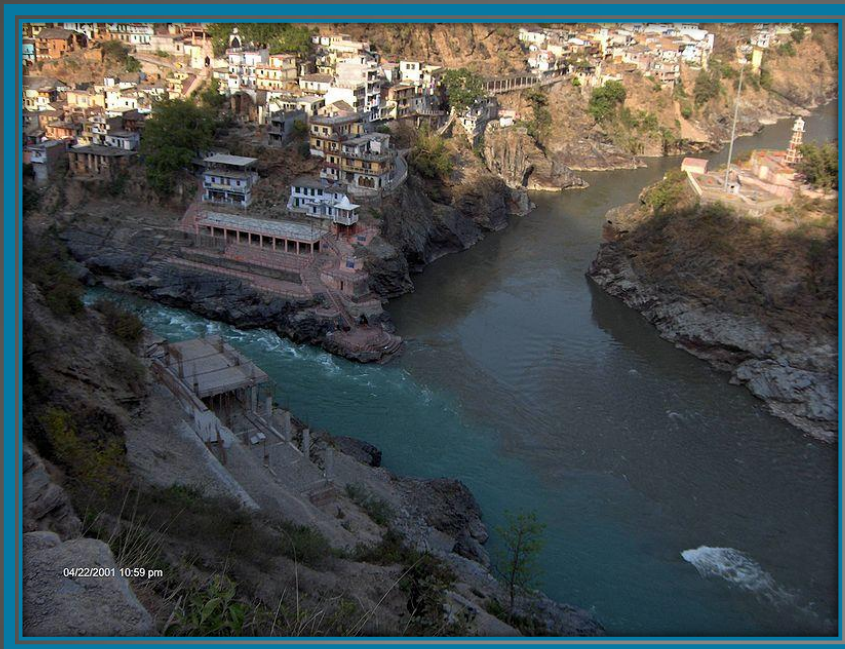


The Chronicle of Ganga

A Cultural and Eco-political Cocktail

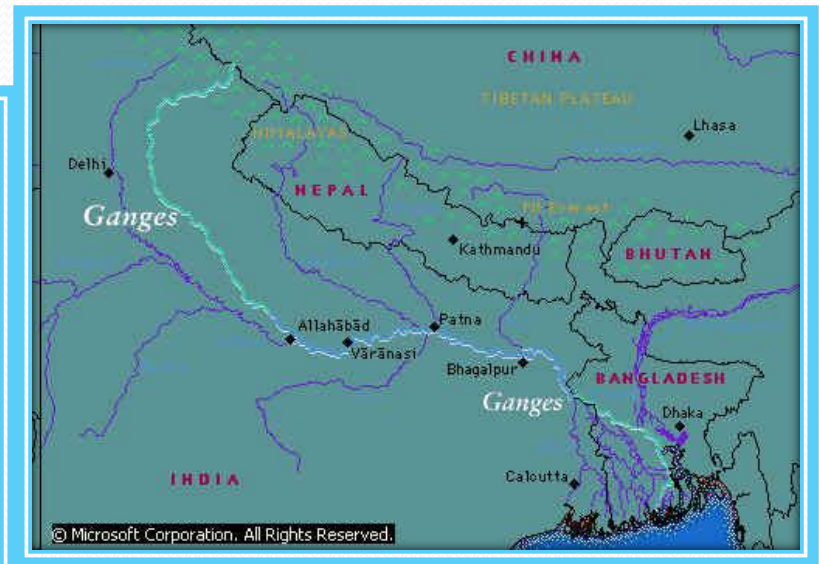
By: Kara Stalter



Bhagirathi at Gangotri glacier

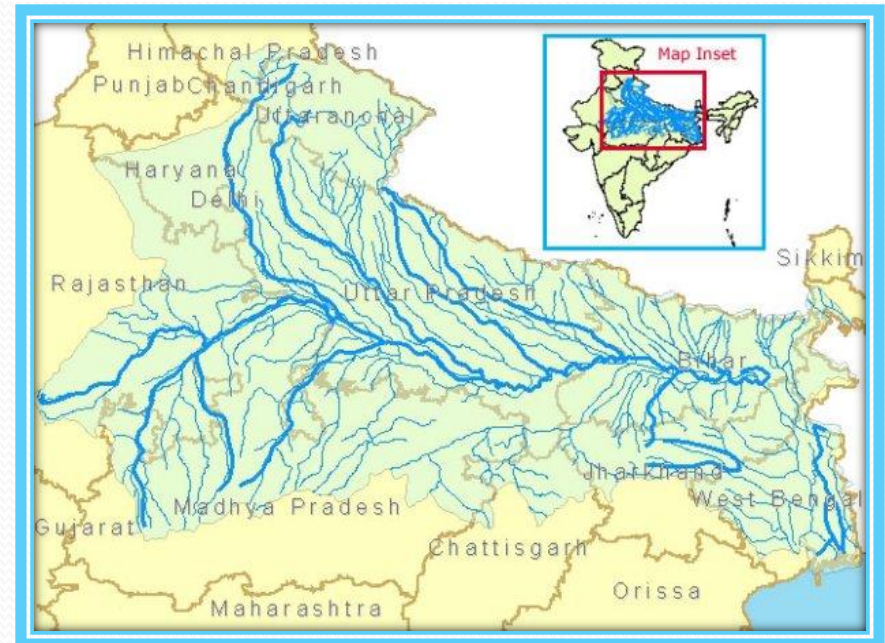
Background: Ganges

- 2,700 km (equivalence of 1,560 miles) from Gangotri glacier of the Himalayas to Bay of Bengal
