

ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORKERS AS A CIVIL SOCIETY ALLIANCE IN UPSCALING THE SANITATION EFFORTS OF THE HOLY RIVER GANGA

Chandrakala Diyali,

Research Scholar,

Department of Social work, University of Lucknow

ABSTRACT

The concerns about the condition of Ganges were raised for a long time which has now gained impetus in past few years owing to awareness and support from keen environmentalists, activist, concerned social and religious leaders etc. Furthermore, different studies revealed the deteriorating health of the river which has conceived the necessity to initiate public mobilization to seek support for Save Ganga Movement – against the pollution of Ganges and its tributaries. In this juncture of critical movement to save the ganga and the people affected by the grievous pollution. The professional social worker aptly can play a major role in saving the ganga and the people affected; not only by being the partner of the movement like other stakeholders but by using the professional traits of different technique, principles, values, methods, skills and knowledge to mobilize the affected community and the people at large in the pledge for ‘Ganga and our duty’; to make them all the crucial partners. The study emphasizes on the role of the Professional Social Worker as a Civil Society alliance in upscaling the sanitation efforts of the holy river Ganga in fulfilling the major objectives of the movement that are to create mass awareness for an eco-friendly non-violent culture of development for the protection of our life-sustaining natural systems in general and of the sacred Ganga and the Himalayas in particular and to put moral pressure on the government, to take time-bound decisive steps to completely and permanently save the Ganga symbolizing all rivers and water bodies, and the Giriraj Himalayas, symbolizing all mountains forests and wildlife.

Introduction

“ The movement to save the Ganga and its ‘nirmal’ (clean) and ‘aviral’ (uninterrupted) flow is not just a movement to save a River.....If the Ganga lives, India lives. If the Ganga dies, India dies.”

*Dr. Vandana Shiva,
Director of Navdanya and renowned
environmental activist and scientist.*

When we attempt to reconcile the significance of the sacred river in the past to its present reality, a most tragic paradox is encountered. Ganga today is being worshipped and defiled

simultaneously. Polluting socio-religious practices apart, Ganga since perhaps about a century, has been subjected to a multiplicity of serious threats, multiplying in their impact and intensity every second. Unplanned urbanization and industrialization together with the population boom have extracted a very heavy price from the river.

The painful reality still remains that environmental concerns in India continue to be the burden of a few green crusaders with the vast majority just plainly looking on. A serious erosion of faith has entered the psyche of the masses, gripping all with the thought that “nothing can be done”.

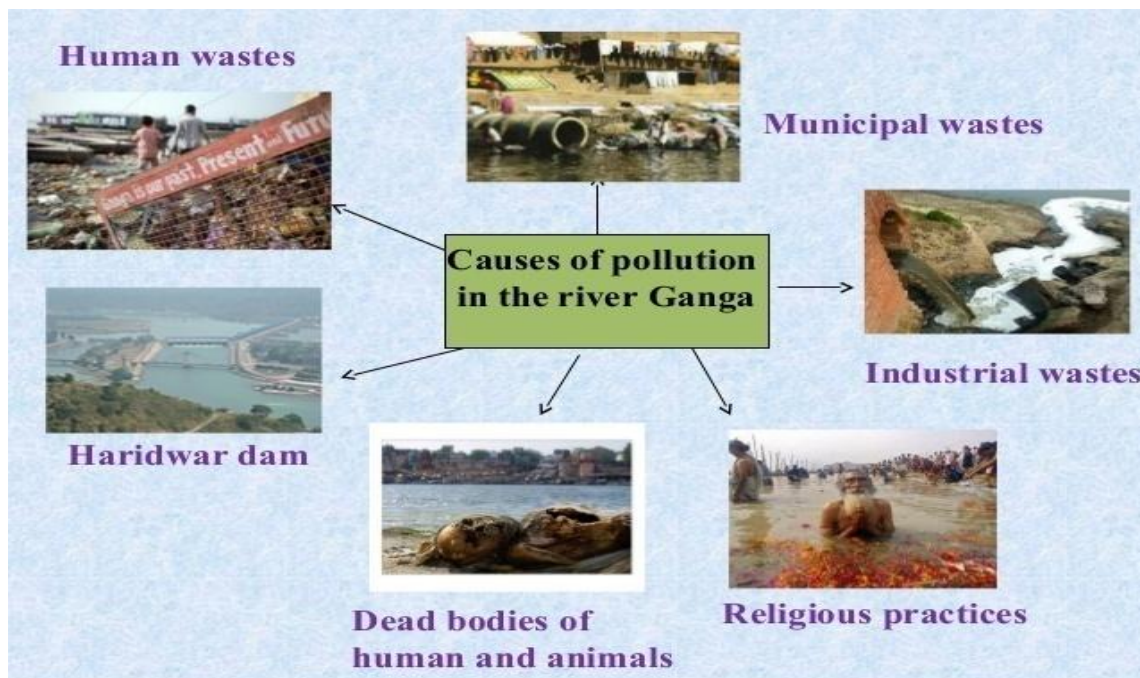
The rapid rise in the pollution of the river has been accompanied by (and also because of) mass apathy. Pollution and public concern of Ganga seem to exist in inverse ratios. If ever any crisis meant an

