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**GANGA, THE GLACIAL HERITAGE OF INDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF ANUJA  
CHANDRAMOULI'S NOVEL *GANGA: THE CONSTANT GODDESS***

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**Abstract**

Ganga is one of the most important and iconic rivers of India. It flows down from its glacial source in the high Himalayas to course through five states in the northern plains. It is India's holiest river and has cultural and spiritual significance. Ganga is worshipped as a goddess since time immemorial. Ganga has been a symbol of divinity, spirituality, purity and moksha. She finds mentioned in numerous ancient texts; she is a mother, a goddess, a life-giving river and a repository of people's beliefs. Today river Ganga had great relevance in literature and real life. Anuja Chandramouli in her novel *Ganga: The Constant Goddess*. She rewrote the entire myth of Ganga. Even though Ganga is the protagonist, other characters like Skanda, Shiva, Parvathi, Saraswati, Brahma and the Sapthrithis also have equal importance. Their silence in the novel is the most meaningful factor. She retold a great myth that exists in the country since the period of Vedas.

**Keywords:** Ganga, Anuja Chandramouli, Puranas, Parvathi, Mahabharata, Siva, Ramayana.

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Jawaharlal Nehru once said that Ganga is one of the most important and iconic river of India. It flows down from its glacial source in the high Himalayas to course through five states in the northern plains before draining into the swirling waters of the Bay of Bengal through the Sundarbans delta; the largest mangrove system in the world. As India's holiest river, the Ganga has a cultural and spiritual significance that far transcends the basin's boundaries. It is worshipped as a living goddess and, since time immemorial, people from across the country have flocked to the many historic temple towns that lie along the river's banks to pray and bathe in its flowing waters.

Ganga is India's national river. For Indians, she is not just a river. It has a sacred position in Hindu mythology. She is regarded as a goddess in Hindu culture. It is one of the most purified figures in Indian culture believed to be the liquid manifestation of Shakti and the nurturer of the three worlds with their life-sustaining waters. Goddess Ganga is the epitome of beauty and purity famous for her indomitable spirit and boundless charm. Renowned as a devoted daughter, a caring mother, a passionate lover and as a merciful saviour; she is here to absorb and absolve the sins of the people of India.

Ganga has been a symbol of divinity, spirituality, purity and moksha. She finds mentioned in numerous ancient texts; she is a mother, a goddess, a life-giving river and a repository of people's beliefs. Today river Ganga had great relevance in literature and real life. The most sacred river in India is now one of the most polluted rivers in the country. The government had undertaken so many measures to reproduce Ganga as it was from its ancient time. Industrial wastes and careless people are the cause of her pollution at present.

In Hindu mythology, she has no prominent role as Draupadi and Sita have; but here she is as the backbone of the entire Puranas. Because of the purifying nature of the Ganga, Hindus believe that any rituals performed at the banks of her water will bring fortune and wash away impurities [papa and sins]. She is the only goddess who consorts all the three important male Gods depending on the mythology: Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma. As Brahma's wife, she always travels with him in the form of water in his kamandalu -water pot. In Hindu iconography, Shiva is depicted as Gangadhara "the bearer of Ganges" with Ganga shown as a spout of water, rising from his hair. Their relationship is both perpetual and intimate – Shiva is sometimes called Uma – Ganga– Patiswara (husband of Ganga and Parvathi). Ganga is respected in Nepal as a guardian water goddess, worshipped together with another river goddess the Yamuna. Her sculptures are found in Patan Durbar Square and Gokarneshwar Mahadev temple in a municipality in Kathmandu District in the Bagmati Pradesh. In Sri Lanka, Ganga with other Hindu deities assumes a Buddhist persona. Her sculpture is also seen in Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara. In Bali Hinduism, she is worshipped together with the goddess Danu. Her waters are considered holy in Bali. Her maternal association with Bhishma is also well known in Bali.

