

# Blended Capacity Building Programme for Stakeholders of River Ganga

05

under Namami Gange Programme

## FAITH IN GANGA



Indian Institute of Public Administration

New Delhi



**NAMAMI  
GANGE**

## OVERVIEW

NAME OF PROJECT

BLENDED CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM FOR STAKEHOLDERS  
OF RIVER GANGA

PROGRAMME

NAMAMI GANGA PROGRAMME

PREPARED FOR

NATIONAL MISSION FOR CLEAN GANGA

PREPARED BY

INDIAN INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

SPECIFIC FOCUS

STUDY MODULE SERIES FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

PROJECT TEAM

PROF. V.K. SHARMA ( Project Investigator)  
DR. SHYAMLI SINGH (Project Investigator)  
Ms. CHARU BHANOT  
Ms. KANISHKA SHARMA  
Ms. IMRANA AKHTAR  
Ms. KANIKA

Cover page image: The Ganga Delta, a  
stunning view to the crew of the Space  
Shuttle Columbia on mission STS-87.  
Photograph by NASA

Left image: Tehri Dam, Uttarakhand.  
Photograph by Altaf Qadri

## MESSAGE DIRECTOR GENERAL



My young Companions,

“Students are the hands by which we take hold of heaven.”

The above quotation by Henry Ward Beecher has inspired me to join hands with you in rejuvenation and conservation of our holy river Ganga. I consider your role in the society and believe that your participation in this herculean task can improve the present state of our River.

To make the descent of Ganga worthwhile, you are being made a part part of the project - Blended Capacity Building Programme for Stakeholders of River Ganga under Namami Gange Programme. Ganga lies at the core of our culture and it is our firm belief that your awareness of the complex

Through this booklet, you will be taken to a journey along the Ganges and its basin. I want to create an imprint on you and mould each one of you into responsible adults. This learning process has been tailored for your effective engagement with inclusion of maps, quizzes and puzzles.

challenges faced by our national river can bring about behavioural change in the society at large.

I consider the potential of a student in contributing towards a cleaner, breathable future. It is my hope and expectation to meet with your feelings, thoughts and awareness to foster a sense of belonging for River Ganga. I have faith in your tremendous curiosity and capacity & hope that together we can change mindsets and take it to practical application.

S. N. TRIPATHI  
Director General, IIPA

## PREFACE

Dear Students,

Universally and religiously, water is considered a purifying natural symbol. Indian rivers, besides being the lifeline for many are considered as manifestations of the divine. They connect state to state, past to present. The Ganges is our sacred river with a culturally significant history. It is not just a river but a deity, a cleanser of sins; It is our mother.

Ganga is a part of India's rich past. It is a symbol of purity and sanctity. It occupies a central space in the collective consciousness of the country, which is why Gangajal is considered the holy water. River Ganga, not only fosters exceptionally rich biodiversity, but it also contributes heavily to the livelihood of India..

It is unfortunate that despite the admiration and reverence invoked by the river, it has become a dumping junkyard at innumerable points. Human greed and misconduct have degraded the river quality. It is indeed a matter of concern that the river has altered its flow over the years; with that, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) has stepped in to keep the river clean, pure and healthy for the benefit of existing and future generations. It is a matter of pride for IIPA to be entrusted by the project “Blended Capacity Building for Stakeholders of River Ganga” under the Namami Gange programme.

With the aim of conserving and rejuvenating River Ganga, This series has been prepared to make students interact with our national river. The book encompasses a holistic view of the river Ganga by posing the challenges and opportunities in and around Ganga basin.



V.K. SHARMA  
Senior professor, IIPA



SHYAMLI SINGH  
Assistant professor, IIPA



## FAITH IN RIVER GANGA

**H**oly River Ganga (Ganga) originates from Gangotri Glacier of Western Himalayas in Uttarakhand and flows almost 2500 km to south and east through the Gangetic Plain of North India into Bangladesh, where it empties into the Bay of Bengal. With almost 37% of Indian <sup>(1)</sup> population living in its basin, and the rest being directly or indirectly associated with it, River Ganga is evidently an inseparable facet of the Indian.

Between the two major communities of Hindus and Muslims, the holy river has emerged as an important "unifying factor." Hindu bathes in the "holy Ganga waters" for salvation and the Muslims also use the gangajal for Wuzu. <sup>(2)</sup>

The holy river Ganga is significant in terms of spiritual heritage, particularly for Hindus. Hindus believe that by taking a dip in river Ganga one can get rid of the sins and attain Moksha. The Ganges river is considered their most sacred river, and it is worshiped as the goddess Ganga Ma. In Hindu mythology Ganga was born from the pot of the Brahma when he washed the feet of sage Vaman, one of the 10 incarnations of the Lord Vishnu. As per the mythology the Ganga in river form was bought on earth by the king Bhagiratha who worshipped lord Brahma for many years and pleased him to release Ganga from his water pot on earth.

Above image:

Priest offering prayers on the banks of Ganga River

Map on next Page:

Panchkroshi Yatra map-One of important pilgrimage route in varanasi

Wuzu-theactofperformingablutionorwashingoneselfupbeforestanding in prayer.

Moksha-freedomfromtheendlesscycleoftransmigrationintoastateof bliss

Salvation-derived(fromLatin:salvatio,fromsalva,'safe,saved')isthe stateofbeingsavedorprotectedfromharmoradiresituation

GangaMahotsav-celebratedeveryyearafterDiwali,fromtheeventhday ofthemothofKartika,i.e.,theProbodhaniEkadashi.Thefestivalcontinuesfor5days;thelastofwhichistheDevDeepavali.Itisafullmoonnight and is known as Kartika Purnima

TO KNOW MORE



SCAN CODE

The mention of Ganga in ancient scriptures, as well as the Holy River Ganga, demonstrates this. Here are some texts that mention the Ganges: <sup>(3)</sup>

The Ganges is personified as the goddess Ganga, who is described in the Mahabharata as the "best of rivers, born of all the sacred waters." Ganga's mother is Mena, and her father is Himavat, the Himalaya mountains' personification. There is one myth that Ganga marries King Sanatanu, but their comes to a shattering end when the goddess is discovered to have drowned her own children. In the Mahabharata Ganga is the mother of Bhishma and in some myths Skanda (Karttikeya), the Hindu god of war, is her son with Agni, the god of fire.

