Importance of Water Bodies in the *Māhātmyas* in the Kāverī Region[1]

Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz (Jagiellonian University, Cracow)
R. Sathyanarayanan (EFEO Pondicherry)

Water reservoirs have always challenged the imagination of the inhabitants of India for obvious reasons, which are also valid in other cultures. Water not only gives life, ensuring vegetation, but also, through its natural and sometimes unbridled power, resembles gods or rather goddesses. Therefore, rivers are often personified as females. The topic of Indian rivers as constituents of both the natural and cultural landscapes of India has already been treated by scholars, among them Indologists.[2] It is also an element of the ongoing project within which we are working on various South Indian *māhātmyas* (glorifications). In this contribution we would like to concentrate on the particular region irrigated by the South Indian river Kāverī and the *māhātmyas* that praise various Vaiṣṇava sacred sites along the river and the Kāverī itself.

Working for some time on the *māhātmyas* of the holy *kṣetra* (area) of the South Indian temple town Śrīraṅgam, we cannot overlook the importance of water and the river for this place, but also for the whole region. Therefore, in our contribution, using the example of the ten-chapter version of the *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya* and passages from some other texts of this genre, we would like to investigate how nature, especially the river and other water bodies, is present in the process of shaping the place which, also due to its natural specifics, becomes suitable for the worship of god. We ask in which way the river and water reservoirs connected with it are present in the religious literature, and how natural phenomena are used to build the position and authority of a holy spot.

---

2 See e.g., Feldhaus 1990, Eck 2013, Krishna 2017.

Fig. 1: Śrīraṅgam on the Kāverī from the Rock Fort, Trichy
(photo by Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz).

Śrīraṅgam and the Raṅganātha Temple

Śrīraṅgam as a holy spot can be dated probably to the late sixth and early seventh century CE, as for example recent work of Eva Wilden shows, presenting some passages from early Ālvārs' poetry in which Araṅkam as a sacred spot appears[3] (Orr (1995) suggests the sixth century CE). It constitutes one of the biggest Hindu temple complexes not only in India but also in the world.[4] The temple, situated on an island between Kāverī and Kollitam rivers, has seven enclosures (*prākāras*). Consequently, it should have 28 temple gates (*gopuras*; four in every enclosure), but not all of them have been finished. The largest of them, the *rājagopura*, was finished only in 1987.

---

3   Wilden (2020, 1) writes: "The three old *Tiruvantāti-s* by Poykai-, Pūtam- and Pēyālvār form, together with the small oeuvre of Kāraikālammaiyār on the Śaiva side, the earliest works of bhakti literature transmitted in Tamil, or in fact, for that matter, in the whole of India." The name Tiruvaraṅkam (Śrīraṅgam) appears in the texts of these early Ālvārs six times.

4   Jeannine Auboyer (2006) writes that it covers an area of about 631,000 square meters (156 acres) with a perimeter of four km.

Fig. 2: Śrīraṅgam temple *vimāna* (photo by Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz).

Viṣṇu is worshipped in the Raṅganātha temple in a monumental sculpture representing the god reclining on the snake Śeṣa.[5] The fame of the temple is such that it is called simply *kōyil*, "the temple". It is one of the few places in which both the particular iconographical form of Viṣṇu and his shrine (*vimāna*) are of the self-manifested type (*svayamvyakta/svayambhuva*). The *vimāna* is described in the *Śrīraṅga-māhātmya*[6] (3.33cd) as *divyaṃ vimānaṃ taṃ dṛṣṭvā svayamvyaktaṃ maharddhimat* ("having seen that prosperous, divine self-manifested shrine ..."). Out of eight self-manifested temples, Śrīraṅgam is enumerated in the *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya* as the first one.[7]

---

5 The sculpture in the *sanctum sanctorum* (*mūlasthāna*) is seven meters in width.

6 *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya* (claiming to be a part of *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*). Cited according to the authors' ongoing critical edition and translation. This is the text meant when we generally refer to the *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya* hereafter.

7 *ādyaṃ svayamvyaktam idaṃ vimānaṃ raṅgasaṃjñikam ǁ*
    śrīmuṣṇaṃ veṅkaṭādriṃ ca sālagrāmaṃ ca naimiśam |
    tottādriṃ puṣkaraṃ caiva naranārāyaṇāśramam ǁ Śrīraṅgamāhātmyam 5.27c–28.

Fig. 3: Śrīraṅgam temple *gopuras* (photo by Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz).

In its long history the Raṅganātha temple was in the scope of interest of many dynasties beginning from the Pallavas up to the Nāyakas, who participated in its development through the building of subsequent enclosures, new shrines and temple gates.[8] These kings not only contributed to the architecture of temples, but they also made numerous land and other endowments for conducting regular worship as well as temple festivals. The temple also owes much to the famous religious teacher and philosopher Rāmānuja (eleventh–twelfth century CE), the exponent of the *viśiṣṭā-dvaitavedānta* and one of the Śrīvaiṣṇava *ācāryas*, who re-organized the temple life and administration, making the temple a powerful center with substantial economic and political influence.

_____

8   Spencer writes that history of the temple has a political dimension and is a mixture of patronage
     and plunder, royal donations and political intervention in its internal deeds, even from the side
     of its ostentatious protectors: "Nor were the temple's political problems all external ones: like
     other complex institutions, large temples like the one at Śrīraṅgam were prone to internal con-
     flicts, reflecting not only the ambitions of individuals, but also jealousies and rivalries among
     groups of temple servants over the control of specific duties and perquisites. Such internal
     tensions were readily aggravated by external pressures and wider societal crises" (Spencer
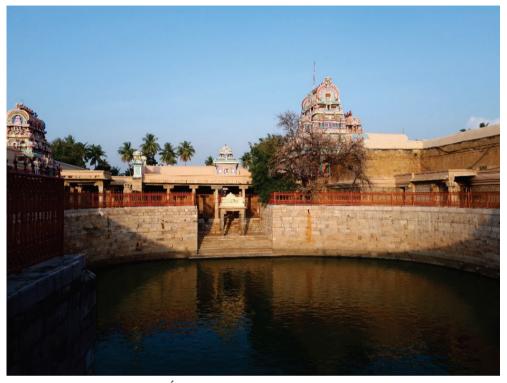   1978, 14).

Fig. 4: Candrapuṣkariṇī at the Śrīraṅgam temple (photo by Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz).

The history of the temple is attested in one complete volume of the *South Indian Inscriptions* (volume XXIV: Inscriptions of the Raṅganāthasvāmi temple, Śrīraṅgam) in nearly 640 inscriptions, which form one of the most important sources of our knowledge about it (Hari Rao 1967, 4–13). The second source, the *Kōyil Oḻuku* (fourteenth–eighteenth century according to Orr 1995), a temple chronicle, provides information concerning the reforms of Rāmānuja.[9] Introducing the Pāñcarātrika ritualistic system, Rāmānuja re-arranged the temple administration, and appointed particular duties to specific groups of temple functionaries.[10] However, as Orr observes by consulting more than 200 inscriptions from the ninth to fourteenth centuries CE, these changes

---

9 Konduri Sarojini Devi 1990. Already in the tenth century, Nāthamuni, who held the position of temple manager (*śrīkāryam*), introduced the hymns of the Āḻvārs to the Śrīraṅgam liturgy (Orr 1995).

10 In the chapter "Religious Institutions: The Temple", Konduri Sarojini Devi (1990) mentions the classification attested in the *Kōyil Oḻuku*. Among these ten groups were *sthānikas/ sthānattars* who issued all temple documents; priests called *pūjāris*; heads of the temple administration known as *senāpatis*; *durandharas*, who, for example, took care of a temple seal *mudrā* and of sacrificial substances *dravyas*; there were also *pārupatyagārs* controlling the work of other workers in the temple and many others to whom Rāmānuja gave name, duties and hereditary right to continue the service.

Fig. 5: *Punnaga* tree at the Candrapuṣkariṇī
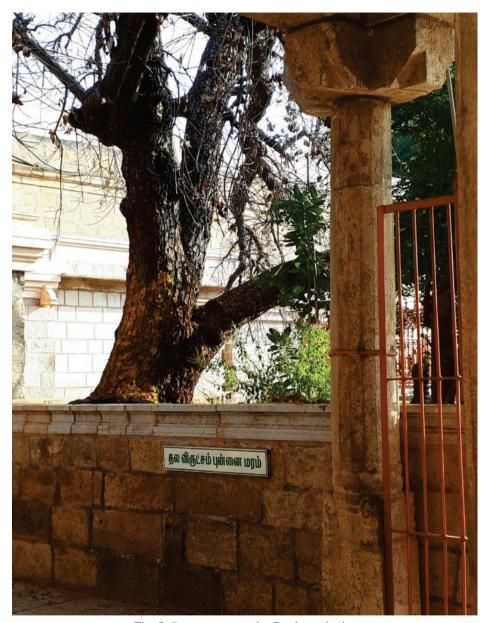(photo by Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz).

are not attested in them (Orr 1995, 121). Nevertheless, tradition has it that the duties were assigned to members of all four *varṇas*, therefore also Śūdras have their role in temple life. In this way, all the functions were distributed among the members of the diverse Vaiṣṇava communities and they are until now continued in the particular

families.[11] Rāmānuja also dedicated to the temple one of his three religious hymns in prose form (*gadyas*), entitled the *Śrīraṅgagadya*.[12]

Māhātmyas of Śrīraṅgam

The next important source of our knowledge about Śrīraṅgam are the above-mentioned *māhātmyas*. One is included in chapter 10 (verses 108ff.) of the Pāñcarātrika text *Pārameśvarasaṃhitā*. Apart from this, a number of independent texts known as *Śrīraṅgamāhātmyas* exist. Hari Rao (1967, 1) mentions two *māhātmyas*: *Daśādhyāyī* (Ten-chaptered) and *Śatādhyāyī* (Hundred-chaptered), though he does not give any detailed reference to these texts. A text with the name *Śatādhyāyī* has been published in 2012 in Śrīraṅgam, bearing the title *Śrī Garuḍapurāṇokta Śrīraṅgamāhātmyam* (*Śatādhyāyī*). This Sanskrit text is printed in Devanāgarī. The same text was published in Tamil script in the same year under the title *Srī Karuṭapurāṇokta Srīraṅkamāhātmyam*. Yet another text, based on a *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya*, entitled *Sriranga mahatmyam (in Tamil), culled from various Purāṇas* was published in 1935.[13] In addition, David Shulman (1980) mentions in his bibliography a *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya* published in 1908 in Tiruccirāppaḷḷi. The *māhātmya* on which we are working can possibly be identified with the *Daśādhyāyī* mentioned by Hari Rao. It is a text in Sanskrit printed in Telugu script and published in Chennai in 1875.[14]