- Sundarban delta largest in world: Yamuna, Brahmaputra, and Ganga
- Discharges 15,000 cubic meters per second

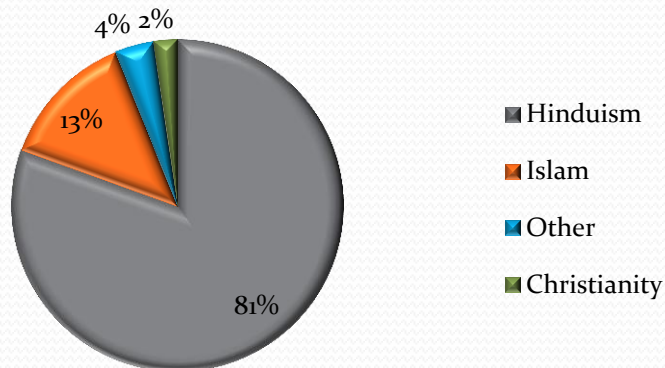


Background: Population

- Currently 1.21 billion
- 2030: India #1, China #2
- River basin: approx. 450 million



2007: Religion in India

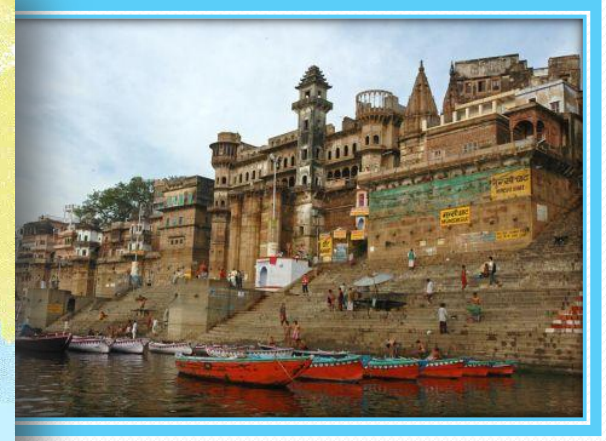
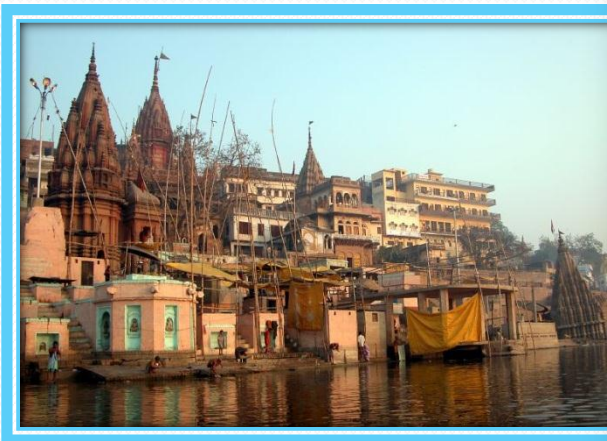


