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Complex Tripartite Hydro Politics of River Ganges

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Complex Tripartite Hydro Politics of River Ganges

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

This paper studies if the Flagship *Namami Gange* program of Cleaning the river Ganges in India aligns with the transcendental discourse on the river. Web contents as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter along with Indian English daily newspaper reports are used here as the source of data. The study shows that the program aligns with the transcendental discourse on river Ganges as the Mother Goddess and reaching out to her devotees.

Chapter One: Introduction

Environmental activist GD Agarwal died at 86 years of age on 12th October 2018. It was not a natural death. Agarwal died of hunger on the 111th day of his Satyagraha protest through hunger strike¹ (Sarkar, 2018). The current NDA (National Democratic Alliance) government of India reacted coercively to his hunger strike and tried to force feed him or to relocate him in Delhi (Sarkar, 2018). Agarwal was a civil engineer, a retired Professor of Kanpur IIT, an advisor of the government on river health and board member of National Ganga River Basin Authority (Chakravarty, 2018). But he was campaigning for “aviral” or relentless flow of the Ganges river from his scientific principles (Chakravarty, 2018). The NDA government, led by BJP or Bhartiya Janata Party promised to clean Ganga or Ganges in their electoral manifesto in 2014 (Das Gupta, 2018). This promise connects with the religious sentiment regarding Ganges as a Hindu Deity. Narendra Modi, the prime minister of India vowed to clean Varanasi, Ganges and other religious and cultural centers of India from pollution (Nelson, 2014), which worked as a vantage point for it appeals to the aspirations of Hindu devotees (Shekhar, 2017; Latha,2017). With NDA’s win in 2014, hopes for clean Ganga project boosted (Shekhar,2017). But their \$3 Billion flagship project named “*Namami Gange*” is already in shambles (Wilkes & Kalra, 2017). The implementation of the project is going slow with not even half of the sewage treatment plants to treat three quarters of sewage and waste from North Indian cities that flows into Ganges. Officials of NMCG (National Mission for Clean Ganga) declared that meeting 2018 deadline to clean Ganges is impossible with much of the money allocated for the project remains unspent (Wilkes & Kalra,2017). Moreover, several hydroelectric projects are threatening the free flow of the river and her tributaries including a behemoth project to divert the trajectories of Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers which will bring catastrophic change in the

¹ Hunger strike is a non-violent, non-cooperative protest to pressurize governments and political stake holders for aspired change in policy. It is a form of self-sacrifice that worked as a political tool for many non-violent movements including Mahatma Gandhi’s (Scanlan et el. 2008)

ecology and social life of the Gangetic and Brahmaputra water basin (Doshi, 2017). Au Contraire to the afoot radical development projects taken by the Government, the High Court of Uttarakhand ordered a rule declaring Human Rights to Ganges and Yamuna rivers (Safi, 2018). But in March 2017, the Supreme Court of India overruled this order (BBC,2017). Most recently from the Government's standpoint, Union Water Minister of India, Nitin Gadkari, declared that there will be no more hydroelectric projects on Ganges (Dash, 2018).

These contradictory developments create a puzzling picture of the hydro politics regarding the river Ganges. Being the most sacred river in India for Hinduism and contributing to the economy, culture and daily life of one third (407 million) people, providing one fourth of the water resources, it is worthy of attention from the political and religious leadership and followers (Kumar, 2017, p. 8). But while far-right political leadership promotes the Cleaning of Ganges as their electoral agenda, it also takes on board projects that will destroy the ecosystems and lifestyle of the basin. As such their broader motive falls under question. What is the goal of the NDA/BJP government of India regarding Ganges? Do the policies taken by BJP government regarding Ganges signify political and religious cooperation? This research intends to look into these questions.

Chapter Two: Problematizing Ganges

Kelly D. Alley (2000) in *Hinduism and Ecology* raises a crucial question about the religious motives of environmental movements; why religious and political ideologies do not coopt the environmental issues even on the case of the sacred river of Ganga? She cites one incident from the early 20th century (1914-1916) where political independence movement cooperated with a religious movement to conserve the religious symbol of river Ganga. Alley claims that was the only time of cooperation between Indian Nationalist political leadership and Hindu religious leadership on an environmental issue. They cooperated against secular British colonial

economic policy. Such a cooperation was absent in independent India, even when VHP (*Vishwa Hindu Parishad*) and BJP joined hands to form central government in 1998 (Alley, 2000). Alley's explanation is that contemporary religious leadership is not concerned about the material pollution of river Ganga, thus their movements revolve around the political and transcendent value of Ganga, thereby rendering environmental challenges less concerning. The political value of Ganga emphasizes on the economic potential of the river.

Three important trends in the issue of purifying Ganges are observable. Firstly, Ganga is the center of a tripartite bargain. The three parties of this bargain are the political leadership, religious leadership and environmentalist leadership. In the state system government of India, the political leadership is divided into central government and state government. Ideologically, the political leadership is divided into secular politics and Hindu nationalist politics. Secondly, in movements regarding Ganga, political and religious issues prevail overlooking environmental issues. Finally, political leadership takes up development and religious issues in narratives as public outreach to earn political support.

In the movement against the controlling of the flow of Ganga in early 1900's, political leaders started moving against the colonial policymakers, on the call of Pandit Malaviya², who called for the conservation of the religious significance and use of Ganga. The pro-independence political leadership involved the *pandas* or religious leaders in the shrines of Ganga on the course of their political movement. The argument from the British Government was that the flow of Ganga needed to be controlled to resolve flooding and irrigation challenges. On the other hand, the movement bargained for water flow to be unimpeded for the ritual bathing of the pilgrims. The government's argument was more concerned about the economic implication of the flow control (Alley, 2008; pg 366-367). But the challenges for Ganga as a river due to

² Indian political leader, social reformer, freedom fighter and educationist. President of Indian National Congress, 1931

the control was overlooked. Through this bargain, Sri Ganga Sabha assumed exclusive control over the management of material affairs of *Har Ki Pauri* shrine of Ganga (pg-368).

