

## INDIAN SOCIETY AND HOLY GANGA

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### ABSTRACT

*Holy Ganga river, resides in the heart and soul of one and all, whether it is a child, youth or an old person hailing from an Indian society or a foreign land. As soon as, we are at Ghats of Ganga river, we all fold hands to worship the mother Goddess Ganga and the mesmerizing scene of the flowing river, thousands of worshippers hold lighted Diya's in their hands willingly lose themselves in the ongoing prayer to find their real identity and awakened soul. This is the power and love, which I felt when I attended an aarti session at the Ghats of Rishikesh and had the sacred bath at Har Ki Pauddi. It was an awakening of a new self and one of the turning points of my life – a New AWAKENED SELF- A SELFLESS SELF. This paper is an attempt to research our ties with Ganges river socially, spiritually, culturally, physically and psychologically since our birth till our death. How an Indian grows with the power and spirit of mother Ganges, her loving blessings and her teachings which are an essential part of Hinduism. Our true religion which is incomplete without holy Ganges and the power and benefits of its sacred water. The research paper is an attempt to make an individual to realize that there exists a profound affinity of an individual with her sacred mother, Ganges, and the inscrutable power of mother nature which believes only in giving and washing away all our sins. Then it remains in our hands to protect and conserve our mother Ganges and be blessed by her infinite bounties. This paper also proves that not only spiritually but scientifically also the mother Ganges is having "unique properties" and its water contains a high proportion of organisms with antibacterial properties. In fact, reverence for Ganga is a part of Indian identity and it's the pride and symbol of Indian culture. Even our Respected Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi feels that it's his fortune that he has got the chance to serve mother Ganga. Shri Narendra Modi has started the Project Namami Gange and we all Indians feel proud about it.*

**Keywords:** Awakened Soul, Hinduism, Infinite Bounties, Antibacterial Properties, Namami Gange.

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### Introduction

River Ganga also known as the river Ganges, flows from the Himalayas and through its vast delta in the Sundarbans and empties into the Bay of Bengal. Ganga has five head streams namely: the Bhagirathi, the Alaknanda, the Mandakini, the Dhauliganga, and the Pindar, all five rises in the mountainous region of northern Uttarakhand state known as Devbhoomi. It is the most sacred river in Hinduism and worshiped as Goddess Ganga. According to Hindus, after the birth or death of anyone, there is a tradition of sanctifying the house with holy Ganges water. Jawaharlal Nehru in his book *Discovery of India*, asserts, "... The Ganges above all is the river of India, which has held India's heart captive and drawn uncounted millions to her banks since the dawn of history. The story of the Ganges, from her source to the sea, from old time to the new, is the story of India's civilization and culture, of rise and fall of empires, of great and proud cities, of adventures of man".

It is religiously and scientifically proven that Gangajal is having extraordinary powers. The Great Maharaja Madho Singh II for his visit to London 1902 to attend the coronation of Edward VII took Gangajal in the silver vessels for the religious ceremonies which was part of his daily routine. The silver vessels were filled with water from the holy river Ganges, and as I have personally seen these Gangajalis. (Ganga water vessels) in the Maharajas city palace (in the private audience hall, Diwan-i-khas). These Gangajalis can carry 8000 litres of water, which was considered to be sufficient for Madho Singh II's short visit to England.

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The Gangajalis silver water urns in the City Palace of Jaipur.

Courtesy: [www.jaipur-travel-guide.com](http://www.jaipur-travel-guide.com).

Indian emperor Akbar also revered the Ganges and called the Ganga Water as 'the water of immortality'. The Ganga water remains fresh over a prolonged period of time. Recently, a new scientific research proved that despite pollution, the water of Ganga still retains its 'medical qualities'. In the recent National news provided by The Hindu.com, New Delhi, 20 April, Jacob Koshy reports, "A study commissioned by the union water Resources Ministry" to probe the "unique properties" of the Ganga found that the river water contains a significantly higher proportion of organisms with antibacterial properties. .... In the river Ganga, the bacteriophages were detected to be approximately three times more in proportion than bacterial isolates".

