



SAVE GANGA MOVEMENT

A GANDHIAN NON-VIOLENT MOVEMENT FOR A NON-VIOLENT CULTURE OF DEVELOPMENT

Ganga symbolizes all rivers and water bodies; Giriraj Himalaya symbolizes all mountains, forests and wildlife; Gandhi symbolizes a culture of Truth and non-violence, i.e. a culture of pursuit of ethical perfection as the ultimate goal of life and pursuit of selfless ethical life of universal love as its means

What We Must Do to Save the Ganga: Some Reflections

The utility, aesthetic and religious value of the natural ecology of the Ganga & of the Himalaya is invaluable. The Ganga is the life-line of crores of our people: a naturally flowing fresh and clean Ganga (Aviral & Nirmal Ganga**) freely and permanently meets various water requirements of people on its banks, recharges the ground water all along its flow, improves the fertility of a lot of farmland through its silt, provides the habitat for hundreds of diverse life forms, etc. The dense natural forests of the Himalayas prevents floods, constitute the natural store house of invaluable water and natural manure, provide the habitat for the invaluable Himalayan diverse life forms, provide seasonal fruits, nuts, edible oil seeds, honey through its flowering trees, medicines through its medicinal plants, and fuel, timber, fiber for local use, and freely contribute to the fertility of the agro-ecosystems of the entire Gangetic planes depositing fresh nutrient rich silt through freely flowing rivers. The GANGAJAL (water of the Ganga) is traditionally claimed to have bactericidal, health promoting, non-putrefying and purifying properties. The aesthetic and religious value of the natural ecology of the Ganga and of the Himalaya is also invaluable. All great religions, explicitly or implicitly, accept the natural eco-systems which sustain healthy life and provide various essentials of life freely to masses to be sacred and invaluable. **We must not allow our development activities to deprive the masses the various invaluable services they have been getting freely since ages from the Himalayas and from the Ganga and its tributaries. We must not allow, in the name of development, our greed for wealth and lust for luxuries to deprive the masses the invaluable essentials of life such as pure air, water, sun light, natural manure, medicinal plants, etc. which they have been getting freely from nature since ages.****

It is deeply painful and highly deplorable that even though thousands of crores of rupees have been spent to clean the Ganga and the Yamuna, the rivers are gasping for breath under unbearable pollution, even though we know that the Ganga is the life-line of crores of our people and crores of our people consider her to be their divine mother and that the polluted water directly or indirectly causes health hazards like cancer, respiratory diseases, renal failure and much other water born or water related diseases. A recent study conducted by the National Cancer Registry programme has found that those living along the banks of the river Ganga are more prone to cancer than others in the country: the river is laden with heavy metals and lethal chemicals that cause cancer. Cases of Gall bladder cancer along the course of the river are the second highest in the world while incidences of prostate cancer are the highest in the country. (See editorial, Times of India, Oct. 18, 2012.) The pain and suffering it must be causing to the aquatic life and to the animals and birds who drink the polluted water goes unaccounted. It is important to note that according to the report of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) published on 20th March 2007, apart from the Ganga, the Indus, Nile, and Yangtze are among the 10 most endangered rivers of the world.

Surely saving our national river Ganga, which constitute the lifeline of nearly 40 % of our country's population, would be a major step in the direction to save all our other great rivers which are also in the process of slow death: it will set an example for saving our all other great rivers. We must not allow NGRBA to fail like our National Ganga Action Plan (GAP) created in 1985 to save the Ganga. NGRBA must have transparency and accountability in every sphere of its activities, which at present it does not have. The management of affairs related to the Ganga continues to be handled by the central and state governmental bureaucracies in the same manner as before in the case of GAP (phases-1&2). Posterity will condemn and curse us if we do not take the necessary time-bound steps to save our invaluable national river Ganga.

We must take the following steps to save our national river.

