

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATIONS OF WATER ISSUES IN THE CONTEXT OF URBANISM: THE YAMUNA RIVER IN DELHI

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ABSTRACT

The present paper explores the reflection of water issues within urban spaces in contemporary art practices, specifically focusing on the Yamuna river in Delhi. The Yamuna holds historical and religious significance and plays a crucial role in meeting the water needs of Delhi's 31.2 million population. However, the rapid urbanization of Delhi has led to detrimental consequences for the river, including increased pollution levels, encroachment on river banks, water scarcity, reduced water flow and detachment from its surroundings. The paper examines contemporary artistic interventions that address these ecological concerns through new media, site-specific art projects and public art. The aim of this paper is to identify those artists and to discuss the various artistic modalities in which these ecological concerns are addressed in the form of aesthetical structures and to discover how art is functionalized as a social and collective agent to create awareness among the public. It also aims to explore how artists are incorporating the ecological aspect of Urbanity in their works. the methodology involves interviews with artists, where their creative insights are explored to discern the multifaceted relationship between the river's ecological challenges and urban development. The study employs an interdisciplinary approach that sheds light on the complex interplay between environmental concerns and artistic expression. the paper concludes how art functions as a social and collective agent, raising awareness among the public about the ecological urgency caused by rampant urbanization.

Keywords: Yamuna River, Urbanism, Ecological

1. INTRODUCTION

In India, a river is not mere a channel of water but has historical and religious significance. Yamuna, which is the largest tributary of the river Ganges, originates from Yamunotri (Uttarakhand), traverses through several districts of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh & Delhi and finally merging with Ganga at Triveni Kala Sangam, Prayagraj. The ancient metropolis of Indraprasth (circa 1400 BC) was established on its riverside (the location of the ancient stronghold in Delhi), subsequent human settlements emerged alongside the river's edge. (Agarwal, 2015). Yamuna is extensively referenced in the Rigveda (from 1700 to 1100 BC) and is associated with the Hindu deity Krishna. Yamuna is mentioned in the legendary tales of Ramayana

& Mahabharata. It is believed to be the twin sibling of Yama (Deity of death) and the offspring of the Sun God and His consort Sanjana (Awareness).

That is why it is said that one, who takes bath in the holy water of Yamuna, liberates from the fear of death and becomes immortal. But currently, our rivers are in such a degraded state that one can not even stand near them, let alone bathe in them. The intense human activities have adverse impact on the current riverine landscape. The snail paced Urbanization played a key role in the process of their deterioration. In present day, many artists are bringing out these concerns in their works, since they are immensely mindful of their environment. Here in this paper, works of such 4 artists; Vibha Galhotra, Atul Bhalla, Ravi Aggarwal, Gigi Scaria are discussed.

Changing dynamics of Yamuna in context of Delhi: Delhi has undergone significant transformations, particularly since the post-independence period and post-partition. Over time, numerous events and hallmark occurrences, such as the Commonwealth Games, Asian games took place. The advent of globalization in 1991 have played a pivotal role in shaping the city. These changes have contributed to the metamorphosis of Delhi. As the city evolves, it carries its natural resources, including rivers, along with it, resulting in alterations in the rivers themselves. The detrimental consequences of Delhi's swift urbanization have manifested in the Yamuna as well, leading to a range of new challenges including heightened pollution levels, encroachment on river banks by urban development, water scarcity, reduced water flow and the overall detachment of the river from its surroundings. Yamuna serves as a vital artery for Delhi, catering to the water requirements of its 31.2 million inhabitants. Presently, this contemporary urban center discharges over 3.8 million liters of predominantly untreated wastewater into the river daily (Agarwal, 2015). The city contributes over 80% of the total contamination load along the river's entire stretch (Agarwal, 2015). Its freshwater flow is often meager, unable to satisfy the competing requirements of industry, energy and agriculture, resulting in a residual flow, and in numerous locations, the river runs dry during the summer season. The fetid, polluted, deteriorating river is disregarded by the populace of Delhi. The river courses through the city from Palla village to Jaitpur, maintaining a semi-rural ambiance for approximately 22 kms from Palla, with agricultural activities visible along its banks. The degradation of the river commences at the Wazirabad barrage, which is the primary water facility for Delhi and the central hub of its water distribution. Beyond the Wazirabad barrage, the river ceases to retain its revered status, marking the onset of urbanization. The river's waters are supplanted by effluents from the extensive Najafgarh canal, channeling untreated waste from the inhabitants of West Delhi into the river. The Najafgarh drain is recognized as a principal sewage source in the river (Krause, 2013). From this juncture to Jaitpur, traversing along the banks becomes nearly impractical, hindered by barriers, drains, private enclosures, governmental edifices, markets, temples, Gurudwaras, bridges and parks. A somber urbanization encroaches upon the natural ecology, presenting a dismal panorama of a polluted river relegated solely to waste disposal. The river revives only when it exits Delhi and the urbanized areas and when Chambal meets it in Bhareh village near Etawah (UP). (Krause, 2013). Described in Hindu mythology as the goddess of life, it is today one of the most polluted rivers in the world. 23 sewage treatment facilities are either nonfunctional or operating at reduced efficiency. (Agarwal, 2015). Even if they were operational, a significant portion of the urban area lacks connections to sewer networks. Sewage simply flows unrestricted into drains and the river.

