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Lack of oxygen makes life in Gomti a thing of the past

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LUCKNOW: Some 25 years back, Gomti had a thriving ecosystem which gave the river its special character. "The river was full of fishes, crabs, prawns and turtles with water birds and small birds feeding on its fauna and nesting on trees on its banks. But pollution has destroyed the river's fauna," said Dr Gyaneshwar Shukla, who has been working for the cause of the river since 1999.

Ecological degradation of Gomti is alarming and the river is not flowing even at a minimum ecological level. Domestic and industrial waste destroyed the river's ecosystem critically.

In the downstream, along Sitapur, due to sudden discharge from sugar factories, there have been several instances of fish getting killed in Sarayan, Gomti's tributary.

"Due to absence of proper regulatory mechanism, offenders are seldom punished," said assistant professor, school for environmental sciences, Baba Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Venkatesh Dutta.

Sometimes, sewage, garbage, discharge from factories and other organic material reaching the river through several drains cause shortage of oxygen and kill the fish. Pesticides and other poisonous material reaching the river as agricultural waste also kill aquatic organisms.

According to Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB) estimates, ecological flow of Gomti has reduced drastically, by 35 to 40%. Besides, there are more people living along its banks and extraction of water from river has increased too. Besides, regular monitoring of the quality of river water at Gaughat (upstream) and Gomti barrage (downstream) shows there has been no fall in pollution level. In summers, the flow is reduced further. "Water should be released from Sharda into Gomti for minimum flow," said Brajendra Pal Singh an eco activist.

Ideally, level of dissolved oxygen (DO) should not be less than 5 mg/litre. But, the river water at several points along Lucknow either shows no trace of oxygen or it is as low as 1 mg/litre. Biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) recorded at every monitoring location has been higher than permitted level because of degenerating organic waste. A healthy river should not have more than 3 mg/litres of BOD but Gomti has at least 18 to 20 mg/litres. Pipraghat in downstream of the river is most polluted with sudden and massive death of fish and other aquatic organisms.

What the new MP can do

- * River should be treated as an eco-system and protected and conserved like national parks and sanctuaries
- * Execution committee headed by commissioner and having representation from departments like forest, LMC, Jal Nigam, irrigation, pollution control board and Ganga basin authority can make conservation efforts effective
- * Gomti flows across the entire length of UP and should be given status of state river