

The Historical Significance of River Yamuna

From Ancient Times to Modern India

By: Pradyumna, Class S4-D

Subject: Social Science



INTRODUCTION

- *The Yamuna is the second-largest tributary of the Ganga and one of the most revered rivers in India.*
- *Originates from the Yamunotri glacier in Uttarakhand and spans about 1,376 km*
- *It flows through major states like Uttarakhand, Haryana, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh.*



Yamunotri glacier

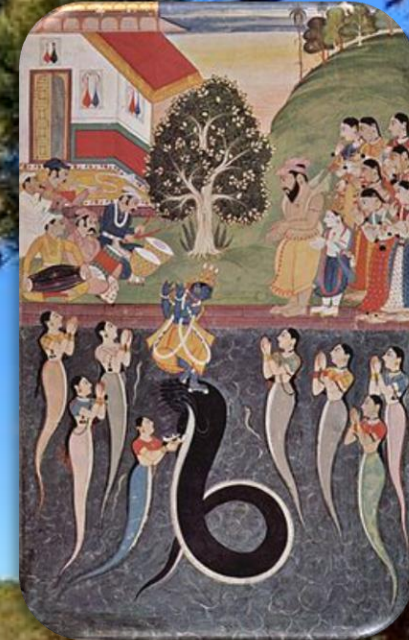


YAMUNA IN MYTHOLOGICAL TEXTS

- *The Yamuna is considered a sacred river in Hinduism and is personified as the goddess Yamuna.*
- *According to the Rigveda and Puranas, Yamuna is the daughter of Surya (Sun god) and sister of Yama, the god of death.*
- *The river finds mention in ancient texts like Mahabharata, Bhagavata Purana, and Skanda Purana.*
- *Lord Krishna's childhood stories are closely associated with the Yamuna River in Vrindavan and Mathura.*



5th century terracotta sculpture of Yamuna with attendants



Krishna defeats Kaliya, dwelling in the Yamuna.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE IN ANCIENT TIMES

- *The Indus-Saraswati civilization extended towards the Yamuna basin with settlements near Kalibangan and Alamgirpur.*
- *Excavations in Hastinapur (Uttar Pradesh) show continuity of habitation since the Vedic period*
- *Pottery, terracotta figurines and inscriptions found on Yamuna banks signify early urban life*
- *Archaeological Survey of India reports confirm the presence of Painted Grey Ware culture.*



Yamuna with attendants, 10th century. Ratangiri temple.

YAMUNA IN ANCIENT INDIAN CITIES

- *Hastinapur, the capital of the Kauravas in Mahabharata, was situated on the Yamuna.*
- *Mathura, on Yamuna's banks, evolved as a major trade, religious and cultural hub in 6th century BCE*
- *Kausambi, another city along the Yamuna, was an important center in the Maurya and Shunga empires*
- *Pillars and inscriptions of Ashoka were found near Yamuna-related cities*



*Ruins of Ashoka
Pillar
Kaushambi,
Uttar Pradesh,*



*Krishna being
carried over
Yamuna by
Yasudeva just
after his birth..*

RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

- *The Yamuna is central to the Bhakti movement, especially linked to Radha-Krishna worship.*
- *Thousands gather at its ghats during festivals like Yamuna Jayanti and Kartik Purnima.*
- *Vrindavan's temples and ghats showcase spiritual importance of Yamuna in daily worship.*
- *Many poets and saints like Surdas wrote verses dedicated to Yamuna and Lord Krishna.*



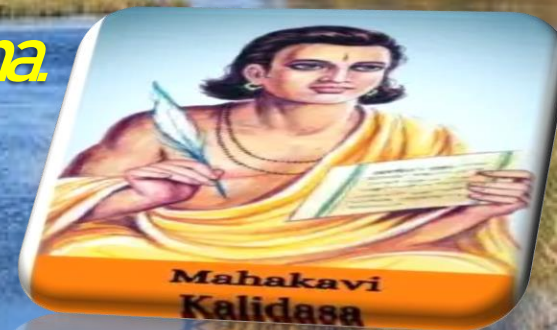
A temple dedicated to Yamuna at Yamunotri near the source of the river.