Sources of river pollution can be categorized in four broad categories; 1. Domestic source 2. Industrial source 3. Religious source. Urban centres Delhi, Dehradun, Karnal, panipat, Soninpat, Faridabad, ballabgarh, Saharanpur, Baghpath, Ghaziabad, Noida, Mathura and Agra are major sources of domestic pollution in the river. (Krause, 2013). Data is almost same in case of the industrial pollution, as a large number of industrial units are in the top cities and still increasing.

2. EXPLORING ARTISTIC RESPONSES

Yamuna is depicted as a Goddess standing on its vehicle tortoise at the entrance of various Indian temples. Its presence can be seen in background of several miniature paintings of Radha Krishna. It is still characterized in today's art but in an entirely different context – Urbanism. A great number of artists have migrated to big metropolis since past few decades. they got to experience the adverse ecological aspect of urbanity which include issues of air toxicity, extinction, waste management, urban encroachment and water degradation. So these issues started reflecting in their oeuvre. Here, the works of selected four artists describe their response to the ecological urgency caused by the destructive effects of rampant urbanization on the Yamuna river.

Vibha Galhotra

Vibha Galhotra focuses on the five fundamental elements ;air, water, earth, fire and space. Being a resident of Delhi and a primary witness to the environmental degradation there, it is natural for Vibha to bring environmental issues in her body of work. She started framing her insights in context of Delhi but presently her works do not talk of a particular locality, they talk of these concerns globally. On the water element itself, she has done intense research and as a result, there is an abundance of such works that she made by collecting sediments from Yamuna, they can be categorized in one segment.

Video **Manthan** is tabulation of statistical-scientific data into a mythological formula produced in a performative act. In present day, Yamuna is less a river and more a sewage, especially while crossing Delhi. The performance highlights the paradox of holy bath and the residential-industrial waste. The whole performance was documented in a video, which opens with a reflection of a crew member in Yamuna water, with passing shots of bridges & concrete buildings, algae on surface of water. River is flowing with the heavy loads of contamination in it. a pure white shroud like cloth is opened and dabbed over the water, water starts flowing on the cloth bringing together the contamination on it, turning the white colour of the fabric into a muddy one. (figure 1). Then they start the replicative churning act. The plot of this performance is based on the hindu mythological story '*Samudra Manthan*¹' which consists several substories such as consumption of halahal poison by lord Siva, significance of centres of Kumbh mela etc. the process of manthan (churning) is mirrored with present-day reality. An analogy is created where consistent churning of ocean milk by Gods & demons resulted in emergence of Nectar and here, churning of the fabric in so-called holy Yamuna water yields a filthy sludge.

Remains is a sequel work of the performative video work *Manthan*. the fabric used in that performance is preserved under resin and showcased in the gallery

¹ The Samudra Manthana, i.e., 'churning of the ocean is a major episode in Hinduism that is elaborated in the Vishnu Purana, a major text of Hinduism. The Samudra Manthana explains the origin of the nectar of eternal life, amrita, that was emerged by constant churning of *ksheer sagar* by alliance of Gods & demons.

against the another part of the same fabric that was not dipped in Yamuna and was kept afresh. both of the clothes are placed on a height and at the base, debris are laid randomly to make one feel the atmosphere of a river. (figure 2). Viewer can easily estimate the amount of contamination in the river by simply observing the work. the cloth itself has taken a form of real sump, after being dipped in the river, is sample of the emitted remains of the modern human.

Beyond the blue (2020) was a whole exhibition of works that addressed ecological awareness about water. the body of works can be categorised into two sections; first the issue of depletion of water sources and the second one is about the evidences of water on Mars and the elite planning of interplanetary escape. through these works, Vibha criticizes the high net worth (HNW) class who are looking to start a new life on another new planet after depleting already available sources on earth. she took reference photos of Mars issued by NASA and employed the same in her works. it presents the Red b colour rough texture and a few marks of blue which possibly can be traces of water, made out of her signature material nickel coated ghunghroo. Shifting to another planet is not possible for middle and lower class people. settling in Mars could only be a possession of Elite. her research initiated in 2013 with NASA Mars mission. “*Why then would life be any different there, when we are not changing here*”. (Garimella, 2020). the other works displayed in this exhibition were **Wounded, Fragile** that address the same concern.