1) The National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) must take the full responsibility of the protection of our national river. Since the Ganga flows through many states, it would be the best if NGRBA takes the full responsibility of making and keeping the Ganga and its tributaries completely and permanently free from pollution through time-bound steps, leaving no scope for the central and state government authorities blaming each other for the failures.

a) Like the planning commission, there should be a Deputy-chairman for NGRBA, whose sole and whole responsibility would be towards NGRBA.

b) The Expert Members of NGRBA must be given important role to play both at the context of decision making as well as at the context of implementation. At present they are almost totally neglected at both the contexts.

c) Analogous to the 'Prevention of Insults to National Honor Act' for the national flag and anthem, there should be an Act for the national river Ganga. **The Ganga should be constitutionally declared as the National River with provisions that ensure due respect to her, considering her National River status.**

The declaration of the Ganga as National River must be done by parliamentary legislation under Entry 56 of the Union List in the Constitution and not by a government notification under the Environmental protection Act.

d) Taking into account the important role rivers play to meet various water requirements of the masses and the danger to their life they are facing at present from various eco-hostile forces of development, we must have a law protecting River rights, and River Guards to prevent crimes against rivers and River Courts to try crimes against rivers.

2) The present policy of allowing treated sewage into our rivers is anti Aam Janata. Since our rivers are the source of drinking water for crores of our common people and also for the animals and STPs cannot convert sewage into potable water, we must discontinue the present policy of allowing treated sewage into our rivers. Sewers must be separated from rivers, sewage must be converted into natural manure producing electricity in the process wherever possible and treated-sewage water must be used only for non-drinking and non-cooking purposes such as irrigation, industrial, non-potable domestic and commercial uses, groundwater recharge, etc. Industrial effluents, hospital wastes, or any other harmful materials, treated or untreated, must not be allowed to enter into the rivers and must not also be allowed to mix with the sewage which is to be used for organic farming after proper treatment. Industries must treat their effluents and use only the recycled water.

Treatment of the sewage through "Pond System and Plant Based Management of Sewage and Waste Treatment" and using the nutrient rich treated waste water for organic farming, which is the cheapest and durable and need least management and electricity, should be preferred wherever possible. The 8 decades old East Kolkata Wetlands constitute an ideal example of a system of natural bio-treatment

of urban waste water through “Pond System and Plant Based Management of Sewage Treatment” and recycling and utilizing treated water for fish culture and agriculture: it provides about 13000 tons of fish per year from it’s about 300 wastewater fed ponds, 150 tons of fresh vegetables per day from the small scale horticulture plots irrigated with the wastewater, water for irrigating paddy cultivation and livelihood for about 50 thousand common people and also serves as a natural sponge absorbing excess rainfall. **The East Kolkata Wetlands system could be developed as an ideal example of low-cost urban waste management & recycling for organic farming and sanitation technology, especially for developing countries.**

A massive time-bound plantation programme on the banks of the river Ganga from Gangotri to Ganga Sagar, along with the development of constructed wetlands for sewage treatment in major cities on the banks of the river, should be undertaken with the help of NBRI, Lucknow and other prominent research centers of botany and like-minded NGOs and local people. It would set an example for undertaking similar projects for all our other great rivers in the country which are also in the process of slow death. Under the scheme of **Eco-friendly River Front Development** of the Ganga, the rural youth should be used for the protection and beautification of the river front in the rural side of our national river with the help of the Panchayatas and rural empowerment schemes like MGNREGS. Such a project can be made a major source of creating Save Ganga Awareness among our rural youth.

Our National laboratories of CSIR- NEERI, Nagapur, NBRI, Lucknow, ITRC, Lucknow, CLRI, Chennai, etc. - along with our other prominent research centers of environmental science/ engineering of the IITs, BHU, etc. should network and collaborate with each other to play the central role in deciding the means to make our National River and its tributaries free from pollution and stop their degradation with the help of a culture of GPPP (Government, Private, Public Participation.) Our scientists have the knowledge and skill to clean our national river within 4 or 5 years if they get the full support and cooperation of the government. Our scientists, not the bureaucrats, should play the central role in deciding the technology to be used to clean the rivers.

