SACRED YET POLLUTED: GANGES POLLUTION DURING MAHAKUMBH 2025

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ABSTRACT

The paradox of the Ganga being revered as a sacred, purifying river while simultaneously suffering from severe pollution was strikingly evident during the Maha Kumbh 2025. Despite government claims of a "Green Kumbh" and efforts to improve infrastructure and monitoring, the water quality data—especially that provided by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)—paints a grim picture. Faecal coliform levels repeatedly exceeded safe limits, posing significant risks to the health of millions of pilgrims. In sharp contrast, the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB) presented outdated or methodologically questionable reports that conflicted not only with CPCB data but also with findings from reputable institutions like IIT Varanasi and BHU. These contradictions highlight institutional weaknesses in transparency, coordination, and accountability. While the spiritual significance of the Kumbh is deeply embedded in India's cultural fabric, the failure to ensure even basic water safety reflects a neglect of both environmental law and public duty. The reliance on bacteriophages and natural self-purification, though scientifically fascinating, cannot justify ignoring biological indicators like BOD and coliform levels that reflect human health hazards. Protecting the sanctity of the Ganga requires more than faith—it demands stringent enforcement of pollution control laws, transparent and real-time data sharing, and coordination between central and state agencies. Until then, the belief in Ganga's purity remains at odds with the scientific truth of its contamination**.**

Keywords: Ganga pollution, Maha Kumbh 2025, CPCB, UPPCB, faecal coliform, environmental governance, ritual bathing, water quality, NGT, Water Act 1974.

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According to Hindu belief, bathing at the confluence during Kumbh washes away sins and leads to salvation. In Hinduism, it is believed that during the churning of the ocean, when the gods fled to protect the pot of nectar from the demons, a few drops of it fell at four places—Haridwar, Prayagraj, Ujjain, and Nashik. This is why the Kumbh Mela is held at these locations.[1]

Prayagraj is considered the holiest as it is the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers.[2]The Kumbh Mela is almost as ancient as Hinduism itself. Even the oldest Veda, the Rigveda, contains verses referring to the Kumbh. This strengthens the significance and faith associated with the Kumbh, and people see it as a connection to Hinduism's thousands of years of heritage.[3]The temporary city built for the Maha Kumbh is the world's largest temporary city, accommodating between 5 million to 10 million people at a time.[4]

This year, the government has also declared that this Maha Kumbh will be the first **"Green** Kumbh,**"** where the use of polythene and plastics will be prohibited, making it environmentally conscious.[5] However, concerns have been raised about whether the water at the Sangam is safe for taking a dip.[6]

RIVER GANGA

River Ganga (Ganges) is considered the longest and the holiest river of India, which originated from Gangotri glacier, at Gomukh, and ends at Bay of Bengal located in the East of India. In Hinduism, the Ganges is revered as a goddess who purifies a person of all sins. The river is worshipped as "Ganga Mata", the divine mother who has sustained life and nurtured civilisation

[1] Janasatta, https://www.jansatta.com/religion/maha-kumbh-why-is-mahakumbh-mela-held-every-12-years-agla-kumbh-mela-kab-aur-kaha-lagega-know-importance-history-and-significance/3792853/ (visited on April 1st, 2025).
[2] Siddarth David and Nobhojit Roy, Public health perspectives from the biggest human mass gathering on earth: Kumbh Mela, India 47 IJID 42-45(2016).
[3] ABP News, https://www.abplive.com/lifestyle/religion/mahakumbh-2025-vedas-and-kumbh-connection-mythology-history-snan-daan-importance-2863779 (visited on 1st April 2025).
[4] NDTV, https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/ganga-water-at-maha-kumbhs-sangam-unsafe-on-another-parameter-too-data-7748943 (visited on 1st April 2025).
[5] Down To Earth, https://www.downtoearth.org.in/environment/mahakumbh-mela-2025-is-it-safe-to-take-a-dip-in-the-ganga (Last visited on 1st April 2025).
[6]The Economic Times, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/maha-kumbh-ganga-water-at-triveni-sangam-unsafe-due-to-high-bod-levels-reveals-govt-data/articleshow/118389317.cms?from=mdr (visited on 2nd April 2025).

for thousands of years.[7] Despite all the respect for the river, the river's condition is worsening, and we Indians are unable to maintain the purity of the river. The Ganga is a river of faith, devotion, and worship. Indians accept its water as "holy," which is known for its "curative" properties. The river is not limited to these beliefs but is also a significant water source, working as the life-supporting system for Indians since ancient times.[8] The Ganga river and its tributaries come from cold, Himalayan-glacier-fed springs, which are pure and unpolluted. But when the river flows downgradient, it meets the highly populated cities before merging into the Bay of Bengal. From its origin to its fall, its water changes from crystal clear to trash-and sewage-infested sludge.

