

## DO ONLY BIG RIVERS GET POLLUTED?

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Staying so close to the National Capital we often realize that only the issues that are talked about and discussed frequently for causing pollution seem to attract significant attention far and wide. In the present times much hue and cry is being heard over the failure of the Ganga Action Plan (GAP) and the Yamuna Action Plan (YAP). Although the abovesaid two rivers are the most polluted rivers in India however, we cannot overlook the small yet many polluting rivers also. These rivers, which are numerous, contribute significant pollution to both the Ganga and the Yamuna. It is a herculean task to clean the entire river. Apart from other reasons it requires a huge budget to clean it. According to the experts instead the pollution if stopped at the source itself could prevent these rivers from getting polluted any further. The *Kali Nadi* (E) which originates near Mansoorpur in Muzaffarnagar district in Western U.P. and merges into the Ganga at Kannauj district during its entire course carries heavy loads of pollution from various sources. This polluted river passes through Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Etah, Farukhabad and Kannauj districts. Often this significantly polluted river is eclipsed by the bigger rivers in the context of the amount of pollution that it causes to the environment. The major polluting sources for *Kali Nadi* are the various sugar processing industries with distilleries, fertilizer manufacturing units, paper mills, domestic waste, raw sewage and slaughterhouses. It is unfortunate that the *Kali Nadi* which was once a religiously strong river for immersing goddess *Durga's* idol by the Bengali Society during *Durga Puja* celebration every year has now turned into one big drain. The river water is severely contaminated with heavy metals which are mostly carcinogens at alarming levels. According to a study of the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), it has been revealed that heavy metals such as chromium, cadmium, nickel and iron are present as high as thirty thousand times more than the desirable limits. Besides deteriorating the environment and natural resources the polluted *Kali Nadi* has also affected the socio-economic status of the people residing near it adversely especially in the villages. There are even incidences of women being shot at in a village while demanding for an alternate arrangement for drinking water against the district administration. People from other villages have stopped marrying

their children in the affected villages. In a few villages situated on the banks of this polluted river everyday several man hours especially of the womenfolk are spent in arranging drinking water for their families. This is because the water from the handpumps and borewells have become severely contaminated rendering it unfit for potable purpose. As a result the villagers have become economically more vulnerable as their time is monopolized in walking several kilometers everyday whereas they could have been employed to generate some income for their households. The womenfolk are the worst hit because of the *Kali Nadi* pollution in many contexts. They suffer from serious epidermal, gastrointestinal, gynecological and neurological disorders. Owing to serious ailments the villagers fall prey to the quacks and unqualified medical professionals etc. and sometimes even lose their lives as they are not able to afford better medical aid. A sum of ninety seven lakhs of rupees has flown down the drain in order to clean the *Kali Nadi* in Meerut itself by the Irrigation Department a few years ago. The role of grassroot level N.G.O.s working towards providing sustainable solution to these villagers' woes becomes significant. Efforts of Janhit Foundation, Meerut have been continuous and significant in these regards. The clear orders of shifting the slaughterhouse situated in Meerut and the recent orders of closing it down completely have also been the outcome of Janhit Foundation's efforts. The plight of the *Kali Nadi* doesn't end here as the river falls neither under the Ganga Action Plan (GAP) nor the Yamuna Action Plan (YAP). As a result, no stringent relief has been provided so far. The Government of India should allot a budget exclusively for cleaning of these rivers. A mass movement involving the locals should build up because they are directly or indirectly affected by the polluted rivers. The locals should be trained and educated for not spreading any more pollution to these rivers. After all it seems as for today the *Kali Nadi* has remained as nothing but one big drain of the National Capital Region's (NCR).