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## POTENTIALS, CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES IN EMERGING “GARHMUKTESHWAR” AS A NEW BIG GANGA CITY OF DISTRICT HAPUR, UTTAR PRDESH

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**Abstract:** In recent past years, it has been noticed that “Garhmukteshwar” is emerging as a new big Ganga city and working as alternative to the holy city of Haridwar and Varanasi. Uttar Pradesh administration with the major support of Government of India is also working on a plan to attract tourists to ‘wash their sins & to get rid of’ in the Ganga which is much closer to Delhi, at the historic spot of Garhmukteshwar. People who are living in Delhi & NCR preferably go to Garhmukteshwar rather than going to Haridwar & Varanasi, as it takes comparatively low time to reach & also it is economically viable. It has been observed that to reduce the burden on the other Ganga cities of Uttar Pradesh, The Administration is quite serious about Garhmukteshwar. Management committees has been formed with more responsibilities, New ghats are being constructed, extra changing rooms are building, Shamshan ghats are being modernized with more facilities, bathing space has been extended and some more necessary actions has been made.

**Keywords:** Ganga city, Holy River, Religious tourism, Pilgrimage tourism, Funeral rites, Namami Gange mission, River ecosystem, Employment growth, Delhi- NCR

### I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Garhmukteshwar has a very long and dynamic history that antecede the common Era. According to our prosperous Hindu literature such as Bhagavata Purana and Mahabharata, the first stone of Garhmukteshwar was laid down thousands of years ago, when the Kingdom of Hastinapur dominated this spiritual land. Hence it is regarded to be an old part of Hastinapur, which was called Pandeva’s capital.

There is a prevailing mythology regarding this holy place. Earlier this place was known as “Shivallabhpur” because of the establishment of Lord Shiva temple and also being Centre point of the great Vallabh Dynasty. The devotees of Lord Vishnu, Jai and Vijay got cursed by Narad Muni. In respect of this Jai & Vijay visited many of religious place but couldn’t attain Moksha. At last, they came to Shivallabhpur and prayed to Lord Shiva. They found lord appeared in front of them and freed them from the curse so that they can get Moksha. And from that time, this place is called “Garhmukteshwar” means land to attain Moksha.

The river banks of Holy Ganga are the ideal locations in this town for some moments of relaxation. Tourist experience a relaxing environment here because of the presence of calm water, a serene ambience & the divine and spiritualistic surroundings. These Ganga ghats are excellent places for mediation and reflectance.

We can see eighty Sati pillars in and around in this town. Sati pillars are the stones which were placed earlier to commemorate the women who committed Sati practice. It was a practice in which a widow immolates herself very soon after her husband’s death. These stones display the information about those women and their sacrifices.

Garhmukteshwar is a small town or hamlet which provides experience to those who want to get mingle with the locals and those who want to explore the best of rural life in contrast to witnessing historical and religious attractions. One can learn about their culture and traditions in their native place. “Garh mela” is also one of the reasons everyone should visit this holy place at least once

in their life. This fair is organized by the local government with the help of Garhmukteshwar management board each year and it lasts for a whole week.