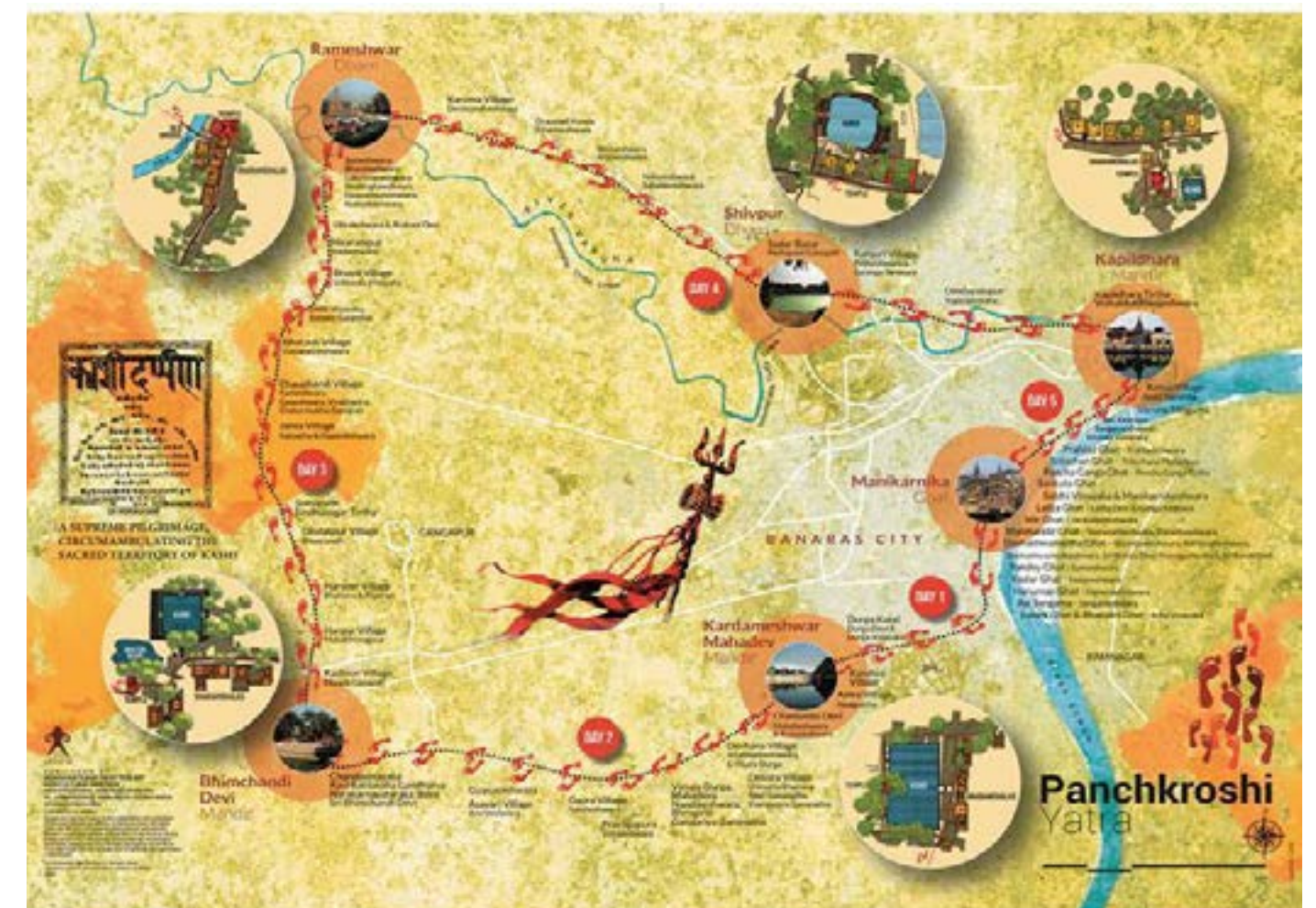


Above image:

Fish guided the ship in the sea and kept the ship safe during the storm. (source-<https://gosthala.com/must-visit>)

## RELIGIOUS PLACES OF SIGNIFICANCE IN THE GANGA BASIN

The Ganga basin is evident of rich cultural and spiritual diversity. These are evident through the religious sites from various faiths along the basin. The map depicts a quick view of all the important sites.



## MANIFESTATION OF FAITH

The festival along River Ganga manifests the faith of several religions living along the banks from time immemorial. In this section we introduce major festivals observed by large population congregations along the river Ganga and its basin.

### Kumbh Mela

The biggest festival celebrated along the river Ganga is the Kumbh Mela which is celebrated every 12 years in Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik, and Allahabad (Prayag). The celebration of Kumbh in these locations is based on a unique set of astrological positions of the Sun, Moon, and Jupiter, with the holiest time occurring<sup>(4)</sup>. Kumbh festival dates back to Vedic times and is one of the most sacred of all pilgrimages for Hindus. Tens of millions of pilgrims, sadhus, and saints come back from everywhere to participate in Kumbh Mela which makes it one of the biggest holy congregations in the world. The Kumbh Mela's origin is found in many Hindu texts. According to these texts, the devas (gods) wished to churn the primordial ocean of milk in order to obtain the pot (the Kumbha) containing the nectar of immortality (amrita) that lay at the bottom. In order to do this, the devas enlisted the help of the asuras (demons), promising to share the nectar<sup>(5)</sup>. They churned the ocean together for a thousand years, but when the amrita started to rise, the asuras wanted to snatch the pot and not share any of the nectar with the devas. The asuras and devas battled for the pot of amrita for twelve days and nights. All over the world, the Kumbh Mela is extremely important for Hindus. Bathing in the Ganga, which is said to contain these drops of immortality nectar, is the main event of the Kumbh Mela. It is believed that bathing in Ganga, particularly during the Kumbh Mela time, cleanses people of all past karma and opens the path to moksha, or liberation. The scriptures claim that bathing in the Ganga during the Kumbh Mela has the same effect as performing millions of other rituals.

