

# Swatcha Ganga

# Chhatra Sangam

Tulsi Ghat, Varanasi

18 January 2002



---

An initiative of the Sankat Mochan Foundation, Varanasi and Oz GREEN, Australia,  
supported by the Australian Government International Development Agency – AusAID.

---

# Swatcha Ganga Chhatra Sangam 2002

## Background

---

Over 290 people from 10 Benares schools gathered at Tulsi Ghat on Friday 18 January 2002 for the inaugural student environmental congress - "**Swatcha Ganga Chhatra Sangam**". Together they examined the causes of the deterioration of water quality of River Ganga at Benares and prepared plans to take action to reverse these trends.

An initiative of the Sankat Mochan Foundation (Varanasi) and Oz GREEN (Australia), the student congress was the first of its kind in Benares. The Sankat Mochan Foundation and Oz GREEN have been jointly executing an environmental education program for the past 10 years. Under the joint banner of these two not-for-profit organizations, the **Swatcha Ganga Environmental Education Centre** was established at Tulsi Ghat in February 1998. This centre has conducted extensive programs with schools and villages.

The congress was made possible through the support of SMF, Oz GREEN and generous donations from the Australian public and the Australian Government Overseas Development Agency (AusAID).

## Executive Summary

---

The inaugural *Swatcha Ganga Chhatra Sangam* was held on the banks of River Ganga at Tulsi Ghat on Friday 18 January 2002. Prof Veer Bhadra Mishra, President of the Sankat Mochan Foundation, inaugurated the program, accompanied by Dr DK Sundd (SMF Executive Director) and Dr SK Mishra (SMF Honorary Director). The congress was facilitated by Colin Lennox and Sue Lennox from Oz GREEN, and Ashok Pandey, Rajesh Mishra, Rohit Joshi and Dr SK Mishra from the Sankat Mochan Foundation. Dr Kamla Chowdhry (Delhi, Vikram Sarabhai Foundation & Earth Charter Council) and Dr Linda Hess (USA, Religious Teacher, Stanford University) were honoured guests at the congress.

Students from Tulsi Vidya Niketan (Lanka), Gopi Radha Girls School (Ravindrapuri), St Joseph's School (Shivpur), Bal Vishwavidyalaya (Prahlad Ghat), Achyut Patvardhan Balika School (Sarai Mohana Village) and Krishnamurti Foundation Rural Institute (Raj Ghat Fort) gave presentations to the congress about their concerns and first hand observations of the factors causing pollution of River Ganga at Benares. Other participating schools included Adarsh Bhartiya Junior High School (Raghnathpur Village), WH Smith School (Sigra), Sunbeam English School (Bhagwanpur) and Little Flower House (Kakarmatta - DLW).

Students identified priority issues of concern including the impact of:

- sewage pollution in the religious bathing areas
- sewage pollution on people's health,
- disposal of solid waste such as flower malas, plastic bags and garbage,
- disposal of dead bodies,
- people washing clothes, buffaloes and themselves

The participants developed a positive vision for the future of river Ganga through a guided visualisation. Students then worked together in school groups to develop action plans for what the school would do to address the pollution of the river. These plans focussed on raising awareness about the serious condition of Ganga, especially the impacts of sewage pollution and disposal of solid waste. Dr SK Mishra gave a short presentation about the work of the Sankat Mochan Foundation. The program was completed when students made pledges about what they would do for Gangaji and lit candles down by the river.

## Field Trip

---

Prior to the congress 5 schools were invited to take part in a field trip to enable them to make observations on the river and prepare presentations for the congress. Each school was allocated a section of river to ensure the entire length of the river would be covered in the presentations. Schools and their allocated river section were:

School	Section of River Ganga
Tulsi Vidya Niketan	Nagwa Nala to Shivala Ghat
Gopi Radha Girls College	Shivala Ghat to RP Ghat
St Josephs School	RP Ghat to Manikarnika Ghat
Bal Vishwavidyalaya	Manikarnika Ghat to Khirkiya Nala
Achyut Patvardhan Balika School (Sarai Mohana) and Krishnamurti Foundation Rural Institute	Khirkiya Nala to Sehuaar

The students were split into two groups and boarded boats with Tulsi Vidya Niketan, Gopi Radha Girls College and St Josephs School boating from Nagwa Nala to Manikarnika Ghat, and Bal Vishwavidyalaya and the Sarai Mohana schools boating from Manikarnika Ghat to Sehuaar. Students used prepared sheets (see attachments) to record their observations as they passed along the river.

