

# Coverage of Ganga Pollution Issue by Daily Newspapers in Garhwal (Uttarakhand): A case Study

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## ABSTRACT

River pollution is one of the main pollution problems in the world. Though there is a universal reverence to water in almost all of the major religions of the world. The purity of such water, the belief in its known historical and unknown mythological origins, and the inaccessibility of remote sources, elevates its importance even further. In India, river Ganga is treated with such reverence. It has been India's river of faith, devotion and worship still today it is one of the most polluted rivers not only in India but in the world too.<sup>1</sup> This is important that media can play responsible role towards this issue. Media cannot cure pollution in the river but can spread awareness and educate people about the issue. Print media has always been the principle source for people to get information about any environmental issues because it interprets their scientific aspects that a common man can easily understand. Anders Hansen said, "The way in which we make sense of the environmental threats which face human-kind is greatly conditioned by a powerful and omnipresent set of electronic and printed messages – the mass media."<sup>2</sup> Pollution in river Ganga is as same as in plains. The presumption that Ganga is clean in the hills and it gets polluted when it enters in the plains of Uttar Pradesh, is not true. According to a study (2011) by the Uttarakhand Environmental Protection and Pollution Control Board, the present level of Coliform in this river at Haridwar has reached 5,500 mpn/100ml whereas even below 5,000 mpn/100 ml, water can only be used for agriculture. This study is a case study done on Daily newspapers published from Uttarakhand. This study analyzed the aspects and context of news or stories related to Ganga pollution issue. Using qualitative method of content analysis four national newspapers (Two Hindi language and two English language) published from Uttarakhand are analyzed during one year period.

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## 1. Introduction

Ganga pollution issue is a burning environmental issue in India as river Ganga is the most sacred as well as one of the most polluted rivers in India. The Government of India has spent billions of Rupees on Ganga cleaning projects. Despite government and private programmes have been implemented and some are currently undergoing for cleaning the Ganga, the situation is becoming worse day by day. Ganga action plan phase 1 and phase 2 (GAP), the first national level cleaning project of the river Ganga, has failed due to lack of proper planning and dedication of people and the Government of India. In fact, the river is more polluted than the time when the Ganga Action Plan was first initiated by India's Late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1986. According to RK Jaiswal, "The Ganga Action Plan is not just a government plan that has been prepared for the PWD or government officials alone. It is a plan for all the people of India; one in which they can come and participate."<sup>3</sup> In 2014, the Government of India started new Ganga cleaning project "Namami Gange". In this project, the government focused mainly on the role of media. Media attention is must for promoting the project as well as informing public and make public participation successful on this issue. Namami Gange project is being implemented under eight main pillars of cleaning the Ganga. These pillars are sewerage treatment infrastructure, river-front development, river-surface cleaning, bio-diversity, afforestation, public awareness, industrial effluent monitoring and Ganga Gram. Media plays an

important role in public awareness through publishing or broadcasting informative news or stories on the issue. That is why the Government of India is focusing on utilization of media to promote public participation. Print media has an important role in collecting and disseminating information related to an issue. River Ganga in the Uttarakhand state of India is also suffering from the problem of pollution like other parts in the country; and newspapers of Uttarakhand raise this issue from time to time. Ganga pollution issue is one of the main environmental issues for them which they perennially have been focusing on. This case study on the coverage of newspaper dailies on the issue of Ganga pollution issue in Garhwal region reveals the pattern of news publishing by selected dailies. The pattern a newspaper follows while publishing stories on such issues is important. Pattern includes aspects the newspapers prefer to highlight in their stories, like political, environmental, cultural or social aspect of the issue. This paper analyzes if newspapers publish only political statements on the issue or they raise important facts about the issue as well. This paper also includes that published stories on the issue are of national interests or local interests. Although Ganga pollution issue is the subject of national concern, it is automatically appreciated and valued by local people when covered by newspapers in the local context. This is a case study of coverage of the issue of Ganga pollution by national level daily newspapers published in Uttarakhand during the period January 2015 to December 2015. This was the year when central government's ambitious Ganga cleaning

project 'Namami Gange' started. Through this study, an analysis of Ganga pollution related news published in selected dailies has been done by using qualitative method of content analysis, a media research technique for objective and systematic description of the manifest content of communication. This study also analyzes the aspects and contexts of published news on Ganga pollution issue. When we read any news, we first realize its nature as it gives us political social or religious feel. Selections of words, contents and main focus point of any issue or occasion decide the nature of any story whereas when a newspaper gives space to news in national or international news page decides the context of news.

