

even so late as 130 years ago, its upper course has been confounded with those of the Indus and the Satlej that we cannot omit paying some attention to the history of human knowledge about the origin of this river. And as could be expected from the immense importance of this river for north-eastern India, the Ganges has been an object of illimited veneration of the Indians ever since the remotest antiquity. It is said to be mentioned only twice in the *Rig-veda*.¹

Gangā was Himavant's eldest daughter, and concerning her the following event is related both by the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa: King Sāgara in Ayodhyā had 60,000 sons. Once while they were searching for a horse that had been stolen from a sacrifice of horses, they met the sage Kapila. They accused him of having stolen the missing horse, and in consequence, in his anger, he transformed them into ashes. Only by the aid of Gangā's holy waters could they again come to life. It was Sāgara's great-great-grandson, Bhagīratha, who at last succeeded in bringing the stream Ākāṣa-Gagā, Vyoma-Gagā, (Air-Ganges, Heaven-Ganges), down from heaven, and its violence was only restrained by Āiva receiving it in the curls of his hair. This tale is often referred to in the Mahābhārata, as: »Her, who is difficult to bear even by mountains, bore after this the holder of Pināka (Āiva) on his head for hundred thousand years.» Or: »Here Mahādeva received the down-pouring, from heaven sent Gagā, and gave her to the world of men, o thou who is full of Brahma knowledge.» And: »That holy Bhāgīrathī, who is worshipped by gods and Gandharvas shines far and wide over the heavens like a pennant banner by the wind, it is perpetually conducted downwards over the lower mountain tops, lying like a serpent King's mistress, trembling on the rocks, she, the dear queen of the sea overflows all the southern district (nourishing it) like a mother after having first streamed from Āmbhu's (Āiva's) hair». And at another place in the Mahābhārata we read of a sacrifice performed »on Himavant, in that place where Gagā bursts forth from the mountains.»²

According to Wilson the legend of the descent of the Gangā is told, in its most ancient and authentic shape, in the Rāmāyaṇa. The Ganges, he says, is called Bhāgīrathī, from King Bhāgīratha, and the sea, which was formed by the river, is termed Sagara, after his great-grand sire.³ WHEELER says that the legend has no real value, excepting that it is universally believed by the Hindus. From the Rāmāyaṇa Wheeler relates a poetical description of the divine Ganges, the river which Rāma saw flowing in three directions, »the river which dashes against its strong banks with a terrific sound resembling a deep laugh, or smiling with its pure foam . . ., the river which abounds with the pure lotos, and where the gods perform their ablutions, . . . the river which removing every load of impurity is itself clear and pellucid, . . . the river which fell from the feet of the divine Vishnu, and

¹ Dowson, op. cit. p. 108.

² Fausbøll, op. cit. p. 160 et seq.

³ Works by H. H. Wilson, Vol. II, London 1862 p. 168.