The show **Absur-City-Pity-Dity** (2015) has the work *365 days* that narrates the experience of artist in the highly populated city Delhi. New people migrate to Delhi in hope for employment and other reasons on daily basis which give rise to the congestion and inevitable outcomes such as air and water pollution. the work was displayed into three modes; 1. the diary journal that vibha maintained throughout the year 2. the mix media works on paper 3. installation water collected from Yamuna in several tiny bottles. *my attempt is not just to map my own reality but through it, the reality of urban life across the surface of planet.* (Pall, 2015).

The work with the title **Who Owns The Water** has several versions in land & site specific installation and in form of formative dinner project, made by artist in different time periods but addressing the same concern of ownership of water. Whenever an environmental issue is raised by an activist or an intellectual, no one is ready to take the responsibility. Delhi is acknowledged as one of the most polluted cities across the globe. Yamuna to be the most polluted river, it is an irony in itself that Yamuna whose only 2% Span crosses through Delhi has 80% of pollution coming from Delhi, due to large scale of untreated industrial and residential waste drained directly into the river, which turns the holy river into a cesspool. This sewage like water is supplied for agriculture and for usage of normal public. this large scale of pollution is then transfered to other two rivers at their confluence in Allahabad. She shows her great concern toward dysfunctional water treatment plants situated in Delhi. she interrogates who owns the water in order to find someone to take charge to change the situation. the work was made by constructing the alphabet of tagline out of found organic materials and letting them flow on the surface of river.

Test tube is another representation of sediments collected from Yamuna in a glass test tube and placed vertically on a steel stand. all the deep black sediments has settled down the tube and only 30% of water looks visibly clean, which might be not enough clean to consume. (figure 3).

Sediments and others untitled (sediments from Yamuna on board) the artist used Yamuna sediment as a medium for her Canvas, in the same manner as one does

with acrylics and inks. Vibha collected the heavily contaminated water full of mud in buckets and splashed over her blank canvas. through this work she brought the real image of Yamuna that is acknowledged as holy in our traditional understanding. the act of working on these Canvas also documented as a performance. (figure 4).

Series **Flow** includes mostly tapastery works made out of ghungroo, fabric, wood and Steel. the woven ghungroo beads of different colour gives the impression of flowing waves. the series includes works that are two dimensional framed in a rectangular formats as well as sculptural works. from the vertex point of adjoining walls, a termite like pattern is woven with ghungroo bells which scrolls down and spreads like a thick liquid on the floor. (figure 5). It certainly indicates the sludge of Yamuna river.

River map is analogous with her another work **Nuke Love** and **the Altering Boon** in terms of method and materials. A mesh is hanged, several map-routs are drawn through weaving glass beads which looks more clearly visible in its shadow.

3. ATUL BHALLA

Atul Bhalla examines the spatial, mythological and spiritual relevance of water bodies in context of urban spaces and its inhabitants through sculpture, installations, video, photography and performance. He views Delhi through the perspective of river Yamuna and this perception helps him think about the city differently. He traveled to different cities around the World such as Shanghai, Basel, Mumbai, Hamburg, Johannesburg etc. the encounters that he makes in each of these places becomes the centre of his work. Research plays a great role in his works. While exploring any City he focuses on what is underneath, that is the underbelly of the city. they are usually the water sources, sewage lines etc which are not visible to most travelers but they are what the city is built upon. so most of his ideas actually emerge as he explores these invisible layers of the city. Being an early riser, he frequently ventures out to explore cities at dawn, when the city is at rest—a time that offers a distinct experience and allows him to observe the unseen side of the city.

Ancient cities have historically developed along the banks of rivers, relying on them for sustenance in various ways. In return, the cities have incorporated them into their myths and histories, they preserved them as a part of their collective consciousness. But Delhi is neglecting its life-giving river, the Yamuna. whether during the Mughal era or the British rule, Delhi faced the river Yamuna. But in modern Delhi, there is a strange disconnect, as the city no longer engages with the Yamuna River and the buildings has their back to the river. Observing the Yamuna has become a challenge, as the river can only be glimpsed from a few barricaded flyovers, let alone touched. Remarkably, most of this neglect has occurred after India gained independence. The river has been reduced to a mere drain running in the background. The land along the riverbanks was used by farmers for harvesting, but that too was taken by authorities to make more concrete structures there. We are always on the receiving end from the river. Yet, we fail to comprehend that what we give back to her can cause her demise. Our "urban temple" offers toxic waste to this giver of energy. The city has allowed untreated sewage from major drains to flow directly into the river and buildings have been constructed along the river that turn their backs on it. Consequently, there is a lack of riverfront and limited access to the river, except for cremation grounds and small ghats used for ash disposal after cremation.

Yamuna walk is a photographic documentation, a five-day journey along the river's western bank encompassing Delhi, which revealed a world closely connected to the river but hidden from common view. Farmers and fishermen reside along the river, while in urban areas, waste collectors, rag pickers, rickshaw pullers and fruit and vegetable sellers can be found near the river or under bridges. At times through this journey, Bhalla navigated between blooming fields, piles of waste, climbed fences and crossed concrete overpasses to continue his quest.