opportunity to make a difference, it could not be truer than is the case for Ganga. The distressed river beckons all to come to its rescue. It took hundreds of years of penance by Sage Bhagirath to bring the celestial river to earth and it would not be an exaggeration to say that today Ganga requires many Bhagiraths to survive and reclaim its sacred nature. Before any action can be initiated, all concerned should start thinking in terms of a new vision for Ganga. How do we want Ganga to be and what can be done to achieve that vision is the question posed to all of us. A new vision for a pristine and pure Ganga has to pour forth and translated on the ground. A new vision which needs churning of the spirit and mind that can inspire the masses to action which needs to reconcile the competing demands on the precious waters of the river with sustainability. It needs to think of the river as one organic entity where tinkering in one-part affects the entire body of the river.

The new vision which believes that if we as humans; wish to survive, the holy River Ganga needs to survive.

Ganga runs its course of over 2500 kms from Gangotri in the Himalayas to Ganga Sagar in the Bay of Bengal through 29 cities with population over 1,00,000 (class-I cities), 23 cities with population between 50,000 and 1,00,000 (class-II cities), and about 48 towns. It is a river with which the people of India are attached spiritually and emotionally. The Ganga is the largest river in India and second greatest river in the world with an extraordinary religious importance for Hindus. It is worshipped as the Goddess Ganga in Hinduism. Along its banks are some of the world’s oldest inhabited places like Varanasi and Patna. It provides water to about 40% of Indian’s Population in 11 States. In modern times, it is known for being irreparably polluted.

The major sources / Causes of pollution in Holy Ganga are shown below



Hindus revere Ganga not just for her ability to free them from their Karma, but also for the lessons that she teaches. No matter what obstacle or

obstruction attempts to block her path, the river Ganga keeps flowing. Her water is for everyone

irrespective of any differences. She abundantly provides for all.

Importance Of Ganga: The Holy River

- Religious/Spiritual importance for the Indians all across the World.
- Development of the Great Civilization/our Rich Culture began along the Ganga basin.
- The River acts as a Lifeline for the People; which is used for commercial agriculture, fishing, use of natural flora (Economic and medicinal importance) around Ganga, Tourism, Navigation.
- Provide rich biodiversity (wide variety of flora and fauna) are available along the River.
- Provides Natural Benefits like the Holy River has high Anti-Septic and Anti-Bacterial Qualities, High Oxygen Retention Capacity 15 to 25 times higher than any other river in the world.

