

100 Days
of
YAMUNA
SATYAGRAH

AUGUST-OCTOBER 2007



JAL BIRADARI



**100 DAYS
OF
YAMUNA SATYAGRAH**

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Jal Biradari (Water Community or Water Brotherhood) was formed in April 2000 at Neemi village (Jaipur district, Rajasthan, India). Jal Biradari consist of, and works with, individuals and organizations who consider water resources like rivers, tanks, ponds etc. as common property of all living beings. It advocates decentralized community driven water management as an approach to solve water problems.

Jal Biradri launched **Yamuna Satyagrah** on 1st August 2007 in Delhi to save and reclaim Yamuna river bed and its floodplains from pollution and encroachment with the immediate demand for stopping the construction of Commonwealth Game Village and Metro Rail Complex structures.

Why Yamuna Satyagrah? :

A satyagrah is a universal interest and an action of devotion for fulfilling the needs of everyone with patience and fortitude in a nonviolent manner. We believe that our lives exist in nature and that rivers serve as our sustenance. But some people's self-interests overpower their commitment to common interests, and jeopardise the wellbeing of these resources. Despite their awareness of the harmful effects their actions have on rivers, they continue to kill the precious rivers.

In 2000 the government of India pressured the Delhi government to provide space for the construction of Akshardham Complex near Yamuna. And now the government has again decided to harm the Yamuna by constructing the athletes' village for the 2010 Commonwealth Games on the adjacent site. Plans to build and convert the land to market housing will eventually profit the Akshardham Complex. The Yamuna floodplains within Delhi used to be owned by the Delhi Peasant's Co-operative Society (DPCS). Till now, whatever work had been done on this land was carried out by the government, requesting land from the DPCS to use for the nation's interest. But in the case of the two most recent sites, no such request for land was made to the DPCS. This was because both of these construction projects were initiated by the private sector in the case of Akshardham Complex it was a trust, and a private Olympic society in the

case of the Games Village.

Both are examples of illegal construction, with collusion of the Delhi Development Authority. We won't let our Mother Yamuna suffer because of it; we aim to salvage what ever health the river is left with by pressuring the government and echoing the demands of the people and the DPCS.

Instead of acting as the proprietors of the River Yamuna, as the Government. Is behaving in the present situation, we need to treat Yamuna as our mother. Only by doing this, can we receive the reciprocal

benefits from the river. Yamuna Satyagrah is an effort to achieve this task. The Honourable Chairman of the core group of cabinet ministers, Shri



Arjun Singh called a meeting with Yamuna Satyagrahis on October 13th 2007, but for some reason the meeting has been postponed until November 12th 2007. We the Yamuna Satyagrahis hope that the government of India will make a positive decision to protect the river bed floodplain of Yamuna and will shift the construction site of the Commonwealth Games Village to another place.

The Usha Mehra Committee, also called the Yamuna

Removal of Encroachments Monitoring Committee, has been appointed by the high court itself and submitted a report which mentions “all authorities be directed to maintain” the river bed as a of all construction or water body and order demolition of all construction of permanent nature brought in place in the river bed and to restore the character of the river bed as a water body. It seems us that the high court hears the voices of the people and its intention is to take rationalised decision to rights of this report indulges energy into the Yamuna Satyagrahis to continue the movement until the government takes positive dictions in this regard.

Background Facts:

Yamuna riverbank area:	9700ha; 6600ha (intact).
Length of Yamuna in Delhi:	48 km (22 km from Wazirabad to Okhla)
Soil composition:	sand (top layer); silt, clay, bedrock (sub layer).
Depth of permeable sand layer:	approx. 30 - 40 metres
Water holding capacity:	50 - 60% per volume
Total water recharges potential:	1.2 billion cu. m. ($\sim\frac{3}{4}$ of Delhi's annual water needs)
Delhi water sources:	30-40% diverted from the

Ganga and Beas Rivers.

Equivalent economic value:

>Rs.12, 000 cores/year.
(USD 3 billion). *Includes
non-invasive water use at
an estimated
Rs.1,000/10,000L tanker.
Excludes value of
Yamuna's ecological
services.

Flood plain recharge:

(Normal annual rainwater):

10-20 cm/year

(1-2day benign river flood):

30-40 metre

*Monsoon provides
enough flow to recharge
the aquifer. But reducing
the floodplain permeable
area reduces the capacity
for recharge.

