Pandits pollute minds. Rituals pollute people. Idols pollute Ganges. The maggots of Kali Yuga are having a feast. Awaken all, my Mind, awaken all to the promised Awakening! (April 20, 2020)

TODAY'S BIG TOPIC:
WHEN THE DRINKING WATER DISAPPEARS

Friday, July 17, 2020

By Whitney Johnson, Director of Visual and Immersive Experiences

How do you show a crisis few in the world have heard about? Writer Paul Salopek and photographer John Stanmeyer tried to get their heads around one mind-numbing fact: Roughly 100 million people in India may gulp their last groundwater dry by year’s end.

Some 600 million people in India already live without clean water. Industrial waste, urban sewage, and agricultural runoff has poisoned entire river systems. The
Ganges, venerated by Hindus, is one of the most polluted rivers on Earth. *Above, a man submerges in the river to bathe away waste, amid marigold offerings, plastic trash, and fecal waste.*

As if India didn’t have enough to worry about, the nation on Friday passed the 1 million mark of people infected with COVID-19, emerging as the third hardest-hit country in the world, behind only the United States and Brazil. Given the lack of clean water in which to wash hands and the limited (but brave) work of front-line volunteers, that number is expected to grow rapidly.

I encourage you to see the photos below and read our full story on the water crisis.

![Man bathing in polluted river](image1)

The cost of pollution: The hands of Resham Singh, a 59-year-old carpenter in Punjab, are gnarled from arthritis. Doctors say it may have been caused by exposure to water tainted by fertilizers and pesticides. Heavy use of chemicals in the 1960s to late 1970s brought India out of famine and into its green revolution, but Singh’s village, Mari Mustafa, has high cancer rates.

![Ganges river pollution](image2)
Venerated (and polluted): India’s rivers inspire countless customs and traditions. Left, a couple poses in a boat on the shore of the Tista River, in West Bengal, as a local photographer shoots pre-wedding pictures. Right, abandoned Hindu offerings litter the Sahu River in West Bengal. Religious ceremonies are a major source of river pollution.

Laid to rest: The family of Ramesh Pandey agreed to be photographed as they prepared to cremate him in Prayagraj on the bank of the Yamuna. His ashes will flow into the Ganges. Hindus believe that cremation at a holy site frees the soul from the cycle of life and death.

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