Religious movements regarding Ganga tend to emphasize political control over ecological conservation of the river. The conflict becomes between religious and secular politics. Since, Ganga is a Hindu religious symbol, Vartiya Hindu Parishad promotes the cause to cleanse Muslim dominion over the river through pilgrimage movements as Ganga Mata, Bharat Mata and Go Mata (pg-372). Ganga being a Transcendent symbol, her secular or scientific discussion as mere a river is rejected and exclusive religious use of her is emphasized.

For the religious symbolism of Ganga, religious leaders argue that it is not possible to impure her. Instead they argue that only a small amount of material contamination is taking place due to unclean activities around her. It also reinforces the claim that no earthly agency or project can purify her, as a result the *Pandas* become askance about any government policy or project that targets to do so.

A relation can be drawn between Alley's (2000) analysis and the persecution of G.D Agarwal and other environmental activists by the center-right government of India. Agarwal was carrying his movement from an environmentalist point of view (Chakravarty, 2018). Though Agarwal was considered a Hindu ascetic, he was not carrying the movement of saving Ganges for any religious or political cause. Rather his goal was profane and for the sake of environment. Thus, the attention of the BJP government he received was coercive than cooperative for their Hindu Nationalist narrative on Ganges, scientific narrative of purification is conflicting.

To work with this issue, it is necessary to define the parties of this tripartite religion-political-environment complex. There are three parties to the bargain. Firstly, the political leadership. Present day India is an independent secular democratic state by constitution. Unlike the British period, the decisions regarding the Ganges is politically made by the central and provincial

leadership elected by popular vote. This largest democracy in the world, however, operates on a peculiar social phenomenon, wherein electoral politics demands garnering the vote of minority groups. These group votes are often captured by offering promises and incentives, and their electoral heft is used *en masse* during elections. For example, the Dalits, Muslims etc. are vote banks for different political parties in state and federal elections. But BJP is using this vote bank politics with another phenomenon Srinivas pointed out, that is “Sanskritization”. BJP’s bases its narration in “Hindutva” or Hindu nationalism, instead of secular Indian nationalism. BJP thus can mobilize the mainstream Hindu population of India in favor. Their narratives, symbolisms, political discourse show the zeal of Hindu nationalism, thus it can connect with the majority Hindu population of India. Many religious organizations are patrons of or by BJP³. Connecting with the religious movements regarding Ganges is thus easier for BJP.

Secondly, the religious leadership, is concerned with the Hindu symbolism and significance of the river Ganges. As Alley showed, they are more interested in identity politics and religious tourism around Ganges. Also, from her research, they are not invested about the physical pollution of the river. Rather, they want to assume right over religious and spiritual significance of Ganges. BJP is vocalizing such issues and thus patron the religious movements.

Thirdly, there are the environmentalist movements. The most prominent face of this movement are exemplary figures, such as G.D Agarwal, and issues such as the Ganges-cleanup draw a lot of attention, the environmentalist movements regarding Ganges has a much wider reach. Such environmental movements and activists are also concerned about the rights of the subalterns. The Adivasi or indigenous people who are the mostly affected from dam projects are an integral

³ i.g. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is believed to be the patron organization of BJP

part of the process, and find their voice amplified by environmentalist groups (Drew, 2017, pp. 811-817).

As a result, often, these movements receive reluctance or enmity from the mainstream Hindu population (Drew, 2017). Drew argues that the members of mainstream Hindu population of India often observe the environmental activists as “fame seekers” who exploit the cultural otherness of the indigenous people to promote their “name and fame”. Jointly, the belief of Ganga’s transcendent value and the notion of “fame seeking activists” refrain them from supporting environmental movements. When Ganges is perceived as a goddess, who cannot be impure or harmed by human activities, rather, purify human, then in popular belief no dam projects can harm her either. So, according to the believers of this notion, the environmental activists are moving for a false cause.

In such a complex tripartite bargain, it is difficult to decide on a single course of action by the stakeholders or decision makers. The effect that is discussed in the previous paragraph, creates supporting notion for economic development projects as dams for hydropower. When the transcendental body of Ganges is perceived impossible to be harmed, and the river is perceived as a goddess who provides people, electricity generated by building dams on her becomes perceived as another blessing of her. As Alley showed the political and religious only once before cooperated in this issue. Hardly any cooperation is formed between the parties regarding the purification of Ganges. (Alley, 2000). But all of them have their separate agenda and justification for the movements or project they carry out.

In such a complex situation, the current BJP government’s promise of cleaning Ganges, supreme courts declaration of Ganges as a legal entity, persecution of environmental activists, exclusion of the Adivasi people in the decision making and projects of diverting trajectory shows a politico-religious trajectory of managing Ganges.

Chapter Three: Thesis statement

Observing such complex turn of events, I draw my thesis statement that, BJP government's Namami Gange program's narrative to clean Ganges aligns with Religious narrative which provides politico-religious support economically accumulate the river's potential. The first time Political and Religious leadership of India worked together against the British colonial management's secular economic policy. The modern secularism was preached by the British in India and thus traditionally considered as an alien and colonial discourse. The environmental activists promote secular and profane ideals of environmental conservation/purification and indigenous rights thus, they step into the boundary of "alien". As a result, they face persecution, even when they want to "protect Ganges". On the other hand, by promoting politico-religious narrative on Ganges through the program, BJP promises a religious-economic development. Such promises emphasize on the sacred purity of Ganges while presents resource accumulation from the river as her sacred blessing.

Chapter Four: Conceptual Framework

The Namami Gange Program

Namami Gange program is the flagship project of BJP led central government in India (NMCG, March 2019). The former National Clean Ganga project was renamed as Namami Gange Program with the goals for this project of abatement of pollution, conservation and rejuvenation of the river. The government approved the program on June,2014. It is a gigantic project with monetary allocation of 20,000 Indian Rupees or 3 billion US Dollars. The allocation is for the project's expenditure till 2019-2020. Moreover, this allocation is invested completely by the central government (narendra modi.in 2016).