Organic farming should be promoted in a massive way for decreasing the non-point sources of pollution of rivers such as hazardous chemicals from agricultural run-off into the rivers, and also for maintaining soil fertility, checking the groundwater degradation, reducing water requirement of crops, protecting human health, etc.

There should be disincentives in the form of proper fines to the states in the Ganga basin in proportion to the quantity and quality of pollution a state has added to the river in the state. The NRCDC must have a monitoring mechanism to regularly monitor the water quality of the Ganga at the entry and exit points of each state

3) The highly earth quake prone, eco-fragile, ecologically invaluable Uttarakhand region of the Ganga Basin must be declared “Ecological Fragile ” and its rivers “wild river” and all steps must be taken to protect them and the natural eco-systems they support. It should be converted into a sanctuary for Himalayan flora and fauna and a paradise for simple living and high thinking. It would be a major step for the realization of our National Mission of saving the Himalayan Ecosystem as a part of the National Action Plan for Climate Change and also of the National Action Plan for Preservation of our Biodiversity. Since crores of our people since ages consider the entire Himalaya region of the Ganga with all its tributaries to be the zone for self purification and spiritual enlightenment (Tapo-Bhumi and Adhyatma-Bhumi), we should also declare this religiously invaluable Uttarakhand region to be our national Spiritual Heritage Zone. The utility value, ecological value and aesthetic value of the age old pristine wild mountains, forests, rivers and wildlife of the Himalayan region of the Ganga are also invaluable which cannot be created by us once we destroy them in the

name of development. **The ill conceived various dam projects for hydroelectricity on the Alakananda and Mandakini which would cause massive and permanent harm to their invaluable ecology must not be allowed.** The run-of-the river hydroelectricity projects stop the flow of the river with a barrage and divert the entire river through dark cemented tunnels leading to a dried pathway of the river along its river bed. Large scale blasting, tunneling, destruction of underground natural streams, submergence of forests causing loss of biodiversity and loss of endangered and threatened species, etc can have devastating effects in the young and highly fragile regions of the Himalayas. Since we have only a partial scientific understanding of the very complex Himalayan ecology, we must not experiment with development activities there until a complete scientific understanding of the natural ecology of the Ganga Basin in the Himalayan region is available. Decision on the controversial issue of construction of eco-hostile dams for hydropower in this region must be postponed till there is a national agreement on this issue on the basis of a holistic scientific knowledge about what would be the loss to the nation because of the loss of various benefits our nation gets from its natural eco systems as well as about the devastating implications of natural calamities if the hydropower plants are constructed in this highly earth quake prone eco-fragile Himalaya region of the Ganga Basin. **Efforts must also be made as soon as possible to rectify our past mistakes as far as possible. We must have a high powered National Himalayan Ecology Preservation and Restoration Authority headed by Hon'ble Prime Minister to save the highly fragile invaluable ecology of the young Himalayas.**

Since the Ganga is our national river, at least the main stream of the Ganga must be maintained close to its pristine and natural state. We must have the policy of minimum interference with its natural flows in place of the present policy of having its minimum eco-flow, which means maximum abstraction of its water. Methods of irrigation and agricultural practices need to be changed keeping in view of the E-flow requirements of our national river and sustainability of ground water in the Ganga Basin. Dependence on rivers for irrigation could be substantially reduced by making our villages self dependent as far as possible for their water needs through storing rainwater in traditional ways in tanks and ponds and creating forests wherever possible which would function as natural water tankers.