### Chhath Puja

The chhath puja is a Hindu festival dedicated to giving thanks to the sun god "Surya" for sustaining life on Earth<sup>(5)</sup>. However, Ganga is directly involved in this festival. Bathing, fasting without water, standing in water for long periods of time, and offering arghya to the sun are all part of the festival's rituals, which take place over four days. Hindu people believe that the early sunlight helps to cure many diseases and is a great source of healing too.



Above image: A view of Har Ki pauri Haridwar Mahakumbh 2021



Above image: Women offering arghya to the sun on Chhath puja

The rituals of chhath puja are designed to prepare the devotee's body and mind (vratti) for cosmic solar-energy infusion. In ancient times, the rishis used the same process that we use during chhath puja without taking any kind of food and water. They were able to absorb the energy required for life directly from the sun with the help of a similar process<sup>(6)</sup>

Worshippers bathe in Ganga on the first day of chhath puja and bring Ganga water (Gangajal) or river water in the home to prepare offerings for the Sun. On the third day, after a day of fasting, worshippers return to the Ganga's banks to offer prayers and offerings to the setting sun. Devotees return to Ganga at dawn on the last day of chhath to make offerings to the rising sun, thanking it for the eternal energy it provides. Significance of sunrise and sunset: The majority of humans can safely receive solar energy during sunrise and sunset. As a result, the chhath puja festival includes a tradition of offering arghya to the sun in the late evening and early morning.

### Ganga Mahotsav

The Ganga Mahotsav is a special five-day festival held in Varanasi to honor the various aspects of the Ganga. This festival honors Ma Ganga's spirituality, purity, and power, as well as the identity and pride it gives Indians, as well as the nourishment it provides.

On this day, the gods are said to descend from heaven to bathe in the Ganga. Hundreds of people light divas (oil lamps), chant vedic mantras, and bathe in Ganga during Ganga Mahotsav

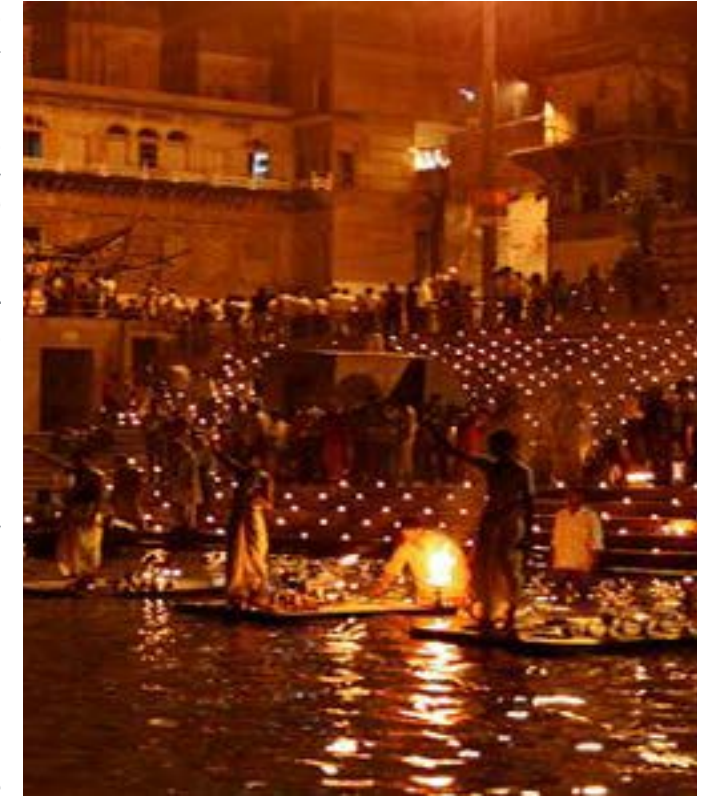
Numerous activities are organized across 5 days in Kashi during the celebration:

**Crafts Fair** - The National Craft Fair takes place on the Chowka Ghat, where artisans from across the country gather and showcase their traditional handicrafts.

**Cultural Exploration** - The festival also explores the richness of Kashi's heritage through the classical and folk performances of vocal and instrumental music and dances.

**Ganga Aarti** - A major highlight of the festival is the Ganga Aarti that takes place in the evenings at Dashashwamedh Ghat.

**Dev Deepavali** - The fifth day of the Mahotsav celebrated as Dev Deepavali. The ghats are adorned with thousands of lamps and beautiful rangolis



Above image: Thousands of divas lightened at Varanasi ghat on Ganga Mahotsav

Source: <http://www.cozynuk.com/fairs-festival-india-ganga-mahotsav.shtml>



Above image: Ganga aarti on Ganga Dussehra (source: <https://www.ixigo.com/ganga-dussehra-2019-a-festival-dedicated-to-goddess-ganga-story-1139247>)

### Ganga Dussehra

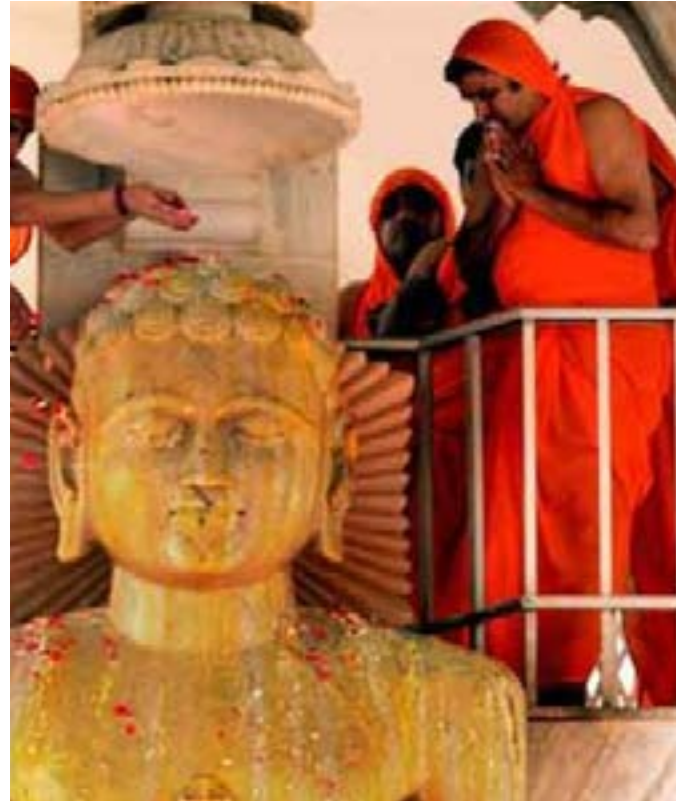
The first ten days of the month of Jyeshtha (in June) are dedicated to commemorating the day Ganga descended from the heavens to Earth. On this day, devotees worship Ganga as the mother and goddess, and special puja and aarti are performed to Ganga <sup>(5)</sup>. Ganga Chunari is a special ceremony held on Ganga Dussehra in which the murti (statue) of Ganga is wrapped in 108 colourful sarees. Pilgrims also collect clay and water from the Ganga during Ganga Dussehra to use in their daily worship <sup>(6)</sup>.