After making their observations students returned to either the Swatcha Ganga Environmental Education Centre (SGEEC), Tulsi Ghat or remained on their boat, to prepare a presentation of their observations. They were assisted by their teachers and Mr RK Mishra, Mr R Joshi and Mr C Lennox at SGEEC and Mr AK Pandey, Mr D Tiwari, Mr AK Dubey and Ms S Lennox on the boat.

## Schools Participating in Chhatra Sangam

---

Achyut Patvardhan Balika School (Sarai Mohana Village),  
Adarsh Bhartiya Junior High School (Ragunathpur Village),  
Bal Vishwavidyalaya (Prahlaad Ghat),  
Gopi Radha Girls School (Ravindrapuri),  
Krishnamurti Foundation Rural Institute (Raj Ghat Fort),  
Little Flower House (Kakarmatta - DLW),  
St Joseph's School (Shivpur),  
Sunbeam English School (Bhagwanpur),  
Tulsi Vidya Niketan (Lanka),  
WH Smith School (Sigra).

## People Involved

---

Prof Veer B Mishra – Mahantji (SMF)  
Prof Shantanu K Mishra (SMF)  
Dr Devendra K Sundd (SMF)  
Gopal Pandey Snr (SMF)  
Colin Lennox (Oz GREEN)  
Sue Lennox (Oz GREEN)  
Ashok K Pandey (SMF)  
Rajesh K Mishra (SMF)  
Rohit Joshi (SMF)  
Dukhi Tiwari (SMF)  
Rana Tiwari (SMF)  
Sunandan Bhattacharya (SMF)

Gopal Pandey (SMF)  
Anupan Dubey (SMF)  
Ajay Pandey (SMF)  
Vinay Pandey (SMF)  
Shivanath (SMF)  
Raj Kapur (SMF)  
Richa Bhargawa - Program Anchor (St Josephs)

### Special Guests

Dr Kamla Chowdhry (Earth Charter Council)  
Dr Linda Hess (Stanford University, USA)

## Program

---

Registration	09:00am
Program Anchor: Richa Bhargawa (St Josephs Convent School)	
Inauguration by Prof. Veer Bhadra Mishra Introduction by Sue and Colin Lennox Making Rain activity	09:30am
Presentation by Schools – Pollution Impacts on River Ganga at Varanasi	10:00am
Going Dotty activity Tea Break	11.00am
Small Group Discussion – Identify priority issues of concern	11.20 am
Visioning	12.00 noon
Lunch Break	12.30 pm
Schools prepare action plans	01.00pm
Presentation by Schools – Action Plans	02:45pm
Swatch Ganga Campaign - Prof SK Mishra & Prof SN Upadhyaya	03.45pm
Candle lighting and pledge at River Ganga	04:00pm
Tea	04.20 pm

## Inauguration

---

The first Swatcha Ganga Chhatra Sangam was inaugurated by Prof Veer Bhadra Mishra (Mahantji) – President of the Sankat Mochan Foundation. Mahantji welcomed guests, gave a brief presentation about the urgency for us all to work together to care for Ganga, with the knowledge that the spiritual, cultural and public health of Varanasi is highly threatened by the ongoing sewage pollution of river Ganga in Benares. Mahantji said that Kashi is a light pillar of culture. Sewage is still being discharged into Ganga due to lack of infrastructure, created in the process of its urbanization. Ganga water quality should not be defined on the scale of present scientific standards. There should be separate standards for it. People with Ganga are the messengers of our culture. We have to protect them. “Swatcha Ganga Chhatra Sangam” aiming to protect Ganga from pollution is a big effort, Mahantji said and mother Ganga will provide necessary strength to complete this great task.

## Making Rain

---

This was a warm up activity designed to be fun and help the students to relax at the start of the congress. Students were guided through a series of actions that collectively made the sound of a rainstorm passing through the meeting. Following the directions of the facilitator, students on the edge of the meeting began rubbing their hands together. As the facilitator moved from one side to the other more students joined in until all students were rubbing their hands together. This simulated the sound of wind beginning in the distance and moving through the meeting. Returning to the original side the facilitator repeated this with students this time clicking their fingers, simulating the sound of light rain.