Water Dependence, Sharing and Stress¹:

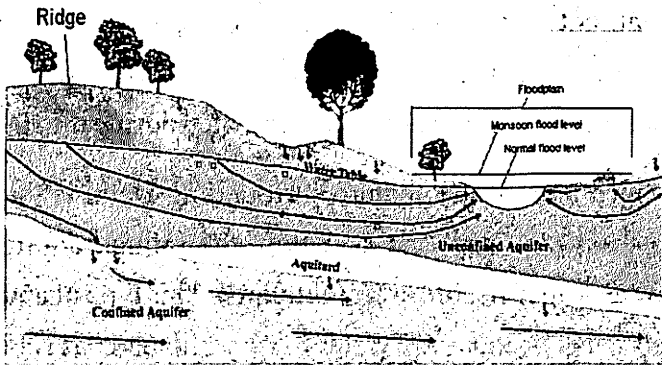
With a population of about 1.2 billion in the country, it is particularly pertinent for Indian mega-cities to consider the carrying capacity of their natural resources. Delhi's water resources have an estimated carrying capacity of 8 million people, while the actual population is around 17 million. These extremely stressed water resources are supplemented by additional withdrawals from the Ganga and Beas Rivers in neighbouring watersheds. Inter-watershed diversions are ecologically disreputable and increasing withdrawals would increase these negative effects on both the giving and receiving watersheds, while potentially aggravating provincial water disputes. Alternative water sources (such as urban rainwater harvesting and water recycling) could alleviate a relatively small percentage of the water stress, but are unrealistic large-scale alternatives. In light of this dependence on the Yamuna, it's imperative that the threats be examined and the river be protected.

Three natural water features surround Delhi. On one side is the ridge, the edge of the Aravali range, which provides a natural catchment basin for collecting and infiltrating rainwater. This serves to recharge Delhi's highest quality aquifers and, using conservative estimates, it provides 60 million cu. m of water, equivalent in value to Rs 11,000 crores

¹ Sourced from Vikram Soni, (2007), *Three Waters* and Vikram Soni & Diwan Singh, (2007), *Delhi's Water Budget: Consumption, Discharge and Groundwater Withdrawal*.

(USD 2.75 billion) per year if valued as high quality mineral water. Less than 50% of the ridge is currently protected.

The Yamuna flood plains are on the other side, badly abused despite being Delhi's largest water feature. Like most rivers in India, Yamuna flow varies and peaks during monsoon. The high waters deposit silt and sand and create a soil which defines the floodplain. This porous soil can hold 60% water and is highly effective in storage because, unlike a lake, surface water loss to evaporation is negligible. Taking into consideration the depth and area of the floodplains, a conservative estimate for water storage is 1 billion cu. m, or approximately the annual water needs of Delhi. In its natural state, the floodplain can recharge completely every monsoon.



But with diversions upstream, and embankments cutting off parts of the floodplain, this service has already been severely handicapped. Assuming that a 10cu.m. tanker is worth Rs.1000/- the annual water available from the floodplains is

worth about ₹s. 10,000 crores (USD 2.5 billion). This service is under threat and the current government seems to disregard its importance, with existing developments like the Akshardham Complex and Delhi Secretariat and the construction of the Commonwealth Games Village and Delhi Metro facilities underway.

What makes the Yamuna floodplains particularly valuable is their natural capacity for storing water without adding many salts which render the water hard. Compared to other older alluvium sedimentary plains, the Yamuna floodplains have very high permeability, and very low salt content. This allows for a quick recharge of nearly 80% of water that reaches the floodplain, as compared to only 17-18% for other plains. In older alluvium plains, floods allow salts to rise to the surface, rendering the soil infertile. But because of the low salt content, not only do the Yamuna floodplains keep the water fresh, the soil here becomes increasingly fertile by avoiding salination and gaining nutrients deposited during the flood.

