

ABSTRACT

Water is one of the indispensable components on which life of all living beings in India depends. Any act polluting water affects unfavourably, not only human beings but also animals, plants, aquatic organisms and even non-living things as well. Today, the water resources are in great jeopardy and the protection of fresh water requires immediate attention so as to save the world from catastrophe.

In India, River Ganga occupies a unique position. From times immemorial, it has been India's river of faith, devotion, and worship. The river, considered to be the lifeline of millions and the holiest river in the world, has become the object of industrial development, the growth of civilization along the riverbank along with its religious significance. The river has been declared as the National River of India on November 5, 2008, by the Government of India. The entire stretch of river Ganga (mainstream) can be divided into three stretches, 'Upper Ganga' (294 km. Gaumukh to Haridwar), 'Middle Ganga' (1082 km. Haridwar to Varanasi) and 'Lower Ganga' (1134 km. Varanasi to Ganga Sagar). These three stretches are different in their geomorphology, ecology, and rheology as also face different problems. The present thesis is limited to pollution in lower stretch of river Ganga in West Bengal from Farakka to Ganga Sagar. In West Bengal, the first town through which river Ganga flows is Maldah, and it is 80 Kms southeast of Farakka. In far more southeast of Farakka, river Ganga has been divided in two different rivers in Mithipur village of Murshidabad. One stream named the Padma enters into Bangladesh and another one flows through various towns of West Bengal, which is almost 500kms and finally merges with Gangasagar.

Ganga has remained the most polluted river in India. As it is flowing through different States and different geographical locations, it has been seen that Ganga naturally dumps most of its resources and pollutants into the lower stretch of its course, which is West Bengal. Furthermore, the river, along with its tributaries, is the chief source of water supply for the people of the State. The river is used for bathing, immersion of idols, various social, cultural and religious functions as well as ferry transport facility.

The Constitution of India and the Central and State legislations enacted in consonance of protection of environment have highlighted the significance of environment for the present and future generations and consequently, right to a healthy and ecologically balanced environment has been read as an integral part of right to life under Art 21 of the Indian Constitution. Central Legislations like Water Act, 1974 and Environment Protection Act, 1986 have primarily adopted 'anti-pollution' approach, whereas, the issue is not merely water pollution but it is much more varied and complex. It has been observed that there is a need to ensure effective abatement of the water pollution and conservation of River Ganga by adopting an effective approach which not only protects River Ganga but also preserves the water quality. In this regard, the functioning of the civic bodies is very important. They are the key authorities to implement measures with regard to city cleaning, sewage, solid waste management etc. In the present thesis, a cross-sectional study of multiple groups, including municipal authorities, local people and Pollution Control Board, has been undertaken in the backdrop of legislative and judicial developments to understand their role in the issue of pollution of the river and suggested institutional coordination as the key element in this regard.

Key words: River, Ganga, Pollution, Municipal waste, Anti-pollution legislation, Civic Authorities