### Buddha Purnima

The birth of Gautama Buddha is commemorated on Buddha Purnima. Buddha Purnima, Vaisakhi Buddha Purnima, and Vesak are all names for the anniversary of his birth. Buddha Jayanti falls on a full moon day in the month of Vaisakh, according to the Hindu calendar (which usually falls in April or May). However, it is actually based on the Asian lunisolar calendar, which is why the dates change every year. In Lumbini, on the Purnima Tithi (full moon day) in 563 BC <sup>(7)</sup>, Lord Buddha was born as Prince Siddhartha Gautama (modern day Nepal). In Hinduism, Buddha is considered as the ninth avatar of Lord Vishnu. Dharma (duty), nonviolence, harmony, and kindness were all preached by Gautama Buddha. At the age of 30, he gave up his worldly possessions and princedom to pursue the truth and seek penance in the hopes of liberating himself from suffering (duhkha) <sup>(7)</sup>. On this day, Buddhists and Buddhist believers offer prayers, meditate, fast, and discuss the Buddha's teachings. There is also a tradition of bathing in the holy Ganga, which is believed that wash away sins.

### Mahavir Jayanti

Mahavir Jayanti is also known as Mahaveer Janma Kalyanak, or the birth anniversary of Lord Mahavira. According to the Hindu Calendar, Mahavir Jayanti is celebrated on the 13th day of the bright half of the moon in the month of Chaitra <sup>(8)</sup>. Mahavir Jayanti is one of the most auspicious festivals in the Jain's community. The Jains offer prayers, carry out rath yatras and visit temples on this occasion. Mahavir Jayanti is a significant day for the Jain community, and it is commemorated in India and around the world with spiritual fervour and festive spirit. On this occasion, charity work by devotees, stavan recitation, procession of the Lord in a chariot, and spiritual lectures by Jain munis and sadhvis are the main attractions. The Rath Yatra is a procession in which the idol of Lord Mahavira is carried. Bhajans are recited by devotees. Right before the procession, statue of the Lord Mahavira is given a ceremonial bath with gangajal which is called 'Jal Abhishek'.



Above image: Mahavir Jayanti 2019

Source: <https://www.oneindia.com/india/mahavir-jayanti>



Above image: Buddhist Monks carry a statue of Buddha as they take part in a procession at The Mahabodi Temple at Bodhgaya on May 10, 2017, on the occasion of Buddha Purnima. | AFP

## IMPORTANT RITUALS ON THE RIVER BANKS OF THE GANGA

People at these places also perform some rituals and ceremonies exclusive to their local beliefs and traditions. Water is one of the five constituent elements of the human body (panch-mahabhut), and what could be more auspicious than being close to the holy Gangajal? The Ganga's rituals are diverse and distinct, attracting tens of millions of people each year. The origin of rituals around Ganga is more than thousand years old. They are deep-rooted into Vedic scriptures which prescribe samskaras. Samskaras are a series of sacraments, sacrifices, and rituals that serve as rites of passage and mark the various stages of human life. Every person, according to Hindu belief, must go through 16 samskaras. These rituals have evolved over time and have impacted Ganga and her devotees in numerous ways, as well as being influenced by them. Three of these Samskaras are performed at the banks of river Ganga. This section details on association of Mundan, Vivaha and Antyesthi with river Ganga.

### Mundan Samskara

Mundan samskara is also known as Chudakaran. This is the eighth of the sixteen samskaras that a Hindu is required to complete in his or her lifetime. It is a child's first haircut, involves tonsuring before the first or after the third birth anniversary. This ritual is based on the belief that hair from the birth represents a link to undesirable traits from a previous life that must be severed. It's a common ritualistic ceremony held in holy places like Rishikesh and Haridwar or in their family temple. Aside from tonsuring for children, most adults shave their heads on various occasions when visiting holy places. The hair is then ceremonially offered to the river.

### Vivaha Samskara

In Hindu tradition Vivaha refers to marriage. Vivaha is the most important samskara (life cycle rite) performed by individuals because of the high value placed on married couples and their roles in society. Traditionally it was the only rite performed for women, and for men in shudras (9). A couple would stay together for the rest of their lives or until the husband took up renunciation. For both women and men, marriage represents the start of social life. It also enables women to participate in religious matters. The significance of marriage is also reflected in Hindu religious mythology, where unmarried gods are often depicted as powerless. In one depiction, for example, the god Siva is a corpse until his marriage to Sakti resurrects him. As a result, Vivaha has religious and societal functions

in Hinduism, which are mirrored in the religious literature.

### Antyesthi Samskara

Antim Samskara, or cremation, is the sixteenth samskara that a Hindu's soul is supposed to go through/embrace after death <sup>(1)</sup>. It is a ritualistic process in which a person's mortal remains are thrown into the flames. The significance of cremation goes far beyond simply disposing of a dead body in a sanitary manner; the main goal is to break the link between the gross body and the astral/ subtle body, allowing the departed soul to travel to heavenly planets. This is based on the belief which is expressed in the Bhagvad Gita – that the soul is indestructible and continues its journey in a cycle of birth and death according to accumulated karma, and that cremation (as contrasted to burial or open disintegration) is the most effective method of disengagement. River banks are typically preferred cremation sites, Kankhal in Haridwar and Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi are two such well-known locations in the country (with several legends woven around them). After cremation, the ashes and any remains, if any, are immersed or disposed of in the river. River banks are typically preferred cremation sites, Kankhal in Haridwar and Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi are two such well-known locations in the country (with several legends woven around them). After cremation, the ashes and any remains, if any, are immersed or disposed of in the river.