Drinking fountains, known as *piaus*, were once a freely available public resource that conveyed clean water from the river to all residents of the city. These fountains can still be found predominantly in the less affluent and communal areas of Old Delhi. ***The Piaus*** series signifies the existence of a traditional water source in a modern urban setting. ***The Piaus I*** focuses on the taps that currently extract water from the highly polluted river, which has been severely affected by years of sewage and chemical pollution. The fountains' dirty and deteriorated state is emphasized by vibrant colors and patterned surfaces. By presenting a collection of 20 images in a large grid, Bhalla's artwork suggests that widespread socioeconomic inequalities are caused by both neglected infrastructure and the contamination of nature. (figure 6) ***Piaus II*** contains set of 16 images, he has done several more sets in the same series.

Chabeel is a Multilayered work, which can be read in a number of ways; as a can shaped monument which later served as a place for collecting wastage and projection of pictures, as banners displayed at platforms of metro stations, as tickets/ stickers distributed in passing by travelers and as the practice of *chabeel*² actually executed among public.

To raise awareness about the river flowing adjacent to Kashmere Gate, Bhalla created a monument called *Chabeel* there. In the medieval times, Kashmere gate served as an entry point to the walled city of Delhi and the Yamuna was a vital part of the city's identity. The chosen site was previously enclosed under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The Chabeel was made as a tilted larger than life sized canister, such water cans are used in the carrying holy water from the Yamuna or Ganges. At The metro station of Kashmere Gate, one of Delhi's busiest sites, bhalla installed lightboxes displaying photographs of the Yamuna within Delhi's geographical boundaries. These images deviate from the conventional portrayal of polluted waters and degraded surroundings, encouraging viewers to question their preconceived notions of the river. The project prompts the questions: "Have you ever seen the Yamuna? Have you ever touched the Yamuna?". His artistic approach often involves staging provocative questions or presenting statements to the public, a format he frequently employs in his works. (figure 7).

The practice was performed by offering free drinking water in recycled paper cups, accompanied by stickers posing the same questions about the Yamuna as displayed at metro station and nearby. People would immediately get reminded of those hoardings and make a connection. they were encouraged to place the stickers on their vehicles or public transport, spreading furthermore awareness throughout the city. After consumption of water, the cups were being collected, this collection of people's "Jhooth" (waste) was placed inside the structure. As more people learned about the project, they were inspired to leave a part of themselves behind. The Chabeel served as a reminder of the Yamuna's presence outside the gates of Kashmere Gate and the forgotten wells and step wells (*baolis*) of Delhi. The structure was covered with square white tiles resembling of city's poorly

² A Chabeel is a temporary site that offers free water, lassi (a yogurt-based drink), and sometimes food to passersby, primarily during summer and auspicious occasions, usually practiced by people of Sikh community.

maintained public bathrooms and toilets. After sunset, projections of photographs taken along various points of the Yamuna were displayed on the tiled surface of the monument. The projections spilled over onto the structure, created a captivating views for visitors and succeeded in rejuvenating the previously inactive ASI site.

Looking for Dvaipayana

In exploration of Delhi by bhalla, he searched for the "lost" water that once existed within the city. Through performances at locations named after water sources, such as old wells, step wells and other forgotten water bodies, he aimed to revive the memory of these vanished resources. Many of these water sources have been covered up or destroyed to make way for roads and facilitate traffic flow. The chosen locations are named after the historic aquifers in Delhi, such as 'ChapparWalaKuh' (the thatched reservoir) in Karol Bagh, Panchkuina Road (Five reservoir road), KhariBaoli (the saline step reservoir), and JantaPiau (one of the earliest reservoirs in Old Delhi, positioned in the center of the thoroughfare opposite Old Delhi railway station).

The hunched body resembles a dehumanized form or a bowed head in supplication, metaphorically represents defeat, submission, or confession. (figure 8). The head is so deeply bowed that it nearly confesses guilt, surrendering oneself to Dvaipayana³ (in the form of a river, lake, baoli or well). The artwork may also convey mourning, creating a moment of silence. It contemplates the question, "*Do I wish to become the well, baoli, river or water body?*" and reminds us that we always step into the same river, emphasizing the eternal nature of change and transformation. (Bhalla, 2023). In Bhalla's work "Immersion" from 2008, sand sourced directly from the Yamuna River was utilized to produce concrete replicas of portable water vessels. Subsequently, these replicas are submerged in glass cases filled with water, establishing a link between Delhi's traditional water reservoir and the conspicuous absence of disposable containers in contemporary times.

