

SONGS OF THE GANGA

I am Ganga
Snow from the mountains
The keeper of water

I am the plains
I am the foothills
I carry the wishes of my streams
To the sea

I am both man and woman

I am paper boats for children
I am habits for fishermen
I am a cloud for shaven monks
I reflect all movements

I am the bridge
I am the fort and the archer
Taking aim
I am the great dissolver of men

I give life and I take it back.

I go out into the world
I am the world
I am nations, cities, people
I am the pages of an unbound book
My room is the air around me

I am dressed in water
I am naked as water
I am clarity

Billy goats
Come down from the mountain
Without finding solitude
Camels return from the desert

I make two lines in the sand
And say they are unbreakable walls

I make the four directions one
I know the secret of walking

I am the death of fire

From smoke I learn disappearance
From the ocean unprejudice

From birds
How to find a rest-house
In the storm

From the leopard
How to cover the sun
With spots

In summer I tend watermelons
And in flood I stay
Near the postman's house

I am a beggar
I am a clown
And I am shadowless

- A.K. Mehrotra

About the poem

This poem has the river Ganga speaking in its own voice and revealing its thoughts and feelings. The use of the first person 'I' focuses on the centrality of the river and the focus is on the identity of the Ganga, its purpose and character.

'Songs of the Ganga' begins with self-introductory 'I am Ganga'. Ganga which is formed of the melted snow from the mountains is also a restorer of water. The myriad streams flow within her; and their wishes are carried to the sea by her. Not being confined within a particular gender slot, the Ganga claims: 'I am both man and woman.'

The children seek the river to float their paper boats, fishermen for their livelihood and shaven monks for solace. In addition to giving, the river also learns a lot from the elements of nature, birds and animals. The ocean teaches the river to keep away from bias and prejudice. The birds teach it to find a refuge even in the middle of a storm. During summer the river helps watermelons to grow and during floods it stays by the postman's house.

The Ganga plays a variety of roles from being a beggar to a clown to finally being shadowless. The poet A.K Mehrotra celebrates the identity of the river Ganga and expresses an enjoyment of the imaginative freedom he has discovered in presenting the picture of the Ganga.

GLOSSARY

- monk : a member of a religious community, or men living under certain restrictions
- dissolver : a person who incorporates, dismisses or causes to disappear
- billygoats : male goats
- solitude : the state of being lonely
- unprejudiced : unbiased, without a feeling or opinion against something

Activity 1: COMPREHENSION

A. Tick the correct alternative:

1. What do the following lines express?
I am naked as water, and
I am clarity
 - (a) Straight forward nature of the river
 - (b) duplicity of the river
 - (c) hypocrisy of the river
 - (d) sacredness of the river
2. What does the ocean teach the river?
 - (a) to keep away from bias
 - (b) to keep away from the honest
 - (c) to keep away from the innocent
 - (d) to keep away from the dull

(B) Answer to the following should not exceed 30-40 words each:

1. What does the poet celebrate in 'Songs of the Ganga'?
2. Comment on the beginning of the poem.
3. What does the use of First person singular narrative focus on?
4. What do the birds teach the river?

(C) Answer to the following should not exceed 60-80 words each:

1. How does the poet celebrate the identity of Ganga in the poem? Comment.
2. How, according to the poet, is the Ganga a beggar and clown?

(D) Think and do :

You must have heard the story of the origin of the river Ganga. Form a group and compose a Skit on the Biography of the river Ganga.