The third large water feature surrounding Delhi is the large deep fossil aquifers that sit below the rainfed aquifer and below an impermeable layer (aquitard). This type of aquifer is called fossil because the water is very old, and has relatively much slower recharge rates. Consequently, it is not a viable renewable water resource, and should only be considered for use in emergencies. Regardless of the unsustainable supply, the fossil aquifers are currently being pumped in Delhi and

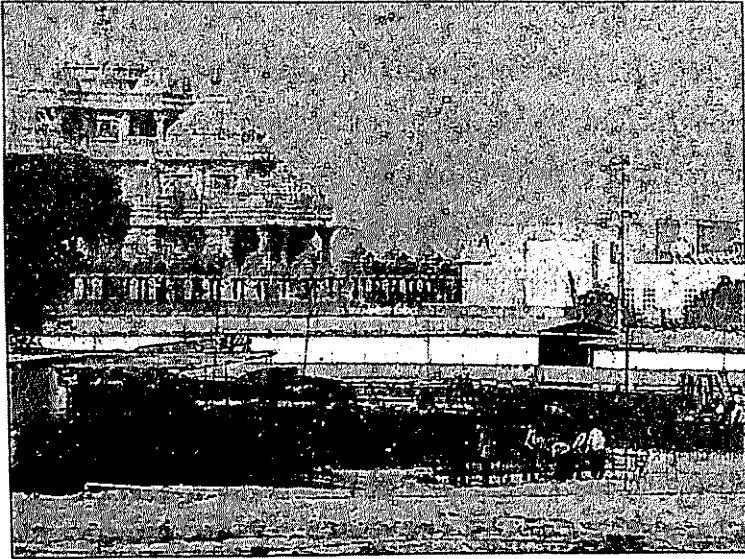
surrounding cities.

Delhi is growing both vertically and horizontally, but little regard is being given to the most basic of urban development infrastructure: water. There is a lack of accurate data on per capita water consumption, So one method used for estimate has been by inference based on sewage released by the city as representing approximately 80% of the volume which was consumed. One estimate finds that Delhi consumes 1.3 billion gallons per day. Of this approximately 50% is said to be extracted from groundwater, and the rest from surface water such as the Yamuna, Ganga and Beas Rivers. The recharge potential for the city is somewhere between 1/8th of the current groundwater withdrawal, and water-tables are dropping, while Delhi's population is ever growing.

All of this is to emphasize the existing stress on Delhi's water resources. With plans to urbanize the greenbelt around the city and the progressive encroachment onto the Yamuna floodplains, the water stress will only increase. It is imperative that the permeable agriculture, forest and undeveloped lands remain in a state where they can serve to recharge the water table, during rains and monsoon floods.



Games In, Games Out²:



Delhi will be playing host to 19th Commonwealth Games (CWG) from 3 -14 October in the winter of 2010. Held every four years since 1930, the CWG would be taking place for only the second time in Asia, following Kuala Lumpur in 1998. After Malaysia and Jamaica (1966), India would be the third developing country to host the event. India had previously lost the CWG bids in 1990 and 1994 and dropped out of the race in 1998 to give support to Kuala Lumpur. With more than 1 billion people, India is the Commonwealth's largest nation and accounts for some 55 percent of the Commonwealth's population. Delhi was bidding to host the Games against Hamilton and Ontario, both from Canada. The secret ballot gave Delhi a winning 46 votes out of a possible

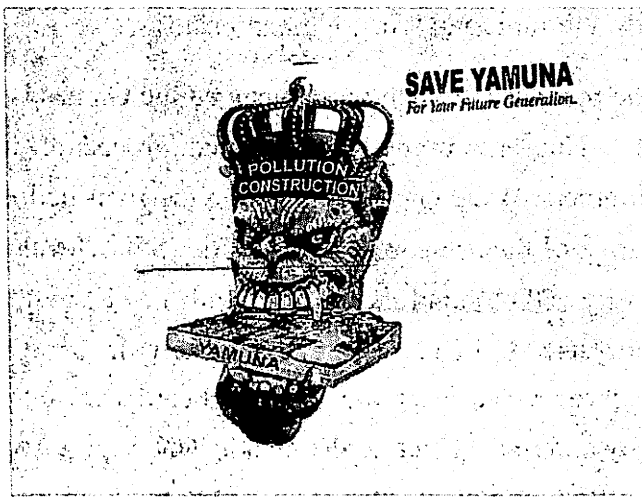
²Source from Hazards Center (2007), *2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi: How Much Does National Prestige Cost?*

72 against Hamilton's 22. Delhi's only previous experiences as host were for the Asian Games (Asiad) in 1951 and 1982. This will be the biggest multi-sport event conducted in the city. Hence, the decision to award the CWG to India is being acclaimed with great fervour by policy-makers, media, and eminent citizens.

