

SAVE GANGA MOVEMENT

A GANDHIAN NON-VIOLENT MOVEMENT FOR A NON-VIOLENT CULTURE OF DEVELOPMENT

Ganga symbolizes all rivers, water bodies and aquatic life; Giriraj Himalaya symbolizes all mountains, forests and wildlife; Gandhi symbolizes a culture of Truth and non-violence, i.e. a culture of pursuit of ethical perfection as the ultimate goal of life and pursuit of selfless ethical life of universal love as its means.

What we must do to rejuvenate and preserve our Dying Rivers: with special reference to Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Krishna and Cauvery

It is deeply painful and highly deplorable that even though thousands of crores of rupees have been spent to clean the Ganga and the Yamuna, the rivers are grasping for breath under unbearable pollution, even though we know that the Ganga is the life-line of nearly 40 % of our country's population and crores of our people consider her to be their divine mother and that the polluted water directly or indirectly causes health hazards like cancer, respiratory diseases, renal failure and much other water born or water related diseases. The pain and suffering it must be causing to the aquatic life and to the animals and birds who drink the polluted water goes unaccounted. Surely saving our national river Ganga would be a major step in the direction to save all our other great rivers which are also in the process of slow death. **We must realize that rejuvenating and preserving the Ganga and its tributaries and their source the Himalayas and the Godavari, Krishna and Cauvery and their source the Western Ghats, and our other great river mothers and their sources is absolutely necessary to ensure lasting water, food, air and health security to our masses.** It would be **highly unethical and satanic** to allow our development activities, essentially to satisfy our greed for wealth and lust for luxuries, in the name of development for the common people, to deprive the masses the various invaluable services they have been getting freely since ages from our life-giving and life- & health-sustaining aesthetically and religiously invaluable natural eco-systems. The great seers of our Indian civilization as well as of various great religions would not approve the present fundamentally materialistic, extremely eco-hostile, inherently unsustainable and out-and-out consumerist global market culture of unlimited desires for wealth and luxuries and cut throat competition for getting more and more wealth for their satisfaction, which has caused disappearance of tens of thousands of plant and animal species and continues to cause greater and greater violence to our life & health-sustaining natural systems **through unethical use of science and technology**, which has catastrophic implications in the long run for our future generations as well as for the entire life-world. **Even if God, the most compassionate and merciful, forgives us, Mother Nature will not forgive us if we fail to save our mother Ganga and other great river mothers which are the life-line of our masses since ages, and surely our future generations will condemn and curse us.**

Main Points / Recommendations of Our Save Ganga Movement:

(1) **The Ganga must be constitutionally declared as the National River with statutory provisions that ensure due respect and protection to her.**

(2) **An adequate flow of natural fresh clean water with sediments must be allowed to flow on the Ganga bed throughout the stretch of the river throughout the year not only to protect and preserve her ecology but also to meet the basic water needs of the cities, towns and villages situated on her banks, and restore the unique health promoting bactericidal, non-putrefying, self-purifying qualities of Gangajal (the water of Ganga).** Ganga has the unique health promoting quality due to its 25 times more self-purifying capacity than that of other rivers and the presence of high levels of bactericidal copper and chromium and perhaps of uranium, thorium in the Himalayan sediments and different types of beneficent bacteria coli phages in the sediments of the river which kill the harmful bacteria coli forms.

We must take decisive time-bound course of actions to ensure adequate environmental / ecological flow in all our rivers throughout the country .

(3) **Since our rivers are the source of drinking water for crores of our common people and also for the animals and STPs cannot convert sewage into potable water, we must adopt throughout the country the following policy of zero discharge:** (A) In place of the present policy of allowing treated sewage into our rivers, we must adopt the policy of zero discharge into the river, and promote Reuse and Recycle of wastewater after proper treatment (tertiary-level treatment): sewers must be separated from rivers, sewage must be converted into natural manure and treated-sewage

water must be used only for non-drinking, non-cooking purposes such as irrigation, industrial, non-potable domestic and commercial uses, groundwater recharge, etc.; (B) Industrial effluents, hospital wastes, treated or untreated, must never be allowed to enter into the rivers and must not also be allowed to mix with the sewage which should be converted into valuable manure for organic farming: industries must treat their effluent and use recycled water; and (C) Organic / natural farming should be promoted in a massive way for decreasing the non-point sources of pollution of rivers such as hazardous chemicals from agricultural run-off into the rivers, and also for maintaining soil fertility, checking the groundwater degradation, reducing water requirement of crops, producing health-friendly food, etc. [These recommendations of our Save Ganga Movement are also now have been made by the consortium of 7 IITs which is preparing National Ganga River Basin Management Plan(NGRBMP).

(4) Treatment of the sewage through **“Pond System and Plant Based Management of Sewage and Waste Treatment”** and using the nutrient rich treated waste water for organic farming, which is the cheapest and durable and needs least management and electricity, should be preferred wherever possible.