## 2. Objectives

1. To know the coverage of news or items on Ganga pollution issue through daily newspapers published in Uttarakhand.
2. To analyze different aspects of news or items related to Ganga pollution issue covered by daily newspapers.
3. To analyze the context of news or items related to Ganga pollution issue covered by daily newspapers.

## 3. Area of study: Garhwal (Uttarakhand):

Uttarakhand separated from Uttar Pradesh as the 27th state of the Indian Union on November 9, 2000. Bounded by Uttar Pradesh in the south, Nepal in the east, Himachal Pradesh in the west and China in northeast, the state declared Dehradun as its interim capital.<sup>4</sup> Uttarakhand is divided in two administrative regions, Garhwal and Kumaun; and this study has been conducted in Garhwal. The state is consisted of thirteen districts. Seven out of these thirteen districts are in the Garhwal region. These are Dehradun, Haridwar, Pauri Garhwal, Rudra Prayag, Tehri Garhwal, Chamoli and Uttarkashi. As far as literacy rate is concerned, according to census 2011, it is 78.82 per cent where 70 per cent females and 87 per cent males are literate. District-wise literacy shows that Dehradun is the most literate with 85.24 per cent literacy rate while Haridwar is the least with 74.62 per cent.<sup>5</sup> This newly state has treasurers of natural resources like water and forest. Keeping these favorable conditions in mind, it becomes important to know the role of media as part of development in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand.<sup>6</sup>

## 4. Methodology

This a study of publication of news and stories on Ganga pollution issue with pictures in four national Hindi and English language daily newspapers published in the Garhwal region.

### 4.2 Selection of Sample:

The study applied purposive sampling method in selection of newspapers published from Garhwal in Uttarakhand for content analysis. The selected newspapers are from Hindi and English language; as Hindi language newspapers are the highest published in number as well as circulation, followed by newspapers published in English. According to data by Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI), there are total 399 dailies (newspapers) in different languages published from Uttarakhand. Out of these dailies, there are 322 in Hindi while

21 in English.<sup>5</sup> Newspapers published in other languages are not so popular as in Hindi and English. In the category of Hindi language, 'Amar Ujala' and 'Dainik Jagran', while in the category of English, 'The Times of India' and 'Hindustan Times' were selected for content analysis.

### 4.3 Selection of contents:

For impartiality in content analysis, the selected newspapers published during a period of one year (from May 2014 to April 2015) were analyzed. Maintaining the objectivity of the study, every page of the select newspapers and every news/article on Ganga pollution issue was included for the content analysis.

#### 4.3.1 Coverage of Ganga pollution issue in local context: Case study of four newspapers

Though Uttarakhand suffers many environmental related issues and Ganga pollution is one of them. When it comes to cover pollution issue generally newspapers take news from the national news agencies. Normally, these agencies cover the issue on national level. So, it becomes difficult for local public to correlate this information with their local environment or surroundings. If these news items have any relevance to people, then people take interest to read those otherwise it is left as a national issue for the rest of the country. Whenever this issue is covered by newspapers in the local context, people read them carefully, whether they are political, environmental or any other type.

#### 4.3.2 Coverage of various aspects of Ganga pollution issue: Case study of four newspapers

Ganga pollution issue is a serious environmental issue with different aspects like environmental, scientific, religious, political, etc. Though the newspapers should highlight its environmental and scientific aspects the most, this is the issue on which every political party has been playing tricks for many years. The newspapers have been publishing this aspect as well. This study analyzes the aspects that are mainly covered by newspapers published from Garhwal.

## 5. Analysis of Newspapers

### 5.1 Case Study of Hindi Newspapers: Amar Ujala:



Figure 1. News/Stories published in Amar Ujala

Amar Ujala and Dainik Jagran being the most circulated newspapers in Uttarakhand have high penetration in the rural areas too. Due to this reason, the issue in the far flung areas has also come under well media coverage. Now traditional knowledge and some other untouched facts related to the issue have got the route to come out through these