The Commonwealth Games, often referred to as the 'Friendly Games' compared to the Olympics, are organized every four years by the Commonwealth Games Federation, a union of about 70 countries. There is relatively a narrow variety of sports, and the performance levels for most are well below both the Olympic and World Championships.

But the manner in which India received the Games is not so simple. The environmental clearance procedure for the development of the Games Village on the river-bed is itself indicative of the pressures at work. The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) approached the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) for clearance of the village in October 2006, three years after the bid had been won, citing the urgency and importance of the matter. The Expert Appraisal Committee made a site visit the next month and *recommended that the DDA find an alternative site*. But the DDA pressured the MOEF on grounds of time being a major constraint. The MOEF then issued the clearance in December subject to *the condition that only temporary structures would be built* and there would be no rain water discharge. In

January 2007 DDA proposed a study on flooding by the CWPRS in Pune and the MOEF agreed that the DDA could begin planning provided mitigation measures were identified. In February, CWPRS submitted the Hydraulic Model Studies and the final report was submitted to MOEF in March, and DDA deemed it sufficient and decided to proceed with construction. MOEF complied with it in April, saying that construction could begin subject to mitigation measures. Thus, it took DDA less than six months to obtain environmental clearance, making a mockery of the entire process of regulation.



In this fast-track process, the private consultants, EQMS Pvt. Ltd, submitted an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the Commonwealth Games Village to the project proponent, the DDA. A review of the EIA reveals many discrepancies and gaps, from unclear definition of terms,

suspicious overlaps and omissions, inconsistent descriptions of site end-use, lack of explanations for conclusions, and insufficient flood modelling. (For a detailed review of the problems with the EIA report, see *2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi* by the Hazards Centre.)

An analysis of the impacts of big Games in host cities shows that such Games are an economic strategy promoted to serve big financial interest through programmes of urban renewal along with advertising and marketing revenues. The Games rarely pay for themselves and its public money that falls into the hands of private businessmen. The Games accelerate an urban development process that exacerbates income and wealth differentials within cities and between cities. Games facilities are constructed in spaces that should have be public, for open social use, like green spaces. The Games are projected as a matter of national pride and the government, using the agency of the complicit corporate media, is thus able to gain enough support from the privileged classes who see it as an opportunity for economic or social advancement and are particularly lured by the projected “world-class” improvements in the infrastructure of the city. The symbolic economy of the city is transformed, as more space becomes fair game for advertisers. It is because of the lack of information and transparency that the citizens are never able to critically look at the benefits and costs of the Games and also never able to effect policy making and planning

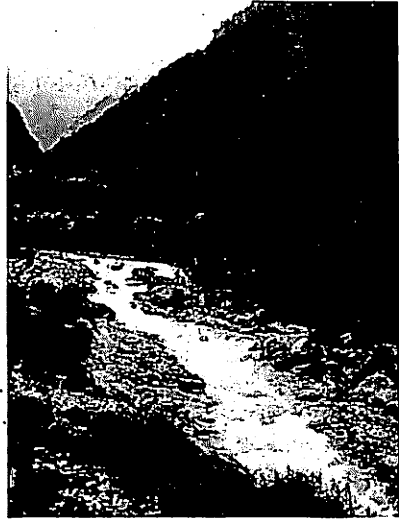
processes surrounding the Games. This is nowhere more evident than in the build-up to the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi. The bidding for the Games itself was treated as a symbol of national “victory” with eminent sportspersons and corporate figures joining in the parleys. Once the bid was won, there was a stream of self-congratulatory propaganda and a Bollywood team was specially flown into Melbourne to perform at the closing ceremony at an outrageous cost of Rs 2.5 crores per minute. This was accompanied by a deliberately designed campaign in the national media about how the city was being transformed from “walled” to “world” class and the new icons of the Metro and the malls were regularly displayed, concealing all information about their horrendously large losses and the consequent social and economic impacts on the city. In tandem with this, there was the consistent attempt to vilify the daily labourer, the industrial worker, the rickshaw puller, the street vendor, the slum dweller, the public bus, and the domestic servant as representative of all that was “bad” and “evil” about the city.