In modern world, the social workers have been indispensable partners and are working hand in hand with the government, non-government and voluntary agencies in order to achieve the goal of making the life and living of people worth by adapting an integrated perspective. A recent way of conceptualizing Social Work Problem Solving (or treatment) actions is to consider the various roles that the Social Worker may perform as part of their Professional Practice as a Civil Society alliance in upscaling the sanitation efforts of the holy river Ganga. Role is a global concept that is not always used consistently. For our purpose we will define role to refer to the behavior that the workers directs towards the accomplishment of the goals that have been set through the interaction of the client(Individual/Group) and the workers .The various literature of the Social Work lists a large number of possible Roles.

Here the researcher would discuss the five roles that the Professional Social Workers should be able to perform as a Civil Society alliance in

upscaling the sanitation efforts of the holy river Ganga in working towards the Restoration of Ganga to Her Pristine Nature.

Mobiliser

The social worker in this case generate awareness and identifies all the available resources economic, social, physical, psychological with the active participation of the community and other agencies which may be tapped for helping and facilitating the task at hand for the wellbeing of the targeted population/area and its sustainability.

- Raising awareness through education about the effects polluted water have on people and on the environment, and the importance of keeping our rivers free from both domestic and Industrial waste.
- Educating and inspiring community to care for Ganga by encouraging to demand to create environmental, value-based curricula in the education system and organizing Ganga-Clean-up days in all educational institutes to generate awareness about the importance of Ganga among the new techno-freak generation.
- Organising local communities to become active stewards of their Ganga by educating them on the issues and training residents on how they can make a difference in saving the Holy River.
- Working with communities, Government and NGOs to restore and maintain adequate pure, original water flow in Ganga in order to flush out pollution and to end over-harvesting of her water.
- Working to develop waste management solutions in collaboration with the government and non-government bodies seeking active participation from the community so the dumping of millions of litres of sewage and Industrial waste into 'Her' water can be stopped.

- Educating all, through mass awareness campaigns such as public service announcements and documentaries on the issues, social networking and outreach at key events like Maha Kumbh Mela and other mass public gathering for the restoration of the Holy River.

Advocate

As far as the advocacy role of a social worker is concerned he/she becomes the speaker for the people in presenting and arguing the cause when it's necessary to accomplish the objective. The professional, advocates the cause of the people to the government and other related or concerned organizations. S/he makes the people aware with their problems and takes their cause to the concerned authorities. Advocacy differs from mediation. In mediation the effort is to secure resolution to a dispute through give and take on both sides. Whereas in advocacy the effort is directed towards securing benefits to which people are legally entitled (Compton and Galaway, 1979).

- Advocate for the comprehensive action to establish a National Ganga River Basin Act which will include provision to control, abate, prevent and monitor the pollution, exploitation and obstruction occurring to the Ganga River Basin System in collaboration with the like-minded agencies and NGOs etc.
- Voice for creation of proper sewage treatment and waste water management plants and can also liaison with the development authority/municipal corporation so as to ban the discharge of domestic waste and industrial effluents flow into Ganga or Her tributaries.
- Advocate for creating effective solid waste management system so that the pollution that is killing the life forms that live in and around Ganga, no longer enters the river.
- Advocate to ensure that every school and community in the Ganga basin has proper toilets so that people are not forced to use Ganga as

their washroom and installation of 'Green toilets' for communities to use.

- Advocate against the rampant deforestation and for planting thick vegetation along the river banks and trees to rejuvenate the environment, help purify the water and mitigate erosion as well as retain water in the soil.
- Voice for tapping country's enormous capacity to produce solar power, providing an alternative to the practice of cutting down trees, obstructing rivers and excavating mountains for energy by constructing dams and other related construction. Restoring the free flow of Ganga by removing the unnecessary obstructions on the path of the river.
- Advocate for restoration and protection of the diverse flora and fauna that flourish along and within the Ganga River basin.
- Advocate for officially declaring the Upper Ganga Region (from the source at Gangotri and downstream to Haridwar inclusive of the Mandakini and Alaknanda river valleys) as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Recognizing this stretch of area as global importance will truly ensure protection and conservation of its rich natural and cultural heritage.
- Advocating for revival to organic farming and ban the use of harmful toxic chemicals found in the pesticides and fertilizer, for the health of the people, the Ganga and the environment, to envision the concept of sustainable development in the true sense.
- Advocate against the use of harmful, non-biodegradable materials such as polythene and plastics and enforcement of alternate use such as paper bags and eco-friendly packaging for the health of human, animals, the River and world as a whole.

