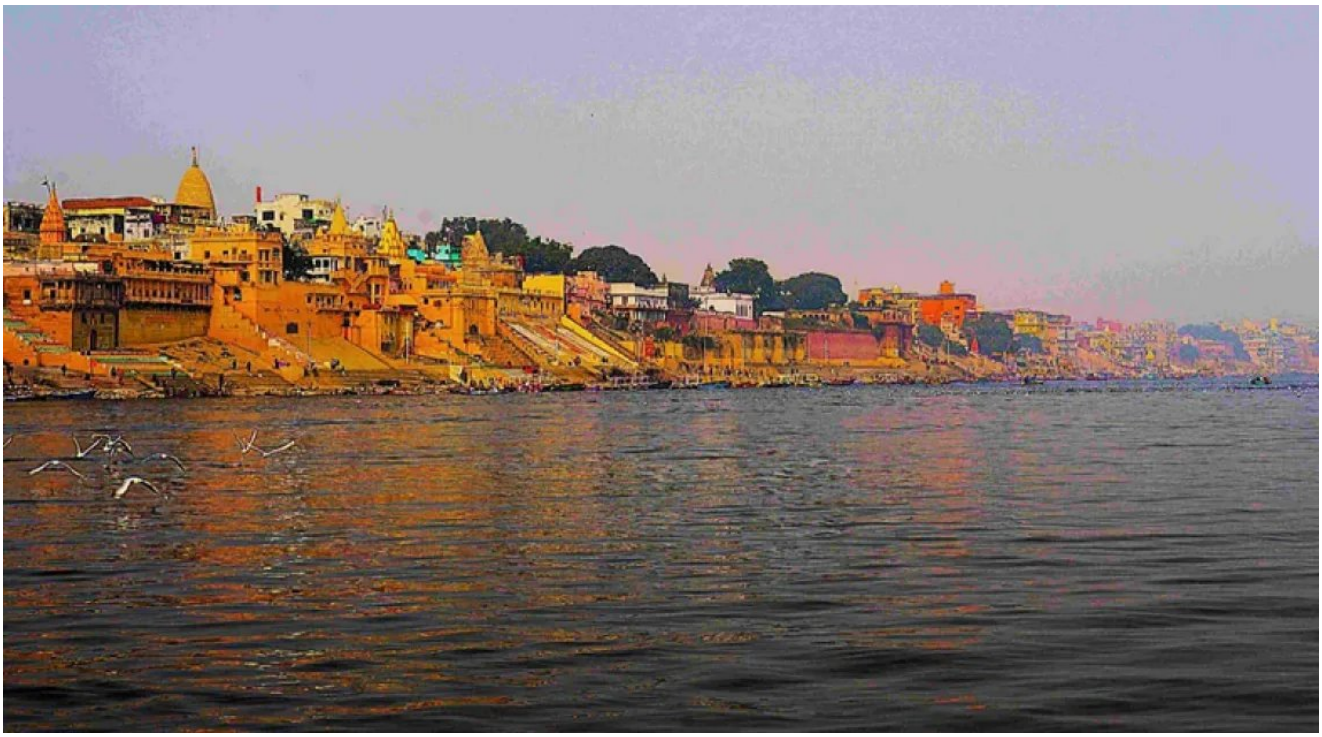
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From India's sacred Ganga River to Mongolia's sacred Ganga Lake

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1. The Ganga River in Varanasi, India

Ganga Lake, or Ganga Nuur, however—located in Sü khbaat Province near the Dhari Ganga[1] region of eastern Mongolia and connected to the Ganga River in India—is not as widely known as the latter!



2. Ganga lake, Mongolia

(The name of the region derives from the sacred mountain Dari Ovoo or Altan Ovoo and from the Ganga Lake)



3. Dariganga village

So, let’s explore the connection between these two, and through them, examine the connection between the two cultures—the Indian and the Mongolian.