This was repeated with the students slapping their thighs, simulating the sound of heavy rain. Progressively the actions were reversed, with students returning to clicking their fingers, then rubbing their hands and finally being silent. All agreed that they could hear the sound of a rainstorm.

## **Presentations by Students**

---

The first ever "**Chhatra Sangam**" organised at the premises of Sankat Mochan Foundation on 18th January witnessed the presentations being made by the students of Tulsi Vidya Niketan, Gopi Radha, St. Joseph, Bal Vishwavidyalaya, Krishnamurti Foundation School and Sarai Mohana Village School. A boat trip from Nagwa to Varuna was organised by the Swatcha Ganga Environmental Education Center a couple of days prior to Chhatra Sangam, in which these schools made their own observations about Ganga, the way the people relate to the river and the existing pollution sources.

### **Tulsi Vidya Niketan**

Students reported observing the following in the River Ganga section Nagwa – Shivala.

- Discharge of raw sewage through Nagwa Nala
- Shivala Nala had ceased to flow by 10.30pm but is well known to discharge large quantities of raw sewage every morning from 7am – 10 am.
- Defecation all along the bank of Ganga near Ravidas Park
- Disposal of garbage, plastic bags and flower garlands into the river
- People using soaps to wash themselves
- Laundering of clothes using detergents and soaps
- Cattle wallowing
- Many people were taking holy dip.
- Swatcha Ganga volunteers cleaning up flowers and plastic

Bathing alone does not contribute any pollution but we should not wash our dirty clothes at the bank of Ganga. Ganga is the largest source for drinking water, they said.

### **Gopi Radha Balika Vidyalaya**

Students from Gopi Rhada School reported their observations in the River Ganga from Shivala – RP Ghat.

- Discharge of sewage at RP Ghat
- Use of soaps and detergents by people washing clothes and themselves
- Disposal of dead animal bodies into the river
- Cremation of dead bodies and placing of ashes into Ganga at Harishchandra Ghat
- Disposal of plastics, flower garlands and garbage
- Many people were taking holy dip, especially at Dashashwamedh Ghat

They also saw many people taking holy dip and saying their prayers, taking holy sips of Ganga water and collecting water in small pots. One student reported that once she was taking a holy dip in Ganga and she observed filth floating on water, she then pointed it out. There was a Sadhu who was also taking a holy dip nearby said "Daughter the day is not far away when Ganga will disappear. Already the glacier at Gangotri is retreating at more than 5 metres a year because of the impacts of global warming."

### **St. Joseph**

Students of this school reported on the section of Ganga from RP Ghat to Manikarnika Ghat. They said in Sangam that Ganga and its ghats are the point of attraction for millions of people. Even the Moghul Emperor had said that the water of Ganga is like nectar. The citizens of Varanasi are responsible for the pollution being caused in Ganga due to drains discharging sewage into it.

- Discharge of sewage
- Disposal of domestic waste
- Dumping of garbage
- Disposal of flowers & plastics
- Many people were taking holy dip.

## Bal Vishwavidyalaya & K.F.I Sarai Mohana

The students reported on their observations in the section of the river from Manikarnika Ghat to Sarai Mohan Village – upstream of the confluence with the Varuna River. They reported that by the time river Ganga reaches the downstream section it has become black in colour and has a very bad smell. They observed bubbles of gas coming up out of the water in the section of river from Khirkiya to Sarai Mohana. They tested the water at Sarai Mohana and found that the level of dissolved oxygen was zero.

- At Manikarnika Ghat there were dead bodies being cremated and huge piles of wood were stockpiled at the river edge
- Raw sewage flowing into Ganga at Khirkiya Nala and Raj Ghat
- Four dead animal bodies floating in the water
- Hundreds of buffalo being washed and wallowing in the water
- Disposal of plastic bags and garbage into the river
- Disposal of flowers
- People washing their clothes using soap and detergents
- People washing themselves using soap
- Many people taking holy dip and praying in Gangaji
- Swatcha Ganga volunteers cleaning up flowers and plastic

Students said pollution in Ganga is very harmful for everyone. We should take proper steps to prevent it. People should be educated.