The story of the temple known from these sources mentions a Cōḻa king whose name is Dharmavarma, but who is not known from historical records. He is supposed to have built the temple, which was subsequently covered with sand due to a flood and was then forgotten. It was yet another Cōḻa king, named Kiḷḷi, who saw the temple in his dream, rediscovered and renovated it. His name probably refers to the fact that it was a parrot (in Tamil *kiḷi*) which helped him to find the forgotten temple. The *māhātmya*, and also the *Kōyil Oḷuku* (chronicle of the Śrīraṅgam temple) evoke a Cōḻa king as a builder of the temple located on the island between two rivers Kāverī and Kollitam. According to the above-mentioned sources and the *māhātmya* itself, the main shrine (*śrīraṅgavimāna*) has a *svayaṃvyakta* representation of the god Viṣṇu in the form known as Raṅganātha. He appeared from the ocean due to intense ascetic practice of Brahmā, who appointed the sun-god Sūrya to accompany him in the daily worship of Raṅganātha. Ikṣvāku, a descendant of Sūrya, took the *vimāna* from the abode of Brahmā (*brahmaloka*) to Ayodhyā. The shrine was worshipped there for a long time before the prince Rāma gave it as a gift to Rāvaṇa's brother Vibhīṣana, who had come from Laṅkā. Vibhīṣana took the *vimāna* on his head, and on his way back to Laṅkā he approached the bank of the Kāverī river, where he

---

11 On this classification and detailed description of the duties of these groups see for example Jagannathan 1994.

12 The three *gadyas* are the *Śaraṇāgatigadya*, the *Śrīraṅgagadya* and the *Śrīvaikuṇṭhagadya*.

13 This is probably a modern English summary.

14 We owe the copy from the British Library to Prof. Ute Hüsken.

decided to have a rest. When he woke up on the next morning, he realized that the *vimāna* remained stuck to the ground. In despair, Vibhīṣaṇa began to cry. Seeing him like that, the Cōḻa king Dharmavarma comforted him, explaining that the god obviously preferred to stay on the Kāverī river side. To show his mercy to Vibhīṣaṇa, Viṣṇu would rest in the *vimāna* lying with his face directed to the south, towards Laṅkā. When Vibhīṣaṇa returned to Laṅkā, Dharmavarman built a temple around the *vimāna* in Śrīraṅgam, which is known as "Vaikuṇṭha on Earth" (*bhūlokavaikuṇṭha*).

Among the subjects which are treated by the *māhātmyā*, there are some which we would like to elaborate more and which are connected with water. One is the notion of the nine ponds (*nava tīrthas*) of Śrīraṅgam. The tenth chapter of the *māhātmya* entitled *navatīrthaprabhāvavarṇanam* "description of the appearance of the nine *tīrthas*" refers to this issue. In this text, all nine ponds are associated with a *maṇḍapa* and with a specific tree. However, in many places the trees are not to be found today. In this text, the main Candrapuṣkariṇī pond is associated with the *punnāga* tree (*Rottleria tinctoria*) and is located in the center of the area. Further *tīrthas*-with-trees are: Bilva Tīrtha (bell-fruit, *Aegle marmelos*) to the east and in front of Candrapuṣ-kariṇī, Jambu Tīrtha (*Eugenia jambolana*) in the south-east, Aśvattha Tīrtha (*Ficus religiosa*) in the south, Palāśa Tīrtha (*Butea frondosa*) in the south of Aśvattha and in the west (south-west), Punnāga Tīrtha (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) in the west, Bakula Tīrtha (*Mimusops elengi*) in the north-west, Kadamba Tīrtha (*Nauclea cadamba*) in the north, and Āmra Tīrtha (*Mangifera indica*) in the north-east.[15] These nine ponds (*tīrthas*) continue to exist mostly unharmed even today, except Bilva Tīrtha.[16]

Riverine Region of Kāverī

Since our supposition is that water bodies play an important role in shaping not only natural but also religious landscape, we would like to concentrate now on the river Kāverī itself. The river was present in the *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya*'s story of the beginnings of the holy spot, but the same text contains some more passages referring to the Kāverī. One of them refers to a discussion between Gaṅgā and Kāverī concerning

---

15 During our field research from February 10, 2020 to February 12, 2020 (together with Mr. Ramaswamy Babu, École Française d'Extrême Orient, Pondicherry) we visited all nine *tīrthas*, checked their actual positions and documented/photographed their present state. The result of this research will be presented soon.

16 We cannot say anything certain about the dating of the ponds and also of the *māhātmya*, although we could take Tirumaḻicai Āḻvār's (around seventh century CE) words from *Tiruccan-taviruttam* song 50 (*eṇṭicaik kaṇaṅkaḻum iṟaiñciyāṭu tīrtta nīr*—"where *gaṇas* (*dikpālas*?) from eight directions come to worship and bathe in its purifying waters [from Candrapuṣkariṇī?]") as alluding to deities being protectors of the eight directions. Nevertheless, even if these eight deities came to the holy spot, there is no direct statement about the existence of the eight separate ponds. As for the *māhātmya* itself, similarly to other texts of this kind, it could have been created from around sixteenth century CE.

their superiority, which is described in the ninth chapter, entitled *Dharmavarmakr-taśrīraṅgotsavaḥ* ("The festival of Śrīraṅga executed by Dharmavarma").[17] In addition to these references in the *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya*, the river is present in several other text passages of Sanskrit and Tamil literature. Being very much in the minds of the inhabitants of the region, the river is also praised in further texts of the *māhātmya* genre.

The culture-establishing role of the Kāverī river cannot be overlooked when talking about Śrīraṅgam and the *tīrthas* along this river. It can be seen, for example, from the fact that the community of inhabitants of this area is sometimes even called the "Kāverī community". Before referring to the textual sources describing the role of the river in the development of regional culture, it is worth mentioning some ancient material creations connected with the river. The practical usage of its water and the role in irrigation systems of the region is demonstrated, for example, by the Kallanai Dam, one of the splendid examples of early Indian technology, known also as Grand Anicut. It was built in Thogur - Koviladi village (Budalur Taluk in Thanjavur District) by, as tradition has it, the ruler of the Cōla dynasty named Karikālan already in the second century CE. Writing about the dam, G. Deivanayagam and R. Paranthaman, the authors of the book entitled *Kallanai Kaveri* (2012), date it even to second century BCE. They also speak about the novelty of the project and its impact on the construction of a modern dam on the Godavari river.[18] Deivanayagam and Paranthaman argue that from the mentions in Sangam literature one can deduce that the region under the Cōlas was rich in water, testifying not only to the existence of the dam at that time but also to its effectiveness. We are not in the position to establish the date of the dam, but it is definitely a very early and very elaborate example of technical advancement of the region as far as irrigation is concerned.

Yet another author, Aravamuthan,[19] in his thesis entitled *The Kaveri, The Maukharis and the Sangam Age*, among other things speaks about Karikālan's project of raising the Kāverī embankments to prevent floods.[20] He writes about an abundance of water in Cōla times which seems to be attested also in the still-used name of the region which is Puṉal Nāṭu – "the land well-watered", though the name, due to floods, is sometimes understood as "the land of floods" (Aravamuthan 1925, 8). However, one has to remember that the present-day Kāverī is not exactly the same as the one known

---

17 We include the Sanskrit texts and English translations of the passage in the Appendix of this chapter.

18 The Godavari dam was constructed in the nineteenth century by general Arthur Cotton, who designed it after the Grand Anicut. He even made a cross-section of the dam to investigate and copy details of its construction.

19 The king Karikālan and his construction of the dam was the subject of thesis of T. G. Aravamuthan (1925).

20 Aravamuthan takes as a starting point the Tamil text *Kaliṅgattuparaṇi* by Jayaṅgoṇḍāṉ. The text eulogizes the poet's patron, Kulottuṅga Cōla I (1070–1120 CE), for having conquered Kaliṅga, and in the genealogy of the king given in the text Karikālaṉ also appears.

Fig. 6: The Kāverī near Śrīraṅgam (photo by Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz).

from history, and for example the role of its mouth at Kāverippaṭṭiṇam previously was much more significant. In his quite elaborate argument concerning king Karikālaṉ, Aravamuthan observes that from the various literary and epigraphic sources he used, it is difficult to establish the exact date of the king. However, these sources attribute to Karikālaṉ the construction not only of the river's embankments, but also of a dam or a barrage across the river. The author tries to establish the dates of the dam, though sources are scarce and their dating is often not decisive or simply unknown. Therefore, ascribing the dam to as early as the second century BCE or to the seventh century CE seems equally provisional and uncertain.[21] Aravamuthan speaks of the existence of an "Old Kāverī" or even of the existence of two Kāverīs, which might have been distinct from the presently existing one (Aravamuthan 1925, 73). In any case, the river had a significant impact on the inhabitants of the region for many centuries, and its history still today preoccupies the minds of scholars.

---

21 See for example the passage "Embankments and dams" (Aravamuthan 1925, 67–71). As in the case of the previously mentioned authors (Deivanayagam and Paranthaman), Aravamuthan also is cautious about the dates and identity of Karikālaṉ himself as well as Mukari, Mukharis and their conquest by this king. Nevertheless, the great irrigation-directed achievements of the Cōḻas, and probably even the early Cōḻas, were noticeable, if not spectacular.

Fig. 7: Grand Anicut (photo by Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz).

Sanskrit Sources Referring to the Kāverī

The Kāverī has been referred to in Śaiva scriptures such as the *Niśvāsamukha* (3.4), *Ajitāgama* (84.7c–8b), *Makuṭāgama* (4.232), etc., and in Vaiṣṇava scriptures such as the *Pārameśvarasaṃhitā* (10.276). Apart from these Āgamas, also the *Mahābhārata* (supplementary passages to *Ādiparvan*: 1.2031.01–03) and many Purāṇas like *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (10.79.013–14) mention the river Kāverī. The river has also been referred to by many Sanskrit literary authors like Daṇḍin (*Daśakumāracarita*, p.159, sixth *ucchvāsa*) and Kālidāsa (*Raghuvaṃśa* 4.45), which shows the significance of the river Kāverī in Southern India.[22]

In the introductory notes of his book addressing the text of the Tamil *Kāvēri Rahasyam*, P. Makātēva Ayyar (1962) refers to many literary sources addressing the Kāverī, among them also Sanskrit texts, from which he provides some quotations. He lists fourteen titles.[23]

---

22 For these passages as well as some examples from Tamil literature, see the Appendix at the end of this chapter.

23 1) *Smṛtimuktāphalam* of Vaidyanātha, 2) *Śrīmadbhāgavatam* (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*), 3) (Keralan)

Among the Sanskrit *stotras* which Ayyar cites, the *Kāveryaṣṭaka* contains a kind of eulogy of the river:

> *marudvṛdhe mānya [mānye?] jalapravāhe*
> *kaverakanye namatāṃ śaraṇye* |
> *mānye vidher mānasaputri saumye*
> *kāveri kāveri mama prasīda* ‖ 1 ‖

"O Marudvṛddhā, Honorable Current of water!
O Daughter of Kavera, O you protecting those who salute you!
O Honorable, and pleasant mind-born daughter of Vidhi [Brahmā],
Kāverī, Kāverī, show me your grace!"