The central government must provide all the help needed to make Uttarakhand an absolutely eco-friendly ideal Himalayan state. Time-bound steps for non-commercial afforestation of the Uttarakhand should be undertaken and these activities should be carried by the local people, using samplings of local plants. **Eco-friendly tourism and services sectors—software parks, universities and health centres— should be promoted to generate revenue as well as jobs.**

4) There is no scarcity of money, knowledge and skills with us to save our rivers including the Ganga. There is lack of will due to our moral bankruptcy which is at the root of our various deep rooted social evils including the problem of corruption. Environmental ethics must be taught as a part of the syllabus on ethics which must be taught as a compulsory subject, both at the school as well as at the college level. Although it is one of our “Charter of Ten demands’ which our Hon’ble Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh accepted on 12th March 2009 at the meeting at his residence, unfortunately no steps have been taken in this direction. Teaching environmental science without teaching environmental ethics and also teaching environmental ethics without discussing various fundamental questions of ethics concerning ethical values, the value and means of an ethical life would be of little significance. We must study critically the views of great religions and of great teachers and thinkers of mankind about various fundamental issues of ethics, which would be a major step in the direction to overcome our present deep rooted moral and spiritual crisis: it would certainly be a major step in the direction to cure our national social disease of corruption.

To begin with we must make Uttarakhand an absolutely eco-friendly ideal Himalayan state and must take time-bound decisive steps to make the Yamuna at Delhi completely and permanently free from pollution, which would set an example for the entire country. It is highly deplorable that

our national capital Delhi is the greatest polluter of the River Yamuna, the largest tributary of our National River Ganga. In dry season no water is allowed to flow in the Yamuna River downstream to Hathnikund barrage in Haryana and what reaches the holy cities of Mathura and Vrindavan is mainly the treated or untreated domestic and industrial waste water contributed by various drains joining the Yamuna at Delhi. **An adequate flow of natural fresh water must be allowed to flow on the Yamuna bed throughout the stretch of the river throughout the year not only to protect and preserve its ecology but also to meet the drinking water needs of the cities, towns and villages situated on its banks.** Natural justice demands that we must not deprive people use of water of a river for drinking and other domestic purposes for using it for agricultural or industrial purpose, and deprive its use for agricultural purpose for using it for industrial purpose.

(The above points constitute essentially the Save Ganga & Save Himalayas Resolution which was unanimously accepted at the National Save Ganga & Save Himalayas Meeting- cum- Panel Discussion held at Gandhi Darsan, Rajghat, New Delhi on 12th March, 2011 in which various eminent persons from different religions and different streams of life were present.)

We must (A) make the Ganga Aviral and take time bound decisive steps to make it and its tributaries completely free from (1) industrial effluents, (2) sewage of the cities and towns (3) hazardous chemicals from agricultural run-off within five/ten years as our short term goal, and (B) make serious effort to solve the problems of industrialization, urbanization, population growth and corruption which are direct or indirect causes of our problem of environmental degradation in general and slow death of our rivers in particular by trying to realize through Gandhian non-violent means the Gandhian conceptions village Swaraj, Swadeshi, dignified body labour, rural centric non-violent development, character-building ethics education, etc., as soon as possible as our long term goal.

Industrialization and urbanization must be in the service of rural India, and development must be non-violent with loving care of our fellow lower form of creatures and life sustaining natural systems. We must not allow our population to grow beyond the limit which would cause great harm to our future generations or to our fellow lower form of creatures, and if it has gone beyond the limit we must try to bring it down in some ethical way to the desirable level. We must take time-bound decisive steps to solve the problem of forced migration of rural unemployed to cities by converting rural India into ideal places for leading enlightened ethical life of simple living and high thinking with dignified exhilarating and health-giving body labour in an atmosphere of natural purity and beauty. We must root out corruption, which is proving to be the biggest hurdle in the way of implementing our various governmental programmes of public services, with the help of good governance and Character building ethics education. In his *Hind Swaraj*, making a severe condemnation of the education system of modern western civilization, Gandhiji claims: "Our ancient school system is enough. Character building has the first place in it and that is primary education. A building erected on that foundation will last. ...Religious, that is ethical, education will occupy the first place."

