



## Mains Practice Question

### Case Studies

You are posted as the Commissioner of the Municipal Corporation in a major North Indian city located along the Yamuna River. The river is the city's lifeline, providing water for domestic, industrial, and agricultural needs. Over the years, however, the Yamuna has become heavily polluted due to untreated sewage, industrial effluents, and religious offerings. A recent National Green Tribunal report has criticised your corporation for failing to meet sewage treatment targets and for allowing illegal industrial discharges.

On assuming office, you discover that several textile and dyeing units are secretly releasing untreated waste into the river at night. Many sewage treatment plants under your jurisdiction are either non-functional or operating far below capacity, partly due to corruption in maintenance contracts. Religious organisations continue to immerse idols and floral offerings into the river, citing cultural tradition, and have mobilised public sentiment against any restrictions.

Environmental activists are running a campaign that is gaining national attention, while the local media have started linking rising cases of skin ailments and loss of aquatic life directly to the state of the river. Political leaders, however, advise you to go slow on enforcement until after the upcoming elections, warning that strict action against industries or religious groups may provoke unrest. Meanwhile, the government has directed you to prepare a detailed action plan for river rejuvenation.

- A. Identify and discuss the ethical issues involved in this case.
- B. How would you balance environmental duty with political and cultural pressures?
- C. How would you ensure accountability in industrial compliance and transparency in sewage treatment operations?
- D. Suggest key measures for sustainable river management and state the ethical values that should guide you. (250 words)

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### Approach

- Briefly describe the situation to establish context.
- Identify and discuss the ethical issues involved in this case.
- Discuss the steps to balance environmental duty with political and cultural pressures.
- Highlight the mechanisms to ensure accountability in industrial compliance and transparency in sewage treatment operations.
- Suggest key measures for sustainable river management and state the guiding ethical values.
- Conclude with a suitable way forward.

### Introduction:

The **Yamuna River** is the lifeline of the city, sustaining **domestic, agricultural**, and industrial needs while holding immense **cultural significance**. Its severe pollution, caused by untreated sewage, industrial effluents, and unregulated religious offerings, presents a **complex ethical** and **administrative challenge**.

# Body:

## A. Ethical Issues Involved

- **Environmental Ethics** - Duty to protect the river's ecological health for current and future generations (intergenerational equity).
- **Public Health Responsibility** - Rising skin ailments and ecological degradation demand adherence to the principle of non-maleficence.
- **Integrity & Anti-Corruption** - Mismanagement and corruption in sewage treatment operations undermine public trust.
- **Rule of Law vs. Political Pressure** - Upholding environmental laws despite electoral considerations.
- **Cultural Sensitivity vs. Sustainability** - Need to respect traditions while preventing ecological harm.
- **Transparency & Accountability** - Obligation to disclose environmental data to citizens truthfully.

## B. Balancing Environmental Duty with Political & Cultural Pressures

- **Stakeholder Engagement** - Collaborate with religious leaders to promote eco-friendly rituals such as biodegradable idols and designated immersion tanks.
- **Phased Enforcement** - Gradually tighten industrial compliance to avoid sudden economic shocks, providing subsidies for effluent treatment upgrades.
- **Political Navigation** - Present data linking pollution control to public health improvement, framing it as a governance success before elections.
- **Public Awareness** - Link river rejuvenation to cultural pride through campaigns, making environmental protection a shared community value.

## C. Ensuring Accountability and Transparency

- **Industrial Compliance:**
  - Install GPS-enabled flow meters and CCTV at discharge points.
  - Conduct surprise night inspections with Pollution Control Board and NGOs.
  - Publicly name and penalise violators to deter further breaches.
- **Sewage Treatment Operations:**
  - Mandate third-party technical audits for Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs).
  - Launch a real-time public dashboard of STP capacity and performance.
  - Cancel corrupt contracts and award new tenders via transparent e-procurement.

## D. Key Measures for Sustainable River Management

### Short-Term

- Repair and maximise use of existing STPs.
- Crack down on illegal industrial discharge.
- Provide alternative facilities for idol immersion.

### Medium-Term

- Upgrade STPs with advanced treatment technologies.
- Enforce zero-liquid discharge norms for industries.
- Involve resident welfare associations and local NGOs in river monitoring.

### Long-Term

- Restore riverfront ecology through wetlands and green buffer zones.
- Integrate river health indicators into city planning and environmental impact assessments.
- Institutionalise continuous environmental education in schools and communities.

## **Ethical Values to Guide Action**

- **Integrity** - Resist corruption and political interference.
- **Accountability** - Transparent performance reporting.
- **Environmental Stewardship** - Safeguard natural resources as trustees.
- **Empathy** - Respect cultural traditions while guiding them towards sustainability.
- **Courage** - Take decisive action despite political pressure.
- **Justice** - Ensure polluters bear the cost of remediation.

## **Conclusion:**

**Aldo Leopold**, father of **environmental ethics**, said, "A thing is right when it preserves the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." The Yamuna is part of this community, and its preservation is an ethical necessity. My actions — from **industrial regulation to cultural adaptation** — will strengthen its ecological integrity and foster community **stewardship**.

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/mains-practice-question/question-8920/pnt>