A massive time-bound fruit / medicinal plant / tree plantation programme on the banks of the river Ganga from Gangotri to Ganga Sagar, ensuring substantial profit to the farmers, along with the development of constructed wetlands for sewage treatment in major cities on the banks of the river wherever possible should be undertaken.

(5) **The highly earthquake-prone, eco-fragile and ecologically, aesthetically and religiously invaluable Uttarakhand region of the Ganga Basin must be declared “Ecologically Fragile, a Sanctuary for Himalayan Flora and Fauna” and its rivers “wild rivers”, and all steps must be taken to protect them and the natural ecosystems they support. Since crores of our people since ages consider the entire Himalaya region of the Ganga with all its tributaries to be the zone for self-purification and spiritual enlightenment (Tapo-Bhumi and Adhyatma-Bhumi), we must also declare this religiously invaluable Uttarakhand region to be our national Spiritual Heritage Zone.** We must not allow any eco-hostile tourism in the Name of Tirtha Yatra: we must know that Tirtha Yatra is a Form of Tapah (Purificatory action/Austerity/ Self-control).

We must have a high powered **National Himalayan Ecology Preservation and Restoration Authority** headed by Hon'ble Prime Minister to save the highly fragile invaluable ecology of the young Himalayas. Like the Western Ghats Ecology Preservation and Restoration Plan made by the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP), **we must have a National Himalayan Ecology Preservation and Restoration Plan** based on a holistic scientific study of the ecology of the Himalayas. It would be a major step towards the realization of our National Mission of saving the Himalayan Ecosystem as a part of the National Action Plan for Climate Change and also of the National Action Plan for Preservation of our Biodiversity

(6)**Decision on various major controversial issues** such as (a)the problem of construction of extremely eco-hostile dams for hydropower in the highly earth quake prone eco-fragile ecologically, aesthetically and religiously invaluable Himalaya region of the Ganga Basin,(b) the problem of construction of extremely eco-hostile barrages/dredging in the River Ganga for Navigation and (c) the problem of extremely eco-hostile interlinking of the rivers within the Ganga basin and between the rivers of the Ganga basin and the Peninsular rivers, etc. **must be postponed till a national consensus on these issues is available on the basis of holistic scientific study about the short-term as well as long-term harmful as well as beneficial consequences of such undertakings.**

(7)Like National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA), we must also have a planning, financing, monitoring and coordinating high powered **National Godavari, Krishna and Cauvery Rivers Basin Authority(NGKCRBA)** headed by our Prime Minister to insure effective abatement of pollution and conservation of the rivers through adopting a river basin approach for comprehensive holistic planning and management.

Like the NGRBMP prepared by the Consortium of 7 IITs, making of a comprehensive **Godavari, Krishna and Cauvery Basin Management Plan (NGKCBMP)** based on a thorough holistic scientific study of various aspects of the Godavari, Krishna and Cauvery basin must be undertaken as soon as possible with the help of a consortium of IITs, IISc Bengaluru, Central University of Hyderabad and other prominent universities of western and southern India and National Laboratories of CSIR, etc.

(8)What we need to ensure our lasting water security is decentralized basin restoration, recharging and management approaches that consider a host of small and medium ecologically sustainable measures involving participation of local people. Methods of irrigation and agricultural practices need to be changed keeping in view of the E-flow requirements of our national river and sustainability of ground water in the Ganga Basin. The same is true in the case of our other great rivers. **Dependence on rivers for irrigation could be substantially reduced by making our villages self-dependent as far as possible for their water needs through storing rainwater in traditional ways in tanks, ponds, etc., and rejuvenating / preserving / creating wetlands, grasslands, forests wherever possible which would**

function as natural water tanks. In India, forest cover is around 24 percent, and we need to increase this to 33 percent to absorb 2.5 to 3 billion tons of carbon dioxide by 2030 as part of our national action plan to counter climate change.

(9) **Eco-hostile river-front development activities in the name of beautification of river-fronts must not be allowed.** Construction of permanent structures for residential, commercial or industrial purposes and eco-hostile mining of sands and gravels in the active flood plains of a river must be prohibited throughout the country.

(10) **There should be disincentives in the form of proper fines to the states in the Ganga basin in proportion to the quantity and quality of pollution a state adds to the river in the state.** The NRCDC must have a monitoring mechanism to regularly monitor the water quality of the rivers at the entry and exit points of each state.

(11) Taking into account the important role rivers play to meet various water requirements of the masses and the danger to their life they are facing at present from various eco-hostile forces of development, **we must have a law protecting River rights,** and River Guards to prevent crimes against rivers and River Courts to try crimes against rivers.

(12) There is no scarcity of wealth, knowledge and skill to save and rejuvenate our rivers including the Ganga, water bodies, mountains, forests, and wildlife which are in the process of slow death. There is lack of will due to our moral and spiritual bankruptcy. **We must introduce universal compulsory critical ethics education with character-building ethics education as its core and the problem of the ultimate meaning of life as its central problem from the beginning of our education system, which would be a major step in the direction to overcome our present deep rooted moral and spiritual crisis.** We must study critically the views of great religions and of great teachers and thinkers of mankind about various fundamental issues of ethics concerning ethical values and the nature (form and content), value and means of ethically good life and good society.

