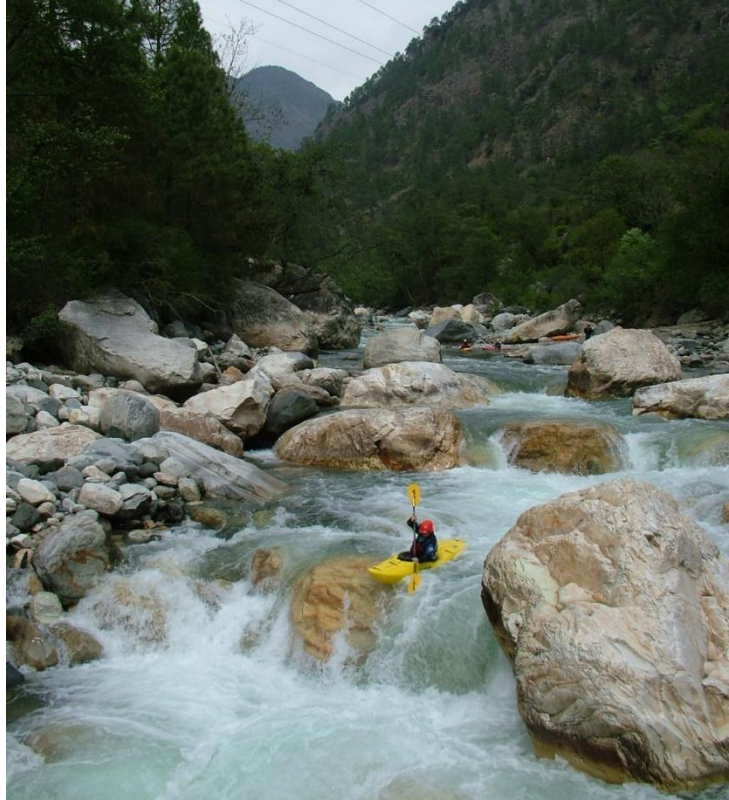


Rivers are Nature's Song

By Dr Datta V.*



Rivers have ever been the nursery of human civilisation. From the Nile and the Tigris to the Ganga and the Yamuna, it is along their banks that cultures have flourished, cities have thrived and histories have been made. They are not just courses of water; they are lifelines that are divine, sustaining and symbolic.

But as humanity has progressed, we have tended to cause deep scars to these very lifelines. Industrialisation, urbanisation and neglect have turned numerous great rivers into unclean streams drained of vigour and dignity.

History, however, gives us hope. Everywhere across the globe, we have examples of rivers that had been declared biologically dead, but which were brought back to life by vision, determination and collective effort.

The London Thames, for example, in the 19th century was no more than an open sewer. In the notorious "Great Stink of 1858" stench, Parliament was compelled to suspend its sessions. Few expected ever to see the river recover. Yet today, after prolonged efforts, the Thames runs with new life, home to a variety of species and an emblem of city renewal.

The Rhine in Europe suffered a similar fate. Known as the “sewer of Central Europe” in the 20th century, its waters were laden with industrial effluents. But through the Rhine Action Programme, nations came together and the river is once again home to variegated aquatic life. It now stands as a beacon of international cooperation and environmental responsibility.

Even in India, there are examples. The Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad, which was once a forgotten, arid stretch, has been rejuvenated into a living, pulsating space for people and culture. Although challenges remain, it shows that change can happen where vision intersects with will.

These are not just environmental vignettes. They remind us of something truer: the state of a river reflects the state of its people. A healthy, clean river represents a healthy and a responsible society. A polluted one represents neglect and complacency.

It is with such a vision that the YaRI Project (Yamuna River Initiative) at Modern School, Barakhamba Road, has been conceived. For the Yamuna is no ordinary river. It is the ecological, cultural and spiritual backbone of Northern India. It runs through the shlokas of our Vedas, the bhajans of our poets and the pages of our history. Empires rose from its waters, Mughal gardens were planned along its bends and generations have found sustenance in its waters.

And yet, the Yamuna which runs through Delhi is a tale of tragedy. The river is polluted, encroached upon and gasping for survival, but in silence, it is also bearing witness to our apathy. This is not just a loss of a water body but this is a loss of heritage, identity and accountability.

YaRI Project aims to turn this around. It is a project that puts students at the centre of river conservation through awareness campaigns, cleanliness initiatives, curriculum-based learning and joint work with civic organisations. But beyond activities, YaRI is a philosophy: that taking care of the environment is a responsibility and that young minds, when educated, can be the most effective change agents.

The value of such an effort cannot be emphasised enough. Resurrecting the Yamuna is not merely a matter of cleaning water. It is a matter of healing ecosystems, enhancing public health, reviving biodiversity and reactivating a sense of civic pride. It is a matter of demonstrating to future generations that when faced with decay, societies have the option to renew.

As a school, our mandate goes far beyond the classroom. Education is not just about books or examinations, it must teach students to be responsible citizens. The YaRI Project reflects this vision. It allows our students to see civic duty is not theoretical; it is lived, experienced and fostered through everyday action.

The task before us is gigantic, but not impossible. History teaches us that rebirth is conceivable. If the Rhine was brought back to Europe, if the Thames was revived by London, then we in Delhi must certainly be able to restore pride to the Yamuna. All we need is the will of all and the humility to look at the river not as a treasure to plunder, but as a heritage to preserve.

In preserving our rivers, we are, in fact, preserving ourselves, our well-being, our heritage and our future. May the Yamuna once again inspire verse, nourish life and flow as a living testament to our shared responsibility.

*Principal
Modern School, Barakhamba Road
New Delhi