Even the acquisition of the lands in the city as part of its restructuring was carefully orchestrated. Thus a plan for 'developing' the river-bed by channelling the river was prepared as early as 1996, but was unveiled with the bid for the Commonwealth Games. The Metro headquarters followed soon after, with the Commonwealth Games village hard on its heels. Each one of these was part of a much larger

game plan. The Swaminarayan Sect mobilised about Rs. 200 crores, mainly from non-resident Indians, to build its commercial temple complex that yields an average estimated income of Rs. 5 crores annually from 'devotees'. This unlocked the doors for the Metro with a first-phase budget of Rs. 5,000 crores. And that in turn led to the Rs. 660 crore Games village, which will eventually spiral up to a massive public expenditure of over Rs. 25,000 crores.

Chronology 100 Days of Yamuna Satyagrah:

The few houses in which money is concentrated are usually able to capitalise on laypeople's reluctance to fight against injustice due to social divisions and lack of organisation. Until the politicians, who think that a river is their property, realise their faults, it looks as though little will change.



Thus, this Satyagrah welcomes all who wish to participate and reassures them that their efforts will reap social and ecological benefits.

Today, earning profits out of inauspicious acts has become a tradition. Destruction of the of Yamuna's flood plains in the

name of development will prove disastrous. Here we provide a brief of the events that have passed in the 90 days of Satyagrah (aug-oct, 2007) to prevent the disaster:

August 1. It is our birthright to plant trees on the river Yamuna, so that is what we did behind the Akshardham Complex. Delhiites joined our effort and planted about 150 trees that morning as part of the Yamuna Satyagrah, under the leadership of Rajendra Singh and other activists. The saplings were planted at the site of the Commonwealth Games village on the Yamuna river bed. At 11 am, DDA officials arrived with police. They told us that we were trespassing and committing illegal activities by planting saplings. They also told us that the site is earmarked for the Commonwealth Games village. We told them that the river bank is meant for the river's water and vegetation, but not for constructing a concrete jungle. The DDA official started uprooting the saplings and told us to vacate the site immediately. The police then took away one of our young satyagrahis, releasing him two hours later. That evening it rained a lot and the satyagrahis were happy and said, "God himself wants to water the saplings." But the next morning we found that the sapling had all been brutally uprooted and cut, diminishing our enthusiasm. It did not take long for the news to spread; farmers from the river bank visited us to pledge their support; lawyers, scientists and other people came to share information; even the guards posted at the site started to sit down with us and listened to our talks on

government apathy, water rights and the role of people in protecting the river. By the end of the day all parts of the civil society were gathering around the *sheesham* tree, including people from the nearby slums. The saplings might have been uprooted but by the second day the seeds of a new campaign had been sown. Seeing the tremendous response from the people, the satyagrahis were reinvigorated for the long journey ahead of them. Many volunteers, including Prof. S. Prakash, (a social activist and former faculty member of Delhi University) my participated in a 24-hour vigil at the site.



August 5. We read a news item that the constructions for the Commonwealth Games village would start in a mere five days. The satyagrahis unanimously decided to oppose the construction through non-violent means and to continue to create awareness amongst the people about the Yamuna

Satyagrah. There was a real sense of community on the site. A local farmer brought home-cooked food and villagers from nearby huts provided drinking water.

August 9. The river bank witnessed a lot of activity as people from the city trooped in to learn more about the cause. Many discussed about the alternates sites that Delhi could offer for building the Commonwealth Games village.

August 15. On India's Independence Day, Social activist Radha Bhatt, Vandana Shiva, P.V Rajgopal, Prashant Bhushan and people from all over the country unfurled the tricolour flag on the river bank. They resolved that the struggle for the Yamuna's freedom from encroachment and pollution had to continue and the of concrete construction of concrete structure on the recharge zone of the Yamuna must be prevented. That would be the first step towards protecting the river.

August 19. On the Sunday morning, Sunil Prabhakar, a 27 year old member of Jal Biradari demonstrating at the site, climbed down a 40 foot well and stayed put for close to eight hours in protest near the proposed Commonwealth Games village site on the eastern bank of Yamuna, before local police fished him out with a crane.