Yet another source, namely Brahmakaivartapurāṇa (in *Sri Kaveri Mahima and Stotras*, Chennai 2017), explains the name of the river in such a way:

> *kākāraḥ kaluṣaṃ hanti, vekāro vāñchitapradaḥ*
> *rīkāro mokṣado nṝṇāṃ kāverīty avadhāraya* ‖

"[The syllable] *kā* removes sin, *ve* bestows what is desired,
rī gives emancipation to people, as such understand [the name] Kāverī."

In all the texts enumerated by P. Makātēva Ayyar there are portions sometimes of substantial length dedicated to the Kāverī. Clearly, the mythology developing around this river was quite elaborate and the interest in it was significant.

Inscriptions

Apart from Purāṇic literature, which, as we have seen, praises her as the one of the most important rivers of the subcontinent, Kāverī is also mentioned in some South Indian inscriptions. Here we would like to mention famous old inscriptions, which are from the Pallava cave in the Tiruccirāppaḷḷi Rock Fort, very close to Śrīraṅgam itself. They appear on the two pillars on the left and right side of the Śiva Gaṅgādhara relief in the Upper Cave.[24] These inscriptions are dated to the times of the Pallava king Mahendra I (ca. 590–630 CE), who is called Satyasaṃdha in the inscriptions. They consist of thirteen and sixteen lines respectively and are written in Sanskrit in Grantha script. In *South Indian Inscriptions* Vol. 1, Hultzsch gives the wording and an English translation for of both of them.[25] The text and translation of the first one begins as follows:

Nārāyaṇīya, 4) *Rāmāyaṇa, Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, 5) *Brahmapurāṇa*, 6) *Kāveristotra* of Duṇḍirājā-vyāsa, 7) *Mahārthamañjarīparimala* of Mahevarananda, 8) *Śivalīlāvarṇanā* of Nīlakaṇṭhadī-kṣita, 9) *Sahyajanavaratnamālikā* of Raju Sastri (twentieth century?), 10) *Brahmakaivarta-purāṇa*, 11) *Skandapurāṇa*, 12) *Agneyapurāṇa*, 13) *Kāveryaṣṭaka*, 14) *Kāveribhujaṅgastotra*.

24 See figures 8 and 9.
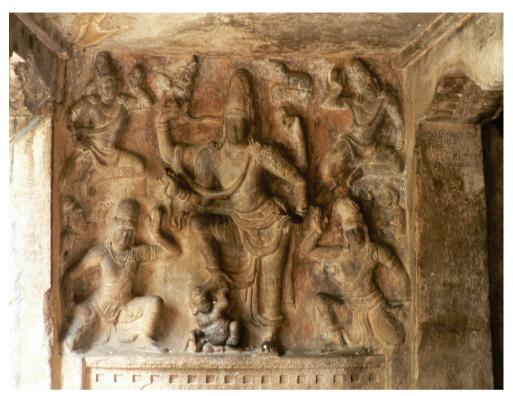25 Hultzsch 1890, 28–31, no 33 and 34.

Fig. 8: Gaṅgādhara relief, Upper Cave, Trichy (photo by Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz).

kāverīnnayanābhirāmasalilāmārāmamālādharām
devovīkṣya nadīpriyaḥ priyaguṇām apy eṣa rajyed iti |
sāsaṃkā girikanyakā pitṛkulaṃ hitveva manye girau
nityan tiṣṭhati pallavasya dayitām etāṃ bruvāṇā nadīm ‖

(verse 1) "Being afraid, that the god who is fond of rivers (*Śiva*), having perceived the Kāvīrī, whose waters please the eye, who wears a garland of gardens, and who possesses lovely qualities, might fall in love (*with her*), the daughter of the mountain (*Pârvati*) has, I think, left her father's family and resides permanently on this mountain, calling this river the beloved of the Pallava (*king*)."

Inscription no 34, on the pillar to the right, reads:

vibhūtiś coḷānāṃ katham aham avekṣeya vipulāṃ
nadīṃ vā kāverīṃ avanibhavanāvasthita iti |
hareṇoktaḥ prītyā vibhur adiśad abhraṃliham idaṃ
anuprakhyo rājye garibhavanam asmai guṇabharaḥ ‖

"After Hara (*Śiva*) had graciously asked him: "How could I, standing in a temple on earth, view the great power of the Cholas or the river Kāveri?" – king

Guṇabhara, who resembled Manu in his manner or ruling, assigned to him this mountain-temple, which touches the clouds."[26]

As we see from this inscriptional material, the river Kāverī's imagery as an important element of the cultural landscape was very much in the minds of the early kings of the region and their poets who were using the Kāverī motif in verses praising their sponsors. For the Pallavas it seemed to be important and meaningful to establish their own temple, endowed with characteristic elements of their style, in the far southern parts of their kingdom marked by the holy river Kāverī, to notify their dominance over the early Cōḻas, whom they defeated.

Religious Dimension

Very often in religious observances all seven sacred rivers are present, and they may be invoked before ritual practice is commenced:

gaṅge ca yamune caiva godāvari sarasvati |
narmade sindhu kāveri jale 'smin sannidhiṃ kuru ǁ [*Merutantra* 5.68]

"O river Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Godāvarī, Sarasvatī, Narmadā, Sindhu and Kāverī, be present in this water!"

Here the religious practitioner invokes the water of all seven sacred rivers in the water pot that is used to sprinkle all worshipping materials to be used for the rituals. This ritual act shall purify the worshipping materials.

Perceived as the Gaṅgā of the South, the Kāverī was and is an extremely important natural element of Tamil culture with many holy places and shrines built along its stream as well as the spectacular Śrīraṅgam temple situated on the island between the Kāverī and its branch Koḷḷiṭam.[27] As we will see, the specific features of the region influenced the authors of the religious scriptures to create stories about, for example, the origins of the sacred spots and the river itself. Geographic and natural specifics of the region of Kāverī delta were in immediate relation to the developments within religious traditions flourishing there. For the pious Vaiṣṇavas, the pilgrimage along the Kāverī leads them through several holy spots on both sides of the river, and culminates in the vision of the wonderful island, which even attracted the god himself, so he, in the mythological past, decided to reside there. The abundance of water enabled the establishment of not only one, but, as we know, several *tīrthas* in the temple precincts and nearby. The *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya* mentions

---

26 These inscriptions were also in the scope of interest of Emmanuel Francis who spoke about them and provided a French translation within the framework of the *Archaeology of Bhakti* workshop in Pondicherry (2011). I am grateful to S.A.S. Sarma (École Française d'Extrême Orient, Pondicherry) for drawing my attention to these inscriptions and for providing me with some information about them (M.C.-D.).

27 One finds some observations about the riverine region of Kāverī, for example, in the book entitled *Eternal Kaveri* edited by Michell and Arni (1999).

Fig. 9: Kāverī inscription, Gaṅgādhara relief, Upper Cave, Trichy
(photo by Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz).

not only Candrapuṣkariṇī, also equated with the Kāverī and through this with the Gaṅgā, but also eight other holy tanks associated with the Raṅganātha temple. The temple is an especially important pilgrimage center, equated with heaven on earth (*bhūlokavaikuṇṭha*), but along the river there are some more *raṅgas*, which are specific Viṣṇu's temples. The tradition speaks about five such *raṅgas*, calling them *pañcaraṅgas*.[28] These are: 1) Śrīraṅganātha temple in Srirangapatnam (located in

_____

28 See for example Krishna 2017 and Dalal 2011 (in the Raṅganātha entry).

Karnataka), 2) Śrīraṅganātha temple in Srirangam, 3) Appala Raṅganātha temple in Koviladi (near Lalgudi), known also as Sri Appakkuṭathān Perumāḷ, 4) Śarṅgapāṇi temple in Kumbhakonam or Trivikrama temple near Sirkali, and 5) Parimaḷa Ranganātha temple in Indaluru (Mayiladuturai).[29]

We understand *raṅga* or *pañcaraṅga* as temple/five temples or land in between two rivers as an island, based on the meaning given in the Tamil Lexicon,[30] quoting from the earliest Tamil epic *Cilappatikāram*, "The Tale of Anklet" by Iḷaṅkō Aṭikaḷ (fifth or sixth century CE). Thus, Śrīraṅgam on the island between Kāverī and Koḷḷiṭam, Koviladi between Kāverī and Koḷḷiṭam, Indalur between Kāverī and Vennar, Kumbhakonam between Kāverī and Arasalar and Srirangapatnam between Kāverī and another river, whose name is not known to us.[31]

Kāverī *Māhātmyas*

As we have mentioned, the role of the Kāverī is reflected in the development of Kāverī-bound mythology as well as in the texts dedicated to or talking about the river, among them *māhātmyas*. Recently we were able to consult a Sanskrit text (in Devanāgarī script) entitled *Tulakāverimāhātmya*, and (to a limited extent) a Tamil text entitled *Kāvēri Rahasyam*, but there are certainly many more, and, as in the case of many other *māhātmyas*, they often claim to belong to specific Purāṇas. Thus, the river has its own *sthalapurāṇa*, but the story of its appearance as well as the story establishing her dominant role can also be found in other sources referring to the region. These texts attracted the attention of the British historian and archeologist Lewis Rice. We can find some data about the existence of the *māhātmyas* dedicated to the Kāverī for example in his *Mysore and Coorg* vol. III, being a part of *Mysore Gazetteer* (Rice 1878, vol. III). Rice writes in the chapter entitled *History. Legendary Period* (Rice 1878, 87-93) about a *Kāverī Purāṇa* which he equates with a *Kāverī Māhātmya*. He adds that this text can be treated as a legendary account of the history of the Coorg region. This text claims to form chapters 11–14 of the *Skāndapurāṇa* or *Kārttikeya Purāṇa*. As Rice reports, the *māhātmya* describes the river from its source up to the sea, mentioning several holy *tīrthas* and temples along its banks. Rice suspects that this Brahmanical text was supposed to subjugate the Coorgs to the Brahmins, but being written in Sanskrit, it did not attract much attention and respect from this community.[32]

---

29 Apart from the nine Śrīraṅgam *tīrthas*, these *pañcaraṅga* temples are also within our scope of interest and some results of our research will be presented soon.

30 The Tamil Lexicon mentions: அரங்கம் *araṅkam*, n. < *raṅga*. Island formed by a river or rivers, delta: ஆற்றிடைக்குறை. ஆற்றுவீயரங்கத்து (சிலப்பதிகாரம் 10.156).

