

## SOME NOTES ON PRAYĀGA-MĀHATMYA

Prayāga is one of the holiest places in India. The importance of this *tīrtha*<sup>1</sup>, also called *tīrtharāja*<sup>2</sup> for its eminence, derives from the fact that for Indian people the confluence of two rivers or of a river with the Ocean has a special meaning. As rivers are considered holy entities, the meeting-point of two streams adds the sacredness of the first river to that of the second one. Prayāga excels all these meeting-points because it stands at the confluence of the two most sacred Indian rivers: the Gaṅgā and the Yamūnā<sup>3</sup>.

1. It derives from the root *tī* «to traverse, to cross over (a river)». This word appears in rather a lot of passages of the *Ṛg-veda* (cf., for example, *Ṛgveda* I,169,6; I,173,11; IV,29,3) with the meaning of «road» or «way». In the *Sāṅkhāyana-brāhmaṇa* (II,9) it is said that Day and Night are the sea that absorbs everything, while twilights are the unfathomable *tīrthas* (of this sea) (vide P. V. KANE, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, IV [Poona, 1973<sup>1</sup>], p. 554). Exactly as some parts of the human body are considered purer than others, so some places of the earth are considered more sacred than others. *Tīrthas* are sacred for three main reasons: for wonderful natural characters of the place, or for the splendour of the waters, or because some wise men frequented them (cf. *Mahābhārata*, cr. ed., XIII,111,16-18; *Padma-purāṇa* [Ānandāśrama-saṃskṛta-granthāvalī, n. 131, 4 vols., 1893-94] VI,237,25b-27a; *Skanda-purāṇa*, *Kāśī-khaṇḍa* [Bombay, 1908], 6,42b-44; *Nārada-purāṇa* [Bombay, 1905], II,62,46-47; BHATTA LAKṢMĪDHARA, *Kṛtyakalpataru*, *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa*, ed. by K. V. R. Aiyangar [Baroda, 1942], I, pp. 7-8, quoted from *Mahābhārata*).

2. The *Brahma-purāṇa* (quoted in *Tristhalisetu*, Ānandāśrama, 1915, p. 13) says: «*prakṛṣṭatvāt prayāgo 'sau prādhānyād rājasabdavān /*». The expression: *tīrtharājo jayati prayāgaḥ* forms the closing of each strophe of an interesting *Prayāga-stotra* (cf. *Padma-purāṇa*, VI, 23,28-35: the *Prayāga-stotra* continues till v. 40); in fact *Tīrtharāja* is a very common name of Prayāga: for example see *Padma-purāṇa*, I,46,15,16; *Nārada-purāṇa*, II,63,3; etc.

3. About the origins of the Gaṅgā, the *Brahma-purāṇa*, 73,68-69 — resuming the well-known legend of *Rāmāyaṇa*, I,42-44 — says that she was born in Heaven from Viṣṇu's feet and then for a long time she was kept by Śiva's locks. The *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*, II,8,109, and other *Purāṇas* affirm that the Gaṅgā was originated by Viṣṇu's left big-toe. *Matsya*-, 121,38-41; *Brahmāṇḍa*-, II,18,39-41; *Padma-purāṇa*, I,3,65-66 say that Śiva let her flow down from his twisted hair in seven streams: three of them flowing towards the East (Nalinī, Hlādinī, Pāvānī); three towards

The *tīrtha* of Prayāga, rich in the sacredness and the redeeming power deriving from both rivers, is considered the holiest place in the Earth<sup>4</sup>. « He who tells the truth, has subdued his anger, has reached a great *ahimsā*, follows *dharma*, knows the *tattva* and is a lover of cows and *brāhmaṇas*, is freed from his sins and attains the fruits of his desire by bathing at the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamunā »<sup>5</sup>.

To complete such a power, according to tradition deep beneath the two streams the Sarasvatī mingles its waters<sup>6</sup> with the dark ones of the Yamunā and the clear ones of the Gaṅgā<sup>7</sup>, reappearing in Prayāga<sup>8</sup> after disappearing in the Indian Desert, in the place called *vinaśana*<sup>9</sup>. The second reason raising Prayāga above all other *tīrthas* consists in the fact that great Gods dwell inside its *maṇḍala*<sup>10</sup>.

The spiritual centre of the sacred complex of Prayāga is the *Akṣaya Vaṭa*, the undecaying banyan tree<sup>11</sup>. Śiva dwells in it, but texts often say that Viṣṇu lies near or on the banyan<sup>12</sup>. The third Great God,

the West (Sitā, Cakṣus and Sindhu) and the *Bhāgīrathī* (cf. P. V. KANE, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 587). *Padma-*, I,43,56 affirms that she flowed down from Śiva's matted hair, and *Padma-*, VI, 23,3 says she was generated from Viṣṇu's feet resembling lotus flowers. So the origin of this river is sanctified by its connection with the two greatest Indian divinities. As regards the Yamunā, she is a Goddess, daughter of the Sun (*tapanasya sūtā devī*: cf. *Padma-purāṇa*, I,41,19a; 45,23a; 47,5a; *Nārada-purāṇa*, II,63,51b; etc.), known also as Kālindī, because texts say she was born from mount Kalinda.

4. « *Jaghana* »: cf. *Mahābhārata*, cr. ed., III (Poona, 1942), 83,71; *Padma-*, I,43,19; 47,6; *Kūrma-purāṇa*, I,35,11; *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa*, 3, pp. 142, 151.

5. *Padma-purāṇa*, I,41,16-17.

6. *Sitāsītā tu yā dhārā sarasvatyā vidarbhitā // taṃ mārgaṃ brahmalokasya sṛṣṭikartā sasarja vai (Nārada-purāṇa, II,63,22b-23a).*

7. « *Sitāsita* ». The wonderful sight offered by the mixing of the two streams has been often sung by poets: for example, see Kālidāsa, *Raghuvamśa*, 13,54 *passim*.

8. The confluence of the three rivers was compared with *omkāra*, the mystical *mantra* which comprehends the whole Universe, and the three parts of the syllable *om* are respectively said to be the Sarasvatī, the Yamunā and the Gaṅgā.

9. Let's remember that in such a place a very important religious act is performed, connected with the Sarasvatī and called *yātsattra*, itinerant sacrificial session. For a description of this rite and for bibliographic references on this subject, see J. ENSINK, *Problems of the Study of Pilgrimage in India*, in « *Indologica Taurinensia* », vol. II, Torino, 1974, pp. 69-70.

10. We can find the measure of Prayāga's *maṇḍala* (extending as far as five *yojanas*) in *Nārada-*, II,63,44; *Padma-*, I,45,8; 48,10; *Kṛtyakalpataru*, VIII,3, p. 147; for the other versions see the « *Concordance Table (I)* », in the Appendix. For an exhaustive description of Prayāga's subdivisions, cf. G. BONAZZOLI, *Prayāga and its Kumbha Melā*, in « *Purāṇa* », vol. XIX, 1, pp. 126-127 and P. V. KANE, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 598-599.

11. Cf. *Nārada-*, II,63,138b-140a; *Padma-*, VI,25,7-13a: there is a particular coincidence of thought between v. 8 (*ādivaṭaḥ samākhyātaḥ kalpānte 'pi ca drśyate / sete viṣṇur yasya patre 'to 'yamavyayaḥ smṛtaḥ //*) and *Nārada-*, II,63,139-140a (*nir-gacchanti jagatsarvaṇi vaṭamūle na [reading na instead of sa] dahyate / hariś ca bhagavān[s] tatra prajāpati-puraskṛtaḥ // āste tatra puṭe devi pādānguṣṭhaṃ dhayan śiśuḥ*).

12. In fact, the *vaṭa* appears alternatively as an abode, or under the protection, of Śiva and Viṣṇu, with a prevalence of the latter. *Padma-*, I,41,10: Śiva (Maheśvara) watches over the *vaṭa*; 43,13: Viṣṇu rests at the foot of the *vaṭa*; 48,6: Maheśvara

Brahmā, is often mentioned together with Viṣṇu, Śiva or other Gods in the eulogies of Prayāga<sup>13</sup>, but only once, as far as we know, is mentioned by himself with the indication of his own abode<sup>14</sup>, lying « to the North of Pratiṣṭhāna »<sup>15</sup>. Moreover the preeminence of « *Tīrtharāja* » is strengthened by its own name, which was connected with the root *yaj* (=to sacrifice): « Brahmā, who is the soul of all beings, performed the first sacrifice here: therefore this place became known as Prayāga »<sup>16</sup>.