Temple in Vrindavan

ROLE DURING MAURYA AND GUPTA PERIODS

- *During the Maurya Empire, Yamuna acted as a trade and communication route.*
- *Gupta kings supported river-based irrigation and religious activities along the Yamuna.*
- *Temples and sculptures along the river flourished under royal patronage.*
- *Literature like Kalidasa's works often referenced the beauty and utility of the Yamuna.*



YAMUNA IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

- *The Delhi Sultanate built forts, mosques, and water structures near the Yamuna*
- *Yamuna's banks were central to cities like Agra and Delhi during the Mughal period*
- *Mughal emperors constructed gardens, palaces, and tombs along the riverbanks*
- *The famous Shalimar Bagh and Humayun's Tomb utilized water from the Yamuna*



The Red Fort on one side and Salimgarh Fort on the other, separated by a braid or spill channel of the Yamuna — a scene from several 19th-century paintings of the Mughal city of Shahjahanabad

MUGHAL ERA – ARTISTIC LEGACY

- *The Taj Mahal in Agra is situated on the banks of the Yamuna and reflects in its waters*
- *Mughal paintings often depicted Yamuna as a serene and sacred setting*
- *Yamuna was part of the royal lifestyle, used for boating and leisure by emperors*
- *Shah Jahan built several structures with Yamuna-facing pavilions and balconies*



Taj Mahal: distant view with Yamuna River towards south

YAMUNA IN SIKH AND JAIN TRADITIONS

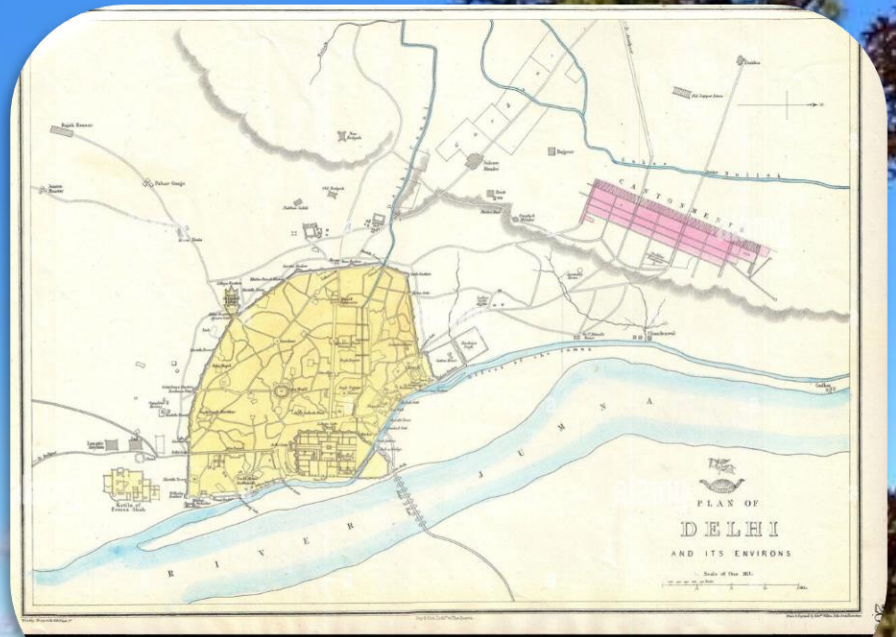
- *Guru Tegh Bahadur visited areas along the Yamuna and spread teachings of Sikhism*
- *Gurudwaras near Delhi and UP mark his travels and spiritual activities*
- *Jain texts refer to ancient pilgrimage centers near Yamuna like Hastinapur.*
- *Jain tirthas and statues have been found near river sites during excavations*



*Guru Tegh
Bahadur*

COLONIAL PERIOD – INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONTROL

- *The British developed canals and barrages on the Yamuna for agriculture and power.*
- *The Eastern and Western Yamuna Canals were constructed during the 19th century.*
- *Delhi's water supply system began relying heavily on the Yamuna during colonial rule*
- *Colonial maps and records documented the seasonal flow and importance of the river.*
- *Rail and road bridges over Yamuna symbolized the integration of old waterways with modern transport.*



British-era Delhi Map showing Yamuna

RIVER YAMUNA AND DELHI'S TRANSFORMATION

- *Delhi's layout during British Raj revolved around the Yamuna for water and aesthetics*
- *The river influenced the positioning of Lutyens' Delhi and New Delhi.*
- *Government buildings and embassies were planned with the river as backdrop.*
- *Delhi's development in the early 20th century focused on Yamuna for sanitation*
- *Barrages like Wazirabad and Okhla became crucial for city planning*

POST-INDEPENDENCE DEVELOPMENTS

- *Post-1947, Yamuna became part of India's Five-Year Plans focusing on irrigation and water conservation*
- *Dams and barrages were renovated and expanded to meet Delhi's growing needs*
- *Pollution control boards were set up due to increasing industrial and domestic waste*
- *Urbanization led to encroachment and exploitation of the river's floodplains*
- *Government initiatives like Yamuna Action Plan (1993) aimed to restore its health*



ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

- *Rapid industrialization led to the dumping of untreated sewage and toxic waste*
- *A 2020 CPCB report declared Yamuna in Delhi as ecologically dead in many stretches*
- *Foam and froth in the river are now symbolic of urban neglect.*
- *Over 70% of Delhi's sewage enters the river untreated*
- *Religious practices like idd immersion also add to the solid waste load*



