

Parikṣit Mahārāja sat on the bank of the Ganges or the Yamunā?

Analysis of the Geographical Location of Ganges, Yamunā, Hastināpura, and Śukatal

By Dāmodara Dāsa, 12 October 2017

In his purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.19.6 (as quoted below) Śrīla Prabhupāda says that Parikṣit Mahārāja sat on the banks of Yamunā for hearing the *Bhāgavatam* from Śukadeva Gosvāmī.

Mahārāja Parikṣit, just after receiving the news of his death within seven days, at once retired from family life and shifted himself to the sacred bank of the Yamunā River. Generally it is said that the King took shelter on the bank of the Ganges, but according to Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, the King took shelter on the bank of the Yamunā. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī's statement appears to be more accurate because of the geographical situation. Mahārāja Parikṣit resided in his capital Hastināpura, situated near present Delhi, and the River Yamunā flows down past the city. Naturally the King would take shelter of the River Yamunā because she was flowing past his palace door. And as far as sanctity is concerned, the River Yamunā is more directly connected with Lord Kṛṣṇa than the Ganges. The Lord sanctified the River Yamunā from the beginning of His transcendental pastimes in the world. While His father Vasudeva was crossing the Yamunā with the baby Lord Kṛṣṇa for a safe place at Gokula on the other bank of the river from Mathurā, the Lord fell down in the river, and by the dust of His lotus feet the river at once became sanctified. It is especially mentioned herein that Mahārāja Parikṣit took shelter of that particular river which is beautifully flowing, carrying the dust of the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa, mixed with *tulasī* leaves. Lord Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet are always besmeared with the *tulasī* leaves, and thus as soon as His lotus feet contact the water of the Ganges and the Yamunā, the rivers become at once sanctified. The Lord, however, contacted the River Yamunā more than the Ganges. According to the *Varāha Purāṇa*, as quoted by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, there is no difference between the water of the Ganges and the Yamunā, *but when the water of the Ganges is sanctified one hundred times, it is called the Yamunā.*

It is accepted even among bona-fide Vaiṣṇava *sampradāyas* that Śukadeva Gosvāmī recited *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* to Parikṣit Mahārāja on the bank of Ganges. Moreover, it is mentioned at other places in Vedic literatures like the *Mahābhārata* that Parikṣit Mahārāja took shelter of Ganges. Prabhupāda himself writes the river as Ganges in his translation. Thus a natural contradiction may arise in minds of thoughtful devotees.

But if we carefully analyze the commentary of Jīva Gosvāmī¹, it is exactly what Śrīla Prabhupāda is saying. Actually, the river that Parikṣit Mahārāja took shelter of is Yamunā passing near New Delhi, which Śrīla Prabhupāda always identified with Hastināpura.

¹ *yā vai tādrśatvena svayam prasiddhā punarlasatsriyastadānīm pracuratayā vṛndaavanajātā yāstulasyastābhīrvimiśrā pūrvaṁ vimiśrībhūtā aikyaṁ prāptā yā vṛndāvanasthitāḥ svayam bhagavataḥ kṛṣṇasyāṅghrīreṇavastābhirabhyadhikāṁ yamunārūpamambu tasyāpi netrī voḍhrītyarthaḥ | abhyadhikatvaṁ coktvamādivārāhe – “gaṅgā śataguṇā puṇyā mātḥure mama maṇḍale | yamunā viśrutā devi! nātra kāryā vicāraṇā||” iti | jalapravāharūpā gaṅgā hyatra voḍhrī | baahyaśca tādr̥gambu | tato bhinnatvamevopapadyata iti netrīti sadaiva tannayanam labhyata iti ca tathā vyākhyātam | kṛṣṇaśabdaśca rūḍhyā śrīgopāla evādhikam prasiddha iti tu tathā vyākhyātam | abhede hi tādr̥gamburūpetyevavakṣyaditi |*

Here is the gist of the commentary translated:

Thus *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.19.6 can be literally explained as follows as per Jīva Gosvāmī's commentary:

yā vai lasac-chrī-tulasī-vimiśra-kṛṣṇāṅghri-reṇu-abhyadhikāmbu-netrī

“(Parikṣit Mahārāja took shelter of the river) whose waters are already glorious and are the carriers of waters that become more glorious (when they reach Vṛndāvana in Mathurā-maṇḍala) by mixing with the *tulasī* of Vṛndāvana and dust of Lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa...”

Here *yā* refers to the river Parikṣit Mahārāja sat on and that river is *netrī* or carrier. Carrier of what? The *ambu* or waters. Which type of waters? *Abhyādhika* or whose glory has been extremely increased. Why the glory is increased? Because of being mixed (*vimiśra*) with the dust of lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa (*kṛṣṇa aṅghri reṇu*) and *tulasī*.