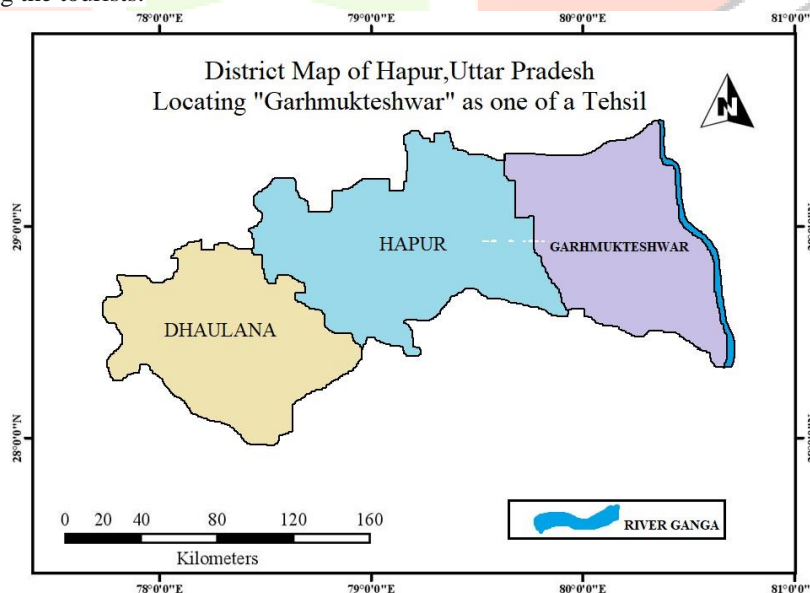
With a distance of less than 100 km, Garhmukteshwar is the only closest spot to Delhi NCR from where Ganga passes and where big river banks are existed. It is true that Garhmukteshwar does not carry that significant spiritual brand such as Haridwar or Varanasi, to wash away sins or to attain spiritual freedom. But yes, it has a potential to be developed like that and to go towards the opportunities. Govt is working on a serious note to develop Garhmukteshwar city as a proper pilgrimage and spiritual tourism site to attract both domestic and foreign tourists as well.

## II. STUDY AREA

Garhmukteshwar is a small religious town, outside of Hapur city, and a tehsil in district Hapur of the state. Garhmukteshwar has total area about 272 km<sup>2</sup> including 237.38 km<sup>2</sup> rural area and 34.13 km<sup>2</sup> urban area. According to census of India 2011, The town has a population of 46,077 of which 24,437 are males and 21,640 are females. There are about 137 villages in Garhmukteshwar block. It is an ancient place that has a historical importance and its name is mentioned in the Hindu literature such as *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Mahabharata*. The land of Garhmukteshwar was the part of ancient Hastinapur, the capital of the Pandavas. The name of this town has been derived from the temple of "Mukteshwar Mahadeva", which is dedicated to the goddess Ganga who is worshipped here in most of the temples. Jama Masjid, Kanka Kuo and Mira Bai Ki Sandi etc. are also other visiting sights.

Garhmukteshwar has the monsoon affected humid subtropical climate and is characterized under very hot summers and cool winters. Summers starts from early April and lasts to late June. During this period extremely hot conditions, with temperatures reaching 43 °Celsius are been observed. Monsoon arrives here in late of June and continues till the mid of September. Temperatures drop slightly, with much of cloud cover but with very high humidity. From late October to the middle of march the city has a mild, dry winter season. The amount of rainfall is about 80 cm to 100 cm per annum, which is good for growing crops. And this is also a fact that during the monsoon period most of the rainfall is received.

It is situated on National Highway 9, which connects this town to New Delhi, which is around 100 kilometers away from here, and puts the town, which is 5 kilometers from the Ganga River. There are two railway stations in this city, named Garhmukteshwar and Garhmukteshwar Bridge (commonly known as Brijghat). Both the stations are situated on the Delhi–Moradabad railway line. Garhmukteshwar and its twin city, Brij Ghat, are supposed to be home for hundreds of temples. An annual fair is celebrated here on the banks of Ganges River, yes, it is not as popular as other annual fairs celebrated in the state. But now Government of Uttar Pradesh has planned to take forward Garhmukteshwar on the tourism map and developing it as spiritual tourism site. There is an Islamic architecture also can be seen in the town through a very old mosque constructed by Gays-ud-din Balban. In 1946, a Mela hosting more than 7 lacs people faced anti-Muslim violence, leading to the death of many of the persons - Muslim and Hindu. Yet the smoothing ghats of Ganges are an all-time favorite spot in the city. Sitting to these ghats is one of the most favorite tourist activities here among the tourists.