Garbhadhana (Conception)	Namakaram (Name-giving)	Karnavedha (Piercing the earlobes)	Samavartana (End of studentship)
Punsavana (Engendering a male issue)	Nishkramana (First outing)	Vidyaramha (Learning of Alphabet)	Vivaha (Marriage Ceremony)
Simantonnayana (Hair parting)	Annaprāsana (First Solid Food)	Upanayana (Sacred thread initiation)	Vanaprastha (Sanyasa)
Jatakarma (Birth rituals)	Mundan (Shaving of head)	Vedarambha (Beginning Vedic study)	Antyesthi (Funeral rites)

Above image: Sixteen Samskaras

Source: <https://www.riritirwaz.com/the-sixteen-samskaras-in-hinduism/>

# Iconography

## Association of animals with God and Goddess along Ganga

The mighty rivers of the Indian sub-continent namely the Ganga, (represented standing on their vahana- makara). In Hindu mythology, Makara is a legendary sea creature. Goddess Ganga is depicted in Hindu art as sitting atop a mythical creature known as the Makara, which has the head of an elephant and the body of a fish. The Goddess's vahana, or vehicle, is the Makara. The makara is often translated as a Water Horse in astrology, and it corresponds to the zodiac sign of Capricorn, which is depicted as having a goat's head and a fish's body. Yet another depiction of the makara is in the form of a crocodile or alligator, which also is depicted as the vehicle of Lord Varuna - the God of winds. Makara's are guardians of gateways and thresholds, guarding throne rooms and temple entrances; it is the most commonly recurring creature in Hindu and Buddhist temple iconography, and it also appears as a Gargoyle or a spout attached to a natural spring. Makara-shaped earrings called Makarakundalas are sometimes worn by the Hindu gods, for example Shiva, the Destroyer, or the Preserver-god Vishnu, the Sun god Surya, and the Mother Goddess Chandi <sup>(10)</sup>. Makara is also the insignia of the love god Kamadeva, who is also known as Makaradhvaja, "one whose flag depicts a makara" and has no dedicated temples.



*River deity Ganga 800-900 Sandstone Two of India's greatest rivers, the Ganga (Ganges) and the Yamuna, are personified as goddesses with the same names. They were often represented at either side of the lower part of temple doorways, and that is where this sculpture would have been positioned. Ganga here stands on a mythical water creature that has a little male figure issuing from its upturned mouth. Asian Art Museum of San Francisco*

## DEPICTION OF ANCIENT ART



Above image: Descent of the Ganges  
source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dbasys/8733466085>

Rivers hold great importance in Indian culture and mythology from the ancient times. The three main rivers of India namely the Ganga, the Yamuna, and the now lost Sarasvati are personified as goddesses and depicted as such in the sculptural art of India. We often come across such sculpture arts which helps us understand better the importance of the rivers in ancient times, their importance and mythology around them. Descent of the Ganges (Mahabalipuram) is one such example. It is a giant open-air rock relief carved on two monolithic rock boulders and is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1984. The relief is one of the best representation of the Indian rock cut sculpture and it depicts the story of the descent of the sacred river Ganges to earth from the heavens led by Bhagiratha.

### Other sculpture art associated with river Ganges found across India

#### Confluence of three rivers (Triveni sangama)

Cascading down from the lofty Himalayas or originating gently in the pristine forested plateaus of the Indian sub-continent, the Rivers of India have sustained, nurtured, and helped blossom a plethora of forms of life from times immemorial. They have catered to the swings and swifts, both natural and man-made, of not just the human life but those of flora and fauna too that is bound together in an intricate and symbiotic manner.

Right image: Confluence of three rivers (Triveni sangama).  
source: <https://artsandculture.google.com>



Ganga and Yamuna with attendant figures, as Siva's dvarapalikas (door-guardians)

Right image: Shiva's Davarpalikas  
source:<https://artsandculture.google.com>



The cultures and communities of India that have shaped their destinies along the banks, basins, and valleys of these innumerable rivers have reverentially and bewitchingly celebrated the "Sustainer of life" in myriad ways. Umasahita- Siva receiving Ganga (in Tripathaga and Trisrotas form) onto his jatas (locks)

Right image: Umasahita- Siva receiving Ganga  
source:<https://artsandculture.google.com>



### Vishnu rescuing earth goddess Prithvi

The visual material (drawn upon from the Photo-archival holdings of the American Institute of Indian Studies) displayed here on a very select basis, comes from the historical sites and locales of Indo-Gangetic doab, central, western, southern, and eastern parts of India.

Right image: Vishnu rescuing earth goddess Prithvi  
source:<https://artsandculture.google.com>



The mythology, the folklore, the literature, the festivals and rituals, and the many art forms of India dealing with the concept of "River" (the flowing Water) have intensely endeavored to conceive, comprehend, and capture the rhythmic and cyclical bond as also the interplay between the "River" (the flowing water), the associated forms of life and their vital interdependency. Siva releasing Ganga from his locks (Gangavisarjanamurti)

Right image: Siva releasing Ganga from his locks (Gangavisarjanamurti)  
source:<https://artsandculture.google.com>



### Descent of the celestial Ganga (Gangatavarana)

The cultures and communities of India that have shaped their destinies along the banks, basins, and valleys of these innumerable rivers have reverentially and bewitchingly celebrated the "Sustainer of life" in myriad ways. Umasahita- Siva receiving Ganga (in Tripathaga and Trisrotas form) onto his jatas (locks)

Right image: Descent of the celestial Ganga (Gangatavarana)  
source:<https://artsandculture.google.com>



Ganga received in the water vessel of sage Jahnu and released again through his ear to flow from the Himalaya (Ganga as Jahnavi)

Right image: Ganga as Jahnavi  
source:<https://artsandculture.google.com>





## IMPORTANCE OF GANGAJAL



Above image:

Devotees hailing Ganga river water during festival at Har Ki pauri, Haridwar

Ganga water, known as 'Gangajal' is considered sacred and typically found in a majority of Hindu households. Gangajal holds great importance in Indian families from religious, spiritual and health benefits perspective. The holy water is believed to purify every place wherever it is sprinkled. It drives away all the negative energies and brings forth the positive energy that enlivens up the place. According to scientific research Gangajal have indefinite shelf life and also has self-cleansing properties. The Gangajal has many perceived health benefits and is believed to cure many skin and stomach diseases. Apparently Gangajal does not get spoiled and can be stored for a very long time.

