



Our Efforts to Stop the Abuse of Ganga Mata

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Varanasi the oldest city and Ganga the holiest river are appreciated by the entire Hindu community as well as others. Situated on the bank of Ganga and named after the rivulets Varuna and Asi, the two tiny tributaries of Ganga forming boundaries of the holy city, Varanasi has special connection with the rivers. Practicing Hindus still exist in Varanasi. They exemplify this special connection of Varanasi. They are the custodians of the age old culture and faith of India in mother Ganga. This microscopic minority of people, their culture and faith are facing imminent danger of extinction because of the open drains, sewers, and such other outlets discharging domestic sewage and some industrial effluent directly into Ganga river.

About 116 cities situated on the river bank in Ganga's 2500 Km journey from Himalayas to the ocean, pollute the river. Ganga basin provides fresh water to 40 percent of the Indian population. India must respond to this suffering of Ganga and her people. Hence the Sankat Mochan Foundation (SMF) was set up in Varanasi with the goal of "Restoring the Ganges (Ganga) by alleviating its fast deteriorating environmental condition" and the Clean Ganga Campaign was launched in the year 1982.

Practicing Hindus believe that Ganga is mother and goddess. Like fish living in water they can not live without Gangaji. They don't know pollution and can't believe that

Ganga is polluted yet. They are suffering on account of Ganga pollution. In today's modern world only few have the sensitivity to understand them and their spiritual life. These practicing Hindus have become endangered specie of human beings. SMF has responded to this human suffering and resolved to make a sincere and committed effort to stop this abuse of mother Ganga and thus protect the human life and several thousand years old culture which sprouted on her banks. The Swatcha Ganga Campaign (Clean Ganga Campaign) is a mission of SMF to serve Ganga. We have decided to use the best scientific methods and technology together with our faith and commitment to stop abuse of our mother. Zero discharge of pollutants in Ganga ji is our goal. We are conscious of the difficulties in our Campaign. To fulfill the objectives of our mission to clean Ganga is difficult because the masses in India have no scientific appreciation of the pollution and the persons in authority responsible for decision making, are having their own mind set and prejudices. In face of these odds the Sankat Mochan Foundation and its friends in many parts of the world specially in U.S.A., Sweden and Australia have decided to be resilient and persistent in running the Campaign for Clean Ganga.

Common people in India are not ready to believe that Ganga can be polluted. They are unhappy and hurt if one says that Ganga is polluted and filthy. But when taken near a sewer outfall discharging domestic sewage



directly in Ganga, their spontaneous public response is to stop this disrespect of our mother Ganga. Thus SMF is able to harness the energy generated by people's love and respect for the river. Swatcha Ganga Campaign uses this positive energy.

SMF has used its scientific skill and Swatcha Ganga Research Laboratory to show that the Ganga water is polluted in the cities situated near her banks. When challenged, SMF has used its technical skill and worked with Indian and foreign experts to give a solution for the problem of Ganga pollution in Varanasi. It prepared a project feasibility report which would use gravity force and not the scarce and undependable electrical energy available in India for interception and diversion of the point sources of pollution causing about 95% pollution of the river. Secondly it would use a system comprising of four ponds arranged in series and known as AIWPS (Advanced Integrated Wastewater Pond System) for treating the wastewater. This system is very good for a tropical country like India. The first pond is anaerobic and guarantees complete methane fermentation of organic matter leaving practically no sludge. In the second pond micro algae use sun light produce abundant amount of oxygen needed for the aerobic bacteria working in it to provide next stage of treatment. The algae will assimilate and remove the chemical pollutants also. The third pond ensures quiescent condition for algae to settle down and get removed. The fourth pond is the maturation pond where the waste water is allowed to stay for a long period for most of the fecal bacteria to perish. This pond system (AIWPS) has been working successfully in other parts of the world. The project prepared by SMF is most economical to build and operate and has grass

root support. It uses practically no electricity for interception of sewage and its treatment. The local government (the municipality of Varanasi) has adopted this plan.

Currently SMF is working to build the capacity of the elected municipal councilors so that they can defend their project in higher levels of Government and other forums. We hope that someday the Varanasi Nagar Nigam and SMF together can solve the problem of Ganga pollution in Varanasi and inspire other river cities to solve their problem of river pollution.

Community using the Ganga river directly also pollute the river. This is termed as non-point source of pollution. It is only five percent of the total pollution of Ganga and has to be cleaned by the direct users - the people of Varanasi. For cleaning the pollution caused by direct users the Sankat Mochan Foundation works with the community and uses culturally consistent ways to motivate the people to take care of the river. To sensitise the people to take care of the non-point pollution is our "spiritual work with the people" requiring patience and innovation. We involve regular bathers in the river, boatmen and others including villagers, women, children, priests and washer men in this work. We involve schools also and encourage school-children to learn scientific aspects of environment, water pollution and work in our Swatcha Ganga Research Laboratory. Students are happy with our work which uses both culture and science. Our environmental education programme is culturally consistent.

SMF believes that faith and commitment in Ganga ji on one side and science and technology on the other are like two parallel banks of the river. They don't



meet. But both these banks must be firm and strong. They are essential to protect the river and solve the problem of pollution. We are convinced that faith and science together can take care of the whole earth and its wonderful flora and fauna. The goal of global peace and happiness could be realized only by interfacing faith and science.

Carefully considering its strengths and weaknesses, the SMF launched its Swatcha Ganga Campaign to clean the Ganga river in Varanasi as its first project. In the last 25 years of this innovative Campaign, the Foundation assumed different roles to use its extremely limited resources to stop the abuse of mother Ganga and acted as catalytic agent, watch dog, expert and activist to achieve its goal of Clean Ganga. It has been able to bring the issue of Ganga pollution under focus of national and global attention. It has been successful in working with the local government and present a non-electrical appropriate solution to clean Ganga in Varanasi. The solution has grass root support and is presently waiting for the Government of India's sanction for its implementation. The solution successfully implemented in Varanasi will show a way to clean the rivers of India.

In the year of Silver Jubilee of its

Campaign SMF has resolved to work more energetically to accomplish the work of cleaning Ganga ji at Varanasi and its work for other reaches of Ganga. The SMF has plans to extend its work to clean Ganga between Allahabad and Varanasi. These are the two holy cities within our reach where unprecedented congregation of people for holy dips and religious activity is witnessed. SMF has plans to work in this reach as coast guard to monitor point sources causing pollution of Ganga. This will involve mapping the point sources and monitoring the quantity and quality of pollution flowing through them. SMF plans to involve local NGOs, teaching institutions in this work. Depending on resources available, the Foundation will expand its work from one end of the Ganga to the other. SMF proposes to assist other municipalities situated on the banks of Ganga and make outlines of plans conducive to the local conditions for interception, diversion and treatment of domestic sewage falling into Ganga within the municipal limits. There are impending threats to our environment and our river system vis-à-vis the global warming, climate change. SMF is studying ways to meet these challenges.

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