Although ecological reasons can be challenging for everyone to comprehend, his public installations and participatory works aim to engage people in environmental issues. He sees this as an indirect yet potentially effective way to make people aware in the cause of cleaning the water. (Bhalla, 2014)

4. GIGI SCARIA

Engaging with Delhi for the past 3 decades, Gigi's daily observations and interactions with the city have greatly shaped his understanding of urban spaces in India. The diverse social structures and hierarchies encountered within a single day in Delhi provoke contemplation on the broader concept of "India." The urban and rural divide, class and caste, religion and practices and countless eccentric exchanges among different social groups contribute to the enigmatic nature of any

³ In the Sanskrit language, Dvaipayana translates to "that which is encircled by water." As per the ancient texts known as Purans, the sage Parashar encounters Kalindi (the Yamuna river in northern India) and desires to cross it. Surveying his surroundings, he spots a fisherman's vessel. Parashar appeals to Satyawathi, the fisherman's daughter present on the boat, for passage across the river. Given her father's absence, Satyawathi consents. During their journey, the sage becomes enamored with the young woman and propositions her for intimacy. She acquiesces, leading to the conception of a child during their voyage. Subsequently, a male offspring is born on a Yamuna island and christened Krishana DvaipayanaVyas (the dusky one from the island), or VedVyas, as he becomes known later. VedVyas is credited with compiling the four Vedas and the Mahabharata epic. Dvaipayana also serves as a body of water in the final stages of the Mahabharata War. King Duryodhana, the war's instigator, seeks refuge in this lake, which then blankets him in ice, alleviating his weariness and anguish from his misdeeds. According to the epic, he can only emerge from Dvaipayana at his own will; no external force can extract him from the frozen depths. Within the Mahabharata, King Duryodhana shelters within the lake, which symbolizes both the creator and the created. Hence, Dvaipayana transforms into the mythical reservoir from which all existence may emanate and where we might trace our origins.

urban space in India. The notion of "modernity" must constantly be questioned and contextualized in every discourse. The impact of the new emerging urban landscape driven by the construction boom on our natural resources is addressed by him in several times through various architectural and sculptural forms.

Sources of a river in descending order explores the collective impact of human waste as it descends to the ground. Urban structures are constantly seeking outlets to release their squalor. Polluted rivers in any location are symptomatic of an epidemic, for which our civilization bears the responsibility to address. Rivers serve as the lifeline to land, location, territory, settlement, community and nation. When we harshly mistreat our resources, driven by our selfish pursuit of happiness, our future becomes as dark as the color of our polluted river. (figure 9).

The project ***City unclaimed- Smart museum project Chicago*** is the outcome of a year-long collaboration of Gigi with curator Jessica Moss to create an installation at the Smart Museum cafeteria. The installation consists of two interconnected sections, forming a complex combination of sculpture and digital intervention. The digital component incorporates manipulated photographic images of Delhi, showcasing an imaginary cityscape with its unique cultural dynamics. These images were captured from various parts of the city, taking into account the stark differences in social and economic classes and exploring the heterogeneous nature of the metropolis. The second part of the installation is a fountain situated in front of the digital wall. The fountain is constructed using apartment blocks, resembling the city's architectural aesthetic. This fountain addresses the issues of water scarcity as Yamuna is getting dry within the city. It raises concerns about drainage water, polluted water bodies and dead rivers as well as the wastefulness of water by both public and private sectors. Considering the global scarcity and depletion of natural resources, urbanization plays a significant role in this predicament. Traditionally, fountains were designed as urban inventions to harness natural water sources through technical means. By juxtaposing a city with a fountain, the artwork initiates a dialogue between man-made disasters and natural calamities. "City unclaimed" explores the idiosyncrasies nurtured within a typical urban setting in India, largely shaped by migrant populations and their constant pilgrimage in search of opportunities. Each part of the city claims its immediate surroundings, but as a whole, it remains unattended and unclaimed by any system or logic. It thrives and deteriorates based on its own rules. (figure 10).

Fountain of purification highlights the lack of wastewater management and the presence of polluted water bodies suffering due to mismanagement. Gigi has been a keen observer of urban planning and various social spaces within Indian metropolises for the past decade. The growth and magnitude of major Indian cities have increased over time, but the distribution of natural resources has become entangled in a severe management crisis. As a result, cities like Delhi, which have a river flowing through a 25-kilometer stretch, bear the burden of polluted water. Recognizing the challenges faced by water bodies in the developing world, he proposed a fountain located in a public area that utilizes contaminated water from natural sources such as polluted rivers or industrial wastewater, which often flow through canals in many cities. The fountain's architectural structure will consist of three to four levels. The water pumped from the lower structure of the fountain will undergo a cleansing process before reaching the next level. The fountain's design will incorporate a mechanical device that purifies the water as it ascends. Upon reaching the fourth or fifth level, the water will be as pure as drinking water. The excess purified water that overflows at the top of the fountain will be directed back to the ground and made available for public use. The Fountain of Purification can

serve as a practical way to generate interest in recycling and wastewater management. It will also function as an intriguing public sculpture with captivating architectural possibilities. (figure 11). The water's transformative journey within the fountain, ascending towards purification and then returning to the ground level for public benefit, symbolizes both the practical application of science and the metaphorical association of an artistic insight to contemporary issues within an urban context. Though the model proposed by Gigi seemed to be promising and serving for both aesthetic and utility purpose, but the project could run only for a couple of days due to lack of fundings. (G. Scaria, personal communication, June 19, 2021).

