



All over the World

The Travel magazine

Great Rivers – part 3 – Ganges

by Robert Shepherd

Vocabulary & pronunciation study by Fiona Kinloch©

Words are explained alongside the text

Syllables are marked with a dot •

Stressed syllables are underlined and in bold*

Hello, this is Robert Shepherd and today we visit **arguably** the **ho•li•est** and most spiritual river in the world – the Ganges. This great river flows from the Him•a•lay•as through to the Bay of Bengal in northern India and Bang•la•desh. Although only the 15th longest river in Asia, its basin is one of the largest in the world and also **covers** China and Nepal. The river is known as Ganga in India, named after the goddess of the same name in ancient texts and art. The Ganges is one of the most **fertile** of all **agricultural regions** in the world. Its rice and other **crops** feed hundreds of millions of people in India and in Bangladesh, where the river is known as the Padma.

The river's 2,520 kilometres is home to 140 different **species** of fish and 90 different species of amphibians, many of which are near extinction. It is also home to the **en•dan•gered** fresh water dolphins and Ganges sharks. A visit to the Ganges must in•clude Varanasi or Banaras, which is known as India's spiritual capital and the most visited **pilgrim destination** in all of India. The ghats, the stone steps that lead down to the Ganges river, are the centre of activities in Varanasi. Each day, **throng**s of **local** Hindu **devotees** and pilgrims from **afar** **descend** to the ghats to wash themselves, as well as their clothes, in the **sacred** river. They believe that the purifying water of the river will **absolve** them of their **sins**.

An early morning boat ride in Varanasi has be•come a **ritual** for tra•vell•ers and is the best way to **wit•ness** the spectacle of the age old rituals in the river and on the ghats. Numerous funerals take place on a **daily** basis and you can witness first-hand families **cremating** their loved ones before **sca•tter•ing** the ashes in the river. The night ceremony also attracts pilgrims, locals and tourists.

arguably (adv.) it may be argued / possibly

holiest (adj.) has a religious purpose

to flow (vb.) to go / to pass

to cover (vb.) travels across

crop (n.) plant e.g. fruit or vegetable

species (n.) a type of

pilgrim (n.) a person who goes to a place for religious reasons

throng (n.) a crowd

afar (adv.) at a distance

to descend (vb.) to go to

sacred (adj.) connected with God

to absolve (vb.) to excuse someone from something (e.g. sins*)

***sin** (n.) an act that is wrong (e.g. a crime)

ritual (n.) a habit

to witness (vb.) to see

to cremate (vb.) to burn

to scatter (vb.) to throw randomly

As moving as these spectacles are, prepare yourself for some **unpleasant** surprises. The Ganges is **prone** to **regular** flooding and so you might be **unfortunate** enough to witness dogs feeding off human remains and other **carcasses**. It will **either** be the body of a priest, whose body must enter the water **intact**, or a **pauper** whose family could not **afford** to give them a funeral. All of this **con•tri•butes** to the Ganges being among the world's most **polluted** rivers, struggling under the pressures of modern India. Environmental initiatives to clean up the river have failed time after time. One of the reasons is **corruption** – charlatan do-gooders who raise funds from the locals to clean up the river are never seen again. Other **obstacles** include a **dearth** of expertise and lack of help from religious leaders who want to maintain thousands of years of tradition. Once a rich **wilderness** full of tigers, lions and other big cats, the plains have evolved into the most densely populated place on Earth. The Ganges river basin has the highest population of any river basin in the world and **contains** over 400 million people. Nourished by the great river's gift of life, it's easy to see how, despite the pollution and economic problems, this **entire** region has continued to **thrive** for millennia. Stay tuned to EnglishWaves and join us again next time when we visit one of Europe's great rivers, the Danube.

unpleasant (adj.) nasty / horrible

to be prone to something (exp.) to risk

carcass (n.) a dead body

intact (adj.) not damaged

pauper (n.) someone who is poor

obstacle (n.) a challenge

dearth (n.) a deficiency / lack of something

plains (n.) large areas of land

to thrive (vb.) to develop well

***Tip!** Syllable Stress can help us to understand spoken words - if we know how to pronounce a word then we are more likely to hear it correctly and therefore understand it and be able to use it when we speak.

Let's take the words 'synonymous' and 'synonym' as an example.

First count the syllables: 'syn•on•y•mous' has 4 syllables

'syn•o•nym' has 3 syllables

Syllable Stress is when you say one of the syllables slightly louder and with more emphasis. So in this example we say: **synonymous** s and **synonym**