

The Ganges River, India

Sacred river. Purifier of souls. Has the power to liberate people from the often miserable cycle of rebirth. All around Varanasi, people, poor and desolate, live for the chance to die by the Ganges, be burned on a funeral pyre and have their ashes cast into the river.

Pure at its source, the Ganges begins in central Himalayas and flows through India to exit in the Bay of Bengal. Along its way, it picks up the ashes of the dead, the bodies of the souls who are too poor to afford a proper funeral along with the industrial and bodily wastes of several millions of people who live without a clean source of water.

To a foreigner, one sip from the Ganges could be deadly. But in the words of a young man rowing on the Ganges, "It's holy water and could not hurt me".

Every night a puja ceremony takes place in Varanasi to thank the Ganges for its powers.

Isabelle Lafortune, Reflections from India