## Small Group Discussions

---

The first session was followed by a very interesting going dotty activity, in which all the students from different schools were divided into five groups by placing a coloured star type sticker on their forehead. In all five different colours (red, green, blue, silver, golden) of stickers were used. Then they were asked to form groups of students bearing similar colour of star on their forehead. Each group then listed the issues causing pollution in Ganga and then from that list they prioritised their three major concerns about pollution in Ganga. Students then reported their discussion to the Chhatra Sangam.

Group	Priority Issues of Concern
Red	1. Sewage pollution , 2. Industrial pollution, 3. Plastic bags being thrown in river
Golden	1. Industrial pollution 2. Plastic bags 3. Throwing dead bodies
Green	1. Sewage Pollution 2. Throwing dead bodies 3. Toileting on the ghats
Silver	1. Sewage pollution 2. Throwing of plastic 3. Disposal of dead bodies
Blue	1. Throwing of plastic bags 2. Industrial waste 3. Dumping of dead bodies

## Visioning

---

Visioning is a process where students are helped to imagine how they would like their community to be in the future. The technique can help them to solve the issues they face and envision solutions. With a positive image of where the students want to go, it is easier to plan how to get there. Strategies can have a different outlook, with an emphasis on the directions the community would **prefer** to go rather

than developing plans based on a projection of current trends. Performing this guided visualisation on the banks of Ganga was an ideal situation.

All 290 participants were guide through a process to imagine the future 20 years from now. They were asked to imagine Ganga beautiful and clear with no pollution entering into the religious bathing areas. They were asked to envision the successful outcomes of their efforts to care for Ganga, which began from the Swatcha Ganga Chhatra Sangam in 2002. This process was very inspiring for all concerned, with students reporting beautiful sparkling images that came to their minds.

## School Action Plans

---

### **Krishnamurti Foundation Institute Rural School & Achyut Patwardhan Balika Vidyalaya**

Priority issues of concern - sewage pollution, dead bodies, plastic bags.

- First of all we will start an awareness campaign about various pollutants and plastics in our school, in villages and at nearby places.
- We will persuade others to assist us in this campaign.
- We will try to enlighten people about how cattle wallowing, use of soaps and detergents is harmful to river.
- We will educate the people defecating at the bank not to do so as this act is very much unreligious.
- We will try to restrict the use of plastics in our school and at nearby places.
- We will make effort to create awareness among the villagers through drama, debate, songs, poetry & posters.
- We will visit temples to request people not to throw plastics and flowers in Gangaji.
- Apart from this we will work in a way, which we think is appropriate to create awareness among the people.

### **Adarsh Bhartiya Junior High School (Raghunathpur Village),**

We, the students of Raghunathpur take this pledge:

- We will not do anything which pollutes the river
- We, all the students offer the feelings of our native villagers to mother Ganga to establish an emotional relationship with her
- We will remove garbage from the banks of Ganga and will inspire other students to follow us. This will make Ganga cleaner and thus we will be able to make Clean Ganga - Clean India.
- We will never use plastics and will teach others not to use plastics. We live close to Keshwa Ghat. We will collect garbage from the ghats and will make compost of the garbage and bury the plastics.

### **Gopi Radha Inter College**

Each one of us should take this pledge that every one will make efforts to keep the Ganges clean by any means.

- Management of wastewater:- all the wastewater which is being discharged into Ganga should be collected at a place. Its harmful matter should be converted into fertilizer and biogas, which will be useful for plants and other, need.
- Management of Cremation of Dead Bodies:- dead bodies should not be disposed directly into Ganga, it pollutes Ganga. The number of electrical crematorium should be increased, and its use should be made compulsory. The cremation cost should be lowered. Turtles and other useful aquatic animals, which could eat the foul matter, should be put into Ganga.
- Banning the use of soaps, detergents and cattle wallowing at the Ghat: - the variety of detergents and soaps used at the ghat pollute Ganga. It should be completely banned. Cattle wallowing should also be banned.

We select the issue ***soaps and detergents use at the ghats*** for action. For this we will hold a rally at the bank of Ganga on any date between 21/1/02 to 24/1/02 to create awareness among the people about the bad effects due to use of soaps and detergents. We will tell the people using soaps and detergents at the bank of Ganga that their this act will adversely affect the life of coming generation.

