

Major Holy Indian Rivers: Tributaries, Legends, and Significance

Below is a comprehensive overview of the principal sacred rivers of India, their main tributaries, associated legends from Hindu scriptures, and pilgrimage sites.

River	Main Tributaries	Prominent Legends and Scriptural References	Spiritual Significance & Pilgrimage Sites
Ganga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yamuna (right bank)^[1] - Ghaghara (left bank)^[1] - Gandaki (left bank)^[1] - Kosi (left bank)^[1] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Descent of Ganga: King Bhagiratha's tapas (penance) prompts goddess Ganga to descend from heaven to purify his ancestors' ashes; Lord Shiva captures her flow in his matted hair before releasing her gently to earth (Bhagavata Purana, Mahabharata)^[2]. - Purifier of Sins: Bathing in Ganga grants moksha (liberation) and absolution of sins (Rigveda, Puranas). 	Varanasi, Haridwar, Rishikesh, Prayagraj (Triveni Sangam)
Yamuna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chambal (right bank)^[3] - Sindh (right bank)^[3] - Betwa (right bank)^[3] - Tons (left bank)^[3] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sister of Yama: Daughter of sun-god Surya, sibling of death-god Yama; personified as river Yamuna (Mahabharata). - Krishna's Leelas: Site of many childhood pastimes of Lord Krishna at Vrindavan and Mathura (Bhagavata Purana). 	Mathura, Vrindavan, Delhi (Yamunotri), Allahabad Sangam
Saraswati	(Mythical; lost)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rigvedic River: Celebrated in Rigveda as foremost of the seven rivers, goddess of knowledge and speech.^[4] - Curse of Saraswati: In Puranic legend, goddess Saraswati is cursed to become subterranean; meets Ganga and Yamuna at Prayagraj as invisible third stream. 	Prayagraj (Triveni Sangam), Ghaggar-Hakra basin sites
Narmada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tawa - Hiran - Banjar - Kolar - Barna 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Son of Lord Shiva: Believed to have sprung from the body of Shiva; flows westward unlike most Indian rivers (Skanda Purana). - Narmada Parikrama: Circumambulation around the river grants punya (merit) and moksha (Skanda Purana). 	Omkareshwar, Maheshwar, Amarkantak, Jabalpur
Godavari	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pravara - Purna - Manjira - Indravati 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dakshin Ganga: Referred to as Ganga of the South; born of sage Gautama's penance (Padma Purana). - Nasik Kumbh Mela: Held every 12 years at the confluence with Kapila; bathing believed to wash away sins (Skanda Purana). 	Trimbak (origin), Nasik, Rajahmundry

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Krishna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bhima - Tungabhadra - Musi - Panchganga 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rukmini's Abduction: Lord Krishna marries princess Rukmini on banks of Krishna; many legends of Krishna's divine exploits in Dwapara Yuga (Harivamsa, Mahabharata). - Life-giving River: Associated with fertility and prosperity, worshipped as goddess Krishnaveni (Skanda Purana). 	Vijayawada, Srisailem, Udupi
Kaveri	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hemavati - Arkavathi - Suvarnamukhi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Born from Brahma's Kamandalu: Emerged when Sage Agastya drank from Brahma's pot; spilled to form river (Skanda Purana). - Kannagi's Tears: After injustice to her husband, Kannagi's tears are said to have created a tributary of Kaveri (Silappadikaram, later Puranas). 	Srirangam, Talakaveri (origin), Hogenakkal
Sindhu (Indus)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kabul - Jhelum - Chenab - Ravi - Beas - Sutlej 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rigvedic Reverence: Extolled in Rigveda as <i>Sindhu</i>, the mightiest of rivers; cradle of Vedic civilization (Rigveda).^[4] - Purifier and Sustainer: Considered life-giver in Vedic hymns; associated with Indo-Aryan migrations and early Hindu rituals at riverbanks. 	Leh (Ladakh), Harappa/Mohenjo-daro archaeological sites

Notes on Format and Sources

- Tributary information for the Ganga system is drawn from hydrological surveys and Smart Water Magazine^[1].
- Legends and scriptural references are synthesized from primary Puranic texts (Bhagavata Purana, Skanda Purana) and "Rivers in Hinduism" (Wikipedia)^[2].
- Pilgrimage sites are identified from traditional Hindu pilgrimage guides and modern travel accounts.

This organized tableau offers a clear reference for the cultural and spiritual tapestry woven around India's sacred rivers—highlighting their physical networks, mythic narratives, and enduring role in devotional practice.



1. <https://smartwatermagazine.com/q-a/what-are-tributaries-ganges-river>
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rivers_in_Hinduism
3. <https://compass.rauias.com/geography/ganga-river-system-tributaries-river-valley-projects/>
4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rigvedic_rivers