In the area of this so sacred spot, minor devotional centres developed. The believers can gain there<sup>17</sup> special benefits, by means of precise offerings, among which self-sacrifice excels.

In fact an inseparable relation binds *tīrtha* to *tīrthayātrā*, because to go on pilgrimage means to enjoy the sacredness of the *tīrtha*<sup>18</sup>: therefore texts not only describe the religious observances that are to be fulfilled in the holy place, but also that which are to be fulfilled at

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is present in the *vaṭa*; *Nārada*, II,63,139-140a: Hari-Viṣṇu lies on the *vaṭa*; *Padma*, VI,25,8: Viṣṇu lies on the *vaṭa* leaves; 25,10: Mādhava dwells there; in *Padma*, VI,93, the *vaṭa* is not expressly mentioned, but the whole etiologic myth is referred to Viṣṇu. In *Kṛtyakalpataru*, VIII,3, p. 137, Śiva watches over the *vaṭa*; on p. 142, Viṣṇu lies at the foot of the *vaṭa*; on p. 151 Śiva assumes the shape of the *vaṭa*. Also vide P. V. KANE, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 600 e G. BONAZZOLI, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-149. Particularly about the *Akṣaya Vaṭa* see P. K. GODE, *The History of the Akṣayavaṭa (undecaying Banian Tree) at Prayāga and Gayā as revealed by Some Sanskrit Texts (between the First Century A.D. and 1900)*, in: « *Studies in Indian Cultural History* », vol. I (V.I.S. 9), Hoshiarpur, 1961, pp. 374-383.

13. Cf. *Padma-purāna*, I,41,6; 43,15; 46,15 (Brahmā always remembers Prayāga); 48,9; VI,93,8 (it hints at the presence of Brahmā near Viṣṇu); 93,9 (Brahmā performs a *vājimedha* sacrifice); 93,17 (Viṣṇu affirms that Brahmā will stay in Prayāga together with the other gods); *Nārada*, II,63,8; 63,22b-24a (Brahmā is considered the only creator of the *sītāsita*).

14. *Padma-purāna*, I,48,5b.

15. It is a place which, together with the Vāsuki pond, the two Kambala and Aśvatara *nāgas* and the Bahumūlaka *nāga*, marks the boundaries of the Prajāpati-*kṣetra*: cf. *Padma*, I,41,4-5a (for the other versions, see the « Concordance Table » [I], in the Appendix). On the possible identification of Pratiṣṭhāna with Sāमुद्रa-kūpa, cf. *Padma*, I,43,30 and P. V. KANE, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 599 and 614.

16. *Vana-parvan*, 85, 14: *yatrāyajata bhūtātām purvam eva pitāmahaḥ / prayāgam iti vikhyātām tasmād bharatasattama //*. The *Skanda-purāna* explains the etymology of Prayāga by taking into separate consideration the two parts *-pra* and *-yāga* composing this word: *prakṛṣṭām sarvayāgebhyaḥ prayāgam iti gīyate / (Kāśīkhaṇḍa, 7,49). Tristhalīsetu* (p. 13), after this *pāda*, adds: *drṣṭvā prakṛṣṭayāgebhyaḥ puṣṭebhyo dakṣiṇādībhiḥ / prayāgam iti tannāma kṛtām hariharādībhiḥ //*. Also vide P. V. KANE, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 597-598; S. G. KANTAWALA, *Prayāga-māhātmya, a Study*, in « *Purāna* », vol. IX, n. 1 (1967), pp. 104-105; G. BONAZZOLI, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-123.

17. About the *sub-tīrthas* of Prayāga, cf. P. V. KANE, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 614-615; S. G. KANTAWALA, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-120; G. BONAZZOLI, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-149.

18. In the greatest *tīrthas* the phenomenon of the internal pilgrimage can be noticed: it is the visit to the various *sub-tīrthas* of the sacred complex, according to a pre-established sequence and in a determined time. With reference to this, it is noteworthy the *pañcakrośī*, the deambulation which must be performed all around Benares,

the beginning and during the *tīrthayātrā*<sup>19</sup>. So great is the care required by *tīrthayātrā* that, according to the *Nārada-purāna*<sup>20</sup>, it is better not to start on a *tīrthayātrā* for a man who is engaged in the duties of the *gṛhasthāśrama*, as these duties would divert his mind<sup>21</sup>.

Such religious practice finds its deep roots in the Great Epic<sup>22</sup> — which probably describes a practice that has been known by the people — and is still living nowadays. Among the places of worship suggested to the pilgrims, Prayāga, together with Kāśī and Gayā (Tristhalī<sup>23</sup>), is one of the most important. The benefits that can be obtained there are largely illustrated by the various purāṇic redactions of *Prayāga-māhātmya* — viz. those in the *Padma-purāṇa*<sup>24</sup>, *Matsya-purāṇa*<sup>25</sup>, *Kūrma-purāṇa*<sup>26</sup>, *Agni-purāṇa*<sup>27</sup> and *Nārada-purāṇa*<sup>28</sup> — by that in the *Mahā-*

19. P. V. Kane dedicates a whole section of his work to *tīrthayātrā* (see P. V. KANE, *op. cit.*, IV, section IV [pp. 552-827]). The rules which must be observed before undertaking *tīrthayātrā* are reported on pages 583-584; see also J. ENSINK, *op. cit.*, p. 67 and K. V. R. AIYANGAR, *Introduction* to the eighth book — i.e. *Tīrthavivekanakāṇḍa* — of the *Kṛtyakalpataru*, *op. cit.*, p. XXIV.

20. Cf. *Nārada-purāṇa*, II, 62,23ab.

21. The pilgrimage is the act which really puts the faith of devotees to the test because many dangers are to be confronted on the way (cf. C. JACQUES, *Les Pèlerinages en Inde*, in « Les Pèlerinages », Éditions du Seuil, Sources Orientales III, Paris, 1960, p. 166 and fn. 5). Moreover it is not rare for pilgrims arriving at a *tīrtha* to fall into the hands of greedy, unscrupulous *brāhmaṇas*, real profiteers on religion, asking for heavy tributes for the completion of the prescribed rites: see C. JACQUES, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-182 (with particular regard to Gayā *brāhmaṇas'* greed). The bad habit of accepting gifts by *brāhmaṇas* was so largely spread that we can find verses condemning this practice in various *Purāṇas*: for example see *Padma-purāṇa*, I,42,15b-17a; *Matsya-purāṇa* (Kalikātā nagare, 1876), 104,14-15; *Kūrma-purāṇa* (with English Translation), ed. by A. S. Gupta, Varanasi, 1972, I,34,42-43; *Nārada-purāṇa*, II,63,121b-123a; *Kṛtyakalpataru*, VIII,3, p. 140.

22. Many chapters of the third book of the *Mahābhārata* (cr. ed. chs. 80-153; Bombay ed. chs. 80-156) grouped under the title of « *Tīrthayātrāparvan* » are dedicated to *tīrthayātrā*. In this *parvan* the principal *tīrthas* which are to be visited and honoured during an ideal *parikramaṇa* — entire deambulation — of India, are enumerated by Pulastya to Bhīṣma and then by Dhaumya. The *parikramaṇa* described by Pulastya takes place from West to East and reaches 270 *tīrthas*, but the Author tells it rather confusedly. The second description is done by wise Dhaumya. In it only 60 *tīrthas* are mentioned, including some of the most important ones that were already quoted in the first enumeration. Because of these repetitions and also for the simple fact that this exposition immediately follows the first, Bhardwaj (cf. S. M. BHARDWAJ, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimages in India; a Study in Cultural Geography*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1973, pp. 29-31) considers it a late interpolation. *Contra* Shejwalkar (cf. T. S. SHEJWALKAR, *The Mahābhārata Data for Aryan Expansion in India*, p. 207) considers the list of *tīrthas* indicated by Dhaumya the original one, because it shows « a less advanced stage of Aryan expansion in India » (quoted in S. M. BHARDWAJ, *op. cit.*, p. 31, fn. 6).