The program follows a five-tier structure (Narendra Modi.in, 2016; NMCG, 2019). The head of the structure is the National Ganga Council chaired by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself. The second tier is the Empowered Task Force (ETF) on river Ganga chaired by Union Minister of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation. The third tier of the structure is held by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG). State Ganga Committees are fourth in the tier. They come from the five states that Ganges runs through, naming, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarkhand, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. On the final tier, are the District Ganga Committees coming from each district that abuts with the river Ganges and her tributaries.

The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) describes the pillars of the program in their website. The pillars are sewerage treatment infrastructure, riverfront development, river surface cleaning, biodiversity, afforestation, public awareness, industrial effluent monitoring and Ganga Gram. Implementation of these are distributed in three level of activities. The entry level focuses for immediate visible impact (NMCG, 2019, narendramodi.in,2016). These activities consist of cleaning liquid and solid surface waste, construction of toilets in river-bank localities, renovation, repair, construction and modernization of Ghats on the river bank to facilitate human contact with the river, building public awareness on the river and finally building crematoriums for proper disposal of dead bodies in the holy river. Medium term activities opt to be implemented in 5 years from the start, which is by the current year, 2019. It focuses on the arrest of industrial pollutant release in the river through public-private partnership (PPP) measures. Government concession for establishing industrial pollutant treatment plants and sustainable industry building is promised. Under this level of implementation, enforcement of environmental laws on industries, bio-diversity conservation and afforestation is also promised. Finally, providing “adequate” water flow to the river, efficient water uses, and surface irrigation projects are promised in the long-term activities.

The elaborate structure of this program has already implemented a number of the activities and projects (NMCG). With the national election coming up in April- May 2019, the government is in a spree of launching new projects (Ref.). Yet majority of the program requirements are not met (Down To Earth)

Immediate action, public relation and narrative:

For this study, the immediate action level of Namami Gange is the most important. As this level focuses on the public awareness as an activity, coupled with actions immediately impacting religious and public sphere, this level of activity is the resource for the narrative that the BJP government is using for the program. The other levels are mostly technical which have to depend on scientific and legal narrative for implementation. Also, those levels can reach the people only when implemented. On the other hand, the awareness outreach's implementation means public connection. Implementation of the public awareness needs to delve into the religious, political and environmental narrative components.

Among these narratives the foremost is the religious narrative. Hindu mythological texts or "*Puranas*" signifies Ganges as a Holiest river (18 puranas). Several different texts of the vast body of Purana literature have elaborate discussions on the origin, birth and virtues of Ganga. As the river is connected with Lord Shiva, the Shiva Purana provides many details on Spiritual Aspects of Ganga. Shiva purana puts Ganga as the holiest of all rivers and Kashi, a city beside the river as the holiest of all pilgrim spots (Shiva purana). Being the holiest, Ganga provides ten times more virtues for worshipping Shiva on her banks than any other rivers. Other tales in Shiva Maha Purana represents Ganga as the bearer of the God of wealth Kartikeya, as a holy figure who brings rain and water and quenched the thirst of sage Atri and also emphasizes on the holiness of Ganga's distributary, Narmada.

Other Purana texts as Vishnu Purana, Skanda Purana and Markandeya Purana also described Ganga with sacred virtues (18 Puranas). The topmost of her virtues is that she takes away the sins of the devotees. In these puranas it is described over and over again, that the river Saraswathi takes away all the sins from a devotee after bathing in her for three weeks (pg-48). River Ganga can take away all the sins if anyone bathes in her just once or even touches only a drop of her holy water. On the other, the tributary of Ganges, Narmada can take away all the sins if someone merely has the sight of her. Ganges thus becomes the spiritual purifier for the devotees.

The puranas connect her to the milky way and signifies her as the giver of life and salvation. There are a number of accounts where her sacred water was used to resurrect dead ancestors or cows. Also, there are number of stories that say her water gave salvation to dead ancestors. The descension story of Ganga shows that her water provided salvation to the ancestors of king Bhagirath and for the king's penance, Ganga has to descend to earth from the Akash-ganga or the milky way. The puranas also recounted on Ganga's virtue of rendering salvation to her devotees. Shiva is described to dictate that one who does pilgrim to Varanasi, the holy city beside Ganges will attain the liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth.

Sharma (2006) provides an interesting legend regarding the purifying attribute of Ganges. The legend tells that an ancient king was resting beside Ganges once at night. In the dark of the night he observed that several celestial women are taking bath in the Ganges. Later he had the divine revelation that those celestial women were the rivers from all over India. They were morally saturated from the sins that they have washed from their devotees. In order to purify themselves, they had to bathe in Ganges. Such a legend makes Ganges as the grand purifier. Religiously she is believed to purify herself and other rivers. Agoramorthy (2014) drew on the point of this religious purification attribute of Ganges to highlight that Ganges is believed

to be able to kill pathogens. He also argued that such purificatory characteristics of Ganges were known by former colonial and Mughal rulers of India.

Skanda Purana and Garuda Purana describes the holy city of Prayag beside Ganges as the provider of both earthly and spiritual salvation (18 puranas, pg-167). The story involves the Sage Agastya and his wife Lopamudra. Agastya as an answer to Lopamudra's question on salvation rendering geographical places, names Prayag as the render of four "Purusharth" or four efforts of man. These are, dharma or duty, artha or wealth, kama or physical pleasure and moksha or salvation. He names few other places and puts Kashi- another city beside Ganges on top of them. Garuda purana describes all the locations that Ganga goes through as sacred (pg-536) and puts Prayag⁴, Kashi and Varanasi as the foremost of them. Again, this purana also emphasize that Prayag is a holy place that can fulfill both the earthly and spiritual desires of people. As Prayag is signified as the conjunction point of Ganga and Yamuna river, it signifies both of the river as holy. This connotation of Ganga also signifies the mythical belief on her as the provider of wealth and earthly need and desires.

