

# A NARRATIVE OF THE GANGA (A CITIZENS' REPORT)

2023

INDIA RIVERS WEEK







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# PREFACE

Rivers, in India, a crucial part of the hydrological cycle, are in a perilous state. In order to draw attention to the conservation of rivers in a holistic manner a consortium of non-government organizations, namely, INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art, Culture and Heritage), WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature) India, Toxics Link, SANDRP (South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People) and PEACE Institute Charitable Trust, came together in 2014 to organize an annual India Rivers Week (IRW). Later in 2016, the Dehradun-based People's Science Institute (PSI) joined the consortium, which was further expanded in 2021 to include Bengaluru based ATREE (Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment), IIHS (Indian Institute of Human Settlements), SOPPECOM (Society for Promoting Participatory Ecosystem Management), Pune and Veditum India Foundation, Kolkata.

River Ganga is much more than a river for the people of India. Over millennia, it has been India's civilizational identity. She is worshipped as an all-forgiving goddess capable of washing away a believer's accumulated sins and as a mother without whose *amrit* (nectar) the life journey of a believer from birth to death is incomplete. Little wonder then that River Ganga is immortalized in prose, poetry, songs, art and timeless rock sculptures. In more recent times, to its devotees its divinity appears to have been reaffirmed by scientific confirmation of its unique self-cleansing ability and curative health properties.

The theme for the event in 2018, was 'Can India Rejuvenate River Ganga?' This book is a result of that event. Much delayed owing to successive years of pandemic the book is a serious effort to promote and strengthen holistic efforts to rejuvenate River Ganga. The book highlights several facets including the geo-morphological and biological diversities of the Ganga basin and their rapidly expanding disruptions with a larger question in mind, which is, its likely future as a physical entity.

The book should be of interest to a wide spectrum of readers and stakeholders including lay persons, researchers, journalists, activists and policy makers. We hope that the readers will find the book informative and useful and that the authorities tasked with rejuvenating River Ganga will find the issues raised and the recommendations made worthy of serious consideration.

## MESSAGE FROM CHAIRMAN, INTACH

The emasculation of the holy Ganga began in the mid 19th century with the construction of the Ganga canal system. Since then, the river has gradually been on the decline impacted by human interventions such as dams and barrages, groundwater depletion and sand mining. The more visible aspect of human impact has been the pollution of the great river and this is what has drawn attention to the plight of the river we worship.

Every crisis spurs its own resolution and thus the sorry state of the river has attracted massive efforts to restore its *aviralta* and *nirmalta*. However, the massive efforts being made by government authorities are alone not adequate. Civil Society has ventured into the field and evolved several insights into what ails the river and possible remedies.

This report is the result of a building upon the erudite inputs of several river experts and activists during India Rivers Week, 2018. It is my hope that it will help both researchers and decision makers in shaping their actions in the quest of revival of the Mother River to its pristine glory.

Maj. General [Retd] LK Gupta [AVSM]  
Chairman, INTACH

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

IRW 2018 attracted a large number of Ganga experts, many of whom led sessions and shared their understanding and research findings in the form of formal presentations and interjections made during different sessions and plenary. This book builds upon those seminal contributions.

On day one they included Ravindra Kumar Sinha (Nalanda Open University, Patna), K J Joy (SOPPECOM, Pune), Manu Bhatnagar (INTACH, Delhi), Mallika Bhanot (Ganga Ahvaan, Uttarkashi), Nachiket Kelkar (ATREE, Bengaluru), Rajiv Sinha (IIT Kanpur), Brij Gopal (NIE, Jaipur), Venkatesh Dutta (Baba Saheb Ambedkar University, Lucknow), Shripad Dharmadhikary (Manthan, Pune), Shashi Shekhar (former secretary, MoWR, Delhi), Ravi Agarwal (Toxics Link, Delhi), Ravi Chopra (PSI, Dehradun), Ravi Singh (WWF India, Delhi), Jagdish Krishnaswamy (ATREE, Bengaluru), Vinod Tare (IIT, Kanpur), Suresh Babu (WWF India, Delhi), Himanshu Thakkar (SANDRP, Delhi), Dinesh K Mishra (Barh Mukti Abhiyan, Patna), Siddharth Agrawal (Veditum, Kolkata), Amita Bhaduri (India Water Portal, Delhi), Seema Ravandale (PSI, Dehradun), Vishwanath S. (Bengaluru) and Swami Shivanand (Matri Sadan, Haridwar).

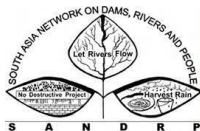
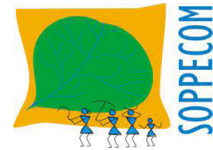
On days two and three, the speakers included Himanshu Kulkarni (ACWADAM, Pune), Jayanta Bandhopadhyay (formerly IIM, Kolkata), Prakash Nautiyal (HNB Garhwal University, Srinagar), A K Gosain (IIT Delhi), Paritosh Tyagi (former Chairman, CPCB, New Delhi), Sunil Choudhary (Vikramshila University, Bhagalpur), Tarun Nair (ATREE, Bengaluru), Abhilash Khandekar (Journalist, Delhi), Anil Gautam (PSI, Dehradun), Nidhi Jamwal (Journalist, Mumbai), Neha Sinha (Biologist, Delhi), Vijay Paranjpye (Gomukh, Pune), Kishore Kodwani (Indore, MP), K Khairnar (NEERI, Nagpur), Mushtakim Mallah (Ramra village, UP), Bhim Singh Rawat (SANDRP, Delhi), Sitaram Taigor (State Mission for Clean Ganga, UP), Shailendra Singh (Turtle Survival Alliance, UP), Srinivas Chokkakula (CPR, Delhi), Sandeep Behera (NMCG, Delhi), T. Velpandian (AIIMS, Delhi), JR Bhatt (Advisor, MoEFCC), Aprajita Singh (PSI, Dehradun), UP Singh (Secretary, MoWR, Delhi), Ritu Singh (INTACH, Delhi), Chandi Prasad Bhatt (Uttarakhand), E. Theophilus (Munsiari, Uttarakhand), Makarand Purohit (Journalist, film maker, Raipur), Rohit Joshi (Journalist, Uttarakhand), Dhruba Das Gupta (Researcher, Kolkata), Romit (WWF India, Delhi), Sreedhar R. (Envionics Trust, Delhi), Joydeep Gupta (Third Pole, Delhi), Seema Mahindra (Ramganga Mitra, Moradabad), BS Sajwan (Yamuna Monitoring Committee, Delhi), SP Singh (IIT, Roorkee), Anand Sharma and Sudeep Sahu (Ghaziabad), Ramesh Mumukshu, Debashish Sen (PSI, Dehradun) and Shailaja Chandra (Yamuna Monitoring Committee, Delhi). UP Singh, Secretary, MoWR, RD & GR graced the valedictory session and gave an insightful speech. This book has tried to capture all that and more.

Normally a book based on conference deliberations is a compilation of papers submitted by the conference participants. This book has not followed the standard pattern. The chapters were written by a select few while taking care to include all that



was shared and discussed at the conference. The editors have accessed information from a large number of sources which are referenced at the end of each chapter. Subject matter experts including late Prof. Brij Gopal, Prof. A.K. Gosain, Prof. R.K. Sinha, Prof. Prakash Nautiyal, Himanshu Thakkar and Prof. Rajiv Sinha reviewed select draft chapters.

Ravi Chopra  
Manoj Misra  
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**TRIBUTE TO A RIVER WARRIOR**

*Shri Manoj Kumar Misra*  
(1954-2023)