23. Cf. NĀRĀYAṆA BHATṬA, *Tristhalīsetu*, cit. ed., pp. 1-72 (Prayāga); pp. 72-316 (Kāśī); pp. 316-379 (Gayā).

24. Cf. *Padma-purāṇa*, cit. ed., I,40-49, pp. 76-87.

25. Cf. *Matsya-purāṇa*, cit. ed., 102-111, pp. 358-382.

26. Cf. *Kūrma-purāṇa*, cit. ed., I,34-37, pp. 228-239.

27. Cf. *Agni-purāṇa*, ed. by. Acārya Baladeva Upādhyāya, Kashi Sanskrit Series n. 174, Varanasi, 1966, 111, pp. 181-182.

28. Cf. *Nārada-purāṇa*, cit. ed., II,62-63, pp. 325b-330a.



*bhārata*<sup>29</sup> and by those in such mediaeval works as the *Kṛtyakalpataru* by Lakṣmīdhara<sup>30</sup> and the *Vīramitrodaya* by Mitra Miśra<sup>31</sup>.

Even after a superficial examination<sup>32</sup>, we immediately notice the difference in style and contents between the redaction of the *Prāyaga-māhātmya* of the *Nārada-purāṇa* and the others. In fact, if on one hand it agrees with the *Prayāga-māhātmya* of the *Padma-purāṇa* and of the other texts<sup>33</sup>, on the other hand — when it deals with the rules relating to *tīrthayātrā* and tonsure — it seems fully original if compared with the other works<sup>34</sup>.

In particular, the former of the two *adhyāyas* dealing with Prayāga<sup>35</sup>, shows the rules of *tīrthayātrā* and *muṇḍana*. It is true that several of its verses can be found, and are almost identical, in some passages of the *Mahābhārata* and various *Purāṇas*<sup>36</sup> — that are quoted in turn by Lakṣmīdhara in the *Kṛtyakalpataru*<sup>37</sup> —: however these passages are not included in texts expressly devoted to Prayāga.

The above-mentioned chapter 62 of the second section of the *Nārada-purāṇa* is introduced by Vasiṣṭha who tells the dialogue between princess Mohinī and her *purohita*, *brāhmaṇa* Vasu.

So Mohinī asks *brāhmaṇa* Vasu to explain to her the *Prayāga-māhātmya* together with the rules of *tīrthayātrā*. Vasu begins by emphasizing that the pilgrimage to a *tīrtha* is superior even to sacrifices (vv. 1-7). *Tīrthayātrā* excels any religious act in benefits and sacredness: but most important of all for him who undertakes it, is that the believer be pure, self-controlled, devoted: in fact the wicked man (*viz.* the atheist, the sceptic, etc.) does not reach the benefits of the *tīrtha*; on the contrary any benefit is obtainable by the man who succeeded in subduing himself: those who undertake a pilgrimage according to the rules are able to overcome every obstacle and obtain Heaven (vv. 8-18)<sup>38</sup>. « Fish dwell in *tīrthas* like the Ganges, etc.; a great number of birds are in the sky. [Men] who have left the internal disposition of devotion

29. Cf. *Mahābhārata*, cr. ed., *Vanaparvan* (Poona, 1942), 83,65-85, pp. 306-307.

30. BHATTA LAKṢMĪDHARA, *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa*, cit. ed., pp. 136-153.

31. MITRA MIŚRA, *Tīrthaprakāśa* in *Vīramitrodaya*, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series n. 242, Benares, 1918, pp. 321-355.

32. See the « Concordance Table » (I), in the Appendix.

33. These concordances may be found above all in the description of the *sub-tīrthas* of Prayāga.

34. On the contrary, for example, the problem of the tonsure in Prayāga is widely discussed in medieval works such as *Tristhalisetu*, cit., p. 17 and p. 22; *Tīrthaprakāśa*, cit., pp. 335-338.

35. I.e. *adhyāya* 62.

36. Cf. the « Concordance Table » (II), in the Appendix.

37. Lakṣmīdhara himself comments upon the verses corresponding to *Nārada*, II,62,12b-13a; 14b; 18b; 19a; 25; then he quotes the Śaṅkha's notes about vv. 12b-13a and the Paiṭhinasi's ones about vv. 37 and 43 (cf. *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa*, cit. ed., pp. 4, 5, 6, 9-10, 11).

38. There are three *pādas*, put between brackets, immediately after v. 17, in the edition we used.

(*bhava*<sup>39</sup>) [towards *tīrthas*] do not receive the fruit from the *tīrtha* nor from Heaven (*devāyatanāt mukhyāt*<sup>40</sup>). On the contrary man must place this feeling of devotion in his own heart and honour *tīrthas* (vv. 19-20a) ». Then the importance of *tīrthayātrā* is asserted, both for the *brahmacārin* (who must undertake it according to his own *guru*'s rules) and for the *brāhmaṇa* — who has to renounce the privilege of performing sacrifices — (even if someone says: « All *tīrthas* cannot balance a sacrifice to Agni [v. 23b]<sup>41</sup>), and the main rules concerning the undertaking of *tīrthayātrā*<sup>42</sup> are shown in a concise but nevertheless complete way — viz. the *upavāsa*, the devoted salutation to Gaṇeśa, to *Pitṛs*, to *brāhmaṇas*, to *sadhus*, then the *pradakṣiṇā* of the village performed in mendicant clothes, and so on<sup>43</sup> — (vv. 20b-31a). Besides, it is allowed to undertake pilgrimage only by particular means of transport: for example, the man who undertakes it on a cart hauled by cows commits a crime similar to the killing of a cow; who does it on a cart hauled by horses does not obtain fruits, and who goes to a *tīrtha* on a litter obtains only half of the fruits: only the devotee who reaches it on foot obtains fourfold fruits. Moreover the man who performs *tīrthayātrā* with his own body sheltered, and then bathes in a *tīrtha*, obtains only the fruits of this act and not those of *tīrthayātrā*: in the

39. In the Lakṣmīdhara's comment (cit. ed., p. 9) « *bhavo* » is the disposition of the mind which is entirely purified.

40. The two parts of the *śloka* are simply juxtaposed but, without doubt, there is an implied simile: like fish, etc., that live in *tīrthas*, do not receive fruits from them because they are « passive » beings, so men who have not a feeling of devotion do not receive benefits from visiting holy places. The whole sixth *adhyāya* of the *Kāśī-khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda-purāna* (*Tīrthādhyāya*), besides containing the description of the main *tīrthas* apart from Kāśī, emphasizes the idea that the efficacy of sacred places is subordinate to the faith and purity of the pilgrim who visits them. On the *adhyāya* 27 the *Kāśī-khaṇḍa* says quite the opposite: « The worms, the insect, the winged insect and the like that die on the banks of the Gaṅgā, and the trees which fall from her sides, all reach the supreme bliss too (v. 134). But this verse does not contrast the speech on the need of personal purity: the hyperbole is often used to emphasize the superior sacredness of *tīrthas*.

41. This verse (which appears in *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa* — p. 9 — too, quoted from the *Brahma-purāna*) shows that the ritual logic is nevertheless a landmark in hindu spiritual life.

42. Vide *supra* note 19. The first chapter of *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa* (*Tīrthayātrā-vidhi*) is dedicated to these rules.

43. *Nārada-purāna*, II,62,30: *tato grāmāntaraṃ gatvā śrāddhaśeṣasya bhojanam / tataḥ pratīdinaṃ gacchet pratigrahavivarjitaḥ //*. Then the first two *pādas* of v. 31 contain the only hint regarding the pilgrimage to Gayā and the fruits (equal to the fruits of an *aśvamedha*) which man can obtain at every step.

44. *Nārada*-, II,62,38: *tīrtheṣu brāhmaṇaṃ naiva parikṣeta kadācana / atrārthi-  
nam anuprāptaṃ bhojyaṃ taṃ manur abravīt //*. This statement doesn't appear in *Mānavadharmasāstra*; and yet *Manu*, III,129, containing a prescription of offering not dedicated to *brāhmaṇas*, can be compared with *Nārada*-, II,62,38: *Manu* says: « Let one feed also a man learned in (the sacrifice to) Gods and another man learned in the sacrifice to Manes: so he will obtain a rich reward: on the contrary he will obtain nothing, if he receives many people that do not know the *Vedas* ». And again on v. 132 (ch. III) it is said that: « Food which is sacred to Manes and Gods must be offered to a man distinguishing himself by his holy knowledge ».

same way, he who arrives at a *tīrtha* not for religious motives, gets only one sixteenth of the fruits; and so on. Then Manu's advice to give offerings to beggars in a *tīrtha* is quoted<sup>44</sup> (vv. 31b-38).