Finally, but most significantly, Narada Purana describes Ganga as the mother of all creation (pg-660). In describing the greatness of the river, the purana says that Ganga rises from the feet of lord Vishnu, so her and the river Yamuna are the holiest of all the pilgrim places. Her greatness lies in the attributes to give salvation, live and also earthly desires.

The mythical stories prime⁵ three stimuli on ganga in the devotee psychology. Firstly, they think of Ganga as a mother figure. The attributes of the mother figure are that she forgives, she creates, and she provides. Secondly, her forgiveness stretches towards her attribute of purification. She purifies the souls of the devotees and the dead bodies touched by her water.

⁴ Present day Allahabad

⁵ A psychological prime is a stimulus that can trigger subsequent stimuli without subject's intention or awareness.

She is the grand purifier. So, she cleans herself and other rivers also. Both physically and spiritually. Finally, another stretch of her motherly attribute is that she provides. As seen in the puranic discussion, she, her tributaries and holy cities beside her can provide spiritual and economic salvation. The myths are aware of the economic potential she has.

Devotees of Ganges thus do not hesitate to release waste and pollutants in the river. Their strong belief that she purifies stimulates such behavior. Cleansing, as Dong & Lee (2017, pg-593) discussed, cleansing reduces post-decisional dissonances. Meaning doubt of guilt for the action will be reduced by the cleaning effect. Moreover, Lee & Schwarz (in press, pg-3) elaborates that cleaning one's self with water or antiseptic can create a psychological separation with moral guilt.

Ganges holds holy water by popular belief. So, bathing in her, cremating beside her and releasing waste in her, create a moral sense of cleanness among her devotees.

Religious stimuli can also provide complicated pro-sociality. Preston, Ritter & Hernandez (2010) argues that religious beliefs that have multiple moral goals can generate conflicting moral behaviors. The study argues (pg-575) that moral conflict in behavior starts for different targets. Religious stimuli can encourage in-group cooperation and non-cooperation with out of the group entities. Their study also shows that the spiritual difference between persons in contact can define cooperation or noncooperation. Among their test subjects, they observe cooperation towards members of similar faith. Subjects are noncooperative towards members from conflicting spiritual belief. Pichon, Boccato and Saroglou (2007) finds stronger prosocial behaviors and cooperation on positive religious stimuli. It means if the narrative of an action aligns with the spiritual narrative, believers will cooperate. These findings can be used to approach Ganges devotee behavior towards scientific/conservation measures of cleaning Ganges. Believers of Ganges's transcendental attributes will cooperate on narratives that

promote the river as a transcendent superiority. On the other hand, less cooperation will occur if the river is seen as a physical or secular body.

Alley's (1998, 2011) field researches highlight the impact of political, scientific and religious narratives on the process of cleaning Ganges. She argues that former Rajiv Gandhi's projects on Ganges cleaning have failed to create a common narrative on the pollution issue. The political, scientific and religious narratives define the word purity/cleanness differently. Religion defines her as a transcendent symbol. She can be dirty (*gandagi* in Hindi) yet pure (Alley, 1998). Meaning that her physical appearance might seem dirty, but she is still a pure spirituality and capable of blessing redemption, spiritual purification to curing physical illnesses.

Alley (2011) argues that the Hindu view of the river Ganges does not detach physical body of the river from the spiritual body. In a fascinating parable she used (1998, pg-306) from Srinivas (1952), this effect is explained. The parable says that one can wear a dirty robe while s/he is pure in morality and spirituality. Srinivas (1952, 105) argues that a robe itself can be physically dirty while ritually pure and vice versa. So, Ganges's physical appearance might be dirty, yet she can be pure ritually and spiritually.

Alley's (1998, 306-310) interviews with the Pandas⁶ show the idioms used in the religious narrative on Ganges. Terms as *saf/gandai*, *svaccha/asvaccha*, *Pavitra/apavitra* are used to express physical cleanness and spiritual purity of Ganges. The first two sets of terms are used to express the physical cleanness or dirtiness of the water. Released wastes from temples, homes, industries and ashes from cremated bodies can dirty the river water. But such physical wastes are not the major concern of the Pandas. They believe that Ganga can wash this physical uncleanness away. But they also emphasize on the necessity of the "aviral dhara" or unimpeded

⁶ Religious tour guides who manage pilgrimage tour of devotees in the holy cities on Ganges.

flow of the river that she can wash these away. Interestingly, it is not emphasized that if the flow decreases, the river will be unable to wash the physical dirt. Rather, the religious narrative is concerned that impeding her flow can anger her, which can manifest in droughts, floods and other natural catastrophes.

The Pandas are more concerned with the spiritual impurity amongst the devotees. Their concern considers corruption, immoral activities and spatial uncleanness. The residents of holy cities as Varanasi agrees upon these issues. Pandas accept that their internal politics and strategic violence to dominate over the pilgrim business can be immoral on occasions. The spatial uncleanness occurs through three actions. Dumping partially cremated or dead bodies without cremation to Ganga, dumping of wastes by residents and pilgrims and using the riverbank for open latrine. Ritually, there are strong dictations in Hindu religious texts to keep physical uncleanness from the sacred spaces (pp-308-309). Not following those directions are signs of moral degeneration. So are the establishment electric crematoriums. The Ganga Action Plan, phase II of 1993 established some electric crematoriums for better management of the dead bodies. The crematoriums were established on the context of increasing cost of woods for cremation. But the Pandas see the crematoriums as a profane action that will degenerate the traditional and ritual practices of cremation (pg-311). They also point to the corruption of the government officials in Ghats management, cleaning waste and facilitating the pilgrimage or cremation of the dead bodies. They claim that the physical uncleanness of Ganga is occurring due to the moral degeneration of the government officials.