5. RAVI AGGARWAL

Ravi Aggarwal is an environmentalist turned artist based in New Delhi who is deeply concerned about how urbanization has affected India's rivers and the way of life associated with them. He has been engaging with the river Yamuna in New Delhi with past few years. To him, the river is more than just a body of water coursing through the urban landscape, but rather a complex web of diverse connections, each founded on various forms of interactions. Nonetheless, it appears that the city not only lacks awareness of the river itself but is also largely ignorant of the profound interconnection that persists. The prosperous river passing through the rural part takes a melancholic form as soon as it enters the highly urbanized Delhi.

The photographic work *Have you seen the flowers on the river ?* (figure 12) originated from the floral cultivation on the banks of the Yamuna (Fatehpuri, Old Delhi), now displaced, emerged. Previously, there existed flower fields along the riverbanks, where individuals cultivated marigolds to sustain their livelihoods. The allure of the flower lies in its exchange worth, which consequently supports a viable local economy. The river furnishes natural soil fertility and readily accessible groundwater, along with its own terrain; the sandy riverbed serves as a location for cultivation. Approximately 1 acre of land can produce more than 15 tons of flowers; including zafris, basantis, and gendas. During the 7 to 9-month flower season, families and acquaintances cultivated and harvested the flowers, primarily vending them at the Fatehpuri market in Old Delhi. This market, one of the largest retail flower markets in North India, witnessed tons of flowers being sold each morning within a few hours. Subsequently, these flowers journeyed to temples, residences, and were transported via trucks to serve as embellishments in weddings and religious ceremonies, often ending up discarded back into the river as waste and debris.

Flower exchange (sites of exchange - flower fields and sinks) The urban area extracts water from the river and returns it as wastewater. Virtually every faucet and sink is directly linked to the river's flow. While the city laments the deteriorated condition of the river due to contamination and filth, it remains oblivious to its own contribution to this situation. More than 3000 million liters of sewage are discharged into the river through drains, bathtubs, sewage systems, pipelines, and similar channels. apart from that, river is severely alienated in the city. Ravi found that most of his friends living for over a decade in Delhi, had never been on the river and not even know how to get there. Ravi decided to capture views of the bathrooms of his fellows and produced them as photographs in response to his insight which he quoted in a note saying : *while flowers flow from the river to the city, waste water flows from the city to the river.* he shared with them the poster of his e blog, where he posted all the information and his personal observations about the river surviving in Delhi. (figure 13).

Riverbank installation In 2007, Aggarwal created installations and took photographs to draw attention of the masses to the destructive consequences of construction along the Yamuna River. The river is slowly giving way to the concrete. It will endure until this phase passes. (figure 14). Aluminium poles are tied with threads and a dummy temporary model of a construction site was created to address the ever-expanding urban encroachment over riverbanks. New urban imagination not only brings bricks, mortar & steel to these flower fields but also expelling these farmers from their abode. He interrogates through the work *is it the final battle between humans and nature ?* In a related piece of writing called "Have You Seen the Flowers on the River?" he expressed:

"The sandy banks are being impaled by steel and pounded by massive mechanical hammers. Water needs no violence. It quietly accommodates and flows around—when it is allowed to. The concrete will make it impossible for the water to sink into the ground, or to bring fertile soil onto its banks." (Agarwal,2021)

Immersion.Emergence includes set of 24 images of performance photographs staged by Ravi Aggarwal. He covered himself in a shroud and stood as a symbol of death. The performance was intended as a dirge dedicated to thousands of farmers who were expelled from riverbanks by state authorities in order to clean up the waterway for the ahead commonwealth games and handing over this land to developer lobby to build bridges, pathways and more concrete constructions. He *"says ecocide (murder of ecology) is suicide"*. (figure 15). The river ought to be permitted to meander naturally, endowed with sufficient water and land, devoid of excessive regulation.

