living beings need water from time to time to make up loss of water in the body. For want of water they feel thirsty. The thirst can be quenched only by drinking water and there is no substitution to it.

The Indian concept of sacredness of rivers: Every nation has got tradition of its own. So India has its own. Our tradition or religious background traces its origin to Vedas. Rigveda refers to some of the rivers with a sense of holiness. Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati etc. some ten rivers are mentioned here. The rivers are also mentioned in the Puranas. We have both religious view and materialistic view; that means we just use it as water for various purposes. All the river bear the names of the female deities with the exception of one or two rivers. People worship them and take a holy dip in them.

Each river, having its origin in some mountain, flows down, finds its way by virtue of its gravity and slope of the land and gains momentum as it flows. On the way tributaries also join the main stream. The panoramic view of the flow of river is a beauty in itself. The flow of great rivers which carry huge magnitude of water will not rest till they join the sea. Indians have got a firm faith in these rivers. They worship them, bathe in them, with a firm belief of a holy dip to destroy individual sins.

Individuality of each river: Science explains the water is made up of two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen. Scientific experiments have helped to explain the brief contents of the Upanishad (Ākāshād Vāyuhu Vāyoh Agnihi Agnerāpah Adbhyah Pr̄thivi Pr̄thivya Oshadhayah Oshadhayah Annam etc.)

The sea water is salty. The river water, lake water, well water etc. are generally palatable to drink, with exceptions. The river waters differ because they flow through different beds of minerals and vegetation. They may differ in taste. Scientific investigations have revealed that bacteria does not sustain for long in Ganges (ref. Jadhavpur University report and observation of a British doctor).

At this stage, a question arises, as to why rivers are considered holy even today when the recycled water flows in them. For example take the Ganges; the water which touched the feet of Lord Vishnu first flew and entered the sea. There after the subsequent is merely the recycled water or the general water gained by the clouds of sea water. Perhaps the river is called still holy since the flow is confined to the same place in length and breadth. Similar view holds good for all the other rivers which are recognised as holy. According to the present day scientific studies one halts at this point.

Further explanation in the Scriptures: The scriptures explain that the rivers join the sea. The river water mixes with the sea water. They will not become one with the sea. The river water particles remain adjoining to the sea water particles. When the rivers remain in the sea they retain their identity; i.e. Ganges, Godavari etc. The rivers use sea or ocean as a reservoir for re-cycling. From the view of common man or science, rivers are not distinguishable when they are in the sea. What happens further?

Sun lifts the water from the sea in the form of water vapour but it is the wind god Vayu who identifies them distinctly by their name and make separate clouds and consign them to the respective rivers.

“Svakī yamudakam Nadhya Samudre-Naiva Jante |

Vāyustu Tat Prthug Jnāatva Meghe Krtva Pravarshati”|

Atharvana Upanishad Bhashya of Anandaśīrtha||.

Thus the rivers have retained their original water and holiness too. Each is a deity flowing in the form of a river. The rivers are rivers and the sea is sea, distinct in their nature. This is the divine administrative arrangement or mechanism of restoration of respective river waters.

The gradation of rivers: All rivers no doubt contains only waters; nevertheless all of them are not equal. It is not said from the point of physical parameters like length, breadth or the quantity of water discharged etc. They are graded based on the governing deities of each river. Saint Raghavendra Swami has composed a small work known as “**Nadī Tāratamya-Stotra**” which finds its origin in **Brahmanda Purana**. The rivers are graded and divided into twelve groups. The river Ganges is graded first. The Godavari River occupies second place. The third is Krishnaveni and so on. The river Bhimarati is counted last. The lakes, ponds, wells come next to rivers.

Effect of bathing and worshiping each river: Just watching the flow of river is highly enchanting, inspiring, pleasing and relaxing. One forgets everything when one merges with

the nature. The conception of sacredness of rivers is on the basis of Rigveda and Puranas. “**Imam-Me Gange Yamune Sarasvati Shatudri Stomam Sachatā Parushnayaḥ || Ashiknyaḥ Marud-Vrudhe Vitastayaḥ Jīkiye Shrunkhya Sushomayaḥ**”|| Rigveda Here, one should understand, the name of the river is also the name of the governing deity. These Rigveda Mantras are used to invoke the deities in the water used for Abhishekam of the Lord. In all the pilgrim centres the river water which is considered holy is used for Abhishekam of the deities.

Therefore, it is not a belief or faith just based on superstitions. Perhaps, the Vedic traditions must be the reason for a firm faith in worshipping the rivers and taking a dip in them. Hence bathing in holy rivers bears significance.

The reward of worshipping and bathing in each river is different. If the bathing in the Ganges washes away all the sins, the river in Prayāg bestows salvation if death occurs there. Some rivers are precious to perform the last rites. Some other rivers like Narmada, Gomati etc. are famous for healing specific diseases. The rivers, mountains, sea and the forests are the various parts of Bhārat Mātā (Bhū Devi). If we do not cultivate respect then how will we worship Bhārat Mātā ! (Samudra-Vasane Devi Parvata Sthana Mandite ||---).

Individuality of the rivers: From the foregoing discussions it may be observed that-

- a) Every river is restored with its original water seasonally. Thus all the rivers contain their original waters at all the times hence they always remain sacred.
- b) The river deities have gradations. The Ganges is the first in the list and Bhimarathi comes in the last. There are twelve grades. Each river has its own rewarding capacity.
- c) Each river maintains its individuality in respect of water, rewards and the deity. This phenomena should be preserved at any cost and not to be disturbed or ignored.
- d) Sometimes two or three rivers meet on their own on their way to their final destination. Such a meeting place of the river is called **Sangam**. That place is considered as the most sacred place for the purposes of bathing and worshipping.

Pollution of Rivers: We have mentioned in the above paragraphs, the sacredness of the rivers. These are the life streams both spiritually and also from the point of view of material prosperity.

The pollution of rivers is a disturbing factor. Of the causes of the pollution of river water, two are major contributing factors; viz. discharge of industrial waste into the river and discharging sewage water into the river.

Industries need large quantities of water. Therefore, they are established on the banks of rivers. Best example could be leather and textile industries on the banks Ganges at Kanpur. Similar cases in other cities. The second type of pollution is due to the discharge of sewage water of the cities and towns situated on the banks of the rivers. The latter type of pollution is more harmful comparatively. The toxics and varieties of acids and poisonous matters cause health hazards and spread worst diseases.

In these days whosoever visits pilgrim centres, if one bathes or drinks water there, one is bound to fall sick. People carry drinking water all the way. This is nothing but due to the pollution of the river.

Conclusion: From the forgoing discussions it is observed that water is the essence of life. The rivers, sea, mountains, mother earth have governing deities. In this land God (Bhagavan Vishnu) has incarnated twenty-two times according to Bhagavata. All this arrangement is the

infrastructure for His stay and finally for the sake of all living beings. Hence it is the duty and responsibility of every one individually, collectively, industrially, administratively (Government) and so on to keep the rivers clean and respect their individuality and take advantage of bathing on them and worshipping them. Keeping these facts in mind, water should be used for all other purposes of prosperity of our country.

Om Tat Sat