Neither Gandhiji nor the seers of various great religions would approve the present culture of development of modern western civilization which has caused disappearance of tens of thousands of plant and animal species and continues to cause greater and greater violence to our life-sustaining natural systems, (in the form of causing pollution of air, water, land, global warming and climate change, depletion of non-renewable natural resources, depletion of ozone layer, etc.) which has devastating implications in the long run for our future generations as well as for the entire life world. Gandhiji was once asked if he expected independent India to attain the same standard of living as Britain. Gandhiji replied, "It took Britain half the resources of the planet to achieve this prosperity. How many planets will a country like India require!" He firmly and rightly believes that "the earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed." He clearly sees: "Man's happiness really lies in

contentment. He who is discontented, however much he possesses, becomes a slave to his desires..... The incessant search for material comforts and their multiplication is an evil. A certain degree of physical harmony and comfort is necessary, but above a certain level it becomes hindrance instead of help. Therefore the ideal of creating an unlimited number of wants and satisfying them seems to be a delusion and snare." (T.N Khoshoo, *Mahatma Gandhi: An Apostle of applied Human Ecology*, Tata Energy Research Institute, New Delhi, 2002, pp.68-69.) "I do not believe that multiplication of wants and machinery contrived to supply them is taking the world a single step nearer to its goal.... I wholeheartedly detest this mad desire to destroy distance and time, to increase animal appetites and go to the earth in search of their satisfaction. If modern civilization stands for all this, and I have understood it to do so, I call it Satanic." (M.K Gandhi, *The Voice of Truth*, Navajeevan Publishing House, Ahmedabad-14, 1968, pp.326-327.) The culture of development of modern western civilization treats Nature as an adversary to be subdued and conquered, but the Gandhian approach to technological progress lies in considering Nature as our friend and benefactor. **Gandhi's thought does provide the form and content of a sustainable, equitable, non-violent form of development which essentially involves retelling the basic ethics of all great religions in the context of our technological age, and which is the surest and perhaps the only solution to our impending catastrophic global ecological crises including the crisis due to global warming which is likely to transform the Ganga into a seasonal river due to disappearance of the Himalaya snow and submerge many of our coastal villages, towns and cities due to rise of the sea level.** (For a discussion on this issue, please see the note entitled "Gandhian Solution of Global Ecological Crisis" in our website, [www. savegangamovement.org](http://www.savegangamovement.org).)

We must protect and take loving care of the delicate and holistic balance that exists in the ecosystems of nature which are invaluable from the view point of utility, aesthetics as well as religion, and try to restore wherever possible our degraded eco-systems. **Protection of the Ganga, symbolizing all rivers and water bodies, and the Giriraj Himalaya, symbolizing all mountains, forests and wildlife, must be accorded highest priority in our national development process. Ultimately, we must create a new paradigm of development for India based on Gandhian principles Truth and universal non-violence.** The modern western form of development which started with industrial revolution in mid-1700 has already caused massive damage to our planet earth's ecosphere. **We must replace the present extremely eco-hostile, out-and-out consumerist and inherently unsustainable self-destructive culture of development of unlimited desires and cut throat life-corroding competition for getting more and more wealth for their satisfaction, which is essentially born of lust for luxuries and greed for wealth, by an ethical culture of contentment, purity and sustainable non-violent development.** Surely classical Indian civilization, the mother of many great religions, has the moral and spiritual resources to provide the awareness necessary to create a mass Satyagraha to save the world from the impending massive ecological crises, and surely India, the mother of this only great living ancient civilization, is in far better position than any other country to create and lead such a movement. Let India provide the world a culture of non-violence and Truth, i.e., the true Ultimate meaning of life, in the context of our present technological age, where all religions could grow harmoniously in spite of their differences in the realm of metaphysics on the basis of the knowledge about their fundamental ethical unity and truth, and where development could take place with loving care of the invaluable countless kinds of flora and fauna of our life giving & life-sustaining aesthetically and religiously invaluable natural eco-systems.

Smt Rama Rauta

Convener, Save Ganga Movement

Member, Expert Committee, National Ganga River Basin Authority, Govt. of India

President, National Women's Organization, Pune

Mobile: 91 9765359040

Email: ramarauta@rediffmail.com, ramarauta29@gmail.com