31 However, for example, Adalbert J. Gail (2016) understands the term *raṅga* differently, referring it to the theatre and the stage.

32 He writes: "The numerous passages inculcating the duty of the valiant Coorgs to offer to the

The beginnings of the Kāverī story recalled by Rice are connected with the *ṛṣi* Agastya. The story starts out from the known Purāṇic episode about the Asuras stealing the *amṛta*, which was produced during the churning of the milk ocean. The desperate gods asked Viṣṇu for help and Mohinī emanated from him, while Lakṣmī sent Lopāmudrā, a form of Pārvatī. Mohinī charmed the Asuras, then rescued the *amṛta* and gave it back to the gods. Then she rested at Brahmagiri, which is the hill at the source of Kāverī. Mohinī was then changed into a cave, while Lopāmudrā was brought up by Brahmā as his daughter. The story then tells of the sage Kavera, a devotee of Brahmā, who retired to Brahmagiri, where he meditated on Brahmā and asked him for children. Brahmā gave him Lopāmudrā as daughter, and for this reason she obtained the name Kāverī. Since she wanted to procure grace for her new father, she decided to become a river, which would pour out blessings on the earth, and the sage Kavera would acquire all the merits of this act. Thus, she turned into a river and asked Brahmā to give her the power of absolving people who bath in her holy waters from sins they committed also in their previous lives. Brahmā granted her this power. Then one day Kāverī was asked by the *ṛṣi* Agastya to become his wife. She consented, but on condition that she would have the right to leave him whenever she was left alone. When one day Agastya was bathing in the river Kānakā, leaving Kāverī near his own holy tank and guarded by his disciples, Kāverī sank into the tank and flowed forth from it as a river. To hide from Agastya's disciples, she went underground and appeared again at Bhaganda Kṣetra (Bhagamaṇḍala), and then flowed on towards Valampuri/Valamburi. When Agastya realized what had happened, he ran after Kāverī, asked her forgiveness and begged her to return and to stay with him. Though she was not willing to do so, she did not want Agastya to grieve. Thus she divided herself, one half flowing off as a river, the other half staying with Agastya. Agastya explained to his river half which road to take to the eastern sea and he enumerated all the holy places along the new stream.

Rice also tells other stories referring to the region where the Kāverī has its beginnings. Herein also the story of Sujyoti—the underground river—appears. Her role is important since she joins Kāverī and Kānakā to form a confluence (*saṃgama*). Rice also explains the region's three different names which are Brahmakṣetra, Matsyadeśa and Kroḍadeśa. The first name is connected with the story of Brahmā's meditation on Viṣṇu in the Sahyādri mountain in the Western Ghats, and with Brahmā's worship of Viṣṇu with water from the river Virajā. For this reason, the country is known as Brahmakṣetra. The name Matsyadeśa connects the place with the holy spring in which Viṣṇu appeared as a fish (*matsya*) worshipping Śiva. The third name Kroḍadeśa is connected with the great king and ascetic Candravarman.

Brahmanas the honours and gifts due to them, have met with singularly bad success. The Coorgs, it would appear, never troubled themselves much about the contents and admonitions of the Kāveri book, and though the translation of it was designed to make it accessible to them, it is so highly spiced with Sanskrit and old Canarese expressions, that few even understand it" (Rice 1878, 86).

When he was worshipping Pārvatī, she promised him that she would appear in his country as Kāverī. Since his offspring, being descendants of a Kṣatriya and his Śūdra wife, similarly to Varāha, also called Kroḍa, had strength and strong nails, their land was called Kroḍadeśa and they themselves were called Kroḍas. With time the name changed into Koḍagu/Kodavu, which is the name of the Coorg people. When Pārvatī appeared as Kāverī in Valamburi, Coorg people were bathing in its waters. The strong stream of the river twisted the knots of the women's clothes around their backs and till today this fashion is characteristic of the Coorg women. Then Pārvatī herself appeared in the water and told the Coorgs to find a proper priest at the source of the Kāverī. The Coorgs met the priest there and stayed with him for a month during which he taught them how to perform rites. From that time onwards, they gather every year and celebrate this event in the month called Tulā (October–November). Thus, the text of the *māhātmya* also serves as a tool for establishing the Coorgs' tradition, strengthening their identity.[33]

After this relatively early report *Mysore and Coorg* by Rice, the region of the Kāverī's source later attracted other scholars, and there is at least one more work on the Coorgs, also bringing the details concerning *Kāverī Māhātmyas*, which is worth mentioning here. This is M. N. Srinivas's *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (1965). Supplied with a foreword by the distinguished social anthropologist A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, whom Srinivas consulted while in Oxford, this book coins the term "Sanskritization"[34] as a strategy of lower castes' social upward mobility. Especially in chapter 7 of his important work, entitled "Hinduism" (Srinivas 1965, 213–228), Srinivas refers extensively to the role of Kāverī in the local culture of the Coorgs and the river's role in the Sanskritization process.[35] He also draws attention to the detail that the all-Indian worship of Gaṅgā facilitates the

---

33 However, in Rice's opinion, the above-mentioned passage was primarily a tool to subjugate the Kodavas to the Brahmins. One finds in this passage these and some other more elaborate traditional stories about the connection of the Coorg region with Kāverī. The story of the Kāverī is also connected with the story of Sujyoti, given by Viṣṇu as a daughter to the Brahmin Suyajña and then becoming a wife of Devendra. Since she wanted to become a river, she, with her husband's servant Kānakā, became two streams. She promised to come back when Kāverī would appear and to join her on her way towards the sea. The text tells also, in the form of the account by the *ṛṣi* Dalbhya to the king Dharmavarman, of the description of the country where Kāverī has its beginnings. Here the three names, Brahmakṣetra, Matsyadeśa and Kroḍadeśa, appear together with their explanations. In the explanation of the name Kroḍadeśa the story of Pārvatī appearing in the Kāverī waters as well as the beginnings of its close connection with the Coorg people is presented.

34 Srinivas prefers "Sanskritization" to "Brahmanization," because the rites he refers to are not limited to only Brahmins, but are also applied to the other two higher, twice-born *varṇas*.

35 Among other aspects, Srinivas shows how this process works in practice by taking examples of Vedic *kṣatrapāla*, who became Ketrappa, a popular god of the Coorgs and while the same time a local cobra-deity was identified with Subrahmaṇya, a son of Śiva (Srinivas 1965, 215).

absorption of the worship of the local rivers and mentions the Kāverī as an example for this strategy.[36]

The model for the Kāverī myth, as Srinivas calls it, is the Gaṅgā myth. The Gaṅgā in Allahabad joins two other rivers, namely the Yamunā and the mythologically added Sarasvatī, forming the so-called *triveṇi saṃgama*. In a similar way, the Kāverī joins the Kānakā and the mythological underground river Sujyoti in Bhāgamaṇḍala. Some natural phenomena of the region of Tāla Kāveri are also included to develop local mythology along the all-Indian paths, for example the so-called Bhīma's pebble which is a big boulder associated with one of the Pāṇḍavas.[37] According to Srinivas, this made the *Mahābhārata* story more familiar and connected with the Coorgs and to other inhabitants of the region. Through identification of the river with the goddess Pārvatī, the Kāverī is worshipped by the Coorgs as their patron goddess.[38]

Though the text in a mixture of Sanskrit and literary Kannada language was not very popular among the Coorgs, the *Kāveri Māhātmya* nevertheless became a kind of a popular folksong in later times, important from the point of view of the Coorgs'

---

36 The river is worshipped along its stream, and many holy spots were established, especially in the places in which other rivers join the Kāverī, as well as on the islands formed by the river. Bathing in the river, especially on particular dates, removes sins and brings good, even emancipation. There is also a belief that there exists an underground passage connecting the source of the Kāverī with the Gaṅgā in Benares. Pilgrims, similarly as those in Benares, take water from the Tāla Kāverī to their homes to use it for purification and drinking on particular days; with this water members of the Coorgs' *okka* (patrilineal joint family) are sprinkled.

37 The story connects this boulder with a small pebble which Bhīma found in his food and threw it away: what was small to him is very big for ordinary human beings.

38 This association of the river with the Coorgs is also found in the following story, which has been referred to above: Pārvatī as the Kāverī appeared for the first time in Coorg, and the pleats of the saris of the bathing Coorg women were pushed back by the flood of its water, thus it is the way Coorg women are wearing their clothes. The Kāverī myth made the Coorgs, due to the fact that they were the offspring of a Kṣatriya and his Śūdra wife, to be Ugras. This fact explains their mode of life, physical strength and warrior character. While considering this fact, Srinivas suspects that the Brahmanical authors of the myth could not accept some features of the Coorgs' life-style, especially their dietary habits and neglecting Vedic rites on some occasions. This, Srinivasan thinks, is the reason they were not labelled Kṣatriyas but Ugras. In modern times however especially educated Coorgs claim to be Kṣatriyas and also descendants of Indo-Aryans.

identity.[39] Thus, the role of the river itself, but also its myth expounded in the *māhā-tmya* is noteworthy, not only from the religious point of view, but also from a socio-anthropological perspective.[40]

The *māhātmyas* connected with the river are also mentioned by Indira Viswana-than Peterson in the chapter of the above-mentioned work *Eternal Kaveri* entitled *The Kaveri in Legend and Literature* (Peterson 1999, 35–48). She refers to the *māhāt-mya* of the Tāla Kāverī in Koḍagu region, where the story tells about the sage Kavera performing a penance to propitiate Brahmā. Brahmā gave him Lopāmudrā, Viṣṇu's *māyā* (Viṣṇu's power) incarnated as a daughter by name Viṣṇumāyā. Lopāmudrā appeared in the form of the Kāverī river who was married to the sage Agastya. The sage kept her in the pot, but one day a crow tipped over the pot and caused the river to stream out. When she was passing by Viṣṇu, he manifested as a gooseberry tree at the site of the Kāverī's source.

Yet another *māhātmya* that Petersen mentioned is the *Kantapurāṇa*, referring to Sirkali. It tells of Śiva who gave the Kāverī to Agastya in order to serve him for ablutions. Agastya took the river in the pot to the south, where Indra was hiding from the demon Surapadman in Śiva's garden in Sirkali, taking a form of a bamboo. Since the garden was afflicted by drought caused by the demon, Indra asked Gaṇeśa to bring the Kāverī to Sirkali. Gaṇeśa took the form of a crow and overturned Agastya's pot. The Kāverī poured out from it into the Sirkali garden.[41]

---

39 Srinivas 1965, 221. In the appendix entitled "The Kāveri Myth" (1965, 244–247) Srinivas presents the content of the Myth, and says that: "In 1864, the Kāvēri Myth, called *Kéveri Māhātmya* or "the greatness of Kāvēri," was translated into Kannaḍa from the original Sanskrit by one Srinivāsa Iyengār at the instance of an influential Coorg official, Nanjappa, of the Biddanḍa *okka*. The Myth has also been translated into Kodagi, presumably from the Kannada translation of the Sanskrit original." He also says that the *māhātmya* can be found in the *Skāndapurāṇa*.