## **Tulsi Vidya Niketan**

People should be made aware of the harmfulness of the use of plastics. Displaying posters, campaigns, street plays, and media such as TV, newspapers, radios and websites can do this.

- We can organise awareness camps and rallies. We can tell the shopkeepers to provide paper or jute bags and earthen pots for drinking tea and coffee.
- We can go to the proprietors of the factories to stop preparing plastic bags.
- Jute bags must be presented to dignitaries on which slogans are written to stop the use of plastic bags.
- Through classroom interactions we would encourage our friends to stop the use of plastic bags through:
  - ⇒ speeches in the assembly and debates in the school requesting the students to stop plastic bags,
  - ⇒ we will present jute bags with a slogan "Say NO to plastic bags"
  - ⇒ we will organise group discussions and then decide to hold short classroom discussions
  - ⇒ waste plastic bags can be recycled and used in the construction of roads

Just now with all of you here on the banks of Ganga, take a pledge not to use plastic bags- to save Ganga and save India. As tomorrow never comes.

## **Little Flower House**

We have discussed that the following are the main causes of Ganges pollution:

- Lack of awareness among people
- Throwing of garbage into river Ganga
- Washing of animals, throwing dead bodies, plastic bags, sacred malas

We give top priority to lack of awareness among people, lack of education among people and lack of fulfilling duties on the part of citizens.

We will also take the following positive steps:

1. We will voluntary groups to spread awareness among the people
  2. We could take out some time from our busy schedule to visit ghats in order to educate people
  3. We could motivate people to work in teams in order to clean the ghats
  4. Visual aid is very much effective. We could make posters and write slogans to let the people know about its critical situation.
  5. We could organise street dramas in order to bring the problem in knowledge of common people.
  6. We could organise debate and speech competition in the school to let the others know about Ganges pollution.
- We would take the help of our teachers, parents - to seek their help.
  - We would contact students of different classes to join our group.
  - We will start working within a week.
    - ⇒ We will first try to create awareness among the people because lack of education is the root cause of Ganges pollution. If the people are aware and educated, they will work themselves to prevent pollution in dying Ganga.
    - ⇒ We, the students will join hand in hand to work for it.
    - ⇒ We will start our work from the very moment by taking the pledge that we will do our best for the renovation of Ganga.
    - ⇒ We will take the permission of our school to form voluntary group of students.
    - ⇒ We will organise meetings of students in our school.
    - ⇒ We will divide our group into three sections. Each section will be assigned different work.
    - ⇒ Primary section will make posters and slogans in school only.
    - ⇒ Junior and senior section will work as a team by organising street dramas, debates and speech competitions.

## **Bal Vishwa Vidyalaya**

Problems on the ghats:

1. Throwing of plastic bags, garlands and other waste materials.
2. Use of soaps and detergents.
3. Human attitude to ease out, despite sanitation facilities provided by local administration.

Under the supervision of our school principal:

1. Group of students would visit once or twice in a week to ghats from Telianala to Rajghat and collect all the garbage in the form of plastic bags, papers, leaves and garlands in and out of Ganga water.
2. We would request to the people to avoid using soaps and detergents and suggest washing clothes can be done to some other place.
3. The main problem in the city is sewage system, which is causing a lot of damage to river water which can only be solved if people aware as well as spare some time to come to mass movement to pressurize authorities on Gandhian principles of non-cooperation.

*"Building a creative climate will ensure tomorrow is better than today".*

### **St Joseph's Convent School**

Issues of concern:

1. Sewage problems
2. Cremation activities
3. Cattle wallowing, garlands and flowers, disposal of soap and detergents by bathers and laundrymen.

Root Causes:

1. Illiteracy
2. Lack of awareness
3. Flush toilets

Actions:

1. We can write a letter to the municipal board and waterworks about the condition of river Ganges.
2. Articles in newspapers and magazines by the students
3. Rallies can be take out which will create mass awareness
4. Cultural programs like seminars, concerts and painting competitions

Steps:

1. We will talk to our principal, Sister Gracy about he condition of river Ganges and ask he to allow us to take out rallies.
2. As from our school, only we 6 children are properly aware about the horrible condition of river Ganges, we would take out a small discussion among the school children in the assembly, in order to create awareness among children.
3. As our school is a member of Tarumitra - an environment based organisation, we would like to have this organisation work together with Swatcha Ganga Chhatra Sangam.

