

River Ganga : A Cultural, Architectural, Environmental Heritage

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The song from a popular film goes thus :

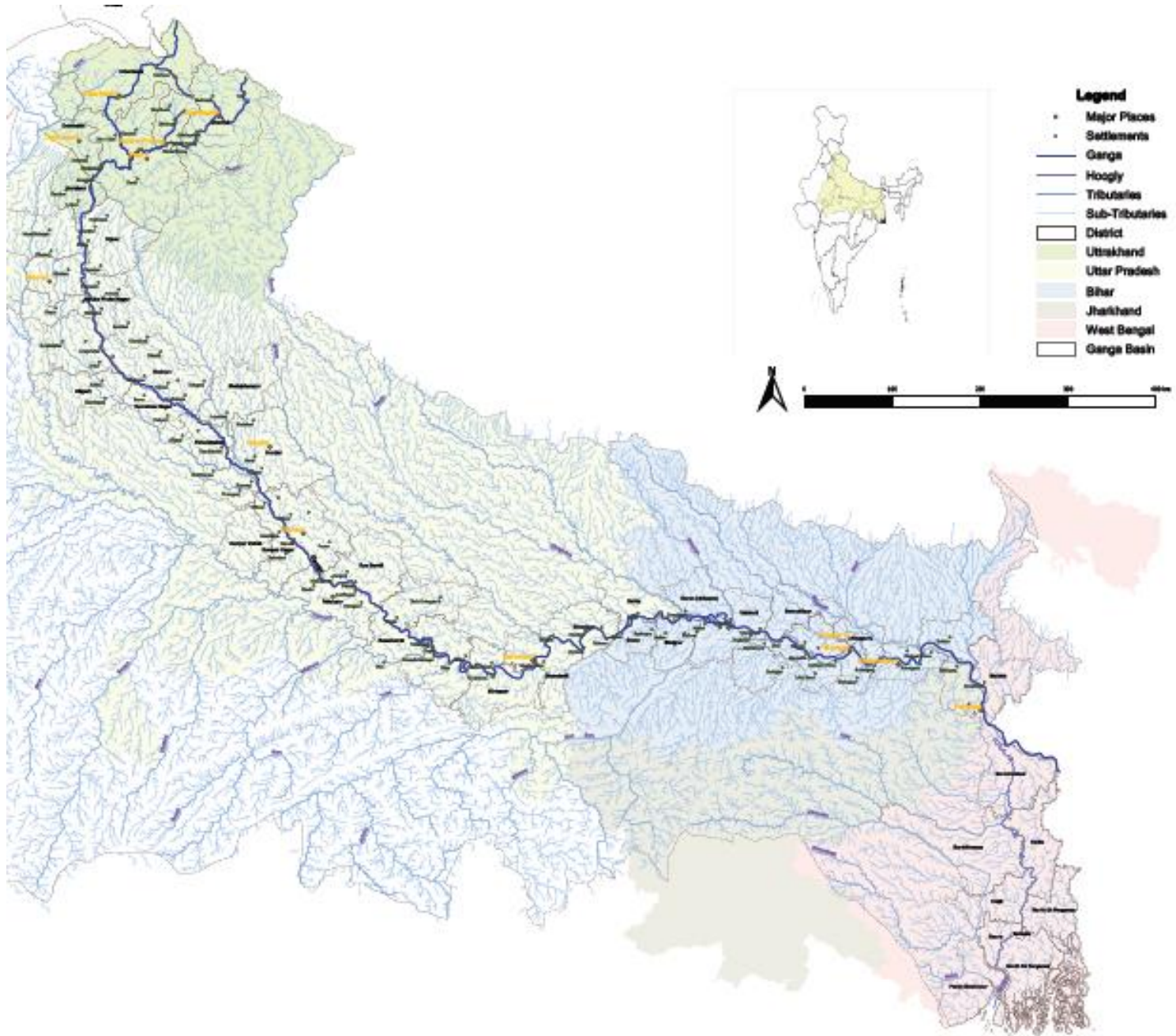
*“ Mano toh mein Ganga Maa hoon*

*Na mano toh behta pani”*

1. With the domination of the planet by humans in this age of industrialization and technology, nature has fallen from its pedestal of supremacy, reverence and awe, to being an object of exploitation or an inert obstacle to be overcome for progress. At this late stage, as a requiem is being heard for our rivers and whilst the public at large is engrossed in its mundane day to day existential struggle, a few concerned souls are trying to undo the near irreversible harm that has been done to riverine systems.
2. People do not perceive rivers as domain specialists do. For the Indian public at large the river is an article of faith and its legends lie at the very foundations of Indian civilization and culture. In this regard it may be noted that nature is the muse of culture and thus, culture thrives only if nature does, which is to say that Ganga can inspire only if it survives in a healthy vibrant flow.
3. Rivers are not merely flowing water channels. In India, more than anywhere else, rivers are personified as mother deities in view of their nurturing character. **Ganga occupies a lonely niche, imbued as it is with an unequalled sacred aura. Building up a narrative which magnifies the sacred and mystical aura of the river is perhaps fundamental to the idea of India.**
4. National Mission for Clean Ganga has been entrusted with carrying forward the task of Ganga rejuvenation. The Mission has focused upon cleaning the river waters by addressing pollution. However, the realization is gradually emerging that the restoration of adequate flow in the river needs to be addressed, perhaps on greater priority.
5. Simultaneously, it is realized that unlike many other rivers Ganga is also a rich cultural stream with many unexplored and hidden facets other than the Kumbh festivals or Ganga Dussehra. The River Ganga has been recognized as being completely intertwined with the religious and cultural tradition of India and thus is not only a lifegiving water artery but also nourishes and renews India's cultural and religious traditions. **The river is thus a cultural stream embedded in the very soul of India.**
6. The twin issues of pollution and anaemic flow have negatively affected the cultural sites and activities along the river banks. While prominent sites and festivals are well known many lesser rituals and sites of local significance are routinely ignored and thus fading