Source: Author

## III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to find out the reality of emerging this town as next big Ganga city and also enquiring that Does this town has that potential to compete Haridwar & Varanasi in respect of pilgrimage activities and becoming a new center of religious tourism. There is no doubt that Garhmukteshwar has an extra weightage of being nearest to the Delhi-NCR and it is able to give the feeling of spirituality to the local peoples. Yet govt should try seriously at their best to for the comprehensive development of this religious town. Following are the other objectives written below-

- 1.To find out the existing capability of Garhmukteshwar to be emerging as the next big Ganga city?
- 2.What are the problems and hidden challenges that have to be faced in implementing this programme?

3. To analyze the potential and the opportunities of this town to be emerged as the new site of pilgrimage and religious tourism in the state?
4. What should be the government strategy in implementing this plan also in respect of comprehensive and sustainable growth?
5. What will be probable positive and negative impacts after the implementation of this programme on the local community?

#### IV. DISCUSSIONS

We can divide findings into four major sections which are elaborated below in detail and there is also a discussion about the future strategies.

##### Potentialities

There is no doubt that Garhmukteshwar is completely capable to be emerged as next big Ganga city and to become a new big pilgrimage and religious tourism center point in the state. It can reduce the burden of popular Ganga cities like Haridwar, Varanasi & Prayagraj. And also, can generate revenue for the state. Below following points prove the potential of Garhmukteshwar as new big Ganga city –

1. Garhmukteshwar is less than 100 km away from the capital of India, Delhi. It comes under National Capital Region.
2. In comparison to Garhmukteshwar, other prominent Ganga cities like Varanasi, Prayagraj & Haridwar are situated too far from Delhi – NCR.
3. Garhmukteshwar has a very old and dynamic history that antedates the common Era. It is regarded to be an old part of Hastinapur, which was called Pandava's capital.
4. Along with "Mukteshwar Mahadev" temple, Goddess of Ganga is worshipped here in most of the temples.
5. Ganga Aarti is organized daily at most of the ghats in the morning and evening as well by the renowned Priests.
6. Staying in Garhmukteshwar for tourism purpose is relatively cheaper in compare to other Ganga cities.
7. Hotel Industry is developing fast in the town and provides all types of accommodations. Restaurants provide healthy and good cost food.
8. A popular "Ganga Mela" is celebrated here annually on the banks of Ganga River. The devotees of Lord Shiva also come here in month of Saawan and come for a "kanvad yatra."
9. Tourists can enjoy boat ride and other adventure activities here. The presence of calm water, natural and divine surroundings contribute to the relaxing experience for guests.
10. Most of the ghats are cemented and chains are installed here for a safe and easy holy bath. A good number of changing rooms are installed here. Ganga police is also deployed here. People can get a lot of Pandit scholars here to do their rituals in a proper and absolute manner.

##### Problems & Challenges

Yet we are planning for launching Garhmukteshwar as next big Ganga city, but there are plenty of challenges also in achieving this goal. Probable problems and challenges which can be occurred are discussed below-

1. Garhmukteshwar does not carry that significant spiritual brand ship such as other Ganga cities like Haridwar, Varanasi and Prayagraj carry which have a brand perception of being able to wash away sins and attain spiritual freedom.
2. Garhmukteshwar does not offer the brand equity of being a spiritual destination as other Big Ganga cities do so which has been instrumental in tapping the international tourist market. It is largely known as a locational site where last rites of Hindu religion are performed.
3. All of the sewage wastes generated in this local town is dumped untreated into the Ganga River including the waste from temples, hotels, restaurants and all other establishments.
4. Garhmukteshwar is not provided that type of infrastructure which has been provided to other big Ganga cities. Ghats are not well maintained; public toilets are not cleaned. Changing rooms are mismanaged.
5. Hotels and other accommodation facilities are not up to the mark hence upper middle class and high-class people are suffered here a lot.
6. There is a need for new ghats to be constructed, old ghats to be redeveloped and proper management should be assured.
7. Plenty of stray animals can be seen near the ghats which make the tourists get in trouble. Sometimes these animals become aggressive and do attack also on the tourists.
8. Lighting system is also not up to the mark. Tourists face a lot of difficulties at night. There are many dark spots which should be identified and lights should be installed there.
9. It has also been seen that local people are not welcoming in nature. They behave rudely and do not act accordingly.
10. It is also true that all the past government did not give much attention to Garhmukteshwar what this city is deserved as a religious tourist destination.