Above all, they observe Ganga as the mother figure and use her name as “*Ganga Mai*” (Mother Ganga) or “*Gangaji*” in reverence. Feldhaus (1995) shows the gendered approach on Ganga. Ganga is seen as a selfless mother who cleans the mischiefs and dirtiness of her children. She is seen as the forgiver and provider. So, she will also carry away all the physical dirtiness and moral impurity if the devotees love and worship her through rituals. Her motherhood extends

to her economic providence. Her body is used for transport, resource collection, irrigation and hydropower plants. As a mother would starve to feed her children, Ganga is seen as a mother who selflessly provides all these economic benefits suffering physical loss. In return, she just wants the love and respect of her devotees.

In 1914, the Hindu leadership opposed the irrigation canal plans by the British government because they were unimpressed by the projected benefits (Alley, pg-364). British government planned several masonry canals and a regulated dam on the banks and across of the Ganges to benefit agricultural irrigation. But in the Hindu political consciousness, Ganges holds superiority and transcendence. Regulating her undermines this superiority. Continuous flow or “aviral dhara” is imperative for her transcendental integrity. The British government preferred the secular narrative of economic development. The political narrative of “self-rule” became involved when the British government dismissed the religious protest (Alley, pg-364). For Ganges issue in contemporary time the narrative of self-rule transforms into the right of devotee’s agency over her.

Hydropower and irrigation plants are very complicated issues in current India. Development issues as these carry secular narratives on Ganges. Her water has a sacred value as well as a monetary price. Dr. Vandana Shiva and Jalees K. (2003) elaborates on the distinction between these two. In their words (pg-9);

“The water crisis results from an erroneous equation of value with monetary price. However, resources can often have very high value while having no price. Sacred sites like sacred forests and rivers are examples of resources that have very high value but no price. Oceans, rivers, and other bodies of water have played important roles as metaphors for our relationship to the divine. Diverse cultures have different value systems through which the ethical, ecological, and

economic behavior of society is guided and shaped. Similarly, the idea that life is sacred puts a high value on living systems and prevents their commodification”.

We see a similar narrative of free agency over Ganga relating to nationalist sentiment against foreign involvement in the Tehri Dam movement (Shiva & K. 2003, pg-20). The movement’s Haridwar Declaration used the religious narrative joining with nationalist narrative. On 21st of June 2002, the Sonia Vihar Water Treatment Plant was inaugurated. The project was to treat and supply Ganges water to Delhi. The water would have come from the Tehri dam on Bhagirathi, a tributary of Ganges. It was contracted to a French company named Suez Ondeo-Degremont. The Haridwar Declaration came be on the 60th anniversary of the “Quit India Movement” against the colonial rule. The declaration’s slogan was “Mother Ganga is Not for Sale”. The declaration observes,

“The river Ganga was brought upon the face of earth by Bhagirath through his yagna (prayers) to sustain the existence of life on Earth. The Ganga is now intrinsic to our culture and a part of our heritage and our civilization. Our life and progress over the millennia have been dependent upon the sacred waters of Ganga. We will fight any multinational company trying to take away our rights to life by privatizing Ganga waters”.

Here, government’s contract with the foreign corporation is viewed as an act of oppression and stealing of the people’s agency over the Ganges water.

Luthy (2019) discussed the *Ganga Aarti* and *Bhajan* by Parmarth Niketan Ashram that is campaigning for environmental awareness through religious rituals and narrative. This campaign is supported by the *Namami Gange Program*. She argues that the campaign reaches to more devotees that secular environmental organizations cannot (pg-2). Their narrative is “*Swavcha Ganga*” or clean Ganga and they promote the awareness through religious

symbolism, myths, rituals and narrative. They promote the notion of cleaning the robe of Mother Ganga, similarly as Namami Gange Program does.

Such a narrative strategy by Namami Gange Program has the capacity to reach the religious imagination of the Hindu population. Yet the question of the hydropower and irrigation plans remains. There are religious figures as G.D Agarwal and Swami Artmabodhanand of Matri Sadan Ashrama whose fasting protest has been neglected by the government or been reacted coercively. The political goal for Ganga has an undertone to use the Mother Ganga narrative to justify these plants as her providence. In this study, I will go through campaign contents to study if this hypothesis can be rejected or not.

Chapter Five: Methodology

To press on the religious stimuli of the devotees, the outreach project of the program needs to formulate their project narrative aligning with religious narrative. This alignment can be achieved by the use of religious terms, idioms and phrases and through active narratives on her transcendental attributes. The active narratives would mean actions taken bearing her purifying, providing and forgiving nature as premise.

The aligned narrative can manifest itself through seven narrative strategies. These strategies are;

Table 1: Content Sources

Strategy	Phrases/concepts Used
Veneration to Ganga	<i>“Ganga Ji”, “Ganga Maiya”, etc.</i>
Ganga’s transcendental significance	<i>Gandagi-</i> physical pollution <i>Apavitra-</i> spiritual pollution

Cleaning the dirty robe of Mother Ganga	The process is not cleaning Ganges, rather her exegesis
Faith on her spiritual and physical cleaning attributes	She can clean the trivial dirtiness on her own, people are just following their duty to her
Ganga as the provider	If pleased, Ganga will provide with economic benefits
Facilitating pilgrimage and rituals	Emphasis on rituals and facilitating
Political Publicity	BJP's success, plans, accusation towards former governments and assurance on Ganges development

Not necessarily the program outreach will follow the exact religious narrative all through the sources. Rather, it is more plausible it will try to reach the audience according to religious, social and economic status. So, it is possible that there will be less religious lean while reaching the non-Hindu or secular population. On the other hand, there will be much religious lean while reaching the population of devotees and believers.