Alien Waters is the collection of random photographs of the alienated Yamuna banks in Delhi. The Yamuna River flows in the margins of Delhi. Sadly, the relationship that people of delhi & Yamuna share, is not what has been between a river and the surrounding habitations. The city seems to not needing it anymore. Buildings are designed in such a way that they have their back to the river. What they want from the river is only the land in underbelly of the river to fulfill their capitalist ambitions. The regional economy relies on the productivity of the soil, yet the escalating land values in the city are reshaping the economic dynamics of sustenance. Land adjacent to Wazirabad, close to the flower fields, now commands prices exceeding 3 lakhs rupees per acre due to the demand for new land sources within the densely populated city. Selling this land could yield greater profits than cultivating flowers or vegetables. The fertility of capital surpasses that of the land itself. The river, increasingly encroached upon for construction projects, stadiums, grand temples, and the Commonwealth Games village, appears to be a casualty of our urbanization process. The narrative of our urban development seems to be inscribed upon it. The river remains timeless, yet it is perceived as lifeless. (Agarwal, 2015).

The video work called **The Sewage Pond's Memoir** creates an immersive experience for the viewer. The work was shot over a duration of a year in Delhi Ridge, also known as green lungs of Delhi. The site was in a dense and eerie forest located at one end of the ancient Aravalli mountain range . The video tells a story about the memories of drawing water from a well, but it does so sparingly, providing only a few details. As you watch the video, you can see misty light coming through the forest, creating an atmosphere that feels slightly unsettling. The forest itself is in a state of despair, with broken branches scattered around and the streams running through it are murky. The light reflects off the surface of these streams, creating a mysterious effect. This particular forest, often referred to as "Delhi's green lungs," used to provide nourishment to the growing metropolis of Delhi. However, now it is

facing a problem. Sewage, trash and construction are slowly encroaching upon the forest from its edges. This intrusion threatens the forest's natural beauty and ecological balance. The video shares a distant memory of drawing water from a well, while also highlighting the degradation of the forest & adjoining pond due to pollution, garbage and construction encroachment. **Polluted waters** video emerges in slides. With each slide the greasy contamination gets increased in the pure transparent water, making it all sludgy till the last slide.

6. CONCLUSION

The contemporary art practices involving photography, installation, new media and public art to address the contemporary issue of Yamuna water problems, not only highlight the ecological and environmental concerns associated with the river but also delve into the mythological and cultural significance attached to it. By utilizing Yamuna sludge as a medium on canvas, Vibha symbolically represents the contamination and degradation of the river. She has drawn attention to the level of pollution in the Yamuna and its impact on both mythological narratives and ecological balance. Atul Bhalla By capturing the pious (taps) and constructing the monument named "Chabeel," Bhalla raised awareness among the public about the neglected Yamuna, encouraging them to connect with and appreciate the river. Gigi Scaria combined aesthetics with utility, addressed the issue of pollution in the river and proposed a solution, suggesting the possibility of restoring the Yamuna's purity and sanctity. Ravi captured the flower harvests and laments the loss of agricultural land due to construction projects. His works raise questions about the consequences of urban expansion and the displacement of farmers. A common thread among these artists is their use of art as a powerful tool for engaging the public and raising awareness about the Yamuna water issues. Through their innovative approaches, they aim to bridge the gap between people and the river, encouraging a deeper connection and a sense of responsibility towards its well-being.

After a comprehensive analysis of the aforementioned works, with a special focus on the performances, site-specific installations within public spaces and socially engaging art practices, it can be concluded that such art interventions succeeded in breaking the conventional norm of art display in white cube spaces, making art accessible to common people and hence conveying their message to a broader and more diverse audience.

the artistic interpretations of Yamuna water issues in an urban context by Vibha Galhotra, Atul Bhalla, Ravi Aggarwal and Gigi Scaria demonstrate the artists' commitment to addressing contemporary environmental concerns. By incorporating mythological narratives, engaging the public and proposing potential solutions, these artists encourage us to reflect on our relationship with the Yamuna river and inspire us to take action towards its preservation and restoration.

As a limitation, it is important to acknowledge that there are additional artists as well, e.g., Vivan Sundaram, Sheba Chhachhi etc. whose contributions could also enrich this study. Their works offer potential insights into the theme and consideration for further exploration in this context. Moreover, a related study can be pursued in reference to the Cooum river in Chennai, where similar issues have been raised artistically.

Figure 1



Figure 1 Manthan, Vibha Galhotra, Single channel Film, 10 min. 43 sec. 2015

Source <http://vibhagalhotra.com/>

Figure 2



Figure 2 Remains, Vibha Galhotra Fabric dipped in sediment embedded in resin, on steel stands, 95.4" x 7.95" x 5.2" 2015