The text goes on recommending *piṇḍadāna* to be performed with *pāyasa*, *saktu*, *samyāva*, *badara*, *āmalaka* and *piṇyāka*<sup>45</sup>, and *śrāddha* not to be contaminated by sinners, dogs, crows, etc.<sup>46</sup> (vv. 39-40).

*Tairthika śrāddha* is held in great esteem (vv. 41-42). The two following *ślokas* illustrate the immersion in the waters of a *tīrtha*<sup>47</sup> of an image made of *kuśa* grass, and the merit of those who teach this practice<sup>48</sup> to other people; the immersion of such an image is equivalent to the immersion performed by the person it represents<sup>49</sup>.

Then the work mentions (*ślokas* 46-47) the origin of the sacredness<sup>50</sup> of *bhauma-tīrthas*<sup>51</sup>: « It comes from the miraculous power of the ground, or from the power inborn in waters or, at last, from the hospitality offered to the ascetics »<sup>52</sup>.

The last part of the chapter is devoted to « the rules concerning the body (v. 46b) » which bring forward the talk already begun by *ślokas* 28 and 45 (the latter is not harmonically placed, being inserted after the rules on *snāna*). V. 28 affirms that if the devotee, whose parents are dead, is setting about performing the pilgrimage to Prayāga, he must have his hair cut (*vapana*), but not completely (*vikaca*)<sup>53</sup>, while

45. In order they are cakes made with milk, oblations made with barley, cakes prepared with wheat meal, the fruit of the jubebe tree, the fruit of the Emblic Myrobalan, oil cakes.

46. Cf. *Mānavadharmasāstra*, III, 239-240.

47. Reading *tīrthavāriṇi* instead of *tīrthaṃ vāriṇi*.

48. So a person obtains an eighth of the religious merit connected with the practice itself.

49. *Nārada-purāṇa*, II,62,44: « *kuśo 'si kuśaputro 'si brahmaṇā nirmitaḥ purā // tvayi snāte tu sa snāto yasya idaṃ granhibandhanam //* »

50. Reading *pūnyatvakāraṇaṃ* instead of *pūnyatve karaṇaṃ*.

51. The *bhauma-tīrthas* are the *tīrthas* which are on the earth and are sacred to it; then there are the *antarikṣa-tīrthas*, the *tīrthas* that are in the sky and are sacred to it; at last *triloka-tīrthas*, the *tīrthas* sacred to the three worlds (cf. J. H. DAVE, *Immortal India*, Bombay, 1970<sup>2</sup>, I, p. XVI). The *Brahma-purāṇa* (cf. *Brahma-purāṇa*, LXX, 16 ff.) develops another list of *tīrthas*. It subdivides *tīrthas* into *daiva*, *āsura*, *ārṣa* and *mānuṣa* ones, according to their origin. *Daiva-tīrthas* are those created by the great divinities Brahmā, Viṣṇu or Śiva: if all three Great Gods sanctified the same place, it obtains a superior sacredness (see the *tīrthas* of Kāśī, Puṣkara, Prayāga, Prabhāsa). Moreover among *daiva-tīrthas* we shall remember the Gaṅgā, the Yamunā, the Sarasvatī, the Venikā and, among the rivers flowing to the South of Vindhya mountains, the Godāvarī, the Bhīmā, the Tuṅgabhadrā, the Kṛṣṇavenī, the Tāpī and the Payoṣṇī: for a similar list cf. *Nārada-purāṇa*, II,63,29-30. Ponds, little artificial lakes are said *daivakhāta*, dug by gods, and considered sacred. Among *āsura-tīrthas* we remember Gayā (very important for the knowledge of Gayā is C. JACQUES, *Gayā-māhātmya*, Pondichéry, 1962: for the myth of Gayā in the *Purāṇas* see pp. XXXVIII-XLIII). *Ārṣa-tīrthas* derive their sacredness from Ṛṣis. Then *mānuṣa-tīrthas* are those made sacred by the kings of the solar and lunar dynasties.

52. *Nārada-purāṇa*, II,62,47: *vide supra* note 1 and see also the « Concordance Table » (II) in the Appendix.

53. For an interesting specification on this subject, see P. V. KANE, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 122 and fn. 274.

at v. 45 the Author specifies that *muṇḍana*, or complete shaving, and abstinence are compulsory in all *tīrthas* except in Gayā and in the Ganges. Nevertheless « he who, after arriving at the Ganges, does not let other people perform *muṇḍana*, whatever act he may enterprise, will render it hostile to the *tīrtha*; he who does not let other people perform *muṇḍana* at the Ganges and the Bhāskara-kṣetra<sup>54</sup>, will go to *raurava* (vv. 48-49)<sup>55</sup> »; and again: « If anyone, after going to the Ganges, the most sacred river of all, respects [his own] hair, he will have [his] sins last for the duration of a *kalpa*: for this reason he should get rid of it (v. 50)<sup>56</sup> ». The last verses of the chapter (vv. 51-55) contain besides a notice about the benefits obtainable by the cutting of hair and nails, an interesting lexical note relating to the practice of the tonsure. According to it, « *muṇḍana* » means « complete hair, beard and moustache cut », while « *kṣaura* » only indicates the hair cut; the word « *vapana* » must be understood as a generic term for « cut ».

In the *adhyāya* 63 too there are some verses generically dedicated to tonsure: « [Man] should tonsure [his head] at Prayāga, offer *piṇḍa* at Gayā, make oblations in Kurukṣetra and leave his own life at Benares: if [someone] performs tonsure at Prayāga, what is the use of *piṇḍa* offerings at Gayā, or of death at Kāśī or of gifts at Kurukṣetra<sup>57</sup>? [If a man] returned to a *tīrtha* within a year less two months, he should tonsure [his head], fast and make a sacrifice<sup>58</sup>. And also the tonsure of women reaching Prayāga should be heightened: hair should be lifted and two fingers of it should be cut. As men's sins take shelter in hair roots, [sins] remain even after bathing in a *tīrtha*: for this reasons [man] should cut it there<sup>59</sup> (vv. 103-107) ».

54. On the possible identification of Bhāskara-kṣetra with Prayāga, vide P. V. KANE, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 217, fn. 507; p. 574, fn. 1300; p. 739. But the most diffused identification is the one done between Prajāpati-kṣetra and Prayāga (cf. *Nārada-purāṇa*, II, 63, 127b-128; *Matsya-purāṇa*, 103,4; *Kūrma*, I, 34, 20, etc.: vide the « Concordance Table » [I] in the Appendix).

55. The concept is proposed again at v. 52, which confirms the non obligatoriness of the *muṇḍana* along the Ganges, except in Prayāga.

56. See also *Nārada*, II, 63, 107.

57. For the sophistic taste that was common in Medieval India, subtle debates were held on these verses, about the application to them of the *rātrisattra-nyāya*, and about the results arising from tonsure. About this subject see MITRA MIŚRA, *Tīrtha-prakāśa*, cit. ed., pp. 335-336. These problems are examined by P. V. KANE, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 601-603 and fn. 1367; on pp. 62-63 (vol. IV), he works out a deeper description of the *rātrisattra* rule. Also see G. BONAZZOLI, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100.

58. Cf. MITRA MIŚRA, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

59. « The ceremonial tonsure that has to precede the ablution in a holy river, and without which pilgrimage cannot even be started, is a purifying act. [...] In the *Brāhmaṇas* (cf. *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa*, S.B.E., XII, pp. 448-450) the shaving of beard and hair of the man who performs the sacrifice is recommended before the beginning of the *yajña*. The initiation of a twice born person is marked by the tonsure (cf. *Manu*, II, 35). Shaving puts an end to an impure period (*aśauca*) which arises from birth or death. This custom — as observed by Frazer (cf. J. FRAZER, *The Golden Bough*, IV, p. 283) — is common to the whole world and reflects the belief that hair is infected by sins and shaving it, is a means for removing sins themselves » (cf. K. V. R. AIYANGAR, *op. cit.*, pp. XLV-XLVI).