40 In the concluding passage of the appendix Srinivas writes: "The *Kāvēri Māhātmya* brings the River Kāvēri and its worship into the main stream of the purāṇas which have an all-India spread. It also makes Sanskritic deities and ideas familiar to the inhabitants of Coorg. A special and intimate relation is established between Coorg, Coorgs, and the river as a result of it. A distinctive feature of the dress of Coorg women is associated with the Kāvēri. Coorgs regard the Kāvēri as their patron goddess. At least once in ten girls is named Kāvēri. The account of the origin of Coorgs in the *Kāvēri Māhātmya* is an attempt to reconcile certain facts which are not easy to reconcile. While it is true that Coorgs are a wealthy and powerful group with a martial outlook, they do not perform certain Vedic rituals which are performed by Kshatriyas elsewhere in India, and their dietary included domestic pork and liquor. The myth finds a way out of the difficulties by suggesting that they are Ugras, the descendants of a Kshatriya father and Shūdra mother" (Srinivas 1965, 247).

41 This myth brings together the most important gods of the pan-Indian pantheon, the most impor-tant South Indian river and the figure of Agastya, who is one of the most important personages for the Tamil identity, at the same time belonging to pan-Indian and orthodox lore. There are also Tamilian stories crediting the Cōḻa king as the one who makes the Kāverī flow eastward.

Apart from the above-mentioned texts, there exist some other *Kāverī Māhātmyas*, among them *Tulākāverimāhātmiyam* (sic), which is available to us in Sanskrit in Devanāgarī script, claiming that it belongs to the *Āgneyapurāṇa*. It is a text in thirty-one chapters. For our purpose, chapter 14 (*tulākāverisnānavidhiprakāraḥ nāma caturdaśo 'dhyāyaḥ*) and especially the chapters from 23 onwards seem to be most interesting, recalling the story of the beginning of the river and its connection with Agastya.[42]

To Conclude

In our contribution we tried to evaluate the role of water bodies and to trace strategies of referring to them, and using them in several religious texts. Thereby, we wanted to present the dynamics between natural phenomena and the life of the inhabitants of the Kāverī region as seen in the *māhātmya* genre, which we see as especially effective, as it is immediately inscribed in the mythological and religious as well as in the regional and environmental contexts. We are convinced that water was an important and efficacious motif in establishing the position and authority of particular places of worship.

The story of the Kāverī, as seen in the above-mentioned sources, puts her in immediate relation with Brahmā, being the representative of the Brahmanical/orthodox stream of Hindu religions. What is more, she is equated with the ancient *ṛṣiki* Lopāmudrā and Viṣṇu's *māyā*. As Brahmā's foster daughter, she directly becomes an integral part of the orthodox setup. Subsequently, she is connected with one of the most important personages of the south—Agastya. He is a great sage of Vedic times and becomes an implementer of orthodox thoughts. At the same time, being a traditional author of important ancient Tamil texts and of the Tamilian system of medicine, he joined two streams of culture, pan-Indian and South Indian or rather Tamilian. In the mutual exchange, Kāverī receives the orthodox and pan-Indian imprimatur and also Agastya enters the realm of the regional culture. This kind of agency we can observe in the case of *māhātmya* literature, which was one of the means and instruments of the processes called localization, Brahmanization, Sanskritization or acculturation—implementing of the pan-Indian, orthodox elements into local lore, but also adjusting the pan-Indian to the local culture and also assimilating/appropriating local elements.[43]

Petersen mentions also the Kodagu Kāverī myths which we have already referred to. As for the Tamil region, the river takes name of Ponni – Golden One, since it carries yellow silt making the earth along its stream very fertile (Petersen 1999, 35–48).

42 Some passages of this text are included in the appendix.

43 For the discussion concerning the notions of locality, Sanskritization, deshification, "spatial turn" in the context of *tīrthas* one can consult, for example, Lazzaretti 2016.

Moreover, the *māhātmya* literature in general and the *māhātmyas* which are in the scope of our interest highlight the relationship between culture and natural phenomena. The splendid reservoir of water that the Kāverī constitutes was practically utilized already by the early rulers of the region eager to create an irrigation system for their land. It was also an ideal element for a religious system, as it facilitated that the local river could be perceived as integral part of the overall system of the pan-Indian religion and as a goddess incarnated, equated with the holy water of the Gaṅgā and even, as we see from the *māhātmyas*, exceeding and superior to the Gaṅgā.

The richness of the natural landscape enabled the development of many mythological stories exploiting particular features of the nature to create stories interwoven into the rich fabric of Indian mythology. Many holy spots along the river were included in a kind of religious pilgrimage net and program, encouraging and enabling devotees to visit not only one, but many holy *kṣetras* along the Kāverī. Such an idea seems, for example, to lie behind the concept of the *pañcaraṅga* Vaiṣṇava shrines. By using the presence of the natural phenomena of several islands on the river and *tīrthas* along its stream, the religious reality of the region was enriched by such concepts. The natural phenomena were closely observed and even the meandering of the river was utilized to claim the special sacredness of some places. For example, this is the case of the Śrī Raṅganātha Perumāḷ temple in Vadarengam/Vata Rangam near Sirkali, which belongs to the *pañcaraṅga* shrines, when the Kāverī branch, the Koḷḷiṭam, takes the direction from south to north. This is perceived as especially sacred. It thus establishes the ideal spot for building a temple there. Therefore, many natural phenomena create the frame of the cultural production of the region. Interconnectedness of the natural phenomena, so spectacularly observed on the example of the river and the places along its stream, is then reproduced in culture, which addresses and exploits the opportunity of creating a net of culturally productive places, shrines and temples. This interconnectedness of different phenomena is then observed in the literary works addressing the issues of connected places along the connecting river. This concept is crucial for the cultural ecology approach to culture and literature and becomes a fruitful method of looking into the culturally productive interactions between humans and nature.

References

Primary Sources

Mss of the *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya*, Maharaja Sarfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library and Research Centre, Thanjavur.
1. 11244a/ palm-leaf/Grantha.
2. 11244b/ palm-leaf/Grantha.
3. 11245/ palm-leaf/Grantha.

4. 11246/ palm-leaf/Grantha.

5. 11249/ palm-leaf/Telugu.

Ajitāgama. Volume III, Part 1. Ed. by N. R. Bhatt. Pondicherry: Institut Français d'Indologie, 1991.

Bhāgavatapurāṇa. Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (GRETIL). Göttingen: Niedersächsische Staats- und Landesbibliothek. http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil.html.

Daśakumāracarita of Daṇḍin. *Mahākavidaṇḍyācāryakṛtam, Paṇḍitaśrītārācaraṇa-bhaṭṭācāryeṇa viracita bālabodhinī nāmaka saṃskṛtaṭīkayā tathā śrīrāmatejaśāstryā-rabdhayā śrīkedāranāthaśarmaprapūritayā bālakrīḍā nāmaka hindī ṭīkayā samulla-sitam*. Banāras: Caukhāmbā saṃskṛta sīris āpis, 2004.

Koyil Olugu. The Koyil Olugu (History of the Srirangam Temple). Condensed English Version by T.S. Parthasarathy. Tirupati: Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanam, 1954.

———. *Koil Olugu, The Chronicle of the Srirangam Temple with Historical Notes*. Ed. and transl. by V.N. Hari Rao. Madras: Rockhouse and Sons, 1961.

Mahābhārata. The Mahābhārata for the first time critically edited. Ed. by V. S. Sukthankar. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1927–1943.

Makuṭāgama. Ed. by C. Cuvāmināta Civācāriyar. Chennai: South Indian Arcaka Association, 1977.

Niśvāsamukha. Niśvāsamukhatattvasaṃhitā: A Preface to the Earliest Surviving Śaiva Tantra. Ed. by Nirajan Kafle, with a foreword by Dominic Goodall. Pondicherry: EFEO, Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2020.

Pārameśvarasaṃhitā. Śrīpāñcarātrāntargatā Śrīpārameśvarasaṃhitā. Śrī Govindā-cāryaiḥ saṃskṛtā. Ed. by Govindacharya. Trichy, 1953.

Raghuvaṃśa of Kālidāsa. With Prakasika commentary of Arunagirinatha and Padartha deepika commentary of Narayana Pandita. Tripunithura: The Sanskrit College Committee, 1964.

Raghupañcika of Vallabhadeva. *Raghupañcikā of Vallabhadeva: being the earliest commentary on the Raghuvaṃśa of Kālidāsa*. Vol. I. Critically ed. by Dominic Goodall and Harunaga Isaacson. Groningen: Forstein, 2003.

Sri Kaveri Mahima and Stotras. Chennai: Simshuba, 2017.

Śrīraṅgamāhātmya. Śrī garuḍapurāṇokta śrīraṅgamāhātmyam (śatādhyāyi). Śrī Garuda Purāṇāntargata śrīraṅga māhātmyam (śatādhyāyi 108 Adyayams). Ed. by Terazandur K. Sriman Bhattachariyar. Srirangam: Sri Pancharatra Agama Samrakshanasaba, 2012.

———. *Sri Garuda Purāṇa Antaragatha Sriranga Mahatmyam (Shatadhyayi 108 Adyayams)* also by Terazandur K. Sriman Bhattachariyar. Srirangam: Sri Pancharatra Agama Samrakshanasaba, 2012.

———. *Srī Karuṭapurāṇōkta Srīraṅkamāhātmyam (Catātyāyī)*. Ed. by Terazandur K. Sriraman Bhattachariyar. Srirangam: Sri Pancharatra Agama Samrakshanasaba, 2012.

———. *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya*. (Telugu script). Ed. by Narayanaswamināyaka, revised by Ramacandra Sastri of Mūñjūrpaṭṭu. Chennai: Vivekakalānidhi, 1875.

———. *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya*. Ed. by Kuppusāmi Ayyaṅkār. With Tamil commentary by Kirusṇayyaṅkar. Tiruccirāppaḷḷi, 1908.

———. *Sriranga mahatmyam (in Tamil), culled from various Purāṇas*. Ed. by Parthasarathi Iyengar. Sahitya Siromani: Srirangam, 1935.

Tulākāverimāhātmiyam. In Sanskrit in Devanagari script. http://www.kriyasagaram.in/puranams.html?fbclid=IwAR0Hda_pRHxt7p0A8fdlSKJkrJud2qZhcu5tmpfdeN7ByVaa1gl1VsibapY.

Secondary Sources

Aravamuthan, T.G. 1925. *The Kaveri, The Maukharis and the Sangam Age*. Madras: The University of Madras.

Auboyer, Jeannine. 2006. *Sri Ranganathaswami: A Temple of Vishnu in Srirangam (Tamilnadu, India)*. A Srirangam Temple Publication.