For this narrative analysis the study will use media sources that discuss the Namami Gange Program. The data is collected from three types of media sources:

Table 2: Data Sources

Media	Elements	Narrative source
Mainstream newspapers (Reaches the population who are able to read)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Times of India • The Hindu • Hindustan Times • The Indian Express etc. 	News reports, editorials, interviews of officials, government spokesmen and experts

Web (Reaches limited audience, who are majorly educated and have access to internet)	<i>Namami Gange Program</i> related websites, uploaded program posters, pamphlets and handbills in the web.	Discussions, slogans, anthems, protest manifesto, posters etc.
Social Media (Reaches the youth, people with access to internet)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youtube, Facebook and Twitter pages of the program 	Interviews, videos, posts. Comments on posts

From these sources the narratives on issues as development, environmental protection, pollution, transcendence, purity, Muslims, Adivasi rights, dams etc. regarding Ganges will be collected. These narratives will be categorized into three categories. Religious, Environmental (Secular) and Government narratives. Common keywords, supporting statements, referencing and agreeing statements will indicate which two of the narratives confer and with which they are in argument with. Secular concepts and causes promoted by the Environmental leadership and religious and political leadership's position on such issues will manifest in this method also.

Chapter Six: Namami Gange: Bowing Down to Mother Ganges

The flagship program for cleaning Ganga is named *Namami Gange* or "I bow down to Mother Ganga". The name itself signifies the reverence towards the river. What the name does not elaborate, is elaborated in the anthem for the program. The communication project for this program also circulated an anthem for the program in media. For the anthem video In Youtube, there are 569,397 views of the anthem video. 75000 people liked the video while 195 people pressed the unlike button. It is published in the official YouTube channel for the program.

Written in Sanskrit and Hindi, the anthem focuses on the spiritual greatness, providence and asks to be pleased at the devotee (The Indian Express, 2016). Written, composed and performed by the Trichure Brothers (Ramkrishna Mohan and Rajkumar Mohan), the anthem draws heavily on the religious literature and motifs. In their Facebook page, the Trichure brothers note (Trichure Brothers, 2016) that they borrowed chunks of the lyric from the Hindu Religious Scholar, Guru Adi Shankaracharya's verses on Ganga. They also note that the anthem has three parts;

Part 1: Discusses the Glory of Ganges

Part 2: Discusses that Ganga takes care of humanity yet as her children people do not take care of her.

Part 3: Vows to clean her and not litter her

The six minutes twelve seconds anthem's lyric in English as this:

O Goddess! I Come to your shores

And consume your holy water

Please liberate my mind from all uncertainties as I pray to lord Krishna

Oh! Remover of Impurities!

Oh! Ladder of Heaven!

Oh, Goddess Ganga! You are full of glistening waves!

Be Pleased with Me!

I bow to you oh Mother Ganga!

I found the shadow of heaven in the shelter of your bosom

Oh Mother! I experience overflowing love in your every drop

When you wrap arms around the body, you purify the mind too!

Every piece of land you touch is induced with life

Everybody brings only sins to you

Yet you keep flowing accepting all in your embrace

I now know of elixir for I have kissed you

Be pleased with me

I bow to you Mother Ganga!

Your waters are becoming impure (*Khara*).

It feels like your tears

How can I bear to see this as I am your child?

I have accepted you as my mother

It is now my duty to give you the respect that you deserve

I bow to you Mother Ganga!

The anthem is an example of the narrative alignment between religious and political nationalism. Taken from praises written by Adi Shankaracharya, the anthem observes Ganges as a Mother Goddess. It praises her as the purifier of body and mind, asks for spiritual liberation from her. It also calls her as the ladder to the heaven

On the issue of pollution, the anthem uses phrases that express physical uncleanness. Though its translated into English as “impurity” in the last stanza, the Hindi word used for it was “*Khara*” that mean rough or saturated with alkaline substance. So, the impurity expressed here

is physical uncleanness after all. The anthem observes Ganga as the tolerant and self-sacrificing mother to whom the children only bear impurity or pollution. But she accepts all like forgivingly and cleanse all and her water is still as elixir. The anthem asks her to be pleased on her children as she forgives them.

The cleaning of Ganges is observed as a duty of her children. The duty to wipe tears of her eyes. The physical uncleanness brings tears to her eyes. We get an undertone of disrespecting her with the pollution as a mother torn, dirty clothes will disrespect her. So, in the last verse it held as her children's duty to respect her by cleaning her.

The music video shows Ganges's beautiful landscapes, vibrant Indian cultures, dependence of life on her and symbols of nationalism. The video starts with glimpses of clean upstream water from Ganges. It shows trekkers exploring beautiful natural sites. When the singers sing the verse that everyone brings only sins to her, the video shows waste and pollution in Ganga. Pollution is translated as sins here. It gathers dance performers, yogis, yoga-students, Hindu devotees, Muslims, fishermen, students, adventurers and dancers from an array for Indian dance schools. During the verses that vow to clean her and respect her, the video shows the Namami Gange Program flag with multiple shots at the Indian National Flag.

The viewers have commented enthusiastically on this video (Namami Ganga, 2016). BISHAL9100 writes, "...first government working for ma ganga...a river which is vein of India". MANURAJ BAJPAI elaborated on the government's work; "I am so delighted each and every time I listen to this anthem. Bravo Modi ji we are with you please keep it up and guys please please help and support to keep The Holy Ganga clean. At least this government is doing something to revive the cultural spirit of Bharat. Otherwise Congress people have done their best to deteriorate the Ganga (as they never considered her as a mother figure) and damage the Bhartiya cultural assets... Thank You Modi Sir. नमामि नमामि माँ गंगे". SRI SHARMA writes,

“goosebumps, tears, pride, thought provoking, all emotions at a time. Kudos to modiji, nearly half of the population is surviving on the holy ganga and its tributaries. It's every citizens duty to revamp and clean the holy ganges. namami gangey.” Other commenters mentioned that they are proud to be Hindus and Indians. Many have thanked the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, the program and expressed that BJP is the first government who are truly dedicated to clean Ganges.

