



Cleaning Ganga

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This article is based on “**River of life**” which was published in The Indian Express on 17/04/2021. It talks about the reason for pollution in the river Ganga and steps taken to deal with it.

Recently, India witnessed the world’s largest religious congregation as millions of pilgrims gathered for a holy dip in the Ganga during the Kumbh Mela. Since time immemorial, the Kumbh Mela has been a melting pot for varied beliefs, practices, philosophies, and ideologies.

Unfortunately, over time, the increase in population, coupled with unregulated industrialization and unsustainable agricultural practices, have led to a significant increase in pollutants in the Ganga river and its tributaries.

However, after the launch of the flagship program called **Namami Gange**, the pollution in River Ganga has significantly reduced. It has adopted a holistic approach to public policy, technology intervention, and community participation.

Reasons for Polluted River Ganga

- **Urbanization:** Rapid urbanization in India during the recent decades has given rise to a number of environmental problems such as water supply, wastewater generation and its collection, treatment, and disposal.
Many towns and cities which came upon the banks of river Ganga have not given proper thought to the problem of wastewater, sewerage, etc.
- **Industries:** Unrestricted flow of sewage and industrial effluents into the Ganga has adversely affected its purity. All these industrial wastes are toxic to life forms that consume this water.
The other significant contributors to wastewater are paper mills, steel plants, textile, and sugar industries.
- **Agricultural Runoff and Improper Agricultural Practices:** Traces of fertilizers and pesticides are washed into the nearest water-bodies at the onset of the monsoons or whenever there are heavy rains.

- **Withdrawal of Water:** According to a report of the Ministry of Water Resources on the study of minimum flows in the Ganga, impact on river water quality resulting from discharges of treated or untreated wastewater into the river will depend on the dilution offered by the quantum of flows in the river.
However, River Ganga gets starved of water when they enter the plain area. For instance, the Upper Ganga Canal and the Lower Ganga Canal have left the Ganga downstream almost dry.
- **Religious and Social Practices:** Religious faith and social practices also add to the pollution of the river Ganga.
 - Dead bodies are cremated on the river banks. Partially burnt bodies are also flung into the river.
 - Mass bathing in a river during religious festivals is another environmentally harmful practice.
 - All this is done as a matter of religious faith and in keeping with ancient rituals. These practices pollute the river water and adversely affect the water quality.

Steps Taken to Reduce Pollution in River Ganga

- **Public Policy:** In 2016, the government issued a notification to authorize the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) to exercise powers under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
NMCG also issued directives regulating mining activities on river banks, prohibiting encroachment, and regulating activities like the immersion of idols.
- **Technology Intervention:** NMCG adopted cutting-edge technologies like satellite imagery, remote sensing, and geospatial solutions which facilitated real-time monitoring of pollutants in Ganga and its tributaries.
Scientific forecast models were deployed for designing new sewage treatment infrastructure.
- **Community Participation:** To encourage community participation in cleaning the river, an awareness campaign is regularly carried out in cities, towns, and villages alongside Ganga through a newly-established community force called “Ganga Praharis”.
Through them, the government seeks to transform “jal chetna” into “jan chetna” and turn it into a “jal andolan”.

Conclusion

The Constitution of India mandates the central and state governments to provide both a clean and decent environment and clean drinking water for the people (Article 48A, Art. 51 (A) (g), Article 21). Also, the Supreme Court has declared that the right to a decent and clean environment is a fundamental right.

In this context, the Namami Gange project is a step in the right direction to clean the river Ganga and should be emulated to deal with pollution in other rivers of India.

Drishhti Mains Question

Namami Gange project is a step in the right direction to clean river Ganga and should be emulated to deal with pollution in other rivers of India. Comment.