According to Valmiki's Ramayana, Ganga was the daughter of Himalaya and Menavathi. The deities abducted her and took her to heaven. From that time onwards Ganga started living inside the kamandalu (a spout-shaped vessel). It is not surprising that people make up myths about rivers. Ganga is the holiest river in India. According to science, it is noteworthy that the Ganga water

contains oxygen levels twenty-five times higher than any other rivers in the world. This is one of the reasons for the self-purifying attributes of River Ganga. The high levels of oxygen in the waters of Ganga give it the unique ability to remain fresh over a prolonged period of time. It begins its journey from the Gangotri Glacier of the central Himalayas and drains into the Bay of Bengal through its vast delta in the Sundarbans.

Ganga's sacrifices are drowned in Puranas. Parvathi is more important in Hindu mythology. Ganga has only a second position according to Parvathi. She is one of the prominent figures in Shiva Puranas but Parvathi is more dominant than Ganga. Ganga has a hidden role in the great epic Mahabharata. In Hindu mythology, the Ganges River was created when Vishnu, in his incarnation as Vamana, the dwarf Brahmin, took two, steps to cross the universe. On the second step Vishnu's big toe accidentally created a hole in the wall of the universe and through it spilt some of the waters of the river Mandakini. In Hinduism, the river Ganga is considered sacred and is personified as the Goddess Ganga. She is worshipped by Hindus and Buddhists who believe that bathing in the river causes the remission of sins and facilitates moksha and that the water of the Ganges is considered very pure. Pilgrims immerse the ashes of their kin in the river Ganga, which they think will bring the spirits closer to moksha.

Her divinity is immediate and everlasting but only for as long as the river survives. She is the symbol of faith, hope, culture and sanity, as well as a source of livelihood for millions; since time immemorial. She is the Centre of social and religious tradition in the Indian subcontinent and is particularly sacred in Hinduism. The very special faith and respect for the river Ganges in India are as old as the Indian culture itself. These are amply reflected in such ancient Indian scriptures as Vedas, Puranas, Mahabharata, Ramayana and several others. Respect for Ganga is a part of Indian identity and the very symbol of Indian culture. The history of Ganga in nurturing culture and civilizations is appreciated through fostering a native culture in its basin.

As a constant Goddess, Ganga is part of the Indian ethos revered and loved across the ages. The exquisite epic that is Ganga's story, from her miraculous origins, her sojourn in the heavens, her poignant relationships with the divine trinity, the birth of her sons, Bhishma and Karthikeya and her descent into a wicked world that is not worthy of her, is dazzlingly retold by Anuja Chandramouli in her novel *Ganga: The Constant Goddess*. Here she rewrote the entire myth of Ganga. Even though Ganga is the protagonist, other characters like Skanda, Shiva, Parvathi, Saraswati, Brahma and the Sapthrishis also have equal importance. Their silence in the novel is the most meaningful factor. She retold a great myth that exists in the country since the period of Vedas. The story of the Ganga was always interesting to the people. So rewriting such a story was a great challenge to the author and we can surely say that she had succeeded in her task.

As the most sacred river in the three worlds; Anuja Chandramouli, gave a significant space for Ganga in her novel, which Hindu Puranas forgot. Here she redefined the entire myth of Ganga and admired her values. In this story, Ganga had got the values and respect that she deserves. Here Anuja focussed on the Shiv-Parvathi story from the point of view of Ganga. She is the main character in the novel who tries to regain the world in its original form after the war. Not only the story of Ganga but also many other Purana stories are retold in this novel.

*Ganga: The Constant Goddess* is a mythical novel written by contemporary Indian author Anuja Chandramouli. This book is a vibrant retelling of the story of Ganga who has the power to save us all and bestowed the precious gift of moksha embracing saints and sinners alike with all-encompassing compassion. In Hindu mythology, there is a thought that touching in river Ganga makes the people pure and free from sins.