from public memory. There is no single document which carries a cultural narrative of the river and thus there is need to develop an adequate appreciation of the river as a cultural stream with an annual calendar of events and rituals. **A knowledge of the sublime aspects of the river can influence public attitudes as well as proposed interventions.**

7. It is thus that NMCG has entrusted to Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage [INTACH] a project to document several aspects of the Ganga which are generally overlooked by hard core domain expertise, all the way from Gaumukh to Ganga Sagar.



8. The aspects of cultural life along the river may be categorized under intangible cultural heritage and architectural heritage. The area to be documented is a corridor 5 km. wide on either side of the main stem of the river. The 2525 km course of the Ganga River passes through 42 districts. The reports would be prepared on a district-wise basis. The duration of the project is 25 months starting from December, 2018. However, with floods preventing work for 3 months the duration is likely to be extended.
9. Under **Architectural Heritage** are being covered aspects like ghats, temples, forts, colonial architecture, civic buildings of significance. Reports have been prepared for the Uttarakhand Districts as well as for Allahabad, Varanasi, Mirzapur and works are in progress in Patna and some of the Bengal Districts. The field teams identify structures through literature survey, field work and interaction with resource persons. The listing follows a detailed listing format where various characteristics of a structure are recorded. Detailed photographs, video clips and geo-coordinates are recorded. At some locations the number of structures is in the hundreds and at other there are few and far between. **Thus, in Varanasi 1000 structures have been recorded, in Allahabad 300 and in Mirzapur 230. Many of these are directly on the river bank and should be incorporated sensitively into the river bank fabric.**



**Abandoned Colonial Warehouse on the River, Mirzapur**



**Island Temple in Ganga at Kahalgaon, Bhagalpur**



**Ancient Water Harvesting Site on Ganga Banks, Shringaverapura**



**Sarnath Varanasi**



**Sacred Gerua Talab, Vindhyachal**



**Vijaynagara Hall, Allahabad University**



**A Vernacular Home in Uttarkashi in Deodar Wood**



**Adibadri Group of Temples**

10. **Intangible Heritage** is a vast aspect which covers rituals, festivals, songs, music, crafts, arts, food]. Here again, the districts have varying richness and the facets are being recorded as per a pre-designed format. Audio-video clips of live performances are being recorded. A calendar of events in each district is also being drawn up. The Uttarakhand districts, Varanasi, Allahabad have been covered so far. Mirzapur and some Bengal districts are being covered presently.