There are many sources of pollution in river Ganga, but as reported by the Central Pollution Control Board, the main sources of pollution within the Ganges are urban liquid waste (sewage), industrial liquid waste, surface runoff from solid waste landfills and dump sites, and solids and liquids from practices such as bathing of cattle and immersing dead bodies in the river. Approximately 30% of the total waste pollution is due to the is industrial activities, while the remaining 70% is primarily from municipal waste.[9]

CPCB ON MAHAKUMBH

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), which is a government agency under the Ministry of Environment and Forests,[10] has itself stated that the water at the Sangam is not safe for bathing.[11]To assess water safety, a key criterion used is BOD (Biological Oxygen Demand). BOD measures how much oxygen aerobic microorganisms need to break down the organic matter present in a water sample. If a water body has high BOD levels, it indicates a high presence of organic material such as sewage, food waste, or decaying plant matter. The breakdown of these organic substances leads to significant oxygen consumption in the water.[12]

[7] BBC News, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-39488527 (Last visited on 2nd April 2025).
[8] DC Jhariya & Anoop Kumar Tiwari, Ganga River: A Paradox of Purity and Pollution in India due to Unethical Practice,https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347803519_Ganga_River_A_Paradox_of_Purity_and_Pollution_in_India_due_to_Unethical_Practice (December 2020) (visited on 2nd April 2025).
[9] DC Jhariya & Anoop Kumar Tiwari, Ganga River: A Paradox of Purity and Pollution in India due to Unethical Practice,https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347803519_Ganga_River_A_Paradox_of_Purity_and_Pollution_in_India_due_to_Unethical_Practice (December 2020) (visited on 2nd April 2025).
[10] Central Pollution Control Board, https://cpcb.nic.in/Introduction/ (visited on 3rd April 2025).
[11] The Economic Times, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/maha-kumbh-ganga-water-at-triveni-sangam-unsafe-due-to-high-bod-levels-reveals-govt-data/articleshow/118389317.cms?from=mdr (Visited on 3rd April 2025).
[12] The Economic Times, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/maha-kumbh-ganga-water-at-triveni-sangam-unsafe-due-to-high-bod-levels-reveals-govt-data/articleshow/118389317.cms?from=mdr (visited on 3rd April 2025).

(Refer Table 1).

Approximately 66 crore visitors have attended the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj.[13] Many participants take ritual baths in the river and even consume its water. This massive influx of people has significantly impacted water quality, particularly in terms of faecal coliform levels.[14]

On Makar Sankranti (January 14), faecal coliform levels were recorded at 11,000 units at Sangam Ghat, which is four times the safe limit of 2,500 units. At Old Naini Bridge Ghat, the levels were even higher, reaching 33,000 units. However, on other days, faecal coliform levels dropped significantly to 200 and 780 units, indicating fluctuating contamination levels. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) also noted variations in biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and dissolved oxygen (DO) levels, both of which are critical indicators of water quality.[15] (Refer Table 3).

Faecal coliform levels refer to the concentration of faecal coliform bacteria in water, typically measured in colony-forming units per 100 milliliters (CFU/100mL). These bacteria, primarily Escherichia coli (E. coli), indicate fecal contamination and the potential presence of pathogens in water sources. Faecal coliforms are bacteria found in the feces of warm-blooded animals, including humans. Their presence in water indicates that it has been contaminated by human or animal waste. The level of faecal coliforms helps determine the extent of faecal contamination in the water.[16] (Refer Table 1).