YAMUNA ACTION PLAN – GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION

- *Initiated in 1993 with Japanese assistance to clean and revive the Yamuna.*
- *Phases I, II, and III aimed to improve sewage treatment and reduce pollution.*
- *Over 20 sewage treatment plants were proposed in the NCR region.*
- *Public awareness campaigns were launched alongside technical measures.*
- *Limited success due to coordination issues and rising urban waste.*



Wastewater Treatment Plant at the Coronation Pillar site in north Delhi

RIVERFRONT DEVELOPMENT AND URBAN PROJECTS

- *Yamuna Riverfront project in Delhi aims to beautify and utilize the banks sustainably.*
- *Recreational spaces, parks, and eco-walks have been proposed*
- *Proposals include floodplain restoration and biodiversity parks*
- *Activists and courts monitor misuse of riverbank land for construction.*

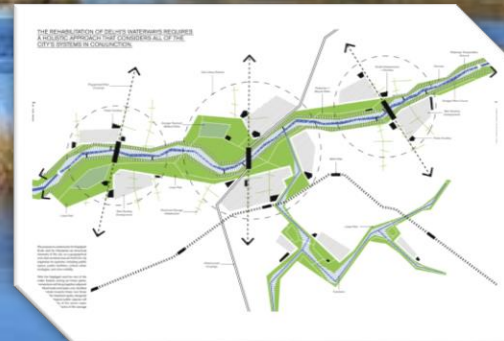
RESTORING THE RIVER, BANK BY BANK

	STATUS OF SOME PROJECTS	
2015 Project conceived	ASITA EAST (DDA AREA) ➤ Old railway bridge to ITO barrage ➤ Spread over 90 acres Phase I complete, phase II initiated	ASITA WEST (PART 2) ➤ Geeta Colony bridge to ITO barrage ➤ Over 107 hectares Phase I and II initiated
2017 Project launched	ASITA EAST (UP AREA) ➤ Over 107 hectares Phase I and II initiated	AMRUT BIODIVERSITY PARK ➤ New railway line to Nizamuddin Bridge ➤ 116.3 hectares Phase I initiated, phase II yet to start
₹800 crore Project cost	KALINDI AVIRAL ➤ Nizamuddin Bridge to DND Flyway ➤ Over 100 acres Phase I completed, phase II initiated	YAMUNA VANASTHALI ➤ Wazirabad barrage to ISBT bridge ➤ 236.5 hectares Phase I and II initiated
22 km Length of stretch being developed	KALINDI BIODIVERSITY PARK ➤ DND to proposed Kalindi bypass ➤ Over 115 hectares Phase I completed, phase II held up	MAYUR NATURE PARK ➤ Nizamuddin Bridge to DND Flyway ➤ 397.8 hectares Phase I initiated, phase II yet to start
September 30, 2022 Deadline		
1,400 hectares Total area to be developed		

FEATURES

- Construction of walkways, cycle tracks and eco trails
- Creation of new wetlands, waterbodies; restoration of old ones
- Floodplain forests and grasslands along the river
- Bathing area
- Play area
- Viewing platform towards the Yamuna
- Open congregational spaces
- Public amenities
- Redevelopment of ghats
- CCTV cameras for monitoring

Waterbody being developed as part of Asita East project

RIVER YAMUNA IN MODERN ART AND LITERATURE

- *Poets like Harivansh Rai Bachchan and artists have lamented the dying Yamuna.*
- *Modern plays, poems, and installations highlight the river's cultural erosion.*
- *Art exhibitions in Delhi have used Yamuna as a theme of loss and hope.*
- *Literature describes the transformation of sacred waters into polluted streams.*
- *Students and young artists now engage with the river in awareness campaigns.*

YAMUNA'S IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE AND ECONOMY

- *The Yamuna irrigates fertile plains across Haryana and Western UP.*
- *Crops like wheat, sugarcane, vegetables thrive due to river-fed canals*
- *Fishermen and boatmen depend on Yamuna for livelihood.*
- *Flower and fruit markets near Yamuna support local economy.*
- *Pollution, however, affects both crop safety and aquatic biodiversity.*



YAMUNA AND FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY

- *Citizens must balance rituals with environmental sensitivity.*
- *Reviving Yamuna requires political will, public cooperation, and technological upgrades*
- *River rejuvenation is tied to sustainable development goals*
- *Efforts must include rural and urban communities equally.*
- *A healthy Yamuna ensures cultural continuity and ecological stability.*

JAN JAGRUKTA ABHIYAN

**ON
YAMUNA
CLEANING**



CONCLUSION – RECONNECTING WITH YAMUNA

- *From mythology to modern India, Yamuna has shaped civilizations and consciousness*
- *It is not just a water source but a symbol of heritage, faith, and survival.*
- *Awareness, education, and collective responsibility can revive its glory.*
- *Reimagining Yamuna is crucial for future generations*
- *Let us preserve its legacy with knowledge, care, and action.*