Ganga was pictured by Anuja Chandramouli as a bold girl. She has great self-respect and has strong visions and views about everything that happened in the world. The wise men and rishis, who lived naked in the icy climate, made the long journey to see the daughter of Himavan, who is believed to be a manifestation of Mahadevi. They

mistook Parvati as the manifestation of Sakthi. But here Anuja says that Ganga is the actual manifestation of Sakthi. In Hindu mythology, Parvati is the Sakthi. She is reborn to become the consort of Shiva. She is regarded as the rebirth of Sati.

Ganga's mischievous behaviour at the beginning of the novel shows her love for her younger sister. She pours water on Parvathi's head as a mock ceremony while the worship was in progress. Ganga felt it ridiculous that those holy men insist on placing Parvati on a pedestal, while she was a little child. She is worried about the future of Parvati. She is very thoughtful and bold enough to question the Rishies' attitude. She gives that much love and cares for her younger sister Parvathi.

"I promise to love you unconditionally even if you insist that I lie prostrate at your feet like an over-enthusiastic devotee, share the last of my sweets with you and be a source of infinite comfort to you, now and forever more. I'll even forgive you for failing to appreciate the numerous things I do to make your life better". (Chandramouli, 46)

These lines show the love and caring of Ganga for her younger sister Parvati. They had spent many days on the great expedition which Ganga had insisted to undertake. They explored the remote regions of the mountain King's abode, marvelling at the wonders offered by icy caves, frozen streams that were perfect for use as giant slides and well worth a chaffing bottom, in the words of Ganga. They gambolled with bear cubs, raced with snow leopards and rode on the backs of wild yaks while the wind whipped the hair back from their faces and made their eyes stream.

Then, Anuja Chandramouli retold the myth of Shiva. Shiva is one of the most respectful figures in Hindu mythology, but in the book, the author addresses Shiva as the destroyer. Ganga has no respect for Shiva. She bitterly criticizes Shiva for his actions after losing his partner sati.

"Such excessive grieving is most unbecoming for one who is supposed to be foremost of the gods. Life goes on for everyone, doesn't it? Besides, he is the destroyer and has been

responsible for the untimely separation of scores of lovers, who no doubt, were heartbroken and wept to no avail. There can be little doubt that there will also be numerous others in the near future who will undergo a similar pain when he very deliberately turns their desire to ashes and ensures that their pleasure is forsaken. He, at least, has the satisfaction of knowing that he will be reunited with his beloved. What does he mean by turning his back on the three worlds? It is most childish of him". (Chandramouli, 88]

This shows the attitude of Ganga towards Shiva. In the novel, Shiva is addressed as the destroyer. Ganga has had a strong dislike for him. She always blames his actions after the loss of his consort. Ganga says that grief and rage are not suitable for a Trimurthi. The Saptarishis approached Ganga for becoming the consort of Lord Shiva and conceive a child from him. Only a child from Shiva's seed could save the world from the evils. They have taken Ganga as the goddess of Shakti's rebirth as Himavan's daughter. In the myth, it is Parvathi as the incarnation of Shakti. Ganga strongly rejects the request of Saptarishis. Her thoughtful words and her views make the Saptarishis and Brahma, the creator to prostrate themselves at her feet.

Ganga has been portrayed as a voiceless woman in Hindu mythology, but in the novel, she has had her views on everything. She has a strong conscience for the woman's conditions.

"The trouble with you, Paro and the rest of hopeless femininity is that you give toxic masculinity too much power by allowing them to dominate your heads and hearts. What is the point of obsessing over the injustice of their actions, agitating against them or loving them to distraction when all that energy and effort could be better expended towards the fulfilment of personal desire or ambition? I can't abide women who whine and weep about not having been treated right, especially if they are responsible for their predicament, having been stupid enough to relinquish control over

their lives to the opposite gender, driven thither by foolish dreams and overly optimistic expectations about finding love and security in another's arms" (Chandramouli, 105)