But, generally, the *adhyāya* 63 of the second section of the *Nārada-purāṇa* is more particularly dedicated to Prayāga. In fact a rather ample concordance can be noticed between this text and the other versions of the *Prayāga-māhātmya* (viz. *Padma-purāṇa*, I, 40-49, etc.<sup>60</sup>). Therefore we shall consider the original parts of this chapter.

The narrator, *brāhmaṇa* Vasu, describes to Mohinī the course of the Ganges in its flowing, and illustrates the degree of sacredness of the River in the various places reached by it; he says that, during the month of Māgha, all the gods go bathing in Prayāga: in *Kṛta-yuga* they appear in their own form, while in *Kali-yuga* they make themselves invisible (vv. 1-12a). Then, during the month of Māgha, when the sun is in Makara, the devotee must recite the *mantra*, always thinking of Vāsudeva, Hari, Kṛṣṇa, Mādhava: he will say: « Oh Govinda, Acyuta, Mādhava, let me reach the gods' path which offers fruits, according to what was said<sup>61</sup> ». Then, after bathing, silence shall be kept (vv. 12b-15a). The devotee can obtain particular fruits with a bath in a pond (*vāpī*), in a spring of water (*taḍāga*), in a river, in a natural basin (*deva-khāta*), in a great river and, lastly, in the confluence between two rivers: then the fruits are multiplied by thousand when the sun is in Makara and this benefit is like the one man can obtain with a bath in the Ganges at Prayāga. This practice is extremely efficacious during the month of Māgha (vv. 15b-21a). In the following verses, after a brief notice about the etiology of Prayāga<sup>62</sup> (vv. 21b-24a), the power of the month of Māgha is described in various *tīrthas*<sup>63</sup>.

In many verses the propitious and saving qualities of Prayāga are extolled<sup>64</sup>, until an interesting tale is told: it is a brief quotation of the legend of Kāñicanamālīnī<sup>65</sup>, immediately followed by the whole

60. See the « Concordance Table » (I), in the Appendix.

61. Reading *yathoktam* instead of *yathokta*.

62. « To burn the burden [lying heavy] on the earth because of the multitude of Sins, Prajāpati placed this Prayāga for the welfare of creatures [...]. This clear and dark stream which is joined with the Sarasvatī, was created by the Maker as a path [for the attainment] of the world of Brahmā ».

63. *Viz.*, in Mānasa it lavishes knowledge but not *mokṣa*; it destroys all the sins in the *tīrthas* that are on the sides of Himālaya, and so on (vv. 24b-37).

64. Verses 38-74. At v. 38 it is told that Māgha resulted the most important holy thing, in a comparison made by Brahmā. However many verses among these are to be found in the other versions of the *Prayāgamāhātmya* (cf. the « Concordance Table » [I], in the Appendix). At v. 45 it is interesting to note the statement that the Ganges flows among three *kuṇḍas*, in Prayāga; later on, at v. 50, it is added that there are three *agnikuṇḍas*, in Prayāga, among which the Ganges flows. This can be read also in the *Mahābhārata*, III,83,69; *Matsya*-, 109,4; *Agni*-, 111,2; *Padma-purāṇa*, I,47,4; *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa*, 3, p. 151. Furthermore in the *Padma-purāṇa* I,41,13; *Matsya*-, 103,12; *Kūrma*-, 34,28; *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa*, 3, p. 137, the Ganges is said to flow among five *kuṇḍas*. Should we affirm the validity of a particular version on the number of consents, we should say that *Nārada*-, II,63,45 is an *errata lectio* and therefore that the Ganges flows among five *kuṇḍas*, at first, and then among three *agnikuṇḍas*.

65. Cf. *Nārada-purāṇa*, II,63,75-77.

narration of the legend of *brāhmaṇa* Bhadraka<sup>66</sup>. A complete chapter<sup>67</sup>, inserted in the *Māghamāhātmya* of the *Uttara-khaṇḍa* of the *Padma-purāṇa*, deals with the legend of Kāñcanamālīnī: the short epitome that is in *Nārada-purāṇa* could have been written making use of the verses extracted from the story in the *Padma-purāṇa*<sup>68</sup>: in *Nārada-* it is told that *apsaras* Kāñcanamālīnī offered a sinful *rākṣasa* the fruits coming from a three-day bath [in Prayāga] during the month of Māgha: by the grace of such a gift, the demon was delivered, while Kāñcanamālīnī arrived among *Devas* thanks to the merits deserved by a bath of twenty-seven days. The legend follows, in which the story of *brāhmaṇa* Bhadraka is told<sup>69</sup>. In ancient times, in the Avanti region, king Vāsaraḅja was reigning. A pious and devout man, he accomplished rich sacrifices and oblations to *brāhmaṇas*. In the same period there lived a *brāhmaṇa* named Bhadraka: he was born in a poor family and was a peasant. Tortured by the ploughing, he went away, wandering here and there, until he reached Prayāga, unawares. There he bathed for three days, after honouring the Mahāmaghī<sup>70</sup>, and by means of such practices he completely purified himself. Destiny made the two men die at the same

66. *Ibidem*, vv. 78-86.

67. It is chapter 246, the twenty-eighth of the *Māgha-māhātmya*.

68. These are the verses in question: 61b-62; 135b-137a. Nothing certain can be said about the date of composition of the *Purāṇas*. Even if, on the whole a *Purāṇa* can be said later than another, nothing excludes that some parts of it might be earlier. As regards the problems of dating the *Nārada-purāṇa*, cf. R. C. HAZRA, *The Bṛhannārādīya- and the Nārādīya-purāṇa*, in: I.C., III,3 (1937), pp. 477-487 (he considers [on pp. 479-483] chapters 38-82 of the *Uttara-Bhāga* posterior to 1100 A.D.) and A. S. GUPTA in the *Introduction* to the edition of the *Kūrma-purāṇa*, Varanasi, 1972 (on p. XXIV he dates the *Nārada-* back to the ninth, tenth century). About the problems concerning the *Padma-purāṇa*, cf. R. C. HAZRA, *The Padma-purāṇa*, in: I.C., IV, pt. 1 (1937), pp. 73-95 (on pp. 76-77 he suggests the posteriority of the *Ādi-khaṇḍa* to the *Uttara-khaṇḍa*, to the *Matsya-purāṇa* and the *Kūrma-purāṇa*, and dates the *Ādi-khaṇḍa* between 950 and 1400 A.D.). About the legend of Kāñcanamālīnī, two other hypothesis are possible: viz. the *Uttara-khaṇḍa* has elaborated chapter 246 from the primary nucleus of *Nārada-purāṇa*, II,63,75-77, or both *Nārada-* and *Padma-purāṇa* have got it from a third version of the legend of the *apsaras*.

69. Substantially verses 78-88 (the legend regarding Bhadraka reaches v. 86 only) fully correspond to verses 2-12 in chapter 249 (the penultimate chapter of the *Māgha-māhātmya*) of the *Uttara-khaṇḍa*. In fact we do not quote the little lexical changes that can be found in the two versions. In *Nārada-purāṇa* the legend of Kāñcanamālīnī and that of Bhadraka are placed side by side, in order to bear witness that eulogize the power of Prayāga. This might confirm the hypothesis of a loan from the *Padma-purāṇa* where such legends occupy definite chapters, and are told widely and with wealth of details (this with regard to the story of *apsaras* Kāñcanamālīnī). The only noteworthy discrepancy between the versions of the legend of Bhadraka is the name of the king who, together with the *brāhmaṇa*, is the protagonist of the story. *Nārada-*, II,63,78a, says: « *avantiviṣaye rājā vāsaraḅjo 'bhavat purā* », while *Padma-*, VI,249,2a reads: « *avantiviṣaye rājā vīraseno 'bhavat purā* ». Without thinking that this is due to an error of reading of one of the two versions, here we meet with two different names by which the same king was called: a fact which was rather common in India.

70. It is the day of full moon which falls in the month of Māgha.

time: they both got to Indra and obtained great gifts. In this story a *bhakta* substratum is clearly recognizable: that is the conception of divinity (in this case the holy *tīrtha*) offering motherly salvation to the wicked man unworthy of it <sup>71</sup>.

