

THE GANGA'S MESSAGE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON MICROPLASTICS POLLUTION

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Pollution - Air, Water, Soil & E-waste

The Ganga might have stood witness to many stages of India's civilisation, as Mahatma Gandhi once noted, but in recent decades it has become a conduit for sewage, solid waste, industrial effluents and other pollutants. It is depressing, though not surprising, therefore, that a new study by an [NGO has found evidence of a modern-day scourge, microplastics](#), in the river, with the highest concentrations in Varanasi and Kanpur, followed by Haridwar. What the data show is the alarming presence of plastic filaments, fibres, fragments, and in two places, microbeads, with their composition pointing to both industrial and secondary broken-down plastics from articles of everyday use. These range from tyres, clothing, food packaging, bags, cosmetics with microbeads, garland covers and other municipal waste. The finding of significant levels of microscopic particles invisible to the naked eye at below 300 micrometres to 5 millimetres in the country's holiest river calls into question the progress of two high-priority, well-funded missions of the NDA government, [Swachh Bharat](#), to deal with solid waste, and [Namami Gange](#), to rid the river of its pollution. Surprisingly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's support for the river clean-up, originally scheduled to be implemented by December 2020, has not saved it from serious deficits; official data indicate that 97 Ganga towns may be discharging about 750 million litres of untreated sewage a day into the river. An environmental activist, [Guru Das Agrawal, died in 2018](#) after fasting in protest, and his letter to Mr. Modi did not change the situation.

[Microplastics](#), recorded in recent times in the remotest of places — Mount Everest, Arctic snow, Icelandic glaciers, the French Pyrenees, and the depths of the Mariana Trench, among others — pose a hazard as plastics production outpaces the ability of governments to collect and manage waste. Successive governments issued waste management rules, but dropped the ball on implementation. Although the Centre recently issued a draft to tighten the Plastic Waste Management Rules, cities have failed to implement existing rules as well as the Solid Waste Management rules, on ending single-use plastics, waste segregation, recycling labels on packaging, extended producer responsibility for manufacturers and recovery of materials. Moreover, growing plastic waste will far exceed the capacity of governments to manage it, given that recycling has its limits. Swachh Bharat, therefore, must mean not merely keeping waste out of sight, achieved through costly dumping contracts, but sharply reduced generation, full segregation and recycling. Plastic waste around the world is threatening the food web and the crisis demands a new global treaty modelled on the [Montreal Protocol](#) and the [Paris Agreement](#). India needs to demonstrate that it is serious about a clean-up at home.

[Our code of editorial values](#)

From the abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, to the landmark Ayodhya verdict, 2019 proved to be an eventful year.

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com