A video brochure shared on the program's YouTube Channel (7 January 2018) starts with the verse from Bhagabat Gita, where Krishna ranks Ganga above all the rivers. The brochure heavily emphasizes Ganga as Holy, Divine and a mother goddess. It holds her as the nurturer of Indian civilization and as India's lifeline. It promotes the mission as a mission for all Indians and vows in the name of Mother Ganga.

It also quotes the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his commitment towards Ganga, he says, it's not “now or never” rather “now and forever” to clean Ganga. The video observes him as a man with conviction and vision. That he is working for the wholesomeness of Ganga, for both continuous and unpolluted flow.

Then it quotes Nitin Gadkari, the minister of Water Resources, as he observes that for the Government Ganga is a matter of faith. That the government's priority is the continuous and unpolluted flow of the river. He urges the people to join this noble cause with the government.

In the publicity video name Rag Rag Mein Ganga, Episode 6 (March 11,2019), the narrator Rajiv Khandelwal visits Haridwar and Rishikesh, two holy cities on the upper banks of Ganges. He talks to a Hindu priest who's been living in Haridwar from his childhood. The priest mentions Ganga's power of fulfilling devotee's desire in Haridwar. They both emphasize that as the name suggests the city is the gate to reach the god. The priest elaborates that in Haridwar, both people's spiritual and earthly desires are fulfilled. The narrator performs the ritual and

prays for Ganga's cleanness and that she will continue to bless India for eternity. Then the narrator visits volunteers of a nongovernmental organization named the Ganga Brigade. This organization started cleaning waste from Ganga at Haridwar from a few years ago. In conversation with one of their volunteers, The Narrator mentions that he has observed Ganga to have become cleaner near Haridwar in last couple of years. He then urges that a few volunteers are not enough to clean the waste of millions of devotees in Haridwar. So, he points, that the government has established a sewage treatment plant there under Namami Gange Project that can clean up to 27 million liters of water from waste and release back to Ganges per day.

The video then shows interview clips of several devotees, residents and children from Haridwar who describes their opinion about Ganges cleaning. One old man among them says that Haridwar is the place where God manifests, if Ganga here is not clean, then god's manifestation will be hampered. He added, if the people can clean their "conscience" Ganga will become clean on her own. The interviewees in this video used the term *Gandagi* to refer to the pollution in Ganges. Their term for cleanup was *Saf*. Both of these terms refer to the physical pollution and cleanness.

There are numerous other promotional videos and web materials that holds the cleaning of Ganges as the sacred duty of all Indians. Ganges in these materials are promoted as a Mother Goddess and an urge to Indian Hindu Nationalism to clean Ganga was made clear. The cleaning of Ganga is shown as a duty to the mother. The mother is observed to suffer from physical uncleanness while the government pledges to clean her from such condition. Such promotional materials express veneration towards Ganges as a divine figure and emphasize on her transcendental value.

India's prime minister Narendra Modi explained his view on Ganges in several interviews posted in the YouTube channel of the program. In the video name *Maan Ki Baat* (2016), he explained that he reveres Ganges for her spiritual contribution and also emphasizes on the economic contribution. His words were that the Indians earn their livelihood from Ganges. She provides with agriculture, tourism, irrigation, drinkable water and hydropower. He argues that the responsible act would be to take care of her as she takes care of Indians.

In his speech at Varanasi on 14th July 2018 he elaborates on his governments endeavor to take this responsibility. He claims that the Namami Gange Project is cleaning Ganga fast. He added that the government is taking steps that the waste from the cities around will not end up in Ganga. He puts example that his government has undergone 200 projects for this purpose. He mentions the need of Ganges water in the Cement Plants. He claimed that previously the waste management systems in the cement plants were not efficient neither was the supply of water for cement production. He assured that the government is taking steps for both of the issues that they will work efficiently at least for 15 years consecutively.

The Times of India (2018) reported Modi slamming the previous governments for failure to clean Ganga. In his speech at the inauguration ceremony of his governments "One district, one product" program to promote iconic products from different districts of India, he argued that to clean Ganga the authorities need to have clean intentions. He claimed that though the previous governments spent millions in their projects, they did not have a clean intention to clean Ganges. He argued that from the beginning of the Namami Gange project the water of Ganges has become cleaner and biodiversity in the river is flourishing.

Here, he complained from an ideological standpoint. His argument is that the previous governments were not concerned about the health of Ganges. Rather, they were eye shadowing the people in the name of cleaning Ganga. In the comment section of the report, a reader Bharat

Kumar complains that the previous governments were busy with looting the allocated money to clean Ganges. Their focus was corruption, more than conservation.

The Rag Rag Mein Ganga series on the YouTube channel (episode 5&6) publicized the Namami Gange projects patronizing of creating environmental awareness through ritual practices as Ganga Aarti by Parmarth Niketan Ashram. These videos also publicized the promotion of religious tourism through Yoga and Pilgrim destinations. In the second half of episode 6, the video shows the attractive pilgrim and travel destinations in Haridwar and the vow of devotees in the Ganga Aarti ceremony held by the Ashram. In the Aarti, terms as *Svacchata* and *Nirmalta* are used to refer to the physical cleanness of Ganga.

The official Twitter account of the program posts videos and tweets on the progress, fund collection, Ganga-quizzes and government's assurances on cleaning Ganges. It is full of nationalist and devotional vibe towards the river. The twitter account does not only perform for Ganges awareness building, but also building the awareness on the government's intention regarding the river.

From these hand-picked few examples of the publicity of the Namami Gange project we observe the use of religious terminologies, narratives and emphasis on the providence of Ganges. The data show that the publicity project connects to the religious-nationalist sentiment of Indian population.

