

Yamuna revival should be seen as a sacred duty

[thestatesman.com/opinion/yamuna-revival-should-be-seen-as-a-sacred-duty-1503397556.html](https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/yamuna-revival-should-be-seen-as-a-sacred-duty-1503397556.html)

February 13, 2025

Opinion

The pollution of River Yamuna became a focal point during the Delhi elections 2025. The Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party failed to fulfil its promise of cleaning the Yamuna and was voted out of power.

GOVIND SINGH AND KONSAM NIRMALA | New Delhi | February 13, 2025 9:37 am



Polluted Yamuna river (Photo:SNS)

The pollution of River Yamuna became a focal point during the Delhi elections 2025. The Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party failed to fulfil its promise of cleaning the Yamuna and was voted out of power. This failure was highlighted by all other political parties, most notably the Prime Minister-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as symbolic of failure to deliver on many other promises made to the people.

BJP leader Parvesh Verma, who fought and won from Kejriwal's constituency, immersed a life-size cutout of Kejriwal in the Yamuna. The cutout showed Kejriwal confessing to have failed in cleaning the river and urging people not to vote for him. The elections have concluded, and BJP has won the overwhelming mandate of the people. It is now BJP's turn to deliver on the Yamuna revival promise or risk facing similar consequences in the next election. Pollution in the Yamuna in Delhi has continued to rise despite several measures undertaken to control it.

BJP can learn from past experience which teaches that haphazard and half-hearted measures do little to clean the River. Mere allocation of a budget and announcement of grand schemes also does not help. Expecting one agency or government department to clean the river has also not worked in the past. The Yamuna clean-up is a multi-faceted, trans-disciplinary, inter-departmental task which needs to be undertaken as a sacred duty. River Yamuna originates from Yamunotri glacier in Uttarakhand, flows through Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi, and merges with the Ganga at Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh.

Its total length is 1,376 km, of which only about 50 km flows through Delhi. After flowing for 22 km in Delhi, Yamuna is regulated by the Wazirabad barrage which diverts most of its water for meeting Delhi's water demand. Less than 1 km downstream of the Wazirabad barrage, the Najafgarh drain flows into the river and contributes significantly to its pollution load. Further downstream, close to two dozen drains empty their wastewater into the Yamuna in its Delhi stretch. Functionally, Yamuna becomes a dead river post-Wazirabad barrage, the latter acts as a French guillotine. Rapid urbanisation and industrialisation in Delhi since independence has led to increasing pollution of the Yamuna.

A Yamuna Action Plan (YAP) was launched in 1993, with financial assistance from the Japan International Cooperation Agency, to tackle pollution. The first two phases of YAP were completed in 2003 and 2013, respectively, without resulting in the desired improvement in river water quality. Despite its shortcomings, the third phase of YAP commenced in 2013 with an estimated cost of Rs 1,656 crore. Several sewage treatment plants (STPs) and similar projects have been completed till date, under various governments, to reduce pollution in the Yamuna. However, pollution in the Delhi stretch of the river remains severe due to weak enforcement, inadequate monitoring and lack of urgency.

The capacity of various STPs in Delhi, as per the Delhi Statistical Handbook 2024, is 668 million gallons per day (MGD). This is much less than what is required to ensure that no wastewater flows into the Yamuna. More STPs or corresponding measures are needed especially around major drains such as the ones at Najafgarh, Shahdara and Barapullah. Some of these drains, such as the Najafgarh drain/Sahibi River, are historic water channels and should be restored to their pristine glory with more gusto and speed. Delhi has already pioneered in setting up biodiversity parks; more such parks are needed on the floodplain of the river than away from it.

The Delhi Jal Board budget 2024- 25 puts the present potable water requirement of NCT of Delhi at around 1,260 MGD. The installed capacity of various waterworks, as per the Delhi Statistical Handbook 2024, is only 956 MGD. The need for additional raw water will exert greater pressure on the already lean Yamuna in Delhi. The construction of wetlands along the floodplain of the river will store water naturally and will help augment water supply in addition to cleaning the river. Along with strictly monitoring and improving the efficiency of existing water and sewage treatment plants and constructing STPs near the mouth of existing drains, these are the first key steps the newly formed BJP-led government can take for reviving the Yamuna in Delhi.

Rivers are functional ecosystems that carry with them water, biodiversity and nutrients. In culturally rich countries like India, rivers are also embodiment of Gods and Goddesses due to their life-supporting attributes. The Yamuna has deep-rooted religious and cultural associations. It is personified as the daughter of Sun God, and Lord Krishna spent his childhood days playing along its riverbank. The Prime Minister hailed Mother Yamuna in his victory speech after the announcement of the Delhi election results. Let us hope he considers Yamuna revival as his sacred duty and its shimmering blue waters as his true victory.

(The writers are, respectively, associate professor at O.P. Jindal Global University, Haryana and executive director of Delhi Greens, a non-profit organisation.)

- [Aam Aadmi Party](#)
- [Air Pollution](#)
- [Arvind Kejriwal](#)