Theoretical Guide

- David Blackburn's "Time Is a Violent Torrent"
- 3 Snapshots
 - The creation and impact of the Sankat Mochan Foundation in fostering awareness of the Ganges River's need for cleanup starting in 1982
 - The government's intervention project Ganges Action Plan (GAP) beginning in 1985
 - The results of the GAP in 2007

Setting: Varanasi

- Also known as “city of temples,” “city of widows and orphans,” “city of lights”
- Religious capital
 - “ ‘Original ground’ created by [gods] Shiva and Parvati, upon which they stood at the beginning of time.”—Mr. Ravindra (I.A.S), District Magistrate

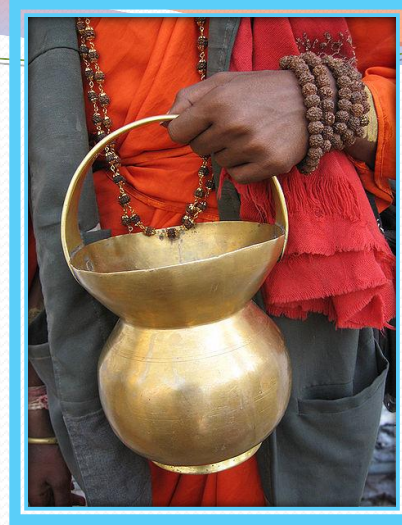


Tara, “The ghats of Varanasi,” <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/india/varanasi>.

Claim:

- Although I acknowledge that the Indian government's extensive plans to clean up the Ganges River have brought some improvement, I claim that the failure of the Ganges Action Plan was due to the inability of the eco-political and religious forces to come together to address the environmental health of the river.

Ganga's Origin



Sadhu's collection vessel
Kamandalu," Flickr, 20
October 2006.

- *Vedas*; 2,000 years ago
- Birth: Lord Vishnu's sacred toe water
 - Lord Brahma and his *kamandalu*
- King Sagara's 60,000 sons burnt as punishment by **Sage Kapil**
 - King Bhagiratha pleads with Kapil
 - Power belongs to Ganga to release their souls from the cycle of reincarnation
- Bhagiratha: "mission impossible" to release the 60,000 souls
 - Succeeded: Brought Ganges to earth
 - Lord Shiva caught and tamed her
- Pictures in *The Birth of the Ganga*
(89-94)

Beliefs

Hinduism

- “And thus she will remain pure as long as there are saints in the world.” (Johari, 111)
- Every drop of water=holy and divine
 - Physical and spiritual cleansing: sickness and sin
- “Divine grace flowing on to our material world”—Kumar







Relationship with Environment

- “Hinduism believes in the existence of pollution, but only to the extent that it affects one’s self directly...the concern focuses on keeping the pollution away from one’s own being...Respect for the person outside has disappeared. It is commonly said today that, while Indians will wash and bathe with great diligence every day, and keep their houses clean as well, they do not blink an eye at throwing garbage out into the street.” —Agarwal



Religious Causes of Pollution

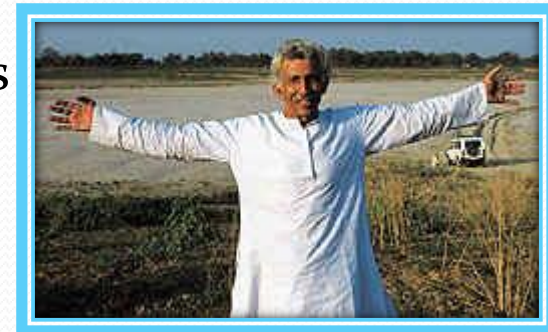
- Mythological heritage
- Ashes and body parts: cremation ceremonies
 - 30,000 bodies dumped annually in Varanasi
- Non-biodegradable offerings to the goddess Ganga
- Daily bathing, washing



Steve McCurry, "Varanasi Pilgrimage, Varanasi, India, 1996," in "India: Fifty Years of Independence," May 1997, National Geographic magazine.