Ayyar, P. Makātēva. 1962. *Kāvēri Rahasyam*. n.p.

Dalal, Roshen. 2011. *Hinduism: An Alphabetical Guide*. New York: Penguin Global.

Deivanayagam, G., and R. Paranthaman. 2012. *Kallanai Kaveri*. Vandavasi: Akkani Veliyeedu.

Eck, Diana. 2013. *India: A Sacred Geography*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Feldhaus, Anne. 1990. "The Image of the Forest in the Māhātmyas of the Rivers of the Deccan". In: *The History of Sacred Places in India As Reflected in Traditional Literature. Papers in Pilgrimage in South Asia*, edited by Hans Bakker. Leiden: Brill.

Gail, Adalbert. 2016. "Theatre and Temple: Raṅgnātha and Raṅganāthamaṇḍapa in South and South-east Asia Temple Architecture and Imaginary of South and Southeast Asia." In *Temple Architecture and Imagery of South and Southeast Asia: Essays presented to Prof. M. A. Dhaky*, edited by Parul Pandya Dhar and Gerd Mevissen. Delhi: Aryan Books International.

Hari Rao, V. N. 1967. *The Śrīrangam Temple. Art and Architecture*. The Sri Venkateswara University Tirupati.

Hultzsch, Eugen. 1890. *South Indian Inscriptions: Tamil and Sanskrit*. Vol. I. Madras: Printed by the superintendent, Government Press.

Jagannathan, Sarojini. 1994. *Impact of Śrī Rāmānujācārya on Temple Worship*. Delhi: Nag Publishers.

Konduri, Sarojini Devi. 1990. *Religion in Vijayanagara Empire*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited.

Krishna, Nandita. 2017. *Hinduism and Nature*. Penguin Random House India Private Limited.

Lazzaretti, Vera 2016. "Questioning Meaningful Layers of Locality in a Pan-Indian *tīrtha.*" *Cracow Indological Studies* 18:119–144.

Michell, George, ed. 1999. *Eternal Kaveri: Historical Sites along South India's Greatest River*. Mumbai: Marg Publications.

Orr, Leslie. 1995. "The Vaiṣṇava Community at Śrīraṅgam: The Testimony of the Early Medieval Inscriptions." *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 3 (3): 109–139.

Petersen Visvanathan, Indira. 1999. "The Kaveri in Legend and Literature." In *Eternal Kaveri. Historical Sites along South India's Greatest River*, edited by George Michell, 35–48. Bombay: Marg Publications.

Rice, Lewis. 1878. *Mysore and Coorg*. Vol. III. Bangalore: Mysore Government Press.

Shulman, David Dean. 1980. *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Śaiva Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Spencer, George W. 1978. "Crisis of Authority in a Hindu Temple under the Impact of Islam. Śrīraṅgam in the Fourteenth Century." In *Religion and the Legitimation of Power in South Asia*, edited by Bardwell L. Smith, 14–27. Leiden: Brill.

Srinivas M.N. 1965. *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House.

Wilden, Eva. 2020. *The Three Early Tiruvantātis of the Tivyappirapantam*. Pondicherry: EFEO, Institut Français de Pondichéry.

Appendix

Excerpts from the *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya* and the *Tulākāverimāhātmiyam*

The passage from chapter 9 of the *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya*[44] presents the way the text addresses and describes the question of the superiority of the Kāverī referring to the competition between two holy rivers, Gaṅgā and Kāverī.

Śrīraṅgamāhātmya 9.19cd–38:

अयं मनोहरो देशः परितस्सह्यकन्यया ॥ ९:१९ ॥

चन्द्रपुष्करिणीचेयं पावनी श्रमनाशिनी ।

अयं च भक्तिमात्राजा धर्मवर्मा सदा मयि ॥ ९:२० ॥

इमे च मुनयः सर्वे वसन्त्यत्र विकल्मषाः ।

अत्रैव वस्तुमिच्छामि लङ्कां गच्छ विभीषण ॥ ९:२१ ॥

पुरावृत्तमिदञ्जात्र श्रोतुमर्हसि राक्षस ।

विन्ध्यपादे महानद्यस्सर्वास्सम्मुदिताः पुरा ॥ ९:२२ ॥

तत्र गन्धर्व आयातो विश्वावसुरिति श्रुतः ।

सप्रणामाञ्जलिं कृत्वा दक्षिणां दिशमास्थितः ॥ ९:२३ ॥

ततो विवादस्संभूतो नदीनां तत्र राक्षस ।

मम प्रणाममकरोन्ममायमिति वै मिथः ॥ ९:२४ ॥

समुद्रं दक्षिणं गत्वा सगन्धर्वपतिः प्रभो ।

---

[44] Forthcoming critical edition by R. Sathyanarayanan and M. Czerniak-Drożdżowicz.

प्राबोधयत्पद्मनाभं नभस्ये मासि संयतः ॥ ९:२५ ॥
अयने तूत्तरे प्राप्ते निवृत्तश्चोत्तरां दिशम् ।
॥ गङ्गाकावेर्योः परस्परमाधिक्यविवादः ॥
पुनः प्रणाममकरोन्नदीनां तत्र गायकः ॥ ९:२६ ॥
त्वया नमस्कृतं कस्या इत्युक्तो याधिकात्र वः ।
तस्यै कृतप्रणामोहमित्युक्त्वा प्रययौ हि सः ॥ ९:२७ ॥
आधिक्यं प्रति सर्वासां तासां वादो महानभूत् ।
नाहमित्येव वै नद्यस्तत्क्षणेन विशश्रमुः ॥ ९:२८ ॥
गङ्गायाश्चैव कावेर्या न विश्रान्तिस्तदाऽभवत् ।
वादश्च सुमहानासीदन्योन्याधिक्यकारणात् ॥ ९:२९ ॥
सदनं ब्रह्मणो गत्वाऽपृच्छेतां परमेष्ठिनम् ।
गङ्गाधिका न सन्देह इत्युवाच प्रजापतिः ॥ ९:३० ॥
तच्छ्रुत्वा दुःखिता चेयं कावेरी सह्यपर्वते ।
तपसा तोषयामास ब्रह्माणं राक्षसेश्वर ॥ ९:३१ ॥
गङ्गाधिक्यमभीप्सन्ती चिरङ्कालं सरिद्वरा ।
तस्यै वरन्ददौ ब्रह्मा गङ्गासाम्यं महामुने ॥ ९:३२ ॥
आधिक्यं च मया दातुं न शक्यन्तेऽथ सोब्रवीत् ।
॥ श्रीरङ्गानुग्रहात्कावेर्या गङ्गापेक्षयाधिक्यम् ॥
सारक्षेत्रे तु कावेर्यां संस्थाप्य प्रतिमां मम ॥ ९:३३ ॥
चिरमाराधयामास वरो दत्तस्तदा मया ।
सा स्तुत्वा प्रणिपत्याह कावेरी मां सरिद्वरा ॥ ९:३४ ॥
कावेरी उवाच—
देव त्वदङ्घ्रिसंबन्धाद्गङ्गा मत्तोऽतिरिच्यते ।
गङ्गासाम्यं मया लब्धमाधिक्यं न कदाचन ॥ ९:३५ ॥
रुद्रोवाच—
तस्यै वरमदात्तत्र कावेर्यै कमलेक्षणः ।
श्री भगवानुवाच—
मत्संबन्धोद्भवं तस्या माहात्म्यं केन साध्यते ॥ ९:३६ ॥
तथापि मत्प्रसादेन गङ्गायाह्यधिका भव ।

मत्संबन्धाय ते देवी त्वन्मध्ये धाममामकम् ॥ ९:३७ ॥

आगमिष्यति रङ्गाख्यं तत्र नित्यं वसाम्यहम् ।

गङ्गायाश्चाधिका भूयो नित्ययोगान्मया सह ॥ ९:३८ ॥

Translation:

Śrībhagavān said:

19cd. This is a charming place surrounded by the daughter of Sahya [=Kāverī].

20. This [pond] Candrapuṣkariṇī is holy and removes fatigue as well. This king Dharmavarman is also always devoted to me.

21. These sinless seers are [also] residing here. [So,] I would like to live here myself. Go to Laṅkā, o Vibhīṣaṇa!

22. O *rākṣasa*! You deserve to listen the past history of this place. In olden days, all great rivers were assembled at the foot of the Vindhya hills.

23. There came, with folded hands, a *gandharva* known as Viśvāvasu, who lived in the southern direction.

24. Then there started a discussion among the rivers, o *rākṣasa*. "He saluted me", "[He saluted] me"—[they quarrel] with each other.

25. Having gone to the southern ocean, the lord of the *gandharvas* with self-control woke up Padmanābha in the month of *nabhas* (*śrāvaṇa*?), o lord.

26. When the sun reached the north, he reached the northern land.

The discussion/quarrel of Gaṅgā and Kāverī about their mutual superiority
Again/then the singer (*gandharva*) saluted the rivers.

27. "Whom are you saluting?"—[he was] asked. "I have saluted the one who is superior out of you two"—having said that he went away.

28. There was a great discussion about the superiority among all [rivers]. The rivers immediately withdrew [saying]: "Certainly I am not".

29. [But] there was no cessation of [discussion] between the Gaṅgā and the Kāverī, [and their] great discussion was for a mutual [claim] of superiority.

30. Having gone to Brahmā's abode [they both] asked the highest Lord. "There is no doubt that the Gaṅgā is superior," said Prajāpati.

31 Having heard that, the unhappy Kāverī on the Sahya mountain satisfied Brahmā by [her] penance, o lord of *rākṣasas*.

32. The best among rivers (Kāverī) was desiring the superiority over the Gaṅgā for a long time. Brahmā gave her the boon [which is] the equality with the Gaṅgā, o great sage.

33–34. He said: "I cannot give [you] superiority." Having installed my image on the Kāverī, in the place of *sāra* [Kumbhakonam?], she worshipped [me] for a long time. Then I gave her a boon. This Kāverī, best of the rivers, having praised me, bowed to me respectfully, and said:

Kāverī said:

35. "O Lord, due to the attachment to your feet the Gaṅgā excels me. I have obtained
equality with the Gaṅgā, [but] never superiority."

Rudra said:

36. Lotus-eyed (Kamalekṣaṇa) gave the boon to that Kāverī there.

Śrībhagavān said:

"Her greatness is due to the attachment to me, by whom [else] can [such] greatness
be achieved?

37–38. Therefore, by my grace be superior to Gaṅgā. O Devī, for the benefit of my
connection, I will come to my abode called Raṅga in the midst of yours and reside
over there always. Due to the eternal connection with me you are superior to the
Gaṅgā again."

The passage from chapter 10 of the *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya* refers to the nine holy ponds
that establish the net of water reservoirs encircling the Raṅganātha temple.