Now the river that is sanctified thousand times by the dust lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa is Yamunā. And Parikṣit Mahārāja did not sit on the bank of river that is already purified a thousand times but on the banks of river that is carrying the waters (*ambu netrī*) that are to be purified. This means that it is Yamunā river that has not yet reached Mathurā where it got purified by dust of lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa. Thus it is rightly suggested herein that the river is the Yamunā passing through New Delhi. Why New Delhi, it can be anywhere between Yamunotrī to Mathura? Śrīla Prabhupāda applies logic that the palace of Parikṣit Mahārāja is in Delhi and thus it is logical that he must have taken shelter at a nearby place and thus at the Yamunā as it flows through Delhi.

Then why many *sāstras* mention that Parikṣit Mahārāja took shelter of the Ganges?

Śrīla Prabhupāda says—

It is confirmed by Śukadeva Gosvāmī that in those days the river flowing through the city of Hastināpura, present-day New Delhi, was known as the Ganges, although today it is called the Yamunā. From authorities like Jīva Gosvāmī it is confirmed that the Ganges and Yamunā are the same river flowing in different courses. The part of the Ganges which flows through Hastināpura to the area of Vṛndāvana is called the Yamunā because it is sanctified by the transcendental pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa.²

Thus, river that passes through New Delhi today is known as Yamunā while previously it was known to be Ganges and thus you find that *sāstras* mention the name of Ganges. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī quotes from the *Varāha Purāṇa* in this regard—

gaṅgā śatagaṇā puṇyā māthure mama maṇḍale |

yamunā viśrutā devi! nātra kāryyā vicāraṇā ||

“The water of the Ganges is already famous (*svayam prasiddhā*), and when mixed with the *tulasī* manifest in Vṛndāvana (mixes with already mixed *tulasī* from before) and the dust of Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet, its water becomes more glorified (*abhyadhika*) and is known as the Yamunā, The river in the place where Parikṣit Maharaj took shelter is the carrier of water for this Yamunā (*tasyāpi voḍhri*). In other words, the water of this river is going to become the water of the Yamunā. This enhancement of its glory (*abhyadhikatvam*) is mentioned in the *Ādi-varāha-purāṇa* – ‘The Ganges becomes one hundred time more pious (or giver of pious credits) when it is in My Mathurā-maṇḍala. And, O devi, there she is known as the Yamunā. There should be no doubt raised about this.’”

² Kṛṣṇa Book, Ch.68

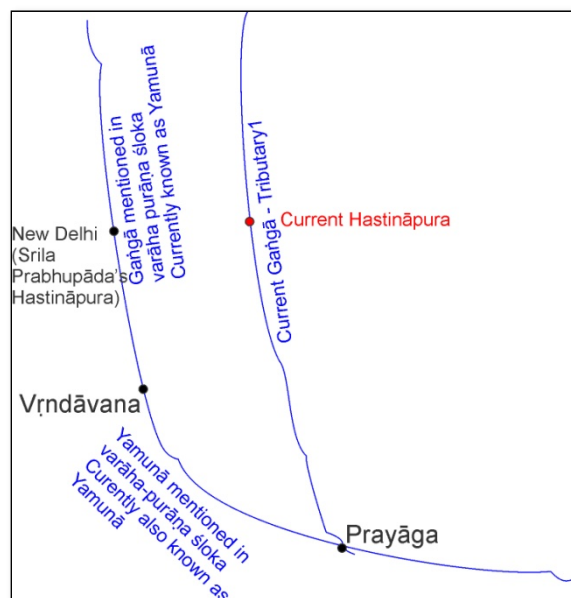
“The Ganges becomes a hundred times more auspicious when it passes through My Mathurā-maṇḍala, and then she is known as the Yamunā. This should not be doubted.”

Then what about the river that is known as the Ganges today?

From authorities like Jīva Gosvāmī it is confirmed that the Ganges and the Yamunā are the same river flowing in different courses.³

Thus the river that is known as the Ganges today was also known as the Ganges in those days considering that the same river Ganges flowed in two courses. And thus it can be logically understood as follows (See Figure):

Previously there were two tributaries or rivers known as the Ganges and both ran parallel until after Mathurā-maṇḍala, where the western tributary takes turn to the East and merges with the Eastern one at Prayāga. It means that the currently well-known locations of Hastināpura and Śukatala on the banks of the currently known Ganges (the eastern tributary) needs relocation. Śrīla Prabhupāda has always placed Hastināpura in New Delhi and not on the banks of the Ganges at its current location.



³ Kṛṣṇa Book, Ch.68.