These samples drawn from the Ganga contained nearly 1100 kinds of bacteriophages, but varied widely along the stretch of the river. "For instance, the stretch from Gomukh to Tehri had 33% more bacteriophage isolates than from Mana to Haridwar, and Bijnor to Varanasi. In the stretch from Patna to Ganga Sagar, the bacteriophages were only 60% of that in the Gomukh to Tehri stretch".

From the above findings it is crystal clear that Ganga water is really having great antibacterial properties which leads to not only purifying the holy water itself but the use of Gangajal by the people and holy dip also leads to cure many diseases in the body. Most of researchers have confessed to the self – purifying attributes of river Ganges and the high levels of oxygen in the water of Ganga which gives it the unique ability to remain fresh over a prolonged period of time. Shakeel Anwar, on March 12, 2018, reports, "according to the research of Chandigarh based Institute of Microbial Technology (IMTECH), Ganga water contains Bacteriophages (viruses which kill bacteria), due to which Ganga water has antimicrobial attributes. The scientific world has always been amused of the antiseptic properties of Ganga's water. In 1896, British physician E Hanbury Hankin observed that cholera microbes died within three hours in its water, but thrived in distilled water. The Institute of Microbial Technology -Imtech (one of the laboratories of the CSIR) revealed that more than 20 types of bacteriophages are found in water of Ganga river which can fight microorganisms that cause diseases like tuberculosis, pneumonia, cholera and urinary tract infection, among others".

In reality every day thousands of people reach different Ghats of sacred Ganges across India but till date mother Ganges has only saved people and hardly any health issues arose due to the Ganges water. Leaving aside its scientific value now I again return to its spiritual value. The dip in holy Ganges really transports us to our real spiritual self. Psychologically even the wisest and intellectuals have always felt some sort of transformation coming to the Ganges aarti. Richard Barz, a critic, writes about the three aspects of Ganga: the material aspect, the spiritual aspect and the Divine aspect. In his words:

In the ninth verse of his treatise Vallabha concludes his analysis by reiterating that water is the material aspect of the Ganga just as the universe is the material aspect of Brahman; the power to bestow success and liberation is the spiritual aspect of the Ganga just as Brahman is the spirit of unity in the universe and the divine aspect of Ganga is the Goddess, just as Krishna, whom Vallabha accepted as his personal god and the supreme being is the divine aspect of Brahman.

The various holy rituals performed at the Ganges Ghats are distinct and varied in nature and draws millions of people every year. Some of the main Samskaras, rituals and festivals performed and celebrated along the course of Ganga are; mundan samskara which is the eighth of the sixteen samskaras of the Hindus in their lifetime. The hair removed are offered to the holy river.

Antim samskara, cremation which is the last of the Samskaras that (the soul of) a Hindu is supposed to undergo upon his or her death. In the ritualistic process the mortal remain of an individual are consigned to the fire. Typically, Ganges river bank is the most preferred place for cremation – the main objective is to facilitate the onward journey of departed soul to the heaven according to our holy text – Bhagvad Gita.

Then 'Tarpan' is a symbolic offering of water and flowers to the God, the sages, the sun and ancestors trying to get their blessing for an individual. Again, this ceremony is performed at the bank of holy river at Haridwar and Varanasi. Shraadh, which is a respectful obeisance to ancestors, it is to satiate their desire and alleviate sufferings of the departed soul is also performed at the bank of the holy river.

But the most attractive ritual is the routine aarti performed by the head priest and his followers it is a mesmerizing and the most enchanting scene of the flowing holy river and the homage paid to the Ganges by the thousands of the devotees simultaneously. I have already witnessed the sacred aarti performed at the Rishikesh, which was an elaborate ritualistic process accompanied by the most beautiful music, blowing of conch shells, bells, cymbals and drumbeats. For a while, we were transmuted and everybody present in the aarti looked at the burning lamps, diya's and the sacred river which flows with its own magical notes taking away all the miseries and pains of the common people. And the holy bath in the Ganges also washes away the sins of the ordinary individual according to the Hindu mythology and religion. Significance of the holy dip on Makar Sankranti, Solar eclipse, Mahakumbh, increases compared to the normal days.