Śrīraṅgamāhātmya 10.46–54:

सर्वत्रैव च कावेर्यां श्रीरङ्गे च विशेषतः ।

स्नानकाले जपेन्मन्त्रं सामशाखा सु चोदितम् ॥१०:४६॥

यद्यत्तीव्रं दुष्कृतं यच्च किञ्चिच्छारीरं वा मानसं वाचिकं वा ।

सद्यः पुनीहि पयसामृतेन कवेरकन्ये मम कर्म यच्च ॥१०:४७॥

नारायणीयशाखायां उक्तोऽयं वेधसा स्वयम् ।

प्रशंसा सह्यकन्यायाः पुंसां पापापनुत्तये ॥१०:४८॥

अष्टतीर्थसमोपेतां अष्टवृक्षोपशोभिताम् ।

जुष्टां च विष्णुना पुण्यां चन्द्रपुष्करिणीं शुभाम् ॥१०:४९॥

दृष्ट्वा स्पृष्टा तथा स्नात्वा प्रीत्या संप्रोक्ष्य वा पुनः ।

कीर्तयित्वा तथा श्रुत्वा मुच्यते सर्वकिल्बिषैः ॥१०:५०॥

अन्यत्रापि प्रदेशेषु यत्र कुत्र जलाशये ।

चन्द्रपुष्करिणीत्युक्त्वा स्नात्वा तस्यार्थभाग्भवेत् ॥१०:५१॥

एतानि नवतीर्थानि एकाहेन प्रदक्षिणम् ।

स्नात्वाप्रणम्य रङ्गेशं पुनाति दशपूरुषम् ॥१०:५२॥

एकादश्यामुपोष्यैव द्वादश्यां स्नानमाचरेत् ।

तारयेदात्मनो वंश्यान् सप्तसप्त च सप्त च ॥१०:५३॥

एतेषु पिण्डदानञ्च गयाश्राद्धेन सम्मितम् ।

॥ श्रीरङ्गमाहात्म्यफलश्रुतिः ॥

अपिगोग्रासमात्रेण मोदन्ते पितरो दिवि ॥ १०:५४ ॥

Translation:

46. Everywhere in the Kāverī, especially in Srīraṅgam, at bathing one should recite the *mantra* well directed in the *Sāmaśākhā*.

47. Whatever violent bad deeds [I have committed] either bodily, mentaly or orally, immediately you should purify whatever may be my *karma* by the nectar [in the form of] water, o daughter of Kavera.

48. In the branch of Nārāyāṇa (*nārāyaṇīyaśākhāyāṃ*), Brahmā himself uttered this, [and] the praise of the daughter of Sahya (Kāverī) for the removal of the sins of people.

49–50. [One will be] released from all sins by praising and by hearing [the glory of Candrapuṣkariṇī], after having seen, touched, bathed, or again by sprinkling the holy beloved of Viṣṇu and the auspicious Candrapuṣkariṇī, [which is] endowed with eight [sacred] waters/ponds [and] adorned with eight [sacred] trees.

51. Even in other places, wherever in the water bodies, having uttered "Candra-puṣkariṇī" [and] having bathed, one will be sharing his merits.

52. These nine *tīrthas* purify up to the tenth generation if someone [visits,] circum-ambulates and takes a bath on one day and prostrates to the lord of Raṅga.

53. Who fasts on *ekādaśī*, [and] who undertakes the bath on *dvādaśī*, he rescues his own family members of seven plus seven plus seven [generations].

54. [In all these nine places] the gift of *piṇḍa* is equal to [performing] *śrāddha* in Gayā.

The passage of the *Tulākāverīmāhātmyam* refers to the mythical origin of Kāverī, identifies the river with Viṣṇumāyā and connects its appearance in the South with the sage Agastya, known for his specific role in the process of implementing Brahmanical culture in the South India.

Tulākāverimāhātmiyam Chapter 23 (pp. 105–107)

हरिश्चन्द्रंप्रति अगस्त्येन कावेर्युत्पत्तिकथनम्

दाल्भ्यः :—

इति धर्मान् शुभान् श्रुत्वा पावनान् कुंभजोदितान् ।

हरिश्चंद्रो प्रहृष्टात्मा पुनः पप्रच्छ सादरम् ॥ १ ॥

हरिश्चन्द्रः :—

भगवन् योगिनां श्रेष्ठ कुंभयोने महामते ।

कृतकृत्याहम् एवाद्य त्वत्पदांभोजसेवनात् ॥ २ ॥

नमस्ते योगिवर्याय नमस्तुभ्यं त्रिमूर्तये ।

नमस्ते मुनिवर्याय नमस्ते दीनबंधवे ॥ ३ ॥

सर्वे धर्माश् श्रुताः पुण्या भुक्तिमुक्तिफलप्रदाः ।

विशेषेण समाश्रौषं कावेर्या दिव्यवैभवम् ॥ ४ ॥

सत्यं प्रसन्नो भगवान् मुकुंदो ममेह विष्णुस् सनकादिवंध्यः ।

नो चेन् मम स्याद् इति साधुसंगोक्तिप्रदो यज्ञजपोपलभ्यः ॥ ५ ॥

कावेरीविभवं श्रुत्वा न तृप्तिर् जायते मम ।

अतः पुनस् त्वां पृच्छामि तद्ब्रवान् क्षंतुम् अर्हसि ॥ ६ ॥

कावेरी सह्यसंभूता लोपामुद्रेति कथम् ।

कदा दक्षिणगङ्गेति विश्रुता लोकपावनी ॥ ७ ॥

कथं सह्याद्रिसंभूता गङ्गाधिकं गता पुनः ।

एतत् सर्वं तु विस्तीर्य ब्रूहि मे मुनिपुंगव ॥ ८ ॥

एवं राज्ञा स पृष्टो ऽथ ह्यष्टमूर्त्यांशसंभव ।

मंदं स्मित्वा प्रशस्त्यैनम् व्याजहार मुनिर् नृपम् ॥ ९ ॥

अगस्त्यः :—

साधु साधु महाराज! त्वम् एव सुकृती भुवि ।

धर्मप्रसंगे यच् छ्रद्धा पुनः पुनर् अभूत् तव ॥ १० ॥

पुण्यश्लोकाग्रणीस् त्वं हि लोकानुग्रहकाम्यया ।

धर्मान् पृच्छसि राजेंद्र संत एव सतां धनम् ॥ ११ ॥

संत एव सतां बंधुस् संत एव सतां तपः ।

संत एव सतां मित्रं संत एव सतां व्रतम् ॥ १२ ॥

तस्माद् ब्रवीमि कावेर्याः प्रभावं पुण्यवर्धनम् ।

इति प्रशस्य तं योगि कावेर्याः पुण्यवैभवम् ॥ १३ ॥

कुंभयोनिर् महातेजा व्याहर्तुम् उपचक्रमे ।

केशवे द्वारकां यांते धर्मजेन महात्मना ॥ १४ ॥

अस्मिन् अर्थे पुरा पृष्टो दौम्यनाम महामुनिः ।

कावेरी संभवं सर्वं धर्मपुत्राय सो ऽब्रवीत् ॥ १५ ॥

दौम्यः :—

कवेरो नाम राजेंद्र! राजर्षिर् अमितप्रभः ।

योगिवर्यः प्रसन्नात्मा सर्वविद्या विशारदः ॥ १६ ॥

जितेंद्रियो जिताहारो निस्संगो निष्परिग्रहः ।

विरक्तस् सर्वधर्मेषु किंचित्कालं तु कर्मठः ॥ १७ ॥

मुमुक्षुर् अभवच् छ्रीमान् कर्मकृत्वा सुदुष्करम् ।

हिमवत्पर्वते रमिए तपस् तेपे सुदारुणम् ॥ १८ ॥

कावेरी योगिनस् तस्य तप्यतस् तप उत्तमम् ।

दिव्यवर्षसहस्रांते ब्रह्मागम्यतम् अब्रवीत् ॥ १९ ॥

ब्रह्मा :—

वरं वृणीष्व राजेंद्र! वरदो ’हम् इहागतः ।

राजा तद्वचनं श्रुत्वा कृतांजलिर् अभाषत ॥ २० ॥

कवेरः :—

प्रसन्नो यदि मे देव तपसो ‘स्ति फलं यदि ।

भवता मुक्तिम् आकांक्षे किम् अन्यैर् नश्वरैः फलैः ॥ २१ ॥

ब्रह्मा :—

न वयम् मोक्षदाने तु समर्थास् सकलास् सुराः ।

स एव मुक्तिदस् सत्यं परं ब्रह्माच्युतस् स्वयम् ॥ २२ ॥

मम कन्या जगन्माता विष्णुमाया महामुने ।

त्वत्पुत्रीत्वं गता देवी तव मोक्षम् प्रदास्यति ॥ २३ ॥

इत्युक्त्वा सो स्मरन् मायां विष्णोर् लोकविमोहिनीम् ।

उपतस्थे विशालाक्षी सर्वाभरणभूषिता ॥ २४ ॥

सा कन्या चिन्तमयी सृष्टा देवगंधर्वसंस्तुता ।

पितामहस् ताम् अलोक्य वाक्यम् एतद् उवाच ह ॥ २५ ॥

भद्रे अस्य योगिनो देवी कन्यात्वं गच्छ मुक्तिदा ।

निदीमूल्वाथ कावेरी मोक्षमार्गैकसाधनी ॥ २६ ॥

सर्वतीर्थमयी पुण्या लोकांस् त्वं पालयिष्यसि ।

लोपामुद्राख्ययादापि त्वम् एकांशेन शोभने ॥ २७ ॥

भव भार्याप्य् अगस्त्यस्य योगींद्रमहात्मनः ।

इत्य् उक्त्वान्तर्दधे ब्रह्मा हंसारूढो ऽमरैस् सह ॥ २८ ॥

गते ब्रह्मणि साशक्तिर् विष्णो भगवतो हरेः ।
कमनीयाकृतिः कन्या कवेरस्य मुनेर् अभूत् ॥ २९॥

Translation:

The story of the birth of the Kāverī [told] by Agastya to Hariścandra

Dālbhya:
1. Thus, having heard to the auspicious, holy rules (*dharmas*) told by the one born in the *kumbha* vessel [i.e,. Agastya], Hariścandra, being satisfied, again asked with respect.