Activist

The role of activist involves non-violent direct action to change political or social arrangements and thus is limited to the worker's actions with certain kinds of community groups or with groups to which the social

workers may belong using such technique as boycott, demonstration, leafleting, picketing and vigils.

- As far as the problem of alarming pollution level of Holy Ganga is concerned the Social activist focuses on preparation of an action plan for immediate reduction of pollution load on the river Ganga with the active participation of like-minded and concerned people, agencies/institutes.
- Working to clean existing pollution in the Ganga immediately by construction of solid waste and waste water management systems, relocation of haphazard constructions along the river basin and find ways to reduce vehicular congestion and pollution.
- Working with Industries, Government official and environmentalist to collectively find solutions to the domestic waste and industrial effluents being dumped into the Holy River that causes deaths of aquatic flora and fauna leading to complete damage of ecological balance in the environment.
- Work as a pressure group to bring about stringent laws and policies against the factories and industries that do not follow the guidelines against the discharge of their waste.
- Work towards finding solution to creation of the proper solid waste management technique and put a permanent ban on the harmful non-biodegradable materials such as polythenes and revive the traditional packaging or other alternative non-harmful materials for the health of all.
- Work for harnessing the alternative sources of energy like solar, geothermal etc. and put a stop on further construction of dams and restoring the free-flow nature of the Holy Ganga through proper plan to remove unnecessary obstruction of water by construction of Dams.

- Work for afforestation along the river banks so as to rejuvenate the environment, help purify the waters, mitigate erosion and retain water in the soil to ensure harmony with our ecosystem. Thereby restoring and protecting the diverse flora and fauna that flourishes along and within the Ganga River Basin.
- Work for the development of home for the stray/wandering dogs, cows and other animals by networking with the agencies working for their care and Protection so as to prevent them from crowding near the filth along the road and river and feed on edibles in the polythenes which cause illness and even death due to choking of polythene and other plastic materials.
- The Social Workers as an activist can put moral pressure on the government, to take time-bound decisive steps to completely and permanently save the Holy Ganga. The sustainable development should be the thrust.

Teacher / Preachers

The role of a teacher is the most important aspect of social work practice. Here the Social Worker provides the client /community with information they need in order to cope with the problem situation, assists them to rehearse or practice new behaviour/ skills and the model alternative behavior patterns and in some situation the information (data, inputs or knowledge) may be all to accomplish the defined goals.(Compton and Galaway,1979).The workers as a teacher rarely gives advice unlike Information.

- The workers gives information to the community or people with whom S/he are working through awareness programmmme like street play, distribution of pamphlets, procession, rally march, Focus Group Discussion(FDG) with targeted group, banners

about the following issues concerning the Holy Ganga.

- (i) Importance of Ganga both culturally and spiritually.
- (ii) How the river is lifeline to people in terms of agriculture, fishing, Resource(flora and fauna),tourism, Navigation, biodiversity, natural benefits of Ganga like anti-septic and anti-bacterial qualities, high oxygen retention capacity of the Holy Ganga etc.
- (iii) Awareness about how the human activities like; explosion of population, rampant Industrialisation and urbanization (dumping huge sewage and industrial waste), diversion and obstruction of rivers by raising unnecessary dams, use of chemical fertilizer and pesticides, solid waste disposal made up of non-bio-degradable materials like polythene/plastics are causing havoc in all the spheres of environment (land, air, water).
- (iv) Making people aware of the solutions to the monstrous problems by controlling explosion of population by adapting different methods(particularly natural restrain method etc.); implementation of doctrine of sustainable development; less consumerism, materialism and greed, alternate vision of development, resort to organic farming, use of bio-degradable materials for packaging, carry bags made out of paper and jute, restoring the free flow nature of Ganga by finding alternative sources of energy, stringent implementation of laws and policies against the factories and industries who do not follow the guidelines against the discharge of their waste, urgent implementation of

creation of solid waste and wastewater management system.