As discussed earlier we need to be sensitized regarding our concern for holy Ganges. As it is not only the river associated with our rituals or religion. It is a lifeline to half a billion people across twenty-nine major cities which depend on Ganges river for drinking, irrigation and sewage. Innumerable industries are situated on bank of Ganga river from Uttarakhand to the West Bengal, for example, chemical plants, textile mills, paper mills, hospital waste, etc, etc. These industries release solid waste and liquid waste into the river. Not only this sometimes-unburnt dead bodies and the dead bodies of animals are also the factor adding to the river pollution. Sudipta Sen, in his latest book: Ganga The Many Past of a River, published in 2019 informs:

Pathogenic analysis of bacteria of the coliform group in places presents an equally daunting picture. A study sponsored by the Uttarakhand Environmental Protection and Pollution Control Board between 1996 and 2006 found that the presence of coliform bacteria in Ganga water is at a level that considered entirely unsafe for agricultural irrigation, let alone drinking or bathing.

The treatment plants fall short in treating the sewage water which is released into the Ganges each day, only one third of it is treated. The river runs for nearly 2500 kilometres with most of the factories and business's dumping their toxic chemical into the sacred river.

Raghu Dayal, a critic, reports, "In the most dense industrial belt along the middle Ganga plains, between the cities of Kanpur, Allahabad, Varanasi, and Patna, tanneries, chemical plants, textile mills, distilleries, slaughterhouses, and nonbiodegradable industrial effluents – including high levels of chromium and mercury – that render the river dangerously toxic. Cities along the Ganga generate 2.7 billion litres of raw sewage daily, of which nearly two thirds enter the river untreated".

It's a matter of great pride that our Revered Prime Minister, shri Narendra Modi has approved the flagship "Namami Gange" programme which unifies the efforts and action to clean and conserve the Ganges river in a comprehensive manner. Due to its significant economic, environmental and cultural, value an immediate action plan is required and it was declared by our Prime Minister that "Ganga will be clean by 2019, but it has now been extended to 2020. Namami Gange is being implemented by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), and its state counterparts – State Programme Management Groups.

According to Economic Times Report, Feb 03, 2019, there is a zero-sewer discharge in Ganga in Varanasi by November. It's the moral duty of every Indian to support the "Namami Gange" programme in these five states through which Ganga flows. The tourist flow has increased with the cleanliness and improved condition on the Ghats of Varanasi. "The Ghats are cleaner and we are receiving more tourists now," said Dilip, who rows his boat at Dashash wamedh Ghat on the Ganga".

### Conclusion

I have finally brought this paper towards its conclusion, it is to be finally reported that there are infinite number of programmes to clean Ganga by Government, NGO's, Scientists, technologists, etc, but the main effort has to come from the society, from an individual we have to individually decide that we will not drop any unholy substance, or polyethene or plastic or any type of non-biodegradable waste into our holy river. Due to this even aquatic life underneath remains in danger. Still our Ganges water can boast of its only fresh water dolphin in the world and many other water species. Ganga water's medicinal benefits, religious benefit and its use for generating hydroelectricity, further its use for irrigation purpose for cultivating better crops are unignorable. As soon as, the name Ganga river is pronounced, we just want to revere and prostrate in front of our Mother Goddess Ganga. Thus, it is really impossible that an average holy Indian can make Ganga impious as he/she would not even bathe in Ganga applying soap, he/she would not spit, urinate or excrete into the holy water. An individual's awareness will certainly lead to the cleaner Ganga. A true humanist, who is the follower of Hindu scriptures must make himself/herself and his/her companions aware of the prohibitions regarding the pollutants which are a threat to the holy river and to our environment. It's really unbearable to see how mother Ganga still takes so much of human dirt into her but in return only sanctifies and blesses her children undeterred, still becoming more inscrutable and formidable with sacred power. Lastly, I would like to confess that mother Ganga is embedded in every Indian's human psyche since his/her childhood as he or she sings the National Anthem of India, "Jan Gan Man" .....as soon as the name of Ganga is uttered, we become more closer to our Holy Mother Ganges.

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