According to water quality standards, drinking water should contain 0 CFU/100mL, as per WHO and EPA guidelines. For recreational water (such as swimming), the level should generally remain below 200 CFU/100mL. In the case of effluent discharge (treated wastewater), the permissible limit is typically below 1,000 CFU/100mL, depending on local

[13] DD News, https://ddnews.gov.in/en/mahakumbh-2025-concludes-attracting-over-660-million-visitors/ (visited on 5th April 2025).
[14] Vinay Kumar Tyagi & Kansha Bhatia, Impairment in water quality of Ganges River and consequential health risks on account of mass ritualistic bathing, 51 Desalination and Water Treatment 51, 2121-2129(2013).
[15] Down To Earth, https://www.downtoearth.org.in/water/maha-kumbh-2025-ganga-yamunas-long-term-sustainability-depends-on-continuous-monitoring-improved-wastewater-treatment-and-public-cooperation (visited on 5th April 2025).
[16] Down To Earth, https://www.downtoearth.org.in/environment/sewage-overload-why-the-ganga-remains-polluted-despite-cleanliness-drives-88651 (Last visited on 5th April 2025).

regulations.[17]

Similarly, in its report submitted to the National Green Tribunal (NGT), the CPCB stated that faecal coliform bacteria exceeded the maximum permissible limit at all monitored locations during the Maha Kumbh.[18]

In 2004, a committee formed by the Ministry of Urban Development set the desirable level of faecal coliform at 500 MPN (Most Probable Number) per 100 mL and the maximum limit at 2,500 MPN per 100 ml. However, according to CPCB data, faecal coliform levels at several locations during the Maha Kumbh exceeded the maximum limit of 2,500 MPN per 100 ml.[19]

Tests conducted in January revealed alarmingly high levels of faecal coliform bacteria at various locations along the Sangam. At Sangam, the faecal coliform level was recorded at 49,000 MPN per 100 mL, while at Deeha Ghat, it remained 33,000 MPN and 17,000 MPN for two consecutive days. At the Old Naini Bridge, the level was 33,000 MPN per 100 ml. The drains flowing into the river also contained extremely high levels of faecal coliform bacteria. In Jondhwal Drain, the faecal coliform count was 9.2 million (92 lakh) MPN per 100 mL, which is 4,000 times the permissible limit. Similarly, in Rajapur Drain and Salori Drain, the levels exceeded 3.4 million (34 lakh) MPN per 100 mL.[20] In its report, the CPCB stated that at all monitored locations, the river water was not suitable for bathing.[21]

DATA OF CENTRAL POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD

Table 1. Permissible limit

[17] Central Pollution Control Board, https://cpcb.nic.in/who-guidelines-for-drinking-water-quality/ (visited on 5th April 2025).
[18] Business Standard, https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/maha-kumbh-mela-ganga-prayagraj-cpcb-report-pollution-sewage-contamination-125021800173_1.html (visited on 6th April 2025).
[19] India Water Portal, https://www.indiawaterportal.org/people-and-culture/culture/can-we-celebrate-kumbh-while-ignoring-the-health-of-its-rivers (visited on 6th April 2025).
[20] Down To Earth, https://www.downtoearth.org.in/water/maha-kumbh-2025-ganga-yamunas-long-term-sustainability-depends-on-continuous-monitoring-improved-wastewater-treatment-and-public-cooperation (visited on 6th april 2025).
[21] Deccan Herald, https://www.deccanherald.com/india/uttar-pradesh/high-faecal-coliform-levels-in-prayagraj-during-maha-kumbh-cpcb-report-to-ngt-3409562 (visited on 7th April 2025).

Bio chemical oxygen Demand (BOD)	3 mg/1 or less	The Biochemical Oxygen Demand of 3 mg/1 or less of the water ensures reasonable freedom from oxygen demanding pollutants and prevent production of obnoxious gases";
pH	Between 6.5-8.5	The range provides protection to the skin and delicate organs like eyes, nose, ears etc. which are directly exposed during outdoor bathing.
Dissolved Oxygen (DO)	5mg/1or minimum	The minimum dissolved oxygen concentration of 5 mg/1 ensures reasonable freedom from oxygen consuming immediately organic pollution upstream which is necessary for preventing production Of anaerobic gases (obnoxious gases) from sediment.
Faecal streptococci MPN/100 ml	100(desirable) 500(maximum permissible)	The desirable and permissible limits are suggested to allow for fluctuation in environmental conditions such as seasonal change, changes in flow conditions etc.
Faecal Coliform	500(desirable) 2500(Maximum permissible)	To ensure low sewage contamination. Fecal coliform and fecal streptococci are considered as they reflect the bacterial pathogenicity.