August 25. At 1:00 am on the (silver jubilee of Yamuna Satyagraha), satyagrahis were taken into custody and kept in prison for 12 hours.

August 28. Celebration of the festival of Raksha Bandhan was allied with the Satyagraha, as the Satyagrahis tied rakhis to the trees on the banks of Yamuna , signifying their commitment to protect them.

September 1. The book release of Satyendra Singh's “Jal Sanskriti”.

September 2. Former Defence Minister under NDA Government, Mr. George Fernandez, visited the Yamuna Satyagraha camp and appreciated the initiative of the satyagrahis. He conceded to the NDA government's mistake in giving the approval for construction on the site of kshardham Complex. He called on the government to stop work on the Games village.

September 6. A yajna procession on Janmashtmi took place, with a group of 700 people rallying for the protection of the Yamuna. Among them were 250 students adding to the energy of the Satyagraha.



September 14. Under the leadership of Rajendra Singh, a foot march was organized to create awareness among people to Save Yamuna between Nagali, Rajapur and Saray Kale Khan village. Rajendra Singh raised the issue at a seminar organized at Indian Habitat centre.

September 16. At Jantar-Mantar, students from Delhi University protested in different ways by turning their clothes inside out.

September 17. A foot march was organized in two groups one go in Nagali Rajapur, Samaspur, Padpadganj, Chila villages and the other one in to the Shakerpur, Mandawali, I.T.O. area.

September 19. Satyagrah completed 50th days. Social activists Medha Patkar and P.V. Rajgopal, and senior reporter Kuldeep Nair strongly supported the Satyagrah and said the time is coming to take some action to save the rivers of India



from the threats of politicians, industrialists and bureaucrats.

September 22. Some Yamuna activists entered the Delhi Legislative Assembly and raised the issue in the front of the chief minister of Delhi, Ms. Shila Dixshit.



September 23. Management students from Aravali School of Management arrived at the satyagrah site and expressed their support. Mr. Baljit Singh and a few other villagers approached former prime minister V.P Singh and strongly raised the issue. Mr Singh showed his full support in favour of Yamuna Satyagrah.

September 25. Activist Smt. Vandana Shiva arrived at the satyagrah site to express her support and strongly opposed the government's rules. Rajendra Singh, with some other satyagrahis, visited the new and soon to launch satyagrah site.

October 2. On Gandhi Jayanti (International Peace Day) a massive rally marched from the satyagrah site to Rajghat, to highlight the issue and to try once again to push the authorities to act. This was imminent ever since a decision to shift the site of the Games village away from the river bed was rejected without any tangible response from the state authorities, notably the Chief Minister and the Lt Governor of Delhi. An



introspection of our struggle' was held. We felt highly let down by our leaders who swore by non-violence and claimed to hold high the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. But here a totally non-violent struggle was ignored by authorities. Instead of addressing the issue, the state showed the biggest act of violence by killing the river, a natural resource essential for the survival of the city. It is paradoxical that, on one hand, chairperson of UPA, Smt. Sonia Gandhi, was extolling the virtue of non-violence at an international forum in New York,

while ignoring the non-violent struggles in the capital of her country.

October 3. Yamuna Satyagrah decided to broaden its struggle and meet public representatives, artists, chiefs of Press Houses, sportspersons and students, to join us in the satyagrah. On this day, we let the authorities know that we had no other alternative but to spread the satyagrah to other parts of the city. Eleven such sites were short listed: Wazirabad, Vishwa Shanti Stupa, Jantar Mantar, Qudsia Ghat, Delhi Secretariat, Supreme Court, Head Quarters of IOA; India Gate, Jasola, Rajghat and the existing satyagrah site near the proposed Games village.

October 5. A delegation led by Kuldeep Nayyar and Rajendra Singh met the Lt. Governor of Delhi for the protection of Yamuna floodplains from construction activities. The delegation demanded that the site of Games village be moved from the riverbed. But the Lt. Governor made no commitment on the matter. He said the question on permanent constructions on riverbed is a matter of serious concern and will take up the matter of temporary construction of Games village at higher levels of decision making. He said he and the satyagrahis are on the same platform as both want to see a flowing clean Yamuna.