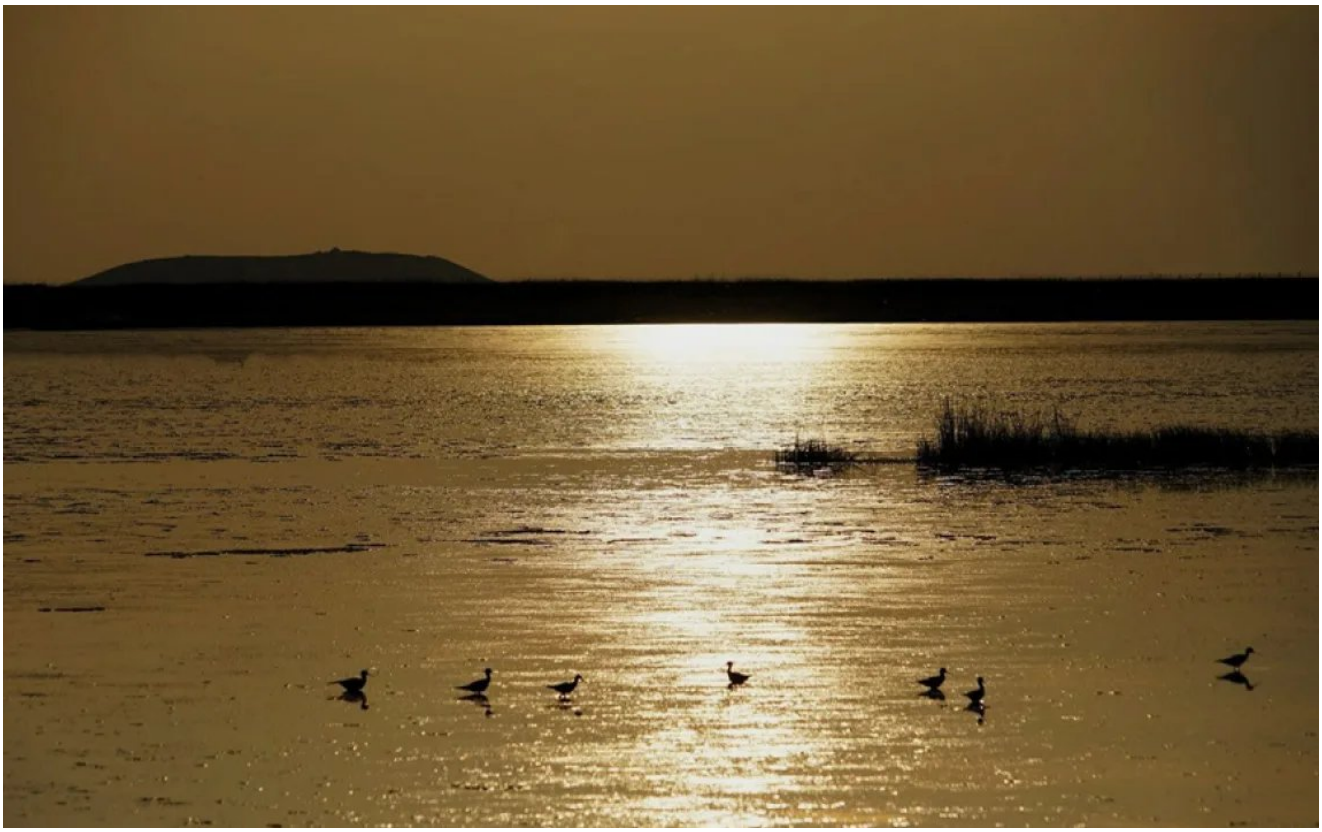
At first, what is surprising is their shared name.

It is said that the reason for the name of Ganga Lake is the Mongol nobleman and politician Hechuu Wang Togtokhtör (September 15, 1779 – April 6, 1868). According to historical accounts, Wang Togtokhtör visited India, took water from the sacred Ganga River, transported it to Mongolia, and poured it into this particular lake. Because of this, the lake was named Ganga!

Let us, however, take a moment here to briefly mention the work of this great Mongol:

During his rule in the Khoshuu region, his deep religious interest led him to found several Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. Among these, the two he built in the Tamsagbulag region are of particular interest: the “Соёлыг бадруулагч,” meaning “he who promotes culture,” and the “Хамгиг хамгаалагч,” meaning “the one who protects everything