

Our biggest source of water is dead

DOWN THE DRAIN Despite thousands of crores spent on cleaning the Yamuna, it has only become more polluted

Mallica Joshi

mallica.joshi@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Civilisations come up along rivers and Delhi is no different. But if

you landed in Delhi and went around looking for its river, you will be in for a surprise.

Delhi hides its river and blocks access to it.

Its residents look away, usually from inside the coaches of a Metro, when the river comes into sight. The black, stinking water that flows in the Yamuna is uninviting and ominous. The pollution figures show that Yamuna

is no better than a drain.

Despite thousands of crores spent on various projects to clean the river, Yamuna, over the years, has just become more and more polluted.

In February, 2014, a parliamentary panel noted that the Yamuna seemed dirtier despite around ₹6,500 crore having been spent on it. The panel said the delay in setting up interceptor sewers along the major drains of the city was among the major reasons for its high pollution levels.

So, what does a dirty Yamuna mean to people living in Delhi, the mega-city?

Apart from killing an entire ecosystem — which is disastrous for any habitation — Yamuna's pollution affects Delhiites

in various other tangible ways.

A report published by The Energy Research Institute released in 2012 showed that vegetables grown along the river contained high levels of nickel, manganese and lead. The study stated that the dumping of untreated industrial effluent and sewage into the river contaminated the riverbed and even the ground water in areas near the river.

In 2012, reports claimed that the toxic fumes emanating from the Yamuna were causing serious health issues, especially those related to the upper respiratory tract. Doctors from the area have reported a consistent increase in the number of people coming to them with upper res-

piratory tract infections. The untreated sewage and industrial waste dumped in the river leads to expulsion of hydrogen sulphide and ammonia gases.

And, it is not just your health that takes a beating. The gases have also been corroding air conditioning and refrigeration units in areas such as Mayur Vihar. Even Delhi Metro's blue line has witnessed corrosion in its AC plants in stations along the river.

The Okhla Bird Sanctuary, too, has not been spared from the pollution and the construction on the river's floodplains. The area, which has been a hotspot for birdwatchers since 1970s, has seen a sharp decline in the number of avian

visitors over the years.

A field visit by activists Manoj Misra and Bhim Singh Rawat from the South Asia Network on Dams Rivers and People found that unseasonal rains in March this year had managed to clean up the Yamuna marginally but, overall, there was no change in the pollution figures or pollution activities.

"It is also clear... that more finances, more infrastructures and more drains by themselves are not going to help unless there is a fundamental change in the governance of rivers, urban water sector and industrial pollution sector, to make them participatory and accountable," a report on the visit read.

YAMUNA IN DELHI IS MOSTLY DOMESTIC SEWAGE AND INDUSTRIAL WASTE

Ritam Halder

ritam.halder@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Every time you cross over one of the massive bridges built across Yamuna, a familiar stench hits you. The culprit is the filth and muck that is generated by Delhiites which flows into what was once a river.

What was once a river has turned into a massive drain, say experts.

The Central Pollution Control Board, in a report earlier this year, stated the Yamuna is almost dead and even as the government single-mindedly pushes to clean the Ganga it overlooks the filthy river at its doorstep. It's not just the Yamuna, whose water quality is as bad as sewage, but many rivers across the country are reeling under an unprecedented load of urban waste and industrial effluents, says the report.

The Yamuna is choking to death primarily because untreated waste is flowing into it from several cities along its banks in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. The river's contamination starts in Haryana and continues in Delhi, ultimately making it almost invisible in Uttar Pradesh where it merges with the Ganga at Allahabad.

Manoj Misra of Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan, an NGO, says the Yamuna in Delhi can't be called a water body.

"Between Hathnikund in Haryana and Etawah in Uttar Pradesh, there is no river. The Yamuna is deliberately turned into a large sewage drain. In some parts of this 600-km stretch, there is no water, just filth. Barely 30 km downstream of the Hathnikund barrage the river starts drying up. What we see in Delhi is domestic sewage and industrial waste. For a healthy river, 70% of its water should be inside the river," Misra said.

What one sees in Delhi's stretch of Yamuna is mostly untreated waste. The Yamuna in Delhi is barely 2% of the river's length but contributes to 76% of the pollution load.

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MANOJ MISRA, convener Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan



■ The black, stinking water that flows in the Yamuna is uninviting and ominous. Tests show that the water in the river that was once Delhi's lifeline is no better than that in a drain.

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