October 9. A large number of people gathered at Rajghat for a planned march to the Supreme Court however, the police had barricaded all points and made it impossible to proceed. So it

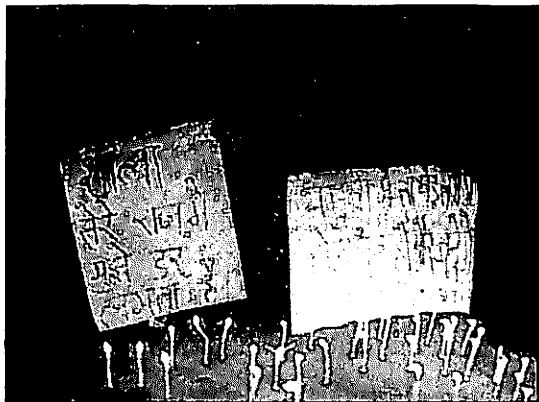
was decided to gather at the Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF). Satyagrahis reached GPF from different directions and at 1:30pm 150 people, including a more than 100 college students gathered and proceeded to Supreme Court to start the new satyagrah site. The march started in two long queues, and as it got close to



ITO crossing, it was confronted by more than 100 policemen. In spite of all efforts by the marchers, people were not allowed to go beyond ITO crossing. This step by Yamuna Satyagrah was part of our programme to launch satyagrah at 11 places. Rajendra Singh said that no response from the government of Delhi after 70 days of satyagrah, we must appeal to the courts to give us justice. We still have faith in the judiciary system and we believe it can serve to save the rivers of this country.

October 13. An Englishman, Mr. Gerald Conyngham, who represents a social group called Quakers in England, a group committed to social justice through non-violence on the path of Mahatma Gandhi, was present at the press conference organized by Yamuna Satyagrah and Janadesh 2007 at GPF. He said people in England like participating in Games and

like watching them. But at the same time they are concerned about their environmental effects. At present, they are not aware that the health of the Yamuna riverbed is being sacrificed to build the Games village, or of the effect the Games will have on the water



security of the city. He agreed to raise the matter with the English people and talk to socially active groups and the media.

October 14. More than 650 people gathered at Central Park in Connought Place in the heart of city and lit candles to convey their anger over the construction of Commonwealth Games village and the injustice of the government.

October 18. Several experts and organization's representatives gathered at GPF and all strongly supported the movement, deciding to spread the message of saving Yamuna in a non-violent manner they also decided on strategies for pressuring the government. The booklet *75 days of Yamuna Satyagrah* book is also released.

October 24. At a site opposite to Radisson Hotel on NH-8, youth and residents of South Delhi launched an indefinite

satyagrah to demand the protection of the river from construction activities. With the a clear message to the government, more than 500 youth of National Youth Programme represented their 22 states organized a cultural programme showing Delhi government that Yamuna is the nation's river and that it has no right to kill it in the name of so-called development.

October 25. In the favour of Yamuna Satyagrah, the Citizen Front for Water Democracy started the awareness campaign “*Jago!Dilli Jago*” from



Samata Sthal (Gandhi Samadhi) and proposed moving in different routes of Delhi & finishing on the 7th of November.

October 27. Ruling party members showed their aversion to Yamuna Satyagrah during a live open house debate called “Save the Yamuna” at Lajpat Nagar, broadcast on Delhi's Aaj Tak News Channel.



October 28-29. *The Yamuna Satyagrah completed 90 days today.* Janadesh-2007 arrived in Delhi and the Yamuna

Satyagrahis supported the cause by marching along side. The march settled in Ramlila Maidan where Rajendra Singh made a presentation to its leader, P.V. Rajgopal and welcomed the movement into Delhi. On the 29th, police forces prevented Janadesh from leaving the maidan. Thousand Janadesh volunteers walked for more than 400km from Gwalior demanding land reforms, land for landless and fast track court system. The Minister of Rural Affairs eventually announced policy changes in an attempt to address the problems of the landless farmers and tribal people who have been systematically excluded from land ownership, rights and reforms.



