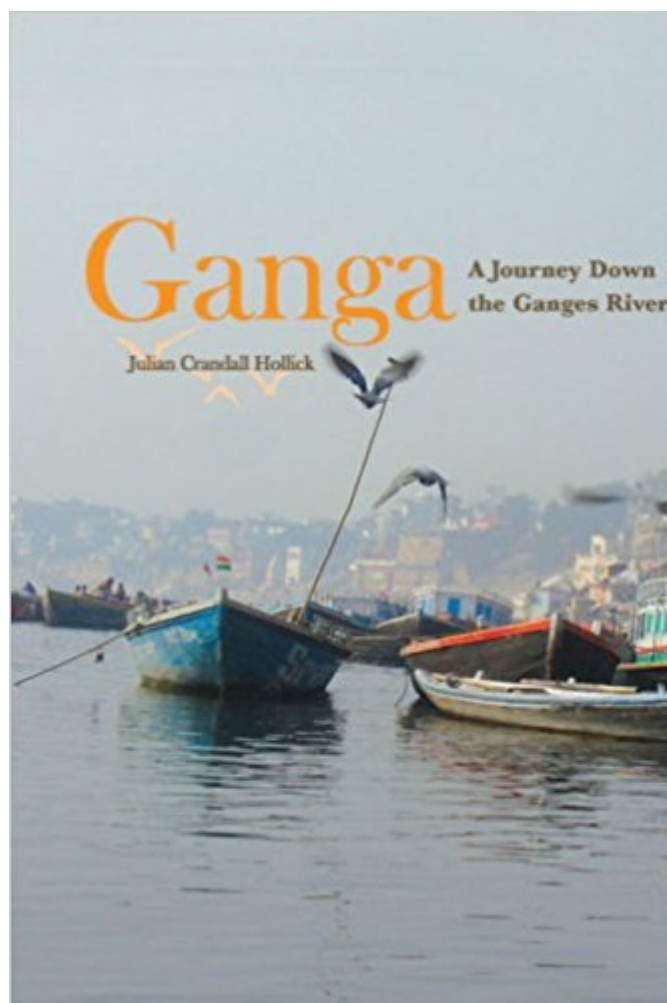


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Ganga: A Journey Down The Ganges River



Synopsis

The Ganges has always been more than just an ordinary river. For millions of Indians, she is also a goddess. According to popular belief, bathing in her waters dissolves all sins, drinking her waters cures illness, and dying on her banks ensures freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth. Yet there remains a paradox: while Ganga is worshipped devotedly, she is also exploited without remorse. Much of her water has been siphoned off for irrigation, toxic chemicals are dumped into her, and dams and barrages have been built on her course, causing immense damage. Ganga is in danger of dying—but if the river dies, will the goddess die too? The question took journalist Julian Crandall Hollick on an extraordinary journey through northern India: from the river's source high in the Himalayas, past great cities and poor villages, to lush Sagar Island, where the river finally meets the sea. Along the way he encounters priests and pilgrims, dacoits and dolphins, the fishermen who subsist on the river, and the villagers whose lives have been destroyed by her. He finds that popular devotion to Ganga is stronger and blinder than ever, and it is putting her and her people in great risk. Combining travelogue, science, and history, *Ganga* is a fascinating portrait of a river and a culture. It will show you India as you have never imagined it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"This book is the ideal fellow passenger—open and informative, chatty and beguiling, a voice for the masses on the shores." (Chicago Tribune)

Julian Crandall Hollick is an award-winning producer and writer of radio documentaries. His programs have aired on NPR, the BBC, and CBC in Toronto, and his writing has appeared in publications including Smithsonian and The New Republic.

Very slow going.

I was surprised and disappointed that there were no pictures. I would not have bought the book had I known that before purchase. There was no "look inside" option for this book. Live and learn!

This book was what I needed for class and it looked brand new. It was a fraction of the cost of a brand new one so that was great.