newspapers. Covering the Ganga pollution issue in the local context by media not only gives value to the issue in local, but also creates awareness in the public to protect their local environment. Amar Ujala mainly focused on the local context of the issue than the national context, i.e. that most published stories were related to places in Uttarakhand. This newspaper published a total of 116 stories on the issue. Most published news on the newspaper covered by local and national journalists of newspaper. Few stories were also taken from news agencies. Such news stories like 'Udgam Me Hi Atak Rahi Ganga Ki Sanse' is a perfect example of public involvement in spreading awareness through their work. This story was also published by other newspapers, but Amar Ujala gave it a good space and published on the front page. In the upcoming issues, Amar Ujala did follow up the story on central government's ambitious Ganga cleaning project 'Namami Gange' step by step, both in the local and national contexts. Stories like 'Ganga ko niramal aviral banane par manthan', 'Ganga ke liye Rs.2037 crore ki Namami Gange yojana', 'Nigrani ke liye banegi Ganga chauwkian', 'Har roj Ganga me girta hai 3766 million litre kachara' are some follow up stories of Namami Gange project. The newspaper started a segment named 'Nirmal Ganga' under which it published various stories related to environmental aspects of the issue. An Interview article 'Sabhi nadiyo ke sanrakshan ki niti kyu nahi' of Anil Joshi focused not only on river Ganga but on every polluted

river in India. In a graphic note titled 'Nadiyo me pradushan', data of high pollution level in other rivers was published in the Amar Ujala. This shows that newspapers not only raised the issue of pollution in Ganga but also in other rivers of the country. Another important story titled 'Ganga tat par nahi roke ja sakte dharmik karmkand' was published highlighting the religious aspects and stubbornness of saints and priests. Another story titled 'Rajya me alag se banega Ganga action plan' was mainly focused on starting a new Ganga cleaning project according to the state's circumstances. Amar Ujala gave this story really a substantial space. Pollution in Ganga's tributaries is the main cause of Ganga pollution in Garhwal. Amar Ujala took this seriously and gave it a good space in its news 'Ganga Ke Liye Sahayak Nadiyo Ki Swachchhata Jaruri'. Though this was a political news, the newspaper did not cover this as it is, and presented it in a social or environmental context. Amar Ujala published nineteen big articles, features and interviews on the issue like 'Waqt Ki Kahani Aur Ganga Ka Pani', 'Ganga ke sath Gomati Aur Gandak Bhi', 'Atah Hua Ganga Ka Udgam', 'Maa Ganga Ka Gaurav Lautana Meri Prathmikata', 'Ganga Ke Liye Bhagirath Jaisa Tap Tyag', 'Judne Ko Betab Hain Ek Sanskriti Ke Asankhya Bikhare Kan', etc. Although it was the time when Namai Gange project had started, Amar Ujala gave prioritized importance to the environmental aspects of the issue, as it gave only the second importance to the political aspects.

#### Dainik Jagran:



Figure2. News/Stories published in Dainik Jagran

Availability of newspapers has direct relationship with benefits of the society. It means greater the number of newspapers in an area, greater the coverage of the local issues would naturally be. Giving space to the issue of Ganga pollution in local context by newspapers is an excellent motivating factor in all kinds of development. The coverage of the newspaper shows how the reporters have nose for news in their surroundings. Dainik Jagran raised the issue very well. It gave more space to the issue compared to the other three newspapers. It published total 269 stories on this. Though the newspaper touched all aspects of the issue and gave them a huge space, it specially focused on environmental and scientific aspects. This newspaper started a segment 'Ganga Tera Pani Rahe Amrit'. Under this, a 3,000 km. 'Ganga Jagran Yatra' also started from Devprayag (Uttarakhand) to Ganga Sagar (Bengal). This Yatra covered 24 cities along the river. 24

Ganga arti, 15 musical programs and 10 conferences were included in this segment. Through some articles like 'Nadiyo Ko Bachane Ke Liye Yaad Rakhni Hongi Panch Baaten' 'Door Karna Hoga Anmanapan', 'Prabhavi Nahi Rahi Koi Pahal' 'Gang Ke Dhime Bahaw Se Vaigyanik Chintit' it explained the scientific terminology of the issue in simple language. No other newspaper highlighted this aspect so beautifully. 'Khatre Me Ganga Ke Jaleeya Jeev Jantu' and 'Jalcharon Ke Liye Abhishapt Hoti Nadiya' articles focused on hitherto untouched side-effects of the issue. These articles flagged the issue of effects of pollution on organisms living in the Ganga and other rivers too. Through some articles, the newspaper touched the cultural, religious, mythological and historical aspects of the river as well as the pollution issue. Article titled 'Ganga – Ek Jeevan Rekha Ka Sanrakshan' was the overall description of the pollution level in the river during different weather

conditions. Article titled 'Sanskar Aur Sanskriti Ki Samwahak' focused on cultural and religious aspect of river Ganga. No other newspaper published such an article based on purely mythological part of the river and related issues. 'Ganga Sirf Nadi Nahi Sabhyata Ki Pahachan Hai', an interview based article of Sundar Lal Bahuguna, gave historical information of the river. This article narrated the role of the river in the development of a civilization in India. The newspaper equal weightage to the issue in both local and national contexts, as it gave more space to the issue compared to the other three newspapers. One of the important causes of Ganga pollution in