Chapter Seven: Exploiting the providence of Ganges

After Water Resource minister Nitin Gadkari's declaration that no more hydropower plants will be built on Ganges and her tributaries, the BJP government has taken steps to rejuvenate old hydropower plants (Pal,2018). They sanctioned a 16000-crore Rupees bailout project to the hydropower sector. This large amount of money will be used to commence the construction or

restart stalled hydropower plants. The government is saying with this project, the hydroelectric production will near 10GW. Reviving such powerplants can affect the flow of the river Ganges. Moreover, in inaugurating 2500 km long Ganges container transport system, the Government overruled the expert panel from the Environment ministry (Koshy,2018). The environment ministry proposed for public consultation and a full-fledged environmental impact assessment which was overruled by other ministries.

Such investment from the government shows their tendency to exploit the economic providence of river Ganges. Both of hydropower and waterway projects can hamper the Namami Gange Program. They will contribute to the decrease in the flow of the river and release petroleum pollutants in the water on a larger amount. Yet, the government is focusing on the economic development narrative in these cases.

Religious leaders as G.D Agarwal and Swami Atmabodhanand of Matri Sadan protested these sorts of governmental plans. Swami Atmabodhanand is still carrying on a hunger strike in demand for complete stop of hydropower and dam plants on Ganga and several other issues regarding Ganga (Koshi, 2019). The government reacted to Swami Atmabodhanand similarly as they reacted to G. D Agarwal, tried to force feed him. There are few other ascetics from the same ashram carried out protests against various issues regarding Ganges and received similar treatment from the government.

Such response from the Government expresses their emphasis on cleaning Ganga for developmental purposes. It shows the narratives emphasis on the forgiving and providence attributes of the Mother goddess. The authority is asking for a few favors from the river in return for cleaning her.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Renaming National Clean Ganga Project to *Namami Gange* program signifies BJP's narrative alignment with religious notions. The program starts with a religious and nationalistic reverence towards the river. Terms as *Ganga Mai* and *Ganga Ji* furthers the narrative in the forefront. The emphasis on her motherly nature and the cry to save the mother reaches the religious and nationalist sentiment of the Hindu Indian population. Ganga's purifying attribute is glorified in a sense that promotes the necessity to clean her robe. It resonates the urge to clean the dress of a selfless, caring, forgiving and all providing mother.

Involvement of the Hindu religious leaders in the program strengthens the narrative. Appointment of Uma Bharti as the Minister and election of Aditya Nath as the chief minister furthers the religious-political alignment. Adding to that, the alignment was strengthened by the BJP's election victory in the state levels. Such an alignment is positive for the progression of the narrative and the implementation of the program.

Moreover, Aditya Nath's ban on the tanneries before the magnified *Ardh Kumbh Mela* and the massive expenditure on the occasion send a message to the devotees and the pilgrims on the intention of the BJP government on cleaning Ganges and assurance of facilities to participate in such religious occasions. Declaring this year's *Ardh Kumbh Mela* to hold the status of a *Purna Kumbh Mela* magnifies Aditya Nath's emphasis on the ritualist approach towards Ganga. Himself is a Yogi, a prominent religious figure. His image and actions can reach the devotees through the religious stimuli.

The government's pilgrim tourism and Ganges river transportation projects reaches both religious and economic aspects of the river. Pilgrim tourism development will increase the influx of devotees to the holy places also invite foreign tourism. It will spread the religious significance of these places and preach religious narratives and notions to other cultures. Also,

it will increase the revenue for the government and create business and employment opportunities. It has the potential to increase investments in the pilgrimage sector. With developed water transport system through Ganges and her tributaries, it will increase the accessibility of the devotees to the holy sites, contributing to the increase of the influx.

On the contrary, these development projects have the potential to further the physical problems of Ganges. Increase influx of people will increase the challenges of waste management in the holy sites. Since the religious narrative is less concerned about the physical pollution and emphasize on the spiritual purity of the river, waste management can face significant challenges. Accessibility to Ganges and her tributaries will mean increased number of devotees releasing cremated ashes and untreated dead bodies to the holy rivers. Since, the government is not promoting any narrative to manage the release of dead bodies to the rivers, it will increase the corpse pollution. The government, similarly, to the former Ganga Action Plan, phase II is investing on crematoriums on the riverbank. But in the root level, electric crematoriums mean divergence from the ritual practices for the salvation of the dead. Such religious narratives can translate into the failure of this investment.

Moreover, hydroelectric plants and irrigation projects are continuing in small scales but significant numbers. Usages of the gendered narrative projecting Ganga as the mother finds justification for this continuation. It will mean impediment of the flow of Ganges. As the aligned religious and political narrative sees Ganges as a forgiving and providing transcendental figure, scientifically proposed narrative of threats to her from such projects will not receive much consideration among the populace.

Such a narrative alliance also translates into the negligence towards the environmental activists. Governments coercive actions towards G.D Agarwal's fasting shows the effect of this translation. So does the Government's negligence towards Swami Artmabodhanand's ongoing

hunger strike and negligence to other environmentalist movements. Because, the environmental narrative does not align with this narrative alliance. As a result, even the movements of such religious figures are being neglected.

Government spokesmen as Nitin Gadkari promised to control or stop the hydroelectric power plants. If such promises are formed into actions, the development goals will be hampered. The development of pilgrim tourism and water transport demands more electricity. Decrease in hydropower plants will mean the decrease in the supply of electricity which will pose challenge to such religious-economic projects.

Finally, the *Namami Gange Program* is a similar project as the Ganga Action Plans and National Clean Ganga Project, but with a different narrative alignment. The program has the potential to work to the extent that will benefit religious and economic sectors. The limited success till date of the program shows influence of the allied narrative.

On the other hand, the program faces the similar root level challenges as the former projects, with a potential challenge of stimulating non-cooperative behavior observed previously. The increased involvement of the devotees in the program, that can promote cleaning Ganga, can also hamper the physical health of the river as before. After all, if millions of individual thinks that Mother Ganga will forgive their small uncleanness, the mother will find it hard to clean herself.

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