Julian Crandall Hollick, a journalist whose radio documentaries on sounds of India have gently woken me up on many days, has written a fabulous, conversational book that comprises a river's ecology, mythology, and, to a lesser extent, her economy. Ganga is the name of Hollick's book--simply Ganga and not the less euphonious, anglicized Ganges (note: this review is based on the Indian edition of Ganga; the American Island Press edition carries the subtitle "A Journey Down the Ganges River"). This is the river that invited Hollick to traverse her length, and she is the goddess who informs his story telling. Just as Ganga meanders through North India, Hollick weaves between the physical and the metaphysical to explore the conundrum of duality: Is Ganga a river, a goddess, or both? The answers come from Ganga's fantastical mythological beginnings and its very real and constrained present. Rather than simply repeating the origin myth of how Mother Ganga's torrential heavenly descent to earth was contained by Lord Shiva's matted hair, Hollick tells the longer, more nuanced "once upon a time" tale about imperial King Sagar. This story bookends the author's own story which begins in the Himalayas and ends at Sagar Island in Bengal. It is helpful to explore the Sagar story before proceeding with Hollick's. In the myth, Sagar performs a horse sacrifice in order to extend his kingdom. The horse wanders into a forest where Kapil rishi is meditating. Sagar's sixty thousand sons--all from one wife--give chase, but disturbed the rishi in the process; all sixty thousand are reduced to ashes. Months pass and Sagar's lone son from a second wife enters the same forest, but, unlike his brothers, Anshuman wisely waits for Kapil rishi to complete his meditation. Pointing to the ashes, the rishi tells Anshuman about his brothers' folly and suggests that only Mother Ganga can wash away their ashes and send their souls to heaven. Three generations of Sagar's sons and grandsons fail to induce Ganga to come down from heaven.

Finally, his great-grandson, Bhagirath is able to please Ganga by standing on one leg for a thousand years, and the goddess consents to come to earth through the Himalayas, but only if Shiva will agree to keep her powerful waters in check by letting them run through his braided hair. Before reaching the end of his cross-country journey from the Himalayan mouth of Ganga to Sagar Island south of Kolkata, Hollick regales the reader with many more stories based in Hindu mythology and the folk culture of villages. The ride on and along the river recalls Alex Frater's *Chasing the Monsoon*. Both books share a palpable, liquid passion for the chase and a storyteller's love for the elusive, watery object of the chase. But along the way, a second story about ecological degradation emerges: Ganga's flow is being strangled by India's insatiable thirst for hydro-electricity and agro-irrigation. Compounding the problem of concrete dams and massive waste are industrial pollution and residential sewage, which poison the Ganga's water used as purifying nectar. This narrative echoes Rachel Carson's plea for protecting the earth's fragile ecosystems; indeed, in one passage Hollick footnotes Carson's title, *Silent Spring*, as "shorthand for environmental poisoning no one notices until the damage has been done." How to reconcile the incontrovertible fact that Ganga's water is impure and the enduring belief that the goddess is pure? After a brief moment of darkness where he bemoans Indians' "private cleanliness [and] public squalor," the open-minded Hollick lets the reader hear from Indians (both celebrated and ordinary) who have little difficulty with any apparent dichotomy between the pure and impure: "We live as multi-faceted personalities and don't have a contradiction to resolve

Touching a chord am a reader from Bangalore, India and have just finished reading *GANGA* by Julian Crandall Hollick, published by Random House. It made absorbing reading and I would recommend it highly to anyone who is interested in India, its people and their beliefs, and who has more than a touristic interest in this country. Hollick has touched a chord in the minds of all those who wonder about the strong faith that the people in this country hold about this amazing river. The first impression one gets on reading the "Ganga" is the author's sincerity. For us in India the feeling for Gangamata is part of our lives and our heritage. The divinity we ascribe to her only underlines the importance of the river in the history and geography, ancient myth and modern economic prosperity of millions of people.. To know that someone not from this country understands this in the same way is heartwarming. What is unique and most enjoyable reading is, the account of his interaction with the ordinary people he encountered on his travels down the river from source to the sea, the simple people with their down to earth philosophies and wisdom, their hospitality, and their abiding faith in Mother Ganga. Hollick is also more pragmatic about the river, pointing out dangers to which our faith

in the Goddess Ganga blinds us,-- such as the many dams, barrages which change her natural flow and the waste and muck we pollute her with. We seem to accept all this over-use of the water, and the man-made pollution as something the Goddess will take care of. There is the widespread belief that Ganga purifies anything that goes into her; the author does suggest a scientific reason for this. Among the several stories about The Coming down to Earth of Ganga is one which says she was very reluctant to do so saying that she didn't want to pollute herself with the sins of humanity. Finally she was forced to obey Lord Shiva's command. I share the author's concern that our endless demands on her may result one day, in her withdrawing herself and her blessings from us...and return to her home at the feet of Lord Vishnu!! Kanaka Kini Bangalore email

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