As a Programmer

Programmes are the tools for the social Workers through which S/he renders his services. He chalks out different types of programme for the solution of the problem of people and for their Socio-economic and other Integrated Development. The social workers by being part of the Social Welfare organization/NGOs and other welfare agencies gathers and analyses information for the Programme Planning for the amelioration of the problems of the people through the dissemination of information and services through networking with other agencies working for the same objectives.

- Work towards creating the Partnership and networking with Government, the Public and Private agencies to utilize their roles and address the concerns related to the Holy Ganga and chalk out the programme with formal discussions and consultations for the planning ,implementation and proper monitoring of the programme and services needed.
- The main objective is to bring long- term sustainable solutions to the past plans and policies and liaison with all the stakeholders for making the programme and services sustainable and result-oriented for the revival and restoration of the pristine nature of Ganga and her tributaries.
- The Social Worker involves and works in partnership with the people concerned. As they realizes that until the common mass want the change and are willing to be partner for the cause the sole efforts is useless. The participation of the community and common mass would then ensure sustainability to regulate the programme for restoring the serenity of the Great River.

- The social Workers can network with the agencies working for the cause of the Holy River Ganga at National Level like GAP (Ganga Action Plan), GAP(Ganga Action Parivar),Regional and even Local levels to make the planned programme coordinated more effective and focused to bring the positive result
- The Social welfare administrator needs to: seriously review the implementation of the entire Planned programme; evolve a financing arrangement whereby the States and the implementing agencies develop a more involved stake in creation of assets, their maintenance, and their functionality at all times; revive and strengthen technical and administrative monitoring to ensure the value for money of assets created at great public expense; and, not the least, facilitate competent technological support for optimum utilization of resources.

Conclusion

There have been many National and Local level programmes in our country for the preservation, Protection and Restoration of our holy pristine nature of the Mother Ganga like Ganga Action Plan or GAP in order to reduce the pollution load on the river. These programmes have not been able to achieve its objectives, despite a huge expenditure over many years. There were many reasons for its failure like Inappropriate Environmental Planning, Insignificant cooperation between Central, State, Local Government bodies, Lack of Local technical expert committees for monitoring the work, Improper mass awareness and involvement of ganga user in different projects, Least political dedication and vision to save Ganga and inability of concerned states like U.P. and Bihar to provide the required resources like uninterrupted electricity for running the facilities.

The movement to restore, protect and maintain our Holy River Ganga and her tributaries to their aviral (free flowing) and nirmal (unpolluted) state have been an issue of grave concern for every member of the sensible society who takes great

pride in giving her a stature of '*Maa Ganga*'. The Profession of Social Work has an edge over other profession as a Civil Society alliance in upscaling the sanitation efforts to really make a difference in saving the 'Holy River' as they have the Professional skill, method, values and technique to involve and work in partnership with the people concerned. As they realize that until the common mass want the change and are willing to be partner for the cause the sole efforts by the Government/NGOs is useless. Therefore the Social Worker would sensitize the community, brings out the feeling of dissatisfaction with the present situation of the River and other related Phenomena and awaken the mass with positive feeling to change for the better. The participation of the common mass would then ensure sustainability to regulate the programme for maintaining the serenity of the Great River. The people at large has to come together and be a part of the family and engage in meaningful dialogue, positive action and implement working solutions to the issue facing the Mother Ganga. Every individual should feel responsible for the appalling condition of our Great Holy River and join the community to be part of the positive action and organise or take part in a local clean-up. Get connected with the local area and community members to get involved and be the change by following the '**DO's and DONTs to SAVE THE HOLY RIVER ; 'GANGA'**'.

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