The *Māhātmya* dwells (vv. 89-102) on the enumeration of the *sub-tīrthas* of Prayāga, together with the rules — by this time stereotyped — showing the rewards intended for devotees <sup>72</sup>.

Then we meet concept of sacredness closely linked with astronomical circumstances (vv. 108-111) which cannot be found in the other *Prayāga-māhātmyas* we have examined; the Work refers especially to the astronomical conjunction called *ardhodaya*, a particular type of *vyatīpāta*, which the text defines « superior to hundred equinoxes » <sup>73</sup>; to *aruṇodaya-saptamī*, the seventh day of the clear fortnight of the month of Māgha, which assumes the same value of thousand eclipses; to solstices and equinoxes able to increase religious merits, respectively of a crore times and a hundred thousand times; at last the text emphasizes the need of doing « a thousand offerings » on the occasion of the astronomical conjunctions of *śaḍaṣṭi* and *viṣṇupadī*.

After this parenthesis the list — almost similar in all versions — of the *sub-tīrthas* of Prayāga continues to be developed <sup>74</sup>; it indicates

71. On this subject see S. PIANO, *L'India antica e la sua tradizione*, G. D'Anna, Messina Firenze, 1975, pp. 122-126; ID., *Note in margine al Viṣṇu-māhātmya*, in: « Indologica Taurinensia », III-IV (1975-76), pp. 381 and following.

72. About verses 103 to 107 *vide supra* p. 186, and note 59.

73. See K. V. R. AIYANGAR, *op. cit.*, p. LVI.

74. From v. 112 to v. 121 the offering of a cow at the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamunā is eulogized as the most sacred among all possible offers. Vv. 122-123 say that the acceptance of gifts by *brāhmaṇas* is forbidden (*vide supra* note 21). At v. 128 *nāgas* Kambala and Aśvatara are quoted again as boundaries of the Prajāpati-kṣetra. Previously they were quoted (v. 89) among the other *sub-tīrthas* of Prayāga as being able to lavish the purification on the man who bathes there and sips their waters. Verses 129b-130a are worthy of a brief comment: *na vedavacanāt ca eva na lokavacanād api // matirukramaṇīyā hi prayāgamaraṇaṃ prati /*. This statement, common to all the versions of the *Prayāga-māhātmya*, raises some problems among which, for example, a lexical one, because various readings of this verse have been handed on. In this passage the suicide in Prayāga is not only admitted, but it is supported. The problem was examined closely by P. V. KANE (*vide P. V. KANE, op. cit.*, IV, pp. 603-613, and particularly on page 606, fn. 1374, about the above-mentioned verse) and by Kantawala (cf. S. G. KANTAWALA, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-112). Moreover about this problem see the works of U. THAKUR, *The History of Suicide in India, an Introduction*, Delhi, 1963 (the specific aspect of the suicide in Prayāga is examined on pages 78-86) and of K. C. CHATTOPADHYAYA, *Religious suicide at Prayag*, in: J.U.P.H.S., X (1937), pp. 65-79. Starting from v. 131 a description follows of the prize for the man who dies in Prayāga or in its *sub-tīrthas*. So vv. 133-137a describe the bright heavenly life of the man who dies at the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamunā. Vv. 137b-138a affirm that the world of Rudra is the prize for the man who dies at the foot of the *vaṭa*. From v. 140b to v. 146a the magnificent fruits which can be obtained by one who gives up his life on the sand bank sacred to Urvaśī, are described. Vv. 149b-151a



the fruits which they grant to the devotee who turns to them and to the man who kills himself (*prāṇān parityajet*) near them or to the pious man who goes to them to die of a natural death.

The *Prayāga-māhātmya* of the *Nārada-purāṇa* ends with these signs of certitude of emancipation for the Prayāga-devotees from the Ocean of the recurring births and endless deaths.

In our opinion, *adhya* 62 appears as a « *Tīrthayātrāvidhi* », while the following chapter constitutes the true *Prayāga-māhātmya*, in which the eulogy of this place is never separated from that of the month of Māgha. The leit-motif appearing throughout the narration seems to be the tension between a formal conventionalism — an attachment to crystallized rites — and a kind of yearning for total adherence to Prayāga, the *jaḡhana* of the Earth, the divinity that thanks to his grace and benevolence can let people obtain what is most difficult to be obtained on the earth: the *parama pada*.

In the *Nārada-purāṇa* definite references to the etiology of Prayāga lack<sup>75</sup>. Besides the brief above-mentioned hint<sup>76</sup>, the most important allusion to this subject is found at vv. 139-140 of chapter 63<sup>77</sup>. The *Akṣaya Vaṭa*, the holy centre of Prayāga, is not destroyed by Rudra's fire and on it baby-Hari lies in a cradle; in this way, even if vaguely, the sacredness of *Vaṭa*, indissolubly bound to the presence of Hari-Viṣṇu<sup>78</sup>, spreads to cover the whole area of Prayāga.

Among the various chapter devoted to Prayāga by the *Uttarakhaṇḍa*

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illustrate the heavenly future due to the man who dies at Koṭitīrtha; vv. 151b-154a show the fruits gained by the man who dies at the Ganges: in this passage (v. 151b) it is specified that these fruits are valid for both the man who commits suicide at the Ganges and for the one who dies a natural death there. Later on vv. 154b-157a describe the fruits for the man who performs *karīṣāgni* at the holy confluence. V. 157b to v. 159 relate what happens to the devotee who puts an end to his life offering parts of his body as food for birds. Vv. 160-161 explain that the devotees who practise *anaśaka* in any place within the five *yojana* circumference delimiting the territory of Prayāga, rescue seven past generations and fourteen future ones of their own families. Then vv. 162b-163a tell that he who bathes in the *Naraka-tīrtha* (for lexical problems regarding this *tīrtha* cf. P. V. KANE, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 615, fn. 1399; S. G. KANTAWALA, *op. cit.*, p. 118) reaches Heaven; and they who die in this place are freed from further re-birth. On the northern bank of the Yamunā there are many *tīrthas* destroying sins: those who bathe there go to Heaven while those who die there are freed from further re-births (vv. 163b-164). V. 165 tells that the Ganges is older than the Yamunā. Vv. 166-167a tell us how the only way to obtain *yoga* is to die in Prayāga. Immediately after that we see that he who dies far from Prayāga (vv. 167b-171a) obtains wonderful fruits even if he only recalls it at the last moment.

75. They are also missing in the various versions of the *Prayāga-māhātmya* examined by us: cf. the « Concordance Table » (I), in the Appendix.

76. Cf. *Nārada-purāṇa*, II,63,21b-24a.

77. See also *Mahābhārata*, III,186,81-83.

78. *Vide supra* note 12.



of the *Padma-purāṇa*<sup>79</sup>, one is dedicated to its etiology<sup>80</sup>. In this chapter the sage Nārada tells that Viṣṇu, taking bodily form in a *śapharī*, fell from the pot used by Kaśyapa for his religious acts, into the *añjali* of the ascetic, who dwelled on Vindhya mountains<sup>81</sup>. Kaśyapa, moved to pity, put her into his pot (*kamandalu*); then, as the fish went on growing, he had to put it in a well, then in a lake and, at last, in the Ocean. Here Viṣṇu, still in the shape of *Matsya*, destroyed Śaṅkha<sup>82</sup> and returned to Badarīvana (vv. 1-4), where he<sup>83</sup> ordered *Rṣis* to look

79. In order they are chapter 23 «*Gaṅgāprayāgayamunāstutiṛ*», a *stotra* which is 54 verse long: the real eulogy of Prayāga goes from v. 27 to v. 40, occupying the central part of the work itself; chapter 25 (five verses of which correspond with chapter 246 of the same book): it consists of 25 verses and substantially reflects the other *Prayāga-māhātmyas*, even if it is different as regards the way in which these subjects are expressed. At last there is chapter 93 (composed of 29 verses showing an original content on the origin of Prayāga). Moreover, chapters 237,246,249 are not expressly devoted to Prayāga, but contain verses which we find also in the version of the *Prayāga-māhātmya* of the *Nārada-purāṇa*. Vide *supra* notes 68-69 and *infra* the «Concordance Table» (II).

80. It is precisely chapter 93, the fourth of the *Kārtikamāhātmya*, entitled «*Prayāgotpattī*».

81. The versions of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* (Sanskrit text and English translation by M. A. Sāstrī, Gorakhpur, 1971), 8,XXIV and *Matsya-purāṇa*, I, are practically parallel: they both say that while king Satyavrata was offering water to the Manes, along the Kṛtamālā river, a *śapharī* jumped into his hands: it asked him to be put into his pot (*kamandalu*): but it was growing so rapidly that the king had to put it in a jar, then in a water-tank, then in a lake and, at last, in the Ocean. But the *Matsya-purāṇa* I,23, says that at first the King put it into the Ganges, and then into the Ocean. This fact, together with the particular that *Bhāgavata*-, 8,XXIV,13 specifies that king Satyavrata ruled over Dravida territory, could let us think that the version of the legend in the *Matsya-purāṇa* is a more northern one. This myth is summarized in three verses (vv. 1-3) in the *Padma-purāṇa*, VI,93. Significant modification of the legend is the presence of sage Kaśyapa instead of king Satyavrata and the fact that the ascetic performs his purifying rites among the Vindhya mountains.

82. Śaṅkha, more commonly called Hayagrīva, was an *asura*, son of Kaśyapa-prajāpati and of his wife Danu (cf. VĀLMĪKI, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Aranyakāṇḍa*, *sarga* 14). He performed *tapas* for a thousand years on the bank of the Sarasvatī. So Devī appeared to him and asked him what grace he would like to get. He asked her to be killed by Hayagrīva (an entity having a horse head: there is a manifest pun here) only. Devī promised this to him. Then Śaṅkha became overbearing and wandered about the three worlds, troubling good people, and he came to oppose the *Devas* themselves. As he could be killed only by a being having a horse head, the attack led against him by the *Devas* and by Mahāviṣṇu was unsuccessful. Mahāviṣṇu decided to rest to recover his strength. But, while resting, his head was hit by the end of his bow, and cut off: then Mahāviṣṇu put a horse's head in the place of his own: so, after having engaged battle with Śaṅkha (Hayagrīva), he succeeded in killing him. While in the *Matsya-purāṇa* the myth of the *Vedas* stolen by Śaṅkha-Hayagrīva does not appear, the *Bhāgavata*-relates this myth (8,XXIV,1-9) as a previous fact to the *matsyāvatāra*, and mentions the finding of the *Vedas* at the end of the chapter (v. 57), after the events relative to the deluge and the long dialogue between Matsya-Viṣṇu and king Satyavrata. In the version of *Padma-purāṇa*, VI,93 this myth assumes an important function in the whole chapter, and it is a pretext for the beginning of the very «*prayāgotpattīkathana*».

83. In the text v. 5 is reported in direct speech.

for the *Vedas*, lost in the depths of the sea, while he would stay in Prayāga (v. 5). *Ṛṣis* brought to light the *Vedas* together with *mantras* and *yajñas*: then they went to Prayāga and offered them to Viṣṇu and Brahmā who, happy as he was, offered a *vājimedha*. At the end of the sacrifice, all the present divinities prayed so (vv. 6-10): « Lord, here Viṣṇu has had the *Vedas* recovered, and we, by your grace, have obtained the parts of the sacrifice: so, still by your grace, be this the best place all over the world and may it offer enjoyment and liberation (*bhuktimukti-prada*), [etc.]: and may this particularly propitious time<sup>84</sup> give utter purification to sinful men, [etc.] (vv. 11-14) ». The long answer of Viṣṇu constitutes the central part of the myth. Viṣṇu assures the *Devas* that the place where the Gaṅgā<sup>85</sup> will join with the Yamunā will be sanctified by the presence of all Gods for ever, and will be called « Brahmaṣṭetra ». The man who will kill himself there, will enter his own body<sup>86</sup>, while Viṣṇu will offer the devotees who bathe there in the month of Māgha the *salokatva*, the *samīpatva*, the *sarūpatva*<sup>87</sup> (vv. 15-24). « I (=Viṣṇu) always dwell in the Badarīvana: the fruits obtainable somewhere else by a ten-year-long austerity, can be reached here in one day only. Men performing the *darśana* of Prayāga, obtain the *jīvanmukti*<sup>88</sup> and nevermore fall into sin (vv. 25b-27) ».

After listening to Viṣṇu's words, the Gods who were present there disappeared, leaving there a sort of emanation of them. As usual the story ends with the *phala*: anyone who listens to this narration or relates it, obtains the same fruits he could gain reaching Tirtharāja and Badarīvana (vv. 28-29).

Chapter 93 of the *Uttara-khaṇḍa* presents the legend under an original point of view: it centres the story on the recovery of the *Vedas*, and located in Prayāga the « Brahmaṣṭetra », the place in which the holy texts, recovered by the *Ṛṣis*, were presented to Viṣṇu — who sanctified the place with his own presence as *matsyāvātāra* — and to Brahmā, who performed the first sacrifice there<sup>89</sup>.

84. As the chapter is inserted in the « *Kārtikamāhātmya* », *kalo 'pi ayam*, without any other specification, can allude to the month of Kārtika.

85. Viṣṇu prophesies that Gaṅgā will be led from Heaven to the earth by king Bhagīratha: for this reason the Gaṅgā is often called by the patronymic of Bhāgīrathī. For an exposition of this legend see *Rāmāyaṇa*, I,42-44; cf. also *Nārada-purāṇa*, I,15-16.

86. The accepted use of the ritual suicide in Prayāga (*vide supra* note 74) seems to have its higher ratification in the clear words uttered by Viṣṇu.

87. In order they mean: the possibility of dwelling in the same celestial sphere of Viṣṇu; the possibility of rejoicing his vicinity; the possibility of having the same shape of the God.

88. « The condition of being freed (by the cycles of eternal rebirth) though being still alive »: for the doctrine of *jīvanmukti*, cf. J.F. SPROCKOFF, *Die Vorbereitung der Vorstellung von der Erlösung bei Lebzeiten in den Upaniṣads*, in: W.Z.K.S.O., VI, 1962, pp. 151-178.

89. The sacrifice performed by Brahmā in Prayāga to show his satisfaction for the finding of the *Vedas*, may be the same quoted in *Vana-parvan*, 85,14, where the etymology of Prayāga is explained.

*The path leading us through a different and deep thought is strewn with serious problems.*

*Only the patient, careful, continuous attention of a true Master, Professor Stefano Piano, enabled one of his disciples to overcome the first obstacles on such a fascinating ground. Grateful, I wish to dedicate this modest work to Him.*

APPENDIX  
CONCORDANCE TABLE

A) Table I

N.P. <sup>1</sup>	P.P. <sup>2</sup>	M.P. <sup>3</sup>	K.P. <sup>4</sup>	T.V.K. <sup>5</sup>	Mbh. <sup>6</sup>	A.P. <sup>7</sup>
62 <sup>8</sup> 10a-11b	45.16b-18a	107.16a-17a		pp. 148-149		
62.32	43.4	105.5	35.3c	p. 141		
62.33	43.6	105.7	35.5	p. 141		
63.2	43.49	105.49				
63.43	43.21	105.21	35.12	pp. 142-143, 152	83.76	
63.44	45.8	107.9		p. 148		
63.45	41.13	103.12	34.28	p. 137		
63.46	45.13	107.14bc		p. 148		
63.47	45.14			p. 148		
63.48-51a	47.1b-4	109.1b-4		pp. 150-151	83.69 <sup>9</sup>	111.2b <sup>10</sup>
63.51b	45.23a	107.23a	37.1a	p. 149		111.3b
63.51b-57	47.5-11a	109.5-11a	37.7 <sup>11</sup>	p. 151	83.70-71a, 72-74	111.3b-4a, 5, 6a
63.58	43.26	105.26	35.17	p. 143		
63.71b-73a	41.16-17	103.15-16		pp. 137-138		
63.89-90	43.27-28	105.27-28	35.18-19	p. 143		
63.91a <sup>12, 94</sup>	43.30b-33	105.30b-33	35.21b-24	pp. 143-144, 153	83.82a <sup>13</sup>	
63.95-97	43.46-48	105.46-48		pp. 145, 153	83.80a, 82b <sup>14</sup>	
63.98-99	44.20-21	106.20-21	36.14-15	p. 147		

1. *Nārada-purāna*, cit. ed., II, 62-63.2. *Padma-purāna*, cit. ed., I, 40-49. The concordance between the *Prayāga-māhātmya* of the *Padma-purāna* and that of the *Matsya-purāna* is nearly complete along the ten chapters constituting the *Prayāga-māhātmya* itself.3. *Matsya-purāna*, cit. ed., 102-111.4. *Kūrma-purāna*, cit. ed., I, 34-37.5. *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa*, cit. ed., 3, pp. 136-153.6. *Mahābhārata*, cr. ed., III (Poona, 1942), 83.7. *Agni-purāna*, cit. ed., 111.8. We do not quote the little lexical changes that can be found in the various versions of the *Prayāga-māhātmya*.9. It corresponds to *Nārada*, II, 63, 50b-51a.10. It corresponds to *Nārada*, II, 63, 50b.11. It corresponds to *Nārada*, II, 63, 53b-54a.12. *Nārada*, II, 63, 91b is excluded from concordance.13. It corresponds to *Nārada*, II, 63, 93b.14. 80a corresponds to *Nārada*, II, 63, 97a; 82b to *Nārada*, II, 63, 95b.

N.P. <sup>1</sup>	P.P. <sup>2</sup>	M.P. <sup>3</sup>	K.P. <sup>4</sup>	T.V.K. <sup>5</sup>	Mbl. <sup>6</sup>	A.P. <sup>7</sup>
63.100	45.15b-16a	107.15bc				
63.101	45.25b-26a	107.25b-26a	37.3ab <sup>15</sup>			P. 148
63.113b-121a	42.17b-24	104.16-22	34.45-46 <sup>16</sup>			P. 149
63.121b-122a	42.16b-17a	104.15	34.44			pp. 140-141
63.122b-123a	42.15b-16a	104.14bc	34.43			P. 140
	42.14b-15a	104.13b-14a	34.42			P. 140
63.125b-127a	44.15-16	106.15-16	36.9-10			pp. 139-140
63.127b-129a	41.4-5	103.4-5a	34.20 <sup>17</sup>			P. 146
63.129b-132a	43.22-24	105.22-24	35.13-15			P. 136
63.132b <sup>18</sup> -134	42.3-4	104.3-4	34.31-32		83.78-79	pp. 143,152-153
	42.5	104.5	34.33			pp. 138-139
63.135-137a	42.6-8a	104.6-7	34.34-36a			P. 139
63.137b-139a	43.11-12	105.11-12	35.8 <sup>20</sup>			P. 139
63.140b-149a	43.34-42 <sup>21</sup>	105.34-42	35.25-26 <sup>22</sup>			P. 142
	43.43	105.43	35.27			P. 144
63.149b-151a	43.44-45	105.44-45	35.28 <sup>23</sup>			P. 144
63.152b-153a <sup>24</sup>	44.5	106.5ab				pp. 144-145
63.154b-157a	44.9-11	106.9-11	36.3-5			P. 145
63.157b-159	44.17a,18-19	106.17a,18-19	36.11a,12-13			P. 146
	44.17b	106.17b	36.11b			pp. 146-147
63.162-163a	45.27	107.27-28a	37.4			P. 146
63.165	45.32	107.32				P. 149
63.166-167a	46.11-12a	108.11b-12				P. 150
63.167b-168	42.8b-9	104.8	34.36b-37			P. 150
63.169	42.10a,11a	104.9a,10a	34.38a,39a			P. 139
63.170	42.12	104.11	34.40			P. 139

15. Substantially v. 3ab correspond to *Nārada*, II,63,101b.

16. V. 45a corresponds to *Nārada*, II,63,113b; v. 45b to v. 114a; v. 46a to v. 116b; v. 46b to v. 117a.

17. It corresponds to *Nārada*, II,63,128b-129a.

18. It corresponds to *Nārada*, II,63,129b-130a.

19. V. 132b does not correspond to *Padma*, I,42,3-4.

20. It corresponds to *Nārada*, II,63,137b-138a.

21. *Padma*, I,43,34b and 37b is excluded from concordance; v. 41 is put before v. 38.

22. V. 25a corresponds to *Nārada*, II,63,140b; v. 25b to v. 141a; v. 26 to v. 141b-142a.

23. It corresponds to *Nārada*, II,63,149b-150a.

24. In *Padma*, *Matsya-purāṇa* and *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa* these two *pādas* are inverted.

B) Table II

N.P.	U.K. <sup>25</sup>	Mbh.	Kāśī-k. <sup>25b</sup>	U.K.	U.K.
62.7b					
62.8.9	237.28b-30a	III, 80.38b		6.46-47	
62.12b-14a <sup>26</sup>	237.30b-32a	80.39-40		6.48-49	
62.14b-15a		80.30-31			
62.15b-16a <sup>27</sup>	237.32b-33a	80.32		6.52	
	237.33b-34a			6.53	
62.16b-17 <sup>28</sup>	237.34b-35a, 42b-43a			6.54, 62	
	237.11b <sup>29</sup> -14a	XIII, App. I, 19.3-8		6.29-31	
	237.15a	I, 19.9		6.32a	
	237.16-18	I, 19.10-14		6.32b-35a	
	237.19			6.35b-36a	
	237.20-21a	I, 19.15-17		6.36b-37	
	237.21b-22a			6.39	
	237.22b-23a	I, 19.20-21		6.40	
	237.23b-24			6.41-42a	
	237.26a			6.43b	
	237.27b-28a			6.45	
62.18 <sup>30</sup>	237.35b-36a			6.55	
62.24a, 25a	237.36b-37a			6.56	
	237.37b-38			6.57-58a	
62.36-37	237.41b-42a, 43b <sup>31</sup>			6.61, 63	

25. *Uttara-khaṇḍa* (Ānandāśrama, 1894) of the *Padma-purāṇa*. Particularly chapter 237 lasts for 65 ślokas and regards the rules of the bath during the month of Māgha (« māghasānānavidhāna »): it is the nineteenth chapter of the wide *Māgha-māhātmya* of the *Uttara-khaṇḍa* (*Padma*, VI, 219-250).

25b. *Kāśī-khaṇḍa*, Bombay, 1908, ch. 6.

26. *Nārada*, II, 62, 12b-13a corresponds to *Brahma-purāṇa* (Bareil, 1971), *prathama khaṇḍa*, ch. 17 (« sarvatīrthamāhātmya »), 2.

27. *Nārada*, II, 62, 15b-17a corresponds to *Vāyu-purāṇa*, 77, v. 125 e 128 (quoted in *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa*, p. 5-6).

28. We must add to v. 17 the first of the three *pādas* placed between brackets and not numbered.

29. *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa* (ch. 1. pp. 5-8) quotes some verses. ascribing them to the *Mahābhārata*, which correspond to *Padma*, VI, 237, 11b-32a, 35b-36a.

30. *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa* (ch. 1. pp. 8-9) quotes some verses (ascribing them to the *Brahma-purāṇa*) which correspond to *Nārada*, II, 62, 19-26.

31. V. 43b corresponds to *Nārada*, II, 62, 37a.

N.P.	U.K. <sup>25</sup>	Mbh.	Kāśī-k. <sup>26</sup>	U.K.	U.K.
62.39-40a <sup>32</sup>	237.39-40a		6.58b-59	246.4b	25.14b
62.41b,42b-43	237.40b-41a,44		6.60,64	246.5-7	25.15b-18a
	237.45-47		6.65-67	246.8a	25.5b
62.46-47	237.25,26b-27a	XIII,111.15,17b	6.42b-43a,44	246.9a	25.18b <sup>33</sup>
63.2-6				246.51-55	
63.7				246.46	
63.8-12a				246.56-60a	
63.12b-13a				246.47	
63.13b-24a				246.19a,36 <sup>34</sup>	
63.60b-64				246.37-40,45	
63.45				246.48	
63.75 <sup>35</sup>				246.61b-62	
63.76-77				246.135b-137a	

32. *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa* (ch. 1, p. 10) quotes some verses, which correspond to *Nārada*, II,62,38-42, from a *Devī-purāṇa*.

33. The concept is completed at v. 19a.

34. *Padma*, VI,246,19b,21b-23a,24b,30-31,34-35 do not correspond to *Nārada*, II,63,13b-24a.

35. The legend of the *apsaras* Kāñcanamālīnī is developed from v. 75 to v. 77.