Source: https://cpcb.nic.in/wqm/Primary_Water_Quality_Criteria.pdf

TABLE 2: water quality data by central pollution control board year wise

No.	year	Temperature (°C)	Dissolved Oxygen (mg/L)	BOD (mg/L)	pH	Fecal Coliform (MPN/100ml)	Total Coliform (MPN/100ml)
1	**2023**	Max-30.8 Min- 20.4	Max-9.1 Min-7.1	Max-3 Min-2.6	max-7.8 min-8.4	Max-930 Min-680	Max-2700 Min-2200
2	**2022**	Max-31.8 Min-18.9	Max-9.2 Min-6	Max-3 Min-2.6	Max-8.39 Min-7.43	Max-930 Min-610	Max-2700 Min-2400
3	**2021**	Max-30.3 Min-18.6	Max-9.9 Min-7.2	Max-2.9 Min-2.0	Max-8.5 Min- 7.6	Max-1400 Min-680	Max-2700 Min-1700
4	**2020**	Max-26.9 Min-18.8	Max-12 Min-7.7	Max-2.7 Min-2	Max-8.4 Min-7.8	Max-3300 Min-680	Max-7900 Min-2000

Sources:

- https://cpcb.nic.in/nwmp-data-2023/
- https://cpcb.nic.in/nwmp-data-2022/
- https://cpcb.nic.in/nwmp-data-2021/
- https://cpcb.nic.in/nwmp-data-2020/

TABLE 3- central Pollution Control Board Data on water quality

Date	pH	DO (mg/L)	BOD (mg/L)	TotalColiform (MPN/100ml)	FecalColiform (MPN/100ml)
12.01.2024	7.52	8.5	3.74	4500	2000
13.01.2025	7.92	9.2	3.94	4500	<1.8
14.01.2025	7.86	7.8	2.18	49000	11000
15.01.2024	8.19	8.5	<1.0	20000	6800
20.01.2025	7.47	8.6	2.46	700000	49000

Source: https://cpcb.nic.in/nwmp-data/

NGT VS. POLLUTION BOARDS ON CONTRADICTIONS IN GANGA WATER QUALITY REPORTS DURING MAHA KUMBH

The National Green Tribunal (NGT)—a body established by an Act of Parliament with the authority to hear and resolve environmental disputes. NGT on December 2024 order in the case of *Kamlesh Singh vs Uttar Pradesh Government*[22] which had ruled that during the Mahakumbh, untreated sewage should not flow into the Ganga and Yamuna to avoid inconvenience to the devotees. Furthermore, the CPCB and UPPCB were directed to increase

[22] Kamlesh Singh vs Uttar Pradesh 2024 AHC 105288.

their monitoring points and frequency of monitoring. Both these agencies were to collect water samples from the Ganga and Yamuna at regular intervals, at least twice a week. To avoid repetition of samples, this was to be done systematically.[23]

However, when the NGT demanded a detailed report, after CPCB report, the UPPCB submitted an old report based on water samples taken on January 12, before the Maha Kumbh had even begun. The 250-page report contained no information on faecal coliform levels. On February 20, the NGT reprimanded the UPPCB, questioning why such a lengthy document was filed if no recent data was available, accusing it of wasting the tribunal's time.[24]

In response, the UPPCB claimed it had more recent water samples and promised to submit a report based on them soon.[25] However, the UPPCB has also faced allegations of using unscientific methods to assess Ganga's water quality, leading to misleading reports. Even when samples were taken from the same location, the results from UPPCB differed significantly from those of IIT Varanasi and Banaras Hindu University (BHU). Due to these inconsistencies, the Allahabad High Court had raised questions about the UPPCB's credibility in 2022.[26]

[23] Down To Earth, https://www.downtoearth.org.in/water/mahakumbh-2025-following-dtes-report-on-government-curtailing-information-on-ganga-water-quality-petition-filed-in-ngt?utm_source=chatgpt.com (visited on 8th April, 2025).
[24] Business Standard, https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/ngt-slams-uppcb-maha-kumbh-water-pollution-faecal-bacteria-125022000327_1.html (visited on 10th April, 2025).
[25] Business Standard, https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/ngt-slams-uppcb-maha-kumbh-water-pollution-faecal-bacteria-125022000327_1.html (visited on 10th april, 2025).
[26] Dialogue Earth, https://dialogue.earth/en/pollution/has-the-indian-government-managed-to-clean-the-ganga-at-last/ (visited on 10th April 2025).

