

# GUARDIANS OF THE GANGA: TASK FORCE KEEPS A WATCHFUL EYE ON THE RIVER

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

To enjoy additional benefits

CONNECT WITH US

May 22, 2023 04:13 am | Updated 08:27 am IST - Narora/Bulandshahr

COMMENTS

SHARE

READ LATER

A sewerage canal spills out dirty water into river Ganga in Patna. | Photo Credit: The Hindu

Omveer Kumar, 41, picks up plastic bottles, pouches and food packets as he walks on the wet sand on the banks of the Ganga. As he nears a heap of garbage, Mr. Kumar sees an overturned turtle, its neck wounded. He rushes it to a nearby rescue centre for treatment.

Mr. Kumar, a resident of Narora town in Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh, is a Ganga *Prahar* (guardian). This is a task force of volunteers constituted by the National Mission for Clean Ganga and the Wildlife Institute of India (NMCG-WII) under the Namami Gange programme to cover 8.61 billion sq. km of the river basin.

Since 2014, [Namami Gange](#) has aimed to clean the river, ecosystem, and the villages around, home to 40% of India's population at 520 million and 2,500 species of flora and fauna. [The United Nations in December 2022 recognised the initiative](#) as one of the top 10 World Restoration Flagships involved in reviving the natural world — a project that has seen the Central government invest \$5 billion.

Since 2016, when the Ganga *Prahar* project began, Mr. Kumar, whose studied till high school, has learnt to identify aquatic species that survive in the river by their scientific name. He can spot over 300 birds, both Indian and migratory, that arrive on the riverbank in different seasons.

The task force, which now has over 4,000 volunteers in 100 districts across Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar, and West Bengal, keeps a check on river protection, preventing people from littering, as well as reports poaching.

The concept of the Ganga *Prahar* was mooted by Ruchi Badola, the dean at WII and nodal officer of the Biodiversity Conservation and Ganga Rejuvenation project.

"I always loved the Ganga, but never realised it was so full of life. During our training period, I was told how many creatures live in the river and how they are important for the food cycle and for human survival," he said. His two children are also part of the project and are known as *Bal* (child) Ganga *Praharis*.

Omveer Shyoraj Singh, 31, who is also a Ganga *Prahar* talks about the efforts to check pollution

through informal patrolling. “Some people listen to us, but there are many who threaten us. They ask for our ID cards and even push us,” he said.

G. Ashok Kumar, Director-General of Namami Gange, said they were planning to issue ID cards to all the Ganga *Praharis* so they could show these to visitors.

“I remember in my childhood, there was a belief among villagers that dolphin skin oil would heal wounds quickly,” he said, adding that it was one of reasons for dolphin poaching. Now endangered, there are about 3,600 Gangetic dolphins, India’s national aquatic animal, in the river.

But there are some basic problems. Sonu Singh, 29, a Ganga *Prahari* in Ayodhya, runs a boat taking tourists down the Saryu river, a tributary of the Ganga. “They gave us training for the boat ride and rescuing of animals, but I wish they’d give us safety jackets too,” he said.

And while Mr. Kumar said that the first target of the project was to ensure that no untreated water — sewage or industrial effluents — flowed into the river, Lakshman Sharma, pati pradhan(husband of the village pradhan or head Renu Sharma), points to sewage waste flowing directly into the river. “I had complained to the panchayat officer, district magistrate, even the Chief Minister, but this nullah is still flowing into the river,” said the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) worker. The party is in power in the State.

Whether or not there’s been an impact on the ecosystem, there has been some change in the lives of the people. To recruit volunteers, WII sets meetings with villagers through the *pradhan* and education institutions. “An obvious question that comes out of the discussion is what they will get if they help. Then we moot the idea of livelihood training,” said Vineeta Sagar, a field researcher with WII. From beautician to electrician, different kinds of skilling opportunities are offered.

Poonam Devi, 30, from Katia village in Muzaffarnagar district, Uttar Pradesh, now runs a beauty parlour in the Panchayat Bhawan of her village, the only source of income for her family.

In Diamond Harbour, West Bengal, Sajal Kanti Kayal, in his 40s, runs a production unit where about 50 women, all Ganga *Praharis*, work to make things like cloth bags, junk jewellery, and cloth sanitary pads. On weekdays, they work in the factory; over the weekend they organise cleanliness drives on the Ganga ghats.

“In a couple of months, you will see a stall that will showcase the products of Ganga *Praharis* at Dilli Haat in Delhi,” Mr. Kumar said.

COMMENTS

SHARE

[India / rivers](#)

BACK TO TOP

Comments have to be in English, and in full sentences. They cannot be abusive or personal. Please abide by our [community guidelines](#) for posting your comments.

We have migrated to a new commenting platform. If you are already a registered user of The Hindu and logged in, you may continue to engage with our articles. If you do not have an

account please register and login to post comments. Users can access their older comments by logging into their accounts on Vuukle.

**END**

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

crackIAS.com