Hariścandra:
2. O lord, best among *yogins*, having the *kumbha* as a womb (Kumbhayoni), o great-minded, I am contented today due to the service at your lotus feet.
3. Salutation to you, O best of *yogins*, salutation to you of three forms, salutation to you, o great seer, salutation to you, kin of miserable ones.
4. All virtues (*dharmas*) have been heard, which yield the fruits of [worldly] enjoyments and emancipation. I heard especially about the divine greatness/appearence of the Kāverī.
5. Truly my gracious Lord Mukunda, here my Viṣṇu is praised/saluted by Sanaka and others, if he is not, he who is claimed by the words of the group of *sādhus*, [and he who is] obtained by the recitation and sacrifices, will not be mine.
6. Having heard the greatness of the Kāverī, satisfaction is not born in me. Therefore I am asking you again about her birth/existence, pardon me/excuse me/you deserve to excuse me.
7. Kāverī born from Sahya [mountains], how does she become Lopāmudrā? When she is celebrated as the Southern Gaṅgā, purifying the world?
8. How did [she who] originated from the Sahya mountain then [obtain] her superiority over the Gaṅgā? All this tell me elaboratelly, o eminent *muni*.
9. In this way asked by the king he, the progeny of Aṣṭamūrti (Śiva), this *muni*, smiling slightly, praising the king said.

Agastya:
10. Well done O Great King! You alone are virtous on the earth. Adherence towards *dharma* happened again and again to you.
11. O Indra among kings! You are indeed the foremost among good people, you ask about dharma of people, good people alone are the wealth of good people.
12. Good people alone are the kinsman of good people; good people alone are the penance for good people; good people alone are the friend of good people; good people alone are the holy practice of good people.

13–14b. Therefore, I am telling about the greatness of the Kāverī, which increases merits. Having praised the great virtues of the Kāverī, the one who was born from the *kumbha*, the mighty one began to talk to him.

14c–15. When the great Keśava went to Dvāraka, by the great soul Dharmarāja (Yudhiṣṭhira) earlier the great muni named Daumya was asked in this matter. [He] told the complete [story of the] appearance of the Kāverī to Dharmaputra.

Daumya:

16. O Lord (king of kings)! There was a *ṛṣi* of royal descent named Kavera, the one of immeasurable power, an eminent *yogin*, of pleased self, fluent in all knowledges.

17–18. [He] of conquered senses and controlled desire for food, free from bondages, with no property/family, the clever having no interest of all *dharmas* for some time, the venerated one desiring emancipation, having executed deeds difficult to be done, undertook a severe penance on the beautiful mountain Himavat.

19. At the end of thousands of divine years Brahmā came and said to the *yogin* Kavera, who was practising the highest penance,

Brahmā:

20. Choose the boon, o king of kings, I, the giver of boon came [here]. The king having heard these words, with his folded hands said:

Kavera:

21. If you are favourable to me, if there is a fruit of [my] penance, I desire emancipation [as a fruit] from you, what [is the point of] other impermanent fruits?

Brahmā:

22. We all gods are not capable of bestowing emancipation. He the supreme truth and *brahman*, Acyuta indeed is granting emancipation.

23. O great *muni*, my daughter, mother of the world, Viṣṇumāyā, the goddess, becomes your offspring [and] will grant emancipation to you.

24. Having said thus, he remembered Māyā of Viṣṇu as infatuating living beings. The large-eyed, adorned with all embellishments appeared [there].

25. She was created as a daughter, consisting of consciousness, praised by gods and Gandharvas. Having seen her, Pitāmaha spoke these words:

26. O beautiful girl! you who bestow emancipation, become a daughter of this *yogin*, go and become a river, Kāverī, the one leading the way towards emancipation.

27–28. Having [the nature of] all *tīrthas*, holy one, you will protect people. Taking the name Lopāmudra even now, with one part, o beautiful, be also the wife of Agastya, the great one and the best of *yogins*. Having said thus, Brahmā disappeared, mounting the goose along with eternal ones.

29. When Brahmā disappeared, this *śakti* of Lord Viṣṇu, Hari, became the beauti-
fully-shaped daughter of the sage Kavera.

In the following we present some chosen references to the Kāverī river from Sanskrit
sources, which speak about its position in Indian culture by introducing the river into
the pan-Indian context.
We also add some passages from Tamil sources exemplifying the role and popularity
of the Kāverī motif in different kinds of texts throughout the centuries.

Some references to the Kāverī in Sanskrit literature:

Ajitāgama 84.7c—8b

काश्मीरः कौसलः काञ्चीकावेरीकोङ्कणोद्भवाः ॥ ८४:७ ॥

कालिङ्गः कामरूपश्च काशीदेशसमुद्भवः ।

[The rivers] originating in Kāśmīra, Kausala, Kāñcī, Kāverī, Koṅkaṇa, Kaliṅga,
and Kāmarūpa are [similar to the river] sprung up/arisen from the country/land
of Kāśī.

Makuṭāgama 4.232

गङ्गाञ्च यमुनाञ्चैव नर्मदाञ्च सरस्वतीम् ।

सिन्धुझ्णोदावरीञ्चैव कावेरीन्तीर्थसप्तकम् ॥ ४:२३२ ॥

One should invoke the seven [sacred] waters such as Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Narmadā,
Sarasvatī, Sindhu, Godāvarī and Kāverī.

Niśvāsamukha 3.4

गोदावरी महावर्त्ता शर्करावर्त्तमर्जुनी ।

कावेरी कौशिकी चैव तृतीया च महानदी ॥ ३:४ ॥

Godāvarī, Mahāvartā, Śarkarāvartam, Arjunī, Kāverī, Kauśikī, and the third is
Mahānadī.

Mahābhārata, supplementary passages to *Adiparvan* 1.2031.01–03

गोदावर्यां ततः स्नात्वा तामतीत्य महाबलः

कावेरीं तां समासाद्य संगमे सागरस्य ह

स्नात्वा संपूज्य देवांश्च पितृंश्च ऋषिभिः सह

After having taken a bath in Godāvarī, having crossed that, the powerful one
reached this Kaverī and, after having taken a bath in the confluence of the ocean,
he worshipped the gods and ancestors along with the *ṛsis*.

Bhāgavatapurāṇa 10.79.13–14

स्कन्दं दृष्ट्वा ययौ रामः श्रीशैलं गिरिशालयम्

द्रविडेषु महापुण्यं दृष्ट्वाद्रिं वेङ्कटं प्रभुः

कामकोष्णीं पुरीं काञ्चीं कावेरीं च सरिद्वराम्

श्रीरङ्गाख्यं महापुण्यं यत्र सन्निहितो हरिः

After having seen Skanda, Rama went to Śrīśaila, which is an abode of the Lord of mountains. The Lord, having seen the virtuous Veṅkaṭa in the region of Draviḍās, and the city of Kāñcī, and the best of the rivers, Kāverī, and a prosperous [city] called Śrīraṅgam, where Hari is residing...

Raghuvaṃśa of Kālidāsa 4.45 (Aruṇagirinātha commentary)

स सैन्यपरिभोगेन गजदानसुगन्धिना ।

कावेरीं सरितां पत्युः शङ्कनीयामिवाकरोत् ॥

By reason of her enjoyment by his army, redolent of [marked by] the sweet scent of elephants' ichor, he made Kāverī [the river] suspectable [an object of suspicion], as it were, to the lord of the rivers [the Ocean].

Daśakumāracarita of Daṇḍin: p.159. (sixth *ucchvāsa*)

शिविषु – कावेरी – दक्षिणतीरस्थदेशविशेषेषु। पट्टने - नगरे...

[Once] in the excellent town [which is] on the southern bank of Kāverī...

Some Tamil Sources on the river Kāverī[45]:

Mentioning and praising the river Kāverī is very old in the Tamil literary tradition. The river Kāverī has been admired starting from the Sangam literature (third century BCE to third century CE) up to modern Tamil literary novels. These are some examples:

தித்தன்
பிண்ட நெல்லின் உறந்தை ஆங்கண்
கழை நிலை பெறாஅக் காவிரி நீத்தம் (அகநானூறு 6.4–6)

tittaṉ
piṇṭa nelliṉ uṟantai āṅkaṇ
kaḻainilai peṟāak kāviri nīttam (Akanāṉūṟu 6.4–6)

---

45 We are grateful to Dr. Indira Manuel for providing the examples and translation related to river Kāverī.

The flooded Kāviri where the poles used for propelling the boat could not be held straight in the city Uṟantai (Uṟaiyūr) belonging to the chieftain Tittaṉ, filled with heaps of paddy.

சிறை பறைந்து உறைஇச் செங்குணக்கு ஒழுகும்
அம் தண் காவிரி (அகநானூறு 76.11–12)

ciṟai paṟaintu cṟaiic ceṅkuṇakku oḻukum
amtaṉ kāviri (Akanāṉūṟu 76.11–12)

The beautiful cool Kāviri, which flows straight towards the east crossing all barriers and eroding them.

காவிரிப்
பலர் ஆடு பெரும் துறை மருதொடு பிணித்த
ஏந்து கோட்டு யானை (குறு. 258.2–4)

Kāvirip
pala rāṭu peruntuṟai marutoṭu piṇitta
ēntukōṭṭu yāṉai (Kuṟntokai 258.2–4)

This describes the Kāviri, with bathing ghats where many people bathe, by the side of which is a marutu tree to which an elephant with big tusks is tied.

சிறக்க நின் ஆயுள்
மிக்கு வரும் இன்னீர்க் காவிரி
எக்கர் இட்ட மணலினும் பலவே. (புறநானூறு 43.21–23)

ciṟakka niṉ āyuḷ
mikkuvarum iṉṉīrk kāviri
ekkar iṭṭa maṇaliṉum palavē. (Puṟanāṉūṟu 43.21–23)

May your life be long and great as the innumerable sand grains of the sand dunes gathered on the banks of the overflowing sweet waters of the Kāviri.

மா மலை முழக்கின் மான் கணம் பனிப்பக்
கால் மயங்கு கதழ் உறை ஆலியொடு சிதறிக்
கரும்பு அமல் கழனிய நாடு வளம் பொழிய
வளம் கெழு சிறப்பின் உலகம் புரைஇச்
செங்குணக்கு ஒழுகும் கலுழி மலிர் நிறைக்
காவிரி அன்றியும் பூவிரி புனலொரு
மூன்றுடன் கூடிய கூடல் அனையை (பதிற்றுப்பத்து 50.1–7)

māmalai muḻakkiṉ māṉkaṇam paṉippa
kālmayaṅku kataḻuṟai āliyoṭu citaṟik
karumpu amal kaḻaṉiya nāṭuvaḷam poḻiya
vaḷaṅkeḻu ciṟappiṉ ulakam puraiic
ceṅkuṇakku oḻukum kaluḻi malirniṟaik
kāviri aṉṟiyum pūviri puṉaloru
mūṉṟutaṉ kūṭiya kūṭal aṉaiyai. (*Patiṟṟuppattu* 50.1–7)

You resemble, not only the Kāviri which flows straight to the east, with full, muddy waters, re-protecting this prosperous word as clouds rumbled in the lofty mountains making the deer herds tremble and rain poured while hailstones fell from the skies mixed with winds making fertile the land with fields full of sugarcane, but also a confluence of three great rivers covered with flowers.