### Science behind the longevity of Gangajal?

These observations and many other medicinal elements that Ganga is believed to possess are not purely faith-based beliefs, but rather have now been supported by much scientific evidence and research. These properties are primarily attributed to the vast reservoir of minerals and herbs available in the catchments of upper Himalayan reaches of the river.

Ganga river water contains bacteriophages due to which Ganga water has antimicrobial attributes. These bacteriophages do not harm humans. In fact, they fight many disease-causing microorganisms including tuberculosis, pneumonia, cholera and urinary tract infection, among others. Also, a study commissioned by the Union Water Resources Ministry to probe the "unique properties" of the Ganga found that the river water contains a significantly higher proportion of organisms with antibacterial properties<sup>(11)</sup>.

Bacteriophages or phages are viruses that infect and kill bacteria. Bacteriophages consist of a nucleic acid molecule surrounded by a specific protein coat (capsid). The bacteriophage that is found in the River Ganges (or Ganga), especially at its origin, shows the ability to infect several kinds of bacteria. It is also considered for use in some cancer treatments. Using these microorganisms, scientists have developed a therapy which is called the phage therapy. It is also hypothesized that the Ganges river may play a therapeutic role in the treatment of COVID-19<sup>(12)</sup>.

## NEED FOR SUSTAINABLE RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Despite the fact that numerous steps are being taken to clean the Ganga or other rivers, researchers continue to claim that religious practices pollute the holy waters significantly. Many religious practices such as flowing leftover of yagnas (fire rituals) into the river, taking a 'dip' in 'holy water', immersion of deities after keeping them at home for days causes river pollution. Also, cremated remains are floated in the river, with the belief that if the last remains are not immersed, the dead will not be in peace or attain salvation. According to another Hindu tradition, holy men, pregnant women, people with leprosy or chicken pox, people bitten by snakes, those who commit suicide, the poor, and children under the age of five are not cremated, but rather float in the water to decompose. These religious practices are exacerbating the problem of rising water pollution.

### Types of Religious Pollution Flower Pollution

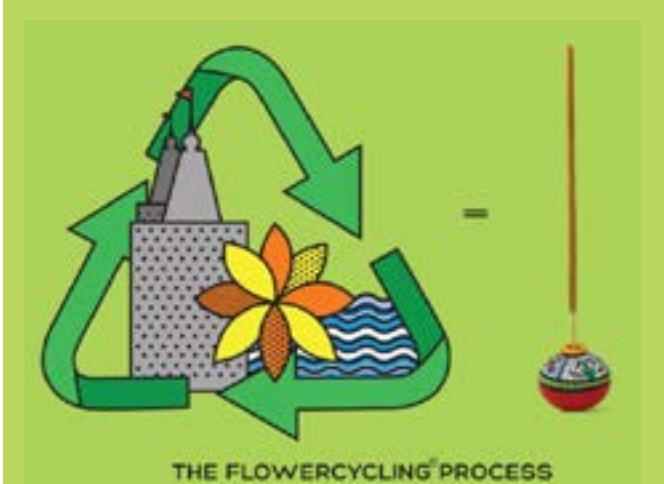
Showering flowers in Temples/Mosques is a religious ritual in India (8 million tonnes per year). These flowers are a sign of devotion, and therefore believe these sacrosanct flowers must be thrown into bodies of water like the Ganges River to respect their sanctity. Unfortunately, these sacred flowers rot and cause havoc in the waterbody's fragile ecosphere and leach into the water. The most prominent causes (86.7%) of child mortality in India and Bangladesh are Toxic Arsenic, Lead and Cadmium from harmful farm-runoffs, pesticides, and insecticides used to make flowers mixed with the water from river, making them highly poisonous (PH 6-8.5). Ganges' biophysical stability is dominated by the monumental disposal of temple flowers and the deeply rooted religious significance<sup>(15)</sup>.

### Mass Bathing

Mass baths were examined during the Maha Kumbh festival in India for water quality at the Ganges River. Significant higher levels have been observed in mass ritual bathing with biochemical demand of oxygen (BOD), chemical demand of oxygen (COD), total suspended solids (TSS) and ammonia nitrogen. In this region, an alarming degree of faecal contamination is demonstrated in accord with Indian and European outdoor bathing standards. There are more total coliforms and faecal coliforms in this area. In addition, such practises can be seen in cases of waterborne infections. It is recommended that baths with ongoing disinfection be strictly regulated at the bathing site to preserve public health and the water quality of the river.

### CASE EXAMPLE 1

PHOOL is the world's first profitable and lean solution to the monumental temple-waste problem. We collect 8.4 tons of floral waste from temples in Uttar Pradesh, India on a daily basis. These sacred flowers are handcrafted into charcoal-free incense, organic vermicompost and biodegradable packaging material through our 'Flower cycling' technology.



TO KNOW MORE



SCAN CODE

Some studies have shown that Ganga mass baths can contribute to anticonvulsant resistance during pilgrimages (AMR). This resistance – previously recognised in India – is the reason for certain major antibiotics, including tuberculosis, to become ineffective in diseases <sup>(16)</sup>.