Our efforts to make Ganga more clean and pure will more easily - the students of St Josephs would like to start action plans. From tomorrow we can carry out the program.

### **Sunbeam Bhagwanpur**

1. Removal of poly bags and using paper bags.
2. Awareness program by organising door to door campaign, posters and advertisements.
3. Quiz, debates, skits etc should be organised.
4. We can have volunteers from different schools during special occasions.
5. People related with the organisation should visit schools and give recent information related with the river.

Students of class 9th will:

- ⇒ Talk to canteen people not to use polythene bags
- ⇒ We will give them paper bags from tomorrow morning.
- ⇒ We will ask the students to make paper bags at least twice each week and give it to the canteen.
- ⇒ A sort of fine or punishment should be given to the students giving polybags.
- ⇒ Throwing biodegradable waste into the compost pit so that it can be changed into manure and used as fertiliser.

### **W H Smith**

1. Create general awareness
  - ⇒ through rallies, pamphlets, door to door visit, roadside meetings and drama,

2. Carry out research into the manufacture of degradable polymers
3. Paper bags through the SUPW (Socially Useful Program Work)
  - ⇒ train the juniors to make paper bags and exchange the same for polythene bags in the market
4. Rallies
  - ⇒ prepare slogans and banners
  - ⇒ motivate students to participate
  - ⇒ plan a schedule
  - ⇒ convince the shopkeepers to avoid the use of polymers
  - ⇒ Issuing pamphlets
5. Awareness in primary classes

## Swatcha Ganga Campaign

---

Prof SK Mishra (Honorary Director of Sankat Mochan Foundation) gave a short presentation about the Swatcha Ganga (Clean Ganges) Campaign.

- Public education through specially designed, culturally consistent programs including plays, concerts, debates, painting competition and conventions etc.
- River water quality monitoring through the Swatcha Ganga Research Laboratory at Tulsi Ghat. The SGRL was established in 1992 with support from Swedish Nature Foundation (SNF).
- Preparing and proposing appropriate technology and suitable alternatives for waste water interception and treatment of sewage in Varanasi using Advanced Integrated Wastewater Ponding System (AIWPS) – supported by Friends of the Ganges USA and USAID.
- Mobilising, involving and working with local government in cleaning Ganga.
- Establishing the Swatcha Ganga Environmental Education Centre at Tulsi Ghat, in partnership with Oz GREEN Australia. Activities of SGEEC include
  - Environmental education programs in schools
  - Health and environmental programs in villages – village environmental action planning
  - Installation of clean drinking water sources in villages affected by sewage effluent.
  - Community education and World Water Day “human chain”.
- Web magazine (Ezine) to create global awareness about environmental issues especially those pertaining to Ganga – supported by Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) – [www.cleanganga.com](http://www.cleanganga.com)
- Creating a workforce of volunteers to work along the religious bathing areas (ghats), cleaning garbage and flower garlands and persuading people from pollution causing habits such as washing clothes, dumping garbage and toileting on the ghats – supported by Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

## Candle Lighting and Pledge

---

The program was concluded with a candle lighting ceremony down on the riverbank at Tulsi Ghat. Congress participants lit special ghee candles and made pledges about what they would do to care for Ganga. Finally participants were thanked by Mahantji (Prof VB Mishra) and Prof SK Mishra.

## Contact Information

---

**Oz GREEN**  
 Global Rivers Environmental Education Network –  
 Australia Inc.  
 PO Box 1378, Dee Why NSW 2099, AUSTRALIA  
 Phone (+ 612) 9984 8917 Fax (+ 612) 9981 4956  
 Email: [ozgreen@ozgreen.org.au](mailto:ozgreen@ozgreen.org.au)  
 Website: [www.ozgreen.org.au](http://www.ozgreen.org.au)

**Sankat Mochan Foundation**  
 Swatcha Ganga Campaign  
 B2/15 Tulsi Ghat, Varansi 221005, INDIA  
 Phone/fax (+ 91 542) 314 278  
 Email: [ybmnganga@satyam.net.in](mailto:ybmnganga@satyam.net.in)  
 Website: [www.cleanganga.com](http://www.cleanganga.com)