Uttarakhand is polluted rainy small or local rivers and waterfalls joining the river. These waterfalls or rainy small local rivers are respectively called 'Gadera' and 'Gaad' in the local language. Uttarakhand government had started 'Sparsh Ganga' program for solving this problem but it never cared about an organized implementation of the program. An article titled 'Bina Sparsh Ke Hi Rah Gai Sparsh Ganga' highlighted such an important cause of the pollution in the river. Articles, 'Bhagirathi Me Hi Ghul Rahi Gandagi' and 'Mayake Me Hi Badrang Ho Rahi Ganga' focused on pollution in the river's origin, i.e. Gangotri (Uttarkashi).

**5.2 Case Study of English Newspapers – Hindustan Times:**



Figure 3. News/Stories published in Hindustan Times

Although both the selected English newspapers raised environmental aspects of the issue, the gap between political and environmental aspects was little. Also, they published only few stories as compared to the selected Hindi newspapers. Hindustan Times published sixteen stories and The Times of India published thirty three stories. Although English language is not so popular in remote areas of the state and English newspapers have limited circulation in big cities, Hindustan Times mainly focused on the local context of the issue. The only editorial in the newspaper titled 'Time to Turn the Tide' focused on importance of the Ganga cleaning project, although it had a political aspect. All stories of local context as well as the national contexts were covered by the newspaper journalists or collected from newspaper's bureau office. Article titled 'Dredging the Ganga Will Upset Its Ecosystem' showed

environmental concern and told the readers about the drawbacks of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government plan to dredge sections of the Ganga from Allahabad to Haldia. Article titled 'Don't Water Down Our River Cleaning Efforts' raised the issue of pollution in other rivers of country. It is a fact that Ganga will not be clean without cleaning its tributaries or those rivers which meet the Ganga in its journey to Ganga Sagar. News titled 'Ganga Cleaning Not A Hindutva Project – Ramesh' had a political aspect which was also covered by other newspapers but Hindustan Times gave it a good space to this statement. The newspaper in its huge feature-cum-article titled 'Unholy Mess' gave the overall facts, history, main causes of pollution in the local as well as the national context with graphics. It covered two full pages of the newspaper.

**Times of India:**



Figure 4. News/Stories published in Times of India

Like the other three newspapers, The Times of India also focused the local context of the issue. Most of the stories of the newspaper were follow ups on the 'Namami Gange' project. Editorial titled 'It is A Burning Issue' focused on the worsening situation and advised that the issue should be cleared at first priority. The newspaper also published a feature titled 'A Tribute to the Ganga' covering a special musical program organized on the Ganga issue. The program was organized by The Times of India group at Haridwar. The newspaper published a huge article with such facts that although Rs. 20,000 crore have been spent during Ganga Action Plan Phase-1 and Phase-2, Ganga is still not clean. The article was titled 'Rs. 20,000 cr. Spent, Ganga Still A Flowing Mess'. The newspaper also published an article-cum-news titled 'Will an NDA Govt Focus on Rivers with a Separate Ministry?', and predicted that a separate ministry would come in form if the NDA came to power. Only this newspaper covered this story collected by its own sources. No other newspaper published such stories.

## 6. Conclusion

Although Ganga pollution issue in Uttarakhand is a low priority as compared to other states, all Hindi as well as English language dailies prominently covered the issue. It was the time when central government started the 'Namami Gange' project. The stories published in the dailies were not just

follow-up stories of the project and they all focused on environmental aspect of the issue. Although political statements and political occasions on the issue were more often, the newspapers didn't cover those political stunts. Moreover, they twisted them to make stories of environmental interest. However, after the environmental aspects, the political aspect of the issue was highlighted the most. No other newspaper except Dainik Jagran prominently focused on the scientific aspects of the issue. Both the selected Hindi newspapers, Amar Ujala and Dainik Jagran raised the issue from various aspects but the English newspapers stuck only on environmental and political aspects of the issue. All the selected newspapers are national level dailies; so they equally cover issues of national and international interests. They are published from Uttarakhand, therefore they raise local issues as well. Hindi newspapers having huge circulation as compared to English newspapers may be the reason for them publishing more stories and allocating more space on the Ganga pollution issue. Generally all the newspapers take some national and the local context news from agencies but this study has shown that all newspapers collect the stories on Ganga pollution issue through their own sources like their local correspondents, bureau office, their own network, etc. Only English newspapers collected some stories of national interest from news agencies.

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