#### Immersion of hundreds of idols

These idols have been worshipped and immersed in bodies of water. Idols are constructed by plasters of the walls of Paris, Ton, Small iron rods and of bamboo, with a variety of decoration paintings, such as varnish, water colours, etc. These paintings contain heavy metals like Mercury, Cadmium, Arsenic, Zinc, Chromium, Lead, and others. Mercury, zinc oxide, chromium and plum which are potent carcinogenic are particularly present in red, blue, orange and green colours. In addition, Sindoor (a traditional, red cosmetic polish that is usually worn by married women and is frequently used in festivals), two heavy metals such as Lead and Chromium add to the waterbodies. Following the decomposition of floating materials released through idols in the river and in the lake, acidity and heavy metal concentration are eutrophic. Pollution of heavy metals caused by immersion in idols can damage the ecosystem, killing fish, damaging plants, blocking natural water flows, causing stagnation. Effects of idolising on various Indian rivers, including Bhoj, Budhabalanga, Ganges, Hussainsagar, Kolar, Sarayu River, Tapi River, Chhatri, Bangalore and Yamuna Lake, have been observed so far. The effects of idolising idolization are observed <sup>(17)</sup>.

Many initiatives have been taken by government to clean and protect river Ganga. **'Namami Gange Programme'**, is an Integrated Conservation Mission, approved as 'Flagship Programme' by the Union Government in June 2014 to accomplish the twin objectives of effective abatement of pollution, conservation and rejuvenation of National River Ganga. According to a Rishikesh-based NGO, Ganga Action Parivar, "When the river in Har Ki Pauri, Haridwar is cleaned for two months we collect a large number of wastes like plastic bags, garlands, coins, plastic bottles etc. The idols made of cement or plastic that are dumped in the river are harmful to the river. It obstructs the flow of water, causing it to become stagnant <sup>(14)</sup>. The only way to avoid this is to use environmentally friendly idols and biodegradable products with no use of any polythene and plastic containers. More such initiatives are required to educate and aware people to practice their religion without polluting the river. Sustainable practices have been implemented to mitigate the substantial increase of pollution and population along Ganga river but still lot to be done and each one of us has to participate in this initiative to keep Maa Ganga pristine and preserve for future generation.



#### BAN ON IDOL IMMERSION:

The National Clean Ganga Mission (NCGM) issued a directive to 15 states of the Ganga Basin to ban immersion of idols in the Ganga, including Dussehra, Diwali, Chhath, Saraswati Puja, in the festivals. Thus, the plastering of Paris (POP), baking clay, resin fibres and thermocol was prohibited for imbibing idols using synthetic material and non-biodegradable material. In addition, it was strictly forbidden to use toxic and non-biodegradable chemical dyes or synthetic paint to paint idols. This was a result of the festival season immersions as NCGM has observed a spike in pollutants in the river Ganga.

## SUFI MUSIC

Sufi music accompanied by Varanasi's quiet and pious atmosphere In the ancient Indian Vedic Sanskrit text the Rigveda, the city is referred to as Kashi, which translates to "shine", and Varanasi is called "the City of Light", a "luminous city of outstanding learning". It was also used by people from Buddha's time and famously referenced by Mark Twain as "older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together".

Kabir called himself "a child of Allah and Ram." Indian mystic poet and saint Kabir is known for his work in Hindi, which is characterised by imagery that is mixed with the local dialects Avadhi, Braj, and Bhojpuri. They addressed various topics and encouraged a devoted faith towards God. All religions pay homage to his verses, dohas, and śalokās. His songs echo in the air of his hometown of Varanasi. There was a multitude of influences on Sufism, making India a contemporary epicentre for Sufi culture. His Sufi teachings on divinity, cosmic balance, love, and humanity are still relevant to people today.



Above image: sair-shehnai-procession

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/lifestyle/art-culture>

## PHOOL WALON KI SAIR

Parade of flower sellers of Delhi celebrates Delhi Floral Guild's birthday each year. The three-day festival, typically held in September, just after the rainy season in the Mehrauli area. The festival is observed by both Hindus and Muslims, and is credited with fostering communal harmony in Delhi.

The celebration involves a procession with shehnai players and dancers, accompanied by pankhas, and bearing fans which are all made of large flowers, on which 13th century Sufi saint Khwaja Bakhtiyar Kaki is remembered.

## DIN-I ILAHI

The religion widely recognized as Dīn-i-Ilāhī (lit. Divine Monotheism) through its time as Taw īd-i-Ilāhī ("Oneness of God") or Divine Faith was devised by the Mughal emperor Akbar in 1582 and was intended to strike the balance between his divided subjects. The religion formation was influenced by Christianity, Jainism, and Buddhism, but the main source is Islam, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism.

Akbar promoted tolerance of other religions and even allowed for philosophical and religious discussion. This established the Ibādat Khāna ("House of Worship") in Fatehpur Sikri in 1575. From discussions held at the Ibādat Khāna, Akbar determined that no single religion had a monopoly on truth. This disclosure led him to establish the Dīn-i Ilāhī in 1582.



Above image: Depiction of Sufi disciples learning at a Sufi Khanqah.

=(Painting by Eugene Baugnies)

## GODESS GANGA IN INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT

### NEPAL

As the guardian water goddess Ganga is respected in Nepal and worshipped along the goddess of the river Yamuna. Her sculptures can be seen in the square Patan Durbar and Gokarneshwar Mahadev is an area in the Bagmati Pradesh area of Kathmandu.

### SRI LANKA

In Sri Lanka, Ganga with other Hindu deities assumes a Buddhist persona. Her sculpture is seen in Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara

### MAURITIUS

The Mauritian Hindus is regarded as Ganga Talao in Mauritius are associated with river Ganga. In 1972, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, then the Prime Minister of Mauritius, brought the Ganga water – Gomukh in India from the source and mixed it with the waters of the Grand Bassin and renamed them Ganga Talao.