After the conclusion of the Maha Kumbh, the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB) submitted a report in February 2025, claiming that the water at Sangam was fit for bathing during the festival. Similarly, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), in its report dated February 28, 2025, submitted to the National Green Tribunal (NGT), also concluded that the Ganga's water quality in Prayagraj was statistically suitable for bathing. Due to significant variability in sample data collected from the same and different locations on various dates, the CPCB relied on statistical analysis to provide an overall assessment. The monitoring was conducted twice a week from January 12 onward, including auspicious bathing days, at five locations on the Ganga and two on the Yamuna.[27]

	Month	**DO**	**BDO**	**Total colliform**	**Faecal colliform**	**Category**
1	**February 2025**	8.90	3.00	4600	2100	C
2	**January 2025**	8.40	3.00	4300	2100	C
3	**December 2024**	7.70	3.30	4300	3100	D
4	**November 2024**	8.00	3.10	3300	2200	D

Source: https://uppcb.up.gov.in/en/page/river-water-quality-data

EFFECT OF POLLUTION ON HUMANS DURING MAHAKUMBH

Bathing in polluted river water can lead to skin diseases, gastrointestinal infections, and other health problems. The contaminated water of the Ganga and Yamuna can cause waterborne diseases such as cholera, typhoid, and hepatitis. According to a 2022 CPCB report, 70% of waterborne diseases in India are caused by river pollution.[28]

[27]NDTV,https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/water-quality-during-maha-kumbh-fit-for-bathing-finds-pollution-control-board-report-7884082 (visited on 12th April 2025).
[28] India Water Portal, https://www.indiawaterportal.org/people-and-culture/culture/can-we-celebrate-kumbh-while-ignoring-the-health-of-its-rivers (visited on 12th April 2025).

Even after the Maha Kumbh, reports have emerged about related health concerns. A Senior Consultant from Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, Delhi, told ANI that many returning Kumbh attendees are experiencing medical issues, including loose motions, vomiting, and an undiagnosed fever. Some patients also reported respiratory problems after returning from the Kumbh.[29] Despite these reports, state government stated that the water at Sangam is safe for both drinking and bathing. The Uttar Pradesh government has maintained that the Ganga's water in Prayagraj is pure.[30]

BACTERIOPHAGES IN THE GANGA NATURAL HEALERS

A claim that despite over 60 crore visitors and countless holy dip during maha kumbh, the ganga remains germ free. A study by padma shri Dr. Ajay Sonkar reveals Ganga's unique bacteriophages that naturally purify the water by killing harmful bacteria. These bacteriophages--1,100 types eliminate pollution and ensure self-purification, marking Ganga as the world's only freshwater river with such capabilities.[31]

According to a notification from the Indian government's Ministry of Environment and Forests, the pH level of bathing water should be between 6.5 and 8.5 to ensure protection of the skin, eyes, nose, and ears. If the pH level falls outside this range, it can harm these sensitive organs.[32]

A 2021 article published in The Hindu referenced a research study titled "Assessment of Water Quality and Sediment to Understand Special Properties of River Ganga." According to this research, the Ganga's water contains around 1,100 types of bacteriophages.

However, the same study also stated that these bacteriophages vary across different locations in the Ganga. For example, between Gomukh and Tehri, the river has 33% more bacteriophages compared to the stretch between Bijnor and Varanasi. Prayagraj falls within the Bijnor-Varanasi stretch, meaning it has fewer bacteriophages.

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[29] Economic Times, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/new-updates/faecal-bacteria-levels-surpass-safe-limits-at-maha-kumbh-says-cpcb-doctors-warn-of-health-risks/articleshow/118360553.cms (visited on 13th of April 2025).

[30] Hindustan Times, https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/others/sangam-water-fit-for-ritual-drinking-bathing-yogi-101739988289110.html (visited on 13th of April 2025).

[31] The Times of India, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/worlds-only-freshwater-river-ganga-with-a-remarkable-50-times-faster-elimination-of-germs-says-expert/articleshow/118476220.cms (visited on 13th of April 2025).

[32] Central Pollution Control Board, https://cpcb.nic.in/wqm/primary_water_quality_criteria.pdf (visited on 13th of April 2025).

According to Environmental Monitoring and Assessment of 2020 self-cleaning properties are there in ganga's water.[33] However the pollution load in the Ganga is not sufficient to handle large-scale contamination, especially during major events like the Maha Kumbh. When millions of people bathe in the river, they introduce organic matter, soap, and other pollutants, which can significantly affect water quality.