**Samudra Manthan Ritual in Garhwal**



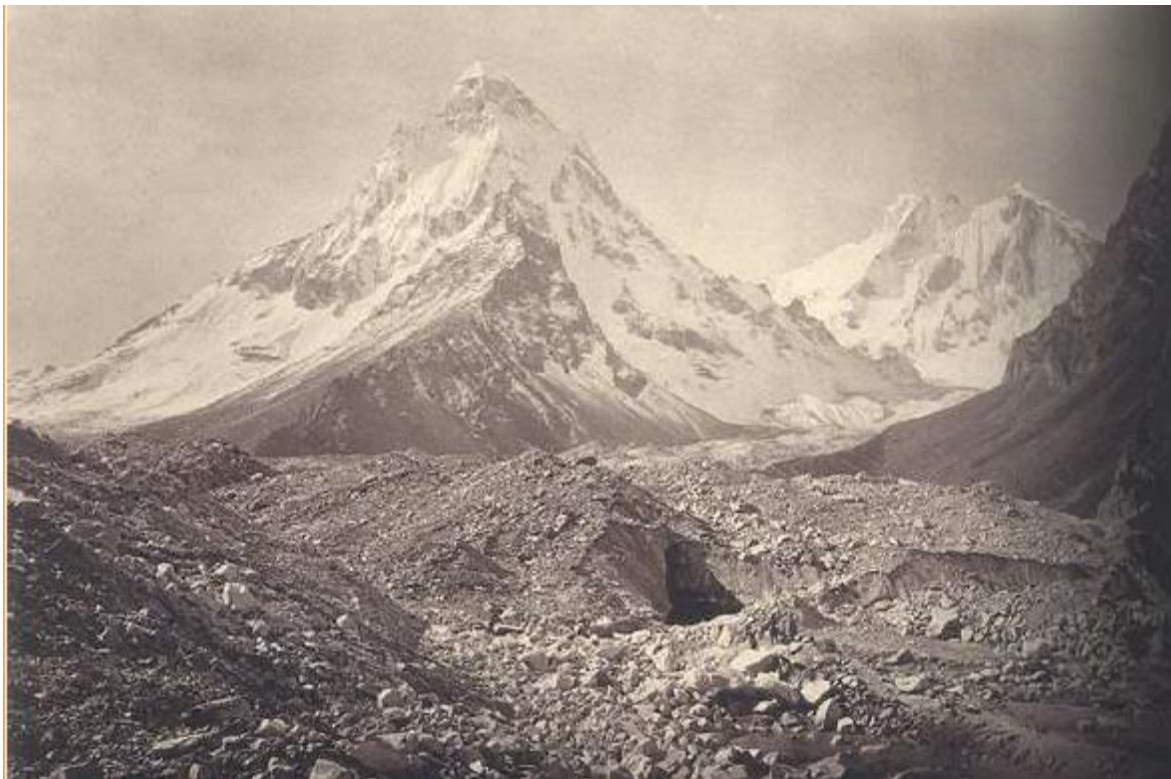
**Kajali Singers at Mirzapur Ghats**



**Bharat Milap, Mirzapur**



11. **Natural Heritage** would cover natural features which are generally overlooked in hard core scientific surveys. Here again, the surveys are being guided by a pre-designed format. This would be a semi-scientific survey based on experiences/observation by riverside communities and by the field team. The facets being noted are climate change as noted by riverine communities, conditions of the floodplains and their produce, major flora and fauna present, riparian vegetation, sacred trees, naming all tributaries, conditions at the confluences, riverine islands, instream fauna, bank erosion, paleo-channels, floodplain lakes, responses by fishermen and boatmen communities with regards to observable changes over last few decades. Extensive written reports are being prepared and video and still recordings being made.