In the long run, we must make serious efforts to solve the problems of eco-hostile industrialization, urbanization, population-growth and corruption which constitute the root of our problem of environmental degradation in general and the slow death of our rivers in particular, by a radical change from our current ideas of development and growth to a Gandhian alternative(in terms of Gandhiji's conceptions of village Swaraj, Swadeshi, Antyodaya, Sarvodaya, dignified exhilarating & health-friendly body-labor, cottage industry, non-exploitative rural serving/centric eco-friendly decentralized industrialization and urbanization, Satyagraha, character-building ethics education, enlightened ethical life of simple living and high thinking, Truth and non-violence, etc.), **which does provide the form and content of a sustainable, equitable, loving and caring non-violent culture of development, which essentially involves retelling the basic ethics of our great living ancient civilization as well as of all great religions in the context of our technological age, and is the surest and perhaps the only solution to our impending catastrophic global ecological crisis, including the seemingly insoluble problem of Global Warming and Climate Change, along with the present all pervasive deep rooted moral and spiritual crisis.** (A discussion on this issue is available in the note entitled "Gandhian Solution to Global Ecological Crisis" in our website, www.savegangamovement.org.) At present industrialization and urbanization is essentially devoted to promoting luxurious life, in the name of development for the common people, at the cost of depriving the masses various essential services which they have been getting since ages from our invaluable natural eco-systems. **We must transform the present extremely rural-hostile and eco-hostile form of Industrialization and urbanization into a profoundly rural-friendly and nature-friendly form of decentralized non-exploitative Industrialization and urbanization.** We must take time-bound decisive steps to solve the problem of forced migration of rural unemployed to cities by converting rural India into an ideal place for leading an enlightened ethical life of simple living and high thinking in an atmosphere of natural purity and beauty with loving care of the life- & health-sustaining aesthetically and religiously invaluable natural eco-systems with the help of the Gandhian conception of ideal rural India. We must not allow our population to grow beyond the limit which would cause great harm to our future generations or to our fellow lower form of creatures, and if it has gone beyond the limit we must try to bring it down in some ethical way to the desirable level: our population has quadrupled since 1951. **We must root out corruption, which is proving to be the biggest hurdle in the way of implementing our various governmental programmes of public services, with the help of good governance and character building ethics education.**

We must realize that the ecological crisis of our river mothers the Ganga, Yamuna, Narmada, Godavari, Krishna, Cauvery, etc., is the sign/ symptom of the ecological crisis of our mother Planet earth due to the present fundamentally unspiritual and greed for wealth and lust for luxuries based, extremely eco-hostile, inherently unsustainable out-and-out consumerist global market culture of development of modern civilization which Gandhiji rightly considered to be false, irreligious and satanic, and the slow death of the rivers is the sign/symptom of the slow death of our great living ancient civilization, which he rightly considered to be true and divine. (MK Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, Chapters VI, & XIII). Unfortunately our leaders are failing to see what Mahatma Gandhi could see clearly long time back: “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s needs, but not for every man’s greed”; “God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after that manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom (England) is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 millions took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts”, (*Harijan*, 20-12-1928). **Surely our civilization, which is perhaps the only living great ancient civilization and which is the mother of so many great religions, has the moral and spiritual resources to play the role of Jagat Guru and show the present spiritually dark world the path of Truth, the path of self-purification, self-enlightenment and self-realization, the path of realization of ethical perfection, which constitutes truly the essence of the science of Yoga.** Surely it does provide profound systematic knowledge about the means to discipline ethically our senses and passions and progress towards ethical perfection, and its message of enlightened selfless ethical action of universal love with detachment to its fruits has the potentiality to save the world from the impending catastrophic global ecological crisis along with its present deep rooted all pervasive moral and spiritual crisis. Let India, the land of many great religions, provide the world a culture/ civilization of non-violence and Truth, i.e. the true ultimate meaning of life, in the context of our present technological age, where all religions would grow harmoniously with reference to morality and spirituality in spite of their differences in the realm of metaphysics on the basis of the knowledge about their fundamental ethical unity and truth and the central place of ethics in religious life, where science and technology would be used for development only within the limits of ethics, where development would take place with loving care of the invaluable countless kinds of flora and fauna of our life-giving and life-& health-sustaining aesthetically and religiously invaluable natural eco-systems. **Let us rejuvenate and preserve our great ancient civilization of non-violence and Truth, through completing the unfinished work of Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of Truth and non-violence of our age, and save India and through it the world at large from the impending catastrophic global ecological crisis along with its present all pervasive deep rooted moral and spiritual crisis.**

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The above recommendations are essentially based on the various Save Ganga & Save Himalayas Recommendations / Demands / Resolutions of our Save Ganga Movement, which are the result of the churning discussions of many Save Ganga and Save Himalayas Seminars / Meetings / Workshops held in different parts of our country in the course of the Movement. (These are available in our website, [www. savegangamovement.org](http://www.savegangamovement.org).)