## Opportunities

Being the nearest Ganga city to the Delhi-NCR region, Garhmukteshwar has a very fine opportunity to be developed as next big Ganga city. It can provide an alternative option to the people who go to other Ganga cities like Haridwar, Varanasi and Parayagraj. Climatic conditions of Garhmukteshwar are suitable and does not notice extreme climatic events. River Ganga is moreover clean in the city comparatively and good amount of water flows from here.

Goddess Ganga is worshipped here in most of the temple followed by "Mukteshwar Mahadev" temple. "The Sandhya aarti" is organized daily in the evening. And all these religious activities make a very spiritualistic environment in the surroundings. The annual Ganga fair organized here doubles the beauty of this religious city.

It is right time for the government to pay more attention towards this small religious town and to launch it as new big Ganga city. More infrastructure should be built, basic tourist facilities should be provided and this city should also be promoted as other Ganga cities are done. So that all round development of this city can be assured.

## Future strategies

The time has come when Government should think seriously about the launching of Garhmukteshwar as the alternative option of Haridwar, Varanasi and Parayagraj. These are the major steps that Govt can take in this regard –

1. A comprehensive action plan should be prepared and responsibilities should be distributed among different stake holders.
  2. New and necessary infrastructure should be built for the holistic & proper development of this religious city.
  3. Garhmukteshwar city should also be promoted as a "brand" as other Ganga cities of Uttar Pradesh are done.
  4. More tourist activities should be introduced and a complete spiritualistic environment should be created with sustainable approach.
  5. Sewage waste generated in the city should not be dumped untreated into the Ganga river. And ghats should be regularly maintained.
  6. Hotel & Accommodation industries should be upgraded and river cruise can also be introduced.
  7. New ghats should be constructed, old ghats should be redeveloped and proper managements of ghats should be ensured.
  8. Dark spots should be identified, no. of public toilets should be increased and more changing rooms should be installed.
  9. Tourist police and Water police should be deployed with good number of female police officers.
  10. Central government should provide assistance to the state government in achieving this goal.
- for the holistic development of this religious city.

## V. CONCLUSION

It is always good when any Government think about to shifting the burden of particular importance from one city to the others and also to increase its revenue system. Planning for launching Garhmukteshwar as new big Ganga city is also a welcoming step. Being the nearest Ganga city to the Delhi-NCR region, Garhmukteshwar also has a very fine opportunity to be developed as next big Ganga city.

It can provide an alternative option to the people who go to other Ganga cities like Haridwar, Varanasi and Parayagraj. The climatic conditions of this city are suitable and does not see extreme climatic events. All the religious activities organized here make a very spiritualistic environment in the surroundings. For the tourists who have less time for travel and also do not have plenty of money to spend can easily go for this option of Garhmukteshwar.

But planning for launching Garhmukteshwar as next big Ganga city is not as easy as it looks. There are plenty of problems & challenges also in achieving this goal. First of all, this mindset of people should have to be changed that Garhmukteshwar is a locational site where last rites of Hindu religion are performed. This city should also carry that significant spiritual brand ship such as other Ganga cities like Haridwar, Varanasi and Parayagraj do. Such infrastructure should be developed so that it could attract the tourist from all over the India and international tourists as well. And all this should be done with the taking consideration of local peoples and the grass route community. All the development activities should be comprehensive, holistic and sustainable in nature. It is right time for the government to pay more attention towards this small religious city and to launch it as new big Ganga city. More infrastructure should be built, basic tourist facilities should be provided and this city should also be promoted as other Ganga cities are done. So that all round development of this city can be assured. And all this can happen with the basic support of Union government and the comprehensive master plan of the state government for this city. Proper management committee and advisory board should be established for this work. And if all these things are happened then the day will not be far when this city will be a new Ganga city destination for the tourists and it will play a vital role in generating revenue for the state.

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