**Gaumukh, 1863 [Samuel Borne Collection]**



**Bhagirathi Peaks Overlooking Glacial Lake Near Gaumukh**



**Snow Bridges Across Ganga**



**Fyonli – A Locally Revered Flower**



**Bharal – Blue Sheep in the High Ranges**



**Bhojpatra Tree, Bhojwasa**

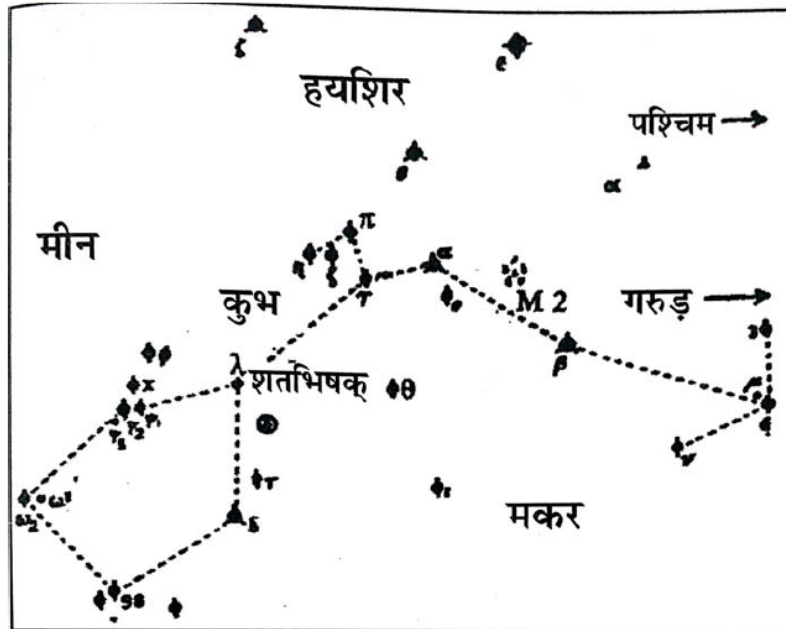


**Fishing in The Ganga Near Haridwar**



**Barasingha in a Floodplain Wetland in Haridwar Distt.**

12. **Kumbh** : A special report on the Prayag Kumbh has been prepared which covers unusual aspects of the festival plus the cosmology behind the event. This is supported by a 40 minute long film capturing diverse aspects of the event.



कुंभ मंडल के तारों को सितंबर-अक्टूबर में रात को 8-9 बजे दक्षिणाकाश में आसानी से पहचाना जा सकता है।

S.N.	Name of Tithi	Day of Tithi
1.	Pausa Poorima	Full moon of Pausa Month
2.	Makara Sankranti	The day when Sun enters the sign of Capricorn or for Uttarayan
3.	Mauni Amawasya	Dark Moon
4.	Basant Panchami	Fifth day of the new moon
5.	Magha Poornima	Full moon or a full lunar eclipse
6.	Maha Shiva Ratri	The day Lord Shiva got married

Table: List of Special Tithis for *snān* during kumbh mela



Collection of Dharma Dhwajas



Variety of *rudrāksh* for sale in the open-to-sky market of Kumbh mela



Kasturi, kesar and rudraksh

13. The **deliverables** consist of District-wise reports, large scale maps in GIS format showing locations of major and minor significance, calendar-wise and location-wise religio-cultural events, a cultural perspective : the river as a cultural stream, an AV Documentary, and a coffee table book. A bibliography with more than 300 references has already been submitted.
14. It is hoped that this work would substantially add to the storehouse of knowledge about the holy river and provide greater depth and a holistic approach to policy and planning responses in the further planning about the river.

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