Snapshot #1: Sankat Mochan Foundation (SMF)

- First organization to take a stand
- Veer Bhadra Mishra: professor at Banaras Hindu University, hydraulic engineer, and priest
 - “Balance ancient beliefs with present-day solutions”
- Swatcha Ganga Campaign launched in 1983
 - “Raising the issues of Ganga pollution to national and international attention, catalysing the development of the Government Ganga Action Plan (GAP) and holding the government accountable for works and claims carried out under GAP, mobilising the love and commitment of the people for the river”—Oz Green
- Biochemical tests of the water: BOD/coliform levels



Veer Bhadra Mishra

Snapshot #2: Ganges Action Plan (GAP)

- Need for a plan to clean the Ganges “stemmed largely from a widespread belief that the Ganga, as a holy river, had the ability to purify all that came into contact with it”—Jaiswal
- June 14, 1986, survey: Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)
 - 75⁰% municipal sewage, 25⁰% industrial runoff
 - 88% of 75% from inadequate sewage disposal
- Purpose/goals: “to conserve biodiversity and develop an integrated river basin management approach, to conduct comprehensive research to further these objectives, and to gain experience for implementing similar river clean up programs in other polluted rivers in India”

Phases of GAP

- The purpose of Phase 1, to be completed by 1990, was to treat eight hundred eighty-two million liters per day of untreated waste.
 - 25 largest cities along the Ganges
- Starting in 1993, Phase II's goal was to clean up 1912 million liters per day of sewage from the major tributaries of the Ganges River.

Snapshot #3: Reasons for Failure

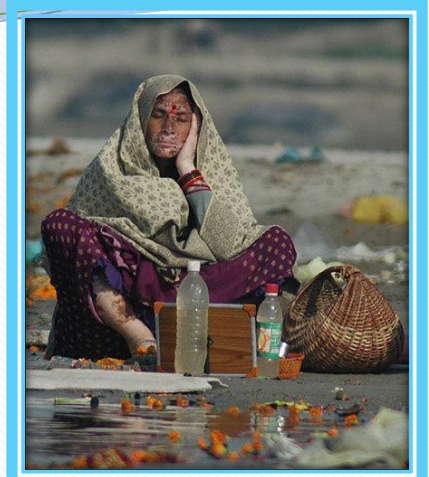
- Sewage treatment and pumping systems
 - First time
 - Chunks, not microscopic contaminants
- Electricity
- Industrial plans: tanneries
 - Chrome treatment facilities untouched
 - Regulations not enforced
- Money: shift to the states in 1997
 - 2006 tax audit, rs 900 crore (equal to \$200 million) were misused—Panjwani



Martine Crandall Hollick, “Raw Sewage at Kanpur,” NPR.org (Dec. 2, 2007)
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16709008&ps=rs>.

More Evidence

- Diseases: cholera, typhoid, diarrhea, malaria, hepatitis, Japanese encephalitis
 - 2/3 diseases=water-borne causes



Jaiswal, "Woman with a skin diseases," in "A Critical Analysis of the Ganges Action Plan"

Locations	Tulsi Ghat	R.P. Ghat	PanchGanga Ghat	Varuna Confluence
Dissolved Oxygen (DO) mg/litre	6.6	6.4	7.0	1.0
Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) mg/litre	8.2	8.6	5.4	34
Feceal Coliform Count (FCC) count/100ml	62000	72000	34000	2700000

Sankat Mochan Foundation, Varanasi, 2007,
<http://www.sankatmochanfoundationonline.org/PollutionofGanga.html>.

Failure of GAP!

- “There have been various projects to clean up the Ganges and other rivers, led by the Indian government's Ganga Action Plan...Its relative failure has been blamed on **mismanagement**, **corruption**, and **technological mistakes**, but also on **lack of support from religious authorities**....Brahmin priests are so invested in the idea of the Ganga's purity and afraid that any admission of its pollution will undermine the central role of the water in ritual, as well as their own **authority**.” — Puttick

Holy River in Need of Salvation

- Religious holiness and salvation v. political greed and corruption
- “Preserving the value of water...is an extension of ethics as well as of wisdom.”—Worster



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