

To Cleanse a Sacred River

By Donald Meinshausen

High atop the highest mountains of the world there is a spring. From there flows a stream where it is joined by other streams. Together they flow down, down gaining in volume and power as the River goes to farms, towns and cities on the plain. The river is called the Mother Ganges and is considered a Goddess. People drink from it, bathe in it and fish in it. They re-create themselves in it and along it. The Ganges becomes a means of transport and commerce like other rivers. It is also a medicine and a place for great ceremonies. The largest ceremony in the world, the Kumbh Mela, drawing a population as large as France, comes every decade or so to towns along the Ganges. It flows down some more becoming stronger still on its way to the sea. Here even tens of millions of people live or come to its banks seeking its sustenance and spiritual help.

Here the Mother Ganges is beset with the problems of its children; pollution from sewage, industrial waste, tanneries and even bodies that are burned there. In continuing traditions from a simpler and less crowded time many people still bathe and even drink the water. This is not mindless religious tradition. Even during religious celebrations when millions bathe in the Ganges at once; no outbreaks of cholera have been reported. This continuous miracle of the Ganges has been based on the super-oxygenation of the water which has yet to be explained by scientists. This miraculous blessing is unknown even in nearby rivers according to a report from National Public Radio.

Still with population growth, industrialization and untreated waste even this power can fail. The Indian government has responded by building water purification plants but they were mismanaged and with no money for maintenance that they are now unused. The famed Indian bureaucracy and the increasingly polluted Ganges make its way. So many have defiled her that it's a Ganges rape. It is not just a grave health hazard but has enormous spiritual implications. What can be done?

There is increased wealth in India nowadays. Through free market reforms fortunes are being made in steel, call centers, textiles, pharmaceuticals and software. As in just about every corner of the world business is being blamed rather than used to deal with pollution and other problems. What is needed is a pilot project to show how a private efficient water purification project could work that would have strong local and institutional support.

The idea is this: Have a wealthy corporation or individual with a libertarian foundation build a water purification plant on the bank of the Ganges as an act of philanthropy. Design it so that it looks like or has a temple to the Goddess of the Ganges close by. Invite the relevant clergy and locals who revere the Goddess to worship on or near the site in an alliance to celebrate and aid the cleansing and honoring of the Ganges. Have them conduct a ceremony to inaugurate the project and those involved. Bring them into discussions and invite the knowledgeable and respected among them to a Board of Advisors. The actual design and operation of the plant should be placed under the control of those who build and run the plant. Arrange for public events, education and tours of the project to help ensure community support. Publicize the fact that this is a private project for the good of all as well to help revive Mother Ganges purity and powers. This would result in incredibly good public relations with free publicity with every ceremony or public event for the foundations, individuals or companies involved. This can help in future confrontations with the bureaucracy and to help to achieve justice against polluters. This could also be also useful in advertising or getting a tax credit

The concrete goal is to use the latest in efficient technology to make the Ganges cleaner. This is not to make jobs or profits for the politically connected and therefore the project needs to be pure of

such corruption. Nor can this purification plant be forced into a premature purist perfectionist project. It is an incremental, long term effort based on efficiency and reducing waste. It is a way of helping the Ganges and those who live on or come to its banks.

This project will show the government's inability to clean things up as studies and publicists verify this great work. This aspect should not be publicized or even announced so as to not alert the state as to potential competition. The project should receive no subsidies or involvement from the government and no regulations except as to monitor its progress in removing pollutants.

If governmental meddling occurs at a later date then the alliances made with the religious and local communities will be powerful allies. The universities and environmental organizations would be consulted and perhaps enlisted on how to make the plant more efficient as well as to monitor the changes. As this project succeeds they will praise it and defend it. Most importantly is that its success will help convert others to privatization. Other private sources would be encouraged to start their own plants/temples along the Ganges since the resources needed are huge. As other technologies develop they might try other methods and a friendly competition will develop. Hopefully then government will then step out of the way selling or giving away its inefficient plants learning that privatization is the way of the future. By making the environment clean as a religious undertaking it could implant the idea of separation of church and state. Some groups might work on helping stop water pollution by showing how waste can be recycled into clean products and profits. Many companies all over the world have made such discoveries

High atop the sacred mountains of philosophy and spirituality there exists a spring. The spring is Liberty. And from this spring flows a stream of energy. It is joined by other streams, freedom of religion, media and speech and markets as well as the growth of wealth, technological progress and culture. The stream becomes a sacred river and flows down, down to the people on its banks who bathe in it, fish from it and drink it. It is a means of commerce, travel and communication. It is called freedom. People celebrate it and it is rightly called a medicine and sacrament. It flows with even greater volume and power to the seas of international commerce and communications and on the planes where millions live. And it is good as even more people come to its banks for sustenance

But as more people come small problems become bigger and cannot be ignored. New problems arise that involve the discharging of waste, greed and the other problems of millions of people interacting constantly. The pollution becomes so great that this ancient river is becoming a source of anxiety rather than a source of strength. The river, our mother which is much loved and from which we are born needs our help. What to do?

Pilot projects to deal with the problems of poverty, pollution, ethical misconduct and clean power need to be developed by private sources that are based on the foundations of liberty. Fortunately this is being done now by people and firms that are not libertarian and maybe do not know of our existence; such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. There are now joint attempts by theologians and ethicists to develop voluntary standards for ethical business dealings. Libertarian groups should not only aid these efforts but make comparisons between their efforts and government attempts. State efforts no matter how well intended; are mired in waste, corruption and blockage; therefore damming this river. Open up your head, oh ye Gates!

Religious groups of all types should be encouraged to work with businesses and foundations and others. The government must be excluded from these efforts to avoid inefficiency, corruption and scandal. We need to show how private efforts through their efficiency alone can outdo the state not by a small margin but exponentially. When possible these private examples should work with spiritual groups of all types to harness a coalition of highly motivated volunteers with the efficiency of business. This is an alliance that can mutually defend their rights Let the sacred river run free and pure to the sea. . XXX