On 29th of October, the nurseries adjacent to NH-24 received warning letters from PWD Department that all nurseries in the area must be evacuated within a period of ten

days, otherwise, they will be removed by force. The land in the area have originally belonged to the villagers of nearby areas and the farmers have been running nurseries here and supplying plant saplings all over the city. Rohtas Bhatti, one of the owners of the nurseries, who is hosting the Yamuna Satyagraha Sthal, is bewildered by this order and says the government is punishing them us for making space for the Yamuna Satyagraha. Rajender Singh says that this step by the government shows that it is panicking at the momentum gained by Yamuna Satyagraha and we are further emboldened with this challenge posed by the government. **Come What May, we will not leave this sthal.**

October 30-31. A large number of volunteers working in the water sector in different states of India expressed overwhelming support to the ongoing Yamuna Satyagrah that has completed ninety days yesterday in Delhi. The volunteers converged in Delhi for a two-day National Convention on "Rejuvenating National Rivers".

The volunteers condemned the indifferent attitude of the central and Delhi governments towards Yamuna Satyagrah which is gaining strength by every passing day. Yamuna Satyagrah has already received widespread support from well-known social activists in the country, and it is a shame that the leaders of the ruling coalition who extol the virtues of satyagraha are paying scant respect to. The Satyagrahis are demanding that the Yamuna river bed and its flood plains

should be protected as a natural treasure and be freed from all construction activities like Delhi metro, Commonwealth Game Village etc.

A writ petition filed by Shri Rajendra Singh on behalf of Jal Biradari for protection of Yamuna river was admitted by the Delhi High Court on 30th October and posted for hearing on 20th November 2007. The volunteers vowed to spread the Yamuna protection movement to the other riparian states of the river. The Yamuna Satyagrah is considered as a beginning to herald a nationwide movement to protect the rivers from encroachment and pollution. All the Jal Biradari activists have taken banners of Yamuna satyagrah and have left for their states to spread this fight in their states. Some activists have decided to come back and give full time to the struggle in the Capital city. Writ petition No. 7506 of 2007 filed by Rajendra Singh and others including INTACH came up for hearing before Justice A K Sikri and Justice Rekha Sharma in the High Court of Delhi in the afternoon of 30 October 2007.

The Solicitor General of India Sri GE Vahanvati appearing for respondents 2 (Ministry of Environment and Forests), 3 (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports) and 4 (Ministry of Urban Development) sought some time to study the affidavits to file response on behalf of GOI.

The adjournment was opposed by Sri Sanjay Parikh, counsel for the petitioners on the grounds that any delay will

not stop the damage continuously being done to the ecologically sensitive Yamuna river bed, which has to be protected for present and future of the city of Delhi and its residents as it is the crucial life line supporting the water needs of the city.

He submitted that since 2003 the High Court has been issuing directions for the protection of river bed and removal of encroachments. He also pointed out that Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, MOEF basing their findings on a study by NEERI which had been commissioned by DDA itself had recommended a conditional clearance suggesting raising of only temporary structures which may be dismantled and the river bed restored to the river once the 10 day sporting event called Commonwealth Games was over. But unfortunately



after this expert opinion it was only the officials of the DDA and MOEF who together watered down the clearance letter and allowed DDA to build permanent structures in the name of Commonwealth Games village in the river bed.

He submitted that hence the delay in hearing the matter would be fatal for the river. The Judges remarked that '*let them construct at their own risk*'.

Post Script:

After more than ninety days of satyagrah, it is an appropriate time to reflect on the movement. We have not seen the government buckle down. But at the same time we have seen growing support from the Indian populace, and if this country is a *true* democracy, there is a chance for our struggle to bear fruits of victory.

While inherent problems have been identified with big games events, we concede that if the games must continue in Delhi, let them be held responsibly and sustainable. Our river is too precious to be sacrificed for an event that will last a mere 10 days. Compared to most mega-cities, Delhi is unique with its green band of agriculture down in the middle. While other cities are now wallowing in regret for having paved over the most fertile agricultural lands in their regions, Delhi has the opportunity to take leadership as a city that values the premises of natural urban groundwater recharge and urban small agriculture.

'Experiences of peoples' struggles for protection of natural resources have taught us that sometimes the struggles may be protracted and drawn- out before results start showing up. A idea sown today may emerge as a peoples' force someday. This struggle, initiated by Rashtriya Jal Biradari, will go on in different forms in different states in the coming period untill peoples' control over their water resources is established, and the rivers are cleansed of the encroachment and pollution.

YAMUNA SATYAGRAH

Revive our rivers for a greener earth



“ There will only be greens on the Yamuna banks; Game Village will have to come up somewhere else”



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