### CAMBODIA

Since the Khmer empire Ganga was revered in Cambodia. Shiva is depicted with Ganga and his wife Uma (Parvati) in Shiva's iconographical form Uma-Gangapatisvarar. The pictures of Ganga are placed in Bakong, Lintel in Thommanon, and are on display at the International Council of Museums

### THAILAND

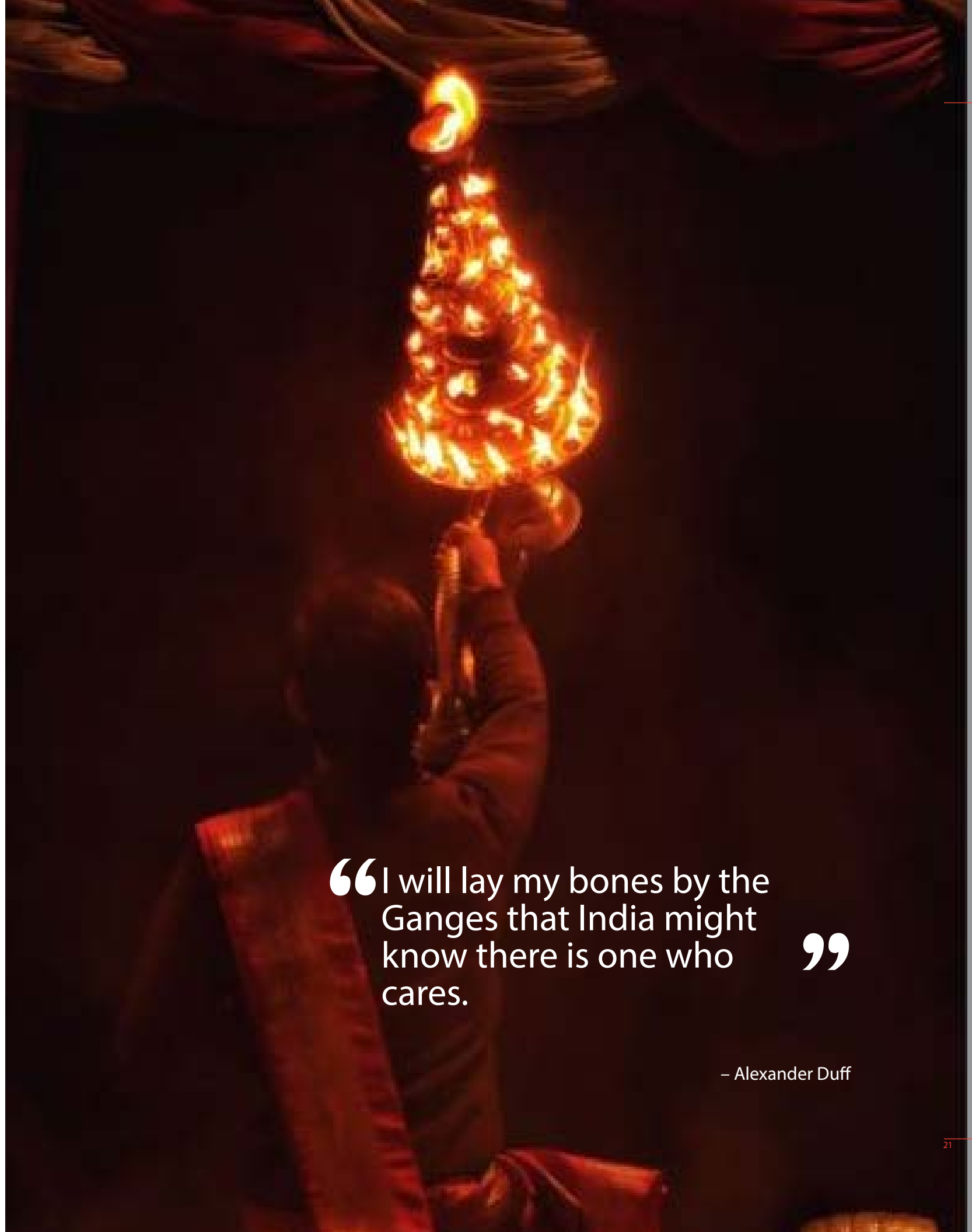
In Thailand's Triyampawai Royal ceremony, Ganga is called with Hindu deities Shiva, Bhumi, Surya and Chandra. She is worshiped together with goddess Phra Mae Thorani within Thai Buddhism and goddess Phosop in Tai folk religion. The Suphan Buri Province's four sacred pools have water from the Ganga and Yamuna Rivers and are used for ritual purposes.

### BALI

Goddess Ganga and the goddess Danu are adored in Balinese Hinduism. Her waters in Bali are regarded as sacred. In Bali her motherly relationship with Bhishma is known. Her religious sites are Tirta Gangga, Pura Taman Mumbul Sangeh, Kongco Pura Taman Gandasari.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. [http://cganga.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2018/11/045\\_GBP\\_IIT\\_SEC\\_ANL\\_07\\_Ver-1\\_Dec-2013\\_0.pdf](http://cganga.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2018/11/045_GBP_IIT_SEC_ANL_07_Ver-1_Dec-2013_0.pdf)
2. <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/243628/ganga-unites-hindus-muslims.html>
3. <https://www.worldhistory.org/Ganges/>
4. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kumbh-Mela>
5. Festivals Along the Ganga | Ganga Action Parivar | Clean Ganga. Green Ganga.
6. <http://www.chhath.org/significance-ofchhath-parva.html>
7. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/lifestyle/festivals/buddha-purnima-2021-date-history-significance-of-buddha-jayanti-101621948554517.html>
8. <https://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/report-mahavir-jayanti-2021-know-date-history-and-significance-of-this-jain-festival-2887732>
9. <https://iskconeducationalservices.org/HoH/practice/rites-of-passage/vivaha-marriage/>
10. <https://mythus.fandom.com/wiki/Makara>
11. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/ganga-has-higher-proportion-of-antibacterial-agents-study/article26890979.ece>
12. <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/ijmicro/2020/8844963/>
13. <https://digital.library.txstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10877/5931/BacaEmily.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
14. <https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-the-toxic-waters-of-religion-2282976>
15. <https://phool.co/pages/impact>
16. Tyagi, V.K., Bhatia, A., Gaur, R.Z., Khan, A.A., Ali, M., Khursheed, A., Kazmi, A.A. and Lo, S.L., 2013. Impairment in water quality of Ganges River and consequential health risks on account of mass ritualistic bathing. *Desalination and Water Treatment*, 51(10-12), pp.2121-2129
17. Bhattacharya, S., Bera, A., Dutta, A. and Ghosh, U.C., 2014. Effects of idol immersion on the water quality parameters of Indian water bodies: Environmental health perspectives. *International Letters of Chemistry, Physics and Astronomy*, 20
18. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganga\\_\(goddess\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganga_(goddess))



“I will lay my bones by the Ganges that India might know there is one who cares.”

– Alexander Duff