Source <http://vibhagalhotra.com/>

Figure 3

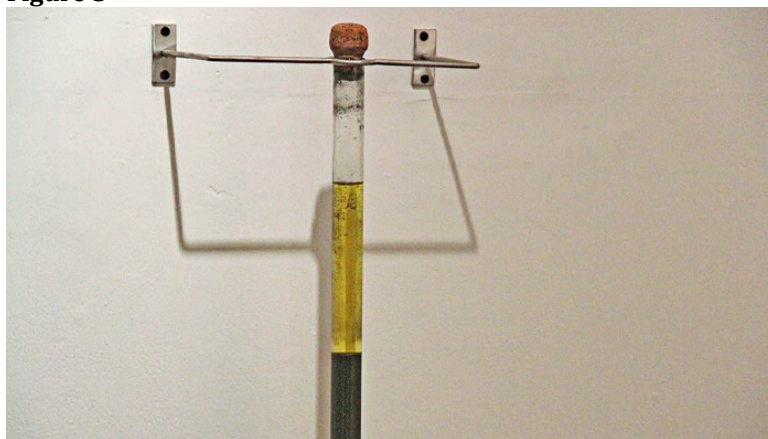


Figure 3 Test Tube, Vibha Galhotra Sediment Collected from Yamuna River in Test Tube 2 x 48 in 2012

Source <http://vibhagalhotra.com/>

Figure 4



Figure 4 Sediment and other untitled..., Vibha Galhotra, Sediment from River Yamuna on Board- 60 x 48 in 2012

Source <http://vibhagalhotra.com/>

Figure 5



Figure 5 From the series – Flow, Vibha Galhotra Ghungroos, Fabric 129" x 93" x 112", 2014

Source <http://vibhagalhotra.com/>

Figure 6



Figure 6 Piau, Atul Bhalla, Digital print on archival set of 20 12 16 inches 2019

Source: <https://atulbhalla.com/>

Figure 7



Figure 7 Chabeel, Atul bhalla Wood, ceramic tiles, recyclable paper cups, water Yamuna, sand, cement, video projection 15 6 10 ft
Source <https://atulbhalla.com/>



a part of Atul Bhall's work Chabeel, Kashmiri Gate Delhi metro station



a part of Atul Bhall's work Chabeel, Kashmiri Gate Delhi ISBT



a part of Atul Bhalla's work Chabeel, the inside view of Canaster monument

Source <https://atulbhalla.com/>

Figure 8

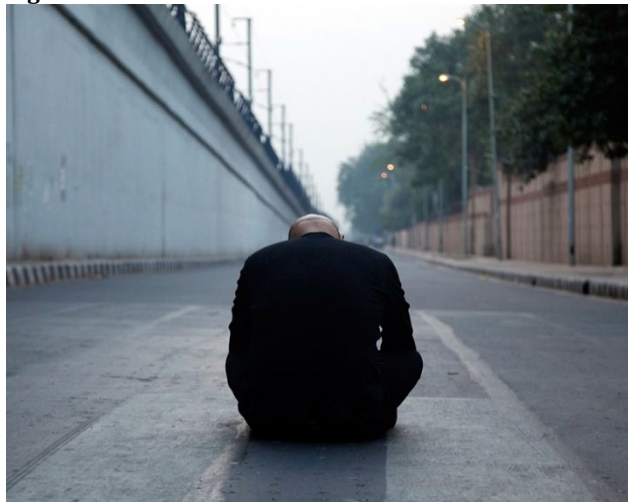


Figure 8 Atul Bhalla, looking for dvaipayana, photo performance, 2014

Source <https://atulbhalla.com/>

Figure 9



Figure 9 Gigi Scaria. Source Of A River In Descending Order 2016

Source gigiscaria.in

Figure 10



Figure 10 Gigi Scaria, City Unclaimed 2012 Digital print, aluminum structure, fountain pump and water. An installation project at the Smart Museum Chicago
Source gigiscaria.in

Figure 11



Figure 11 Gigi Scaria, Fountain Of Purification 2011 A proposal for a site specific installation on the bank of river Yamuna
Source gigiscaria.in

Figure 12



Figure 12 Ravi Agarwal. Have you seen the flowers on the river? Print on Archival (2007-2010)

Figure 13



Figure 13 Ravi Agarwal Flower exchange, print on Archival Photographic prints , 11" x 16 " each
Source raviagarwal.com

Figure 14

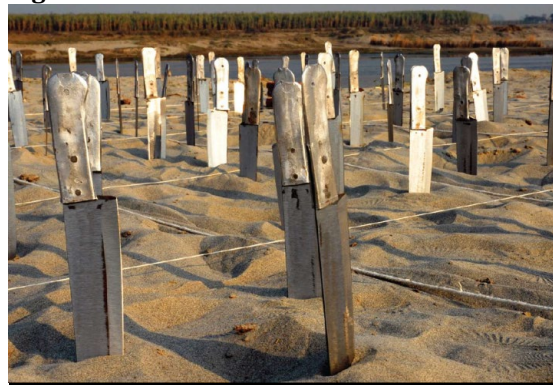


Figure 14 Ravi Agarwal Riverbank Installations I, II, III (2007)
Source raviagarwal.com

Figure 15



Figure 15. Ravi Agarwal Immersion.Emergence (2007), PerformanceSet of 24 images, approx. 8" x 11" each. Public art, 2008
Source raviagarwal.com

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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