According to research published in Oxford Press's FEMS Microbes Journal, the presence of various types of bacteriophages does not indicate "germ-free" clean water. Instead, it actually points toward faecal contamination.[34] This means that while bacteriophages can kill harmful bacteria, their abundance in water often suggests the presence of faecal matter, as these viruses need host bacteria (like E. coli) to survive and multiply. So, rather than being a sign of purity, their presence is often an indicator of pollution.

TWO AGENCIES, ONE RIVER, MANY TRUTHS

During the Maha Kumbh 2025, significant contradictions emerged between the water quality data reported by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB), revealing deep flaws in monitoring, transparency, and enforcement. While the CPCB submitted timely and detailed reports based on water samples collected during peak bathing days such as Makar Sankranti (January 14) and January 20, it highlighted dangerously high faecal coliform levels—up to 49,000 MPN/100ml—far exceeding the permissible limit of 2,500 MPN/100ml.[35] In contrast, the UPPCB submitted an outdated report based on pre-Kumbh samples taken on January 12, containing no information on faecal coliform levels.[36] When questioned by the National Green Tribunal (NGT), the UPPCB claimed it had more recent data but also faced allegations of using unscientific testing methods.[37] Furthermore, the board reported much lower faecal coliform levels (2100 MPN/100ml in February), directly contradicting the CPCB's findings, as well as results from

[33] Sanjay Dwivedi, Self-cleansing properties of Ganga during mass ritualistic bathing on Maha-Kumbh,4 Environmental Monitoring and Assessment 192, 221(2020).
[34] Elisenda Balleste & Anicet R. Blanch, Bacteriophages in sewage: abundance, roles, and applications 3 FEMS Microbes3, 1-12 (2022).
[35] Down To Earth, https://www.downtoearth.org.in/water/maha-kumbh-2025-ganga-yamunas-long-term-sustainability-depends-on-continuous-monitoring-improved-wastewater-treatment-and-public-cooperation (visited on 14th April 2025).
[36] Business Standard, https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/ngt-slams-uppcb-maha-kumbh-water-pollution-faecal-bacteria-125022000327_1.html (Visited on 14th April 2025).
[37] Dialogue Earth, https://dialogue.earth/en/pollution/has-the-indian-government-managed-to-clean-the-ganga-at-last/ (Visited on 14th April 2025).

IIT Varanasi and Banaras Hindu University.[38] While the CPCB's data indicated that the Ganga water was unfit even for bathing,[39] the UPPCB categorized it under Class C, suggesting it was suitable for drinking after treatment—a conclusion that appears scientifically unsound. This discrepancy not only undermines the statutory duties imposed by the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, but also poses serious risks to the health of over 66 crore pilgrims who participate in ritual bathing and water consumption during the Kumbh. The failure to provide accurate, real-time water quality data violates legal obligations under Sections 17[40] and 25[41] of the Act and disrespects binding NGT directions. These contradictions weaken the credibility of pollution control institutions and threaten the larger constitutional and environmental pledge to protect the Ganga, especially during spiritually significant events like the Kumbh Mela.

It's not the first time that questions have been raised about the Kumbh Mela. Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) report, *'Environmental Footprints of Mass Bathing on Water Quality of River Ganga during Kumbh Mela'*, highlighted the impact of the 2019 Kumbh Mela, In 2019, during the Kumbh when around 13 crore people took a dip at the Sangam, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) stated in its report that at many locations, the Ganga's water was not fit for bathing.[42]

CONCLUSION

Contradictions between CPCB and UPPCB data reflect systemic failures in monitoring, transparency, and enforcement. While the Ganga's natural bacteriophages offer some self-purifying ability, they cannot counter the overwhelming pollution caused by untreated sewage, industrial waste, and mass human activity. A sustained solution demands coordinated executive action, strict enforcement of environmental laws, real-time data transparency, and genuine local involvement. Without these, the constitutional and ecological duty to protect the Ganga will remain unfulfilled.

[38] Dialogue Earth, https://dialogue.earth/en/pollution/has-the-indian-government-managed-to-clean-the-ganga-at-last/ (Visited on 14th April 2025).
[39] The Economic Times, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/maha-kumbh-ganga-water-at-triveni-sangam-unsafe-due-to-high-bod-levels-reveals-govt-data/articleshow/118389317.cms?from=mdr
[40] The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 (Act no.6 of 1974). s. 17.
[41] The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 (Act no.6 of 1974). s. 25.
[42] India Water Portal, https://www.indiawaterportal.org/people-and-culture/culture/can-we-celebrate-kumbh-while-ignoring-the-health-of-its-rivers (Last visited on 12th April 2025).