Ganga could never condone senseless violence against women. Before the eyes of her parents, Ganga blessed them. Brahma tells in the novel about the importance of Ganga over Parvathi. The fate of Himavan's daughters is inextricably linked with Lord Shiva. But for the immediate future where the survival of all in creation is being threatened, there is no choice but to look towards Goddess Ganga for protection. Without her grace, compassion and willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice, all is lost. Ganga is very bold enough to support the decision of her younger sister Parvathi, to stay with Shiva. She always knows where she is needed. The war is described in a very realistic manner. The descriptions that Anuja Chandramouli used in the novel are vivid and clear. We can see a real war in front of us. In the novel, Ganga felt Shiva's presence in every drop of blood, every blow of a spiked club, every hoarse cry of pain, every spasm and every last breath of the dying. Intoxicated by his heady presence, she drank every single drop of blood, wielded every weapon she could while receiving every blow, and revelled in the destroyer's dance of death, wrapping her around his body like a second skin.

Her waters could always be counted on to clean up the excesses of the mortals, immortals and all things in between. Ganga cleans up the earth with her highly purified waters. She saved the land from bloodshed and a terrible atmosphere. Her water is deliciously cold and sweet to taste. It is as clear as crystal. Ganga gathered the broken and bruised in her arms with maternal concern. Some were given merciful release and put out of their misery. Others felt her healing touch. Those who were beyond all hope, Ganga held to her bosom, rocking them gently while the waves sang a lullaby. And they supped at her breasts, imbibing the life-giving mother's milk in great gulps and came back to life, feeling they could live forever as indeed they would. Her womb tightened with the love she bore them all.

Ganga is very bold in her decisions throughout the novel. She does not give any value to the luxurious celebrations conducted on behalf of marriage. She calls it an unnecessarily extravagant so-called celebration of the joining of two souls. She can't find any value in it. Ganga and Shiva had a fascination in their mind that they hadn't recognized. In that image, they share the inner love that they stored in their mind. This is because it is Ganga who is the rebirth of Shakti to reunite with Shiva. But the situations separated them. So Ganga could not reunite with her partner. When the story moves on, the dislike of Ganga for Shiva is decreased. She realizes the doings of Shiva for the sake of the world. The suffering that he experienced makes his actions the worst. His actions are all because of his sorrow after the death of his consort. This shows how Shiva loved his wife. This made Ganga show a little respect towards Shiva.

Another character in the novel is the king named Mahabisha. Ganga wished to be with him. They decided to unite in life, but couldn't. Mahabisha was distanced from Ganga for the selfish need of Devas. Ganga is always the victim of their selfish needs.

Another mythical story that Anuja described in her novel is the mental and physical agony Ganga had faced during the birth of Karthikeya. Nobody could hold Shiva's seed. The radiance and the strength of it were very high. Nobody could bear it. Ganga had originated in the snow-clad mountains of Himavan, the great king and had always been impervious to heat. Her waters simmered and boiled, hurting her with scalding sprays of steam. But she wouldn't flinch. Rather, she reveled in the pain, ignoring her singed hair and the blackened patches of burnt skin, welcoming it as a small price to pay for the privilege of being chosen to bear this special child, who had been awaited for thousands of years, and carry him to safety. All the rivers, streams, seas, fountains and wells harkened to her call and gathered around her, absorbing the all-powerful heat within her life-giving waters before the three worlds were burnt down and utterly destroyed. Bhumi Devi wept with relief, joining her voice to those of her denizens who sang their gratitude to the constant goddess of the divine

waters, the one who had never failed them. Ganga was oblivious to all but the beautiful baby boy taking shape in her arms. The child is born of bits and pieces of the wild, unfathomable magic and mystery of Shiva and Parvathi, coupled with the secret components of the mystical elements. She felt him deep inside her womb, nourished by the power of unstinting sacrifice, transforming into whatever he was meant to be a protector, redeemer, warrior; the possibilities were endless. He was the sum total of every good deed, an act of courage, generosity, kindness, selfless love and sacrifice. She wept for the baby that she had carried and protected against all odds but who would never belong to her alone. So she cherished every moment granted to her and went on welcoming the pain, for it meant that the child would be with her that much longer. She hadn't known that there had been so much love in her heart. She would have loved to hold on to him forever, but it was time to let him go. She was reborn to bear the seed of Shiva and only she could do that.

The consequences of Ganga's actions were bitter. Parvathi was mistaken that it is Ganga's selfish celestials to interrupt their lovemaking and stole her son. She cursed Ganga. The curse of Parvathi had great social relevance in today's world. People dumped their filth, sins and poisons into her waters, till they become every bit as noxious and unworthy. Shiva comes to support Ganga. Ganga treats their son as her own. She left Parvathi only because of her love for her younger sister. But Parvathi was unaware of that. Ganga had a great affection for Karthikeya but she is unable to express it. She had to walk away from her motherly feelings. In the mythology also, Karthikeya was always described as Parvathi's son even though Ganga had done a great things for his birth. Ganga refused to cry about it. During the growing reign of Karthikeya, she felt proud of her son. When Karthikeya realizes the truth, he comes to Ganga at the end. He understood that his mother was Ganga and respected her. She is also worried about her daughter-in-law. She is afraid about who would become a match for her son. This shows the possessiveness of a mother.

In Bagiratha's story, Ganga shows her dislike of Indra and Shiva. Ganga was requested to

come to earth due to the heavy drought that people are suffering. Only the constant goddess and the liquid manifestation of Shakti can save them. She was requested by Bagiratha, a king. The inhabitants of the three worlds were hoping that she will step in and make everything right again. When Ganga had been persuaded to descend from heaven and fill the ocean to relieve Bhumi Devi of her suffering. And once the ashes of the deceased have been washed clean by her waters, they will take their place in heaven and be at peace. When Bagiratha saw Ganga he felt blessed to see her. He admires her in his inner thought. When Ganga held his hands, Bagiratha felt her strength flow into him as his fingers and toes regenerated one by one and his body regained its former strength and youthful vigour. She promised him that she will not disappoint him.

The retelling of myth can be seen in the story of the river Yamuna. She was a slim, dusky girl with lustrous dark hair, and was lovely. Yami is the daughter of Surya who was imprisoned as the victim of patriarchy. It was Ganga who came forward to rescue her. Yami was effusive in her gratitude when she found herself afloat in Ganga's tides, far away from the ignominy they had sought to bury her under. The comforting waters gathered her close in a silken embrace, easing the trauma of her troubled childhood and family history. She could feel the raw infusion of Ganga's power into her very own being, the essence of the constant goddess flowed into her veins, shared generously, with nothing held back. Bowing her head, she accepted the blessing and slipped into her new role, surrendering to the wisdom of her new sister-river who was also the mother that she had always wanted to be.

Ganga had the power to control her feelings. She is aware of her identity. She didn't allow the rage to take possession of her. She was heartbroken at the loss of her lover Mahabisha. Despite her pretensions to the contrary, she was a mother at heart and cared too much for her children and their world, which she had helped restore, and even at the height of her grief, she wouldn't lacerate them with her pain. Instead, she would suffer in solitude. She had made a flood on behalf of the results of the doings done by Devas and Rishis. She makes flood. Nobody can make her calm. In the end,

a perfect union happened between Shiva and Ganga. He promised her that one day she could reunite with Mahabisha who will take rebirth as king Shantanu.

This work has great relevance in today's life. The river Ganga is not only important in the culture of India but also in the culture of the whole world. But that purity and magnificence lie only in words and articles. People are careless about the purity of the River Ganga. The holiest and most sacred river in India has now become the most polluted river in India. It has become a dumping place of all types of waste materials. However, pollution has been an old and continuous process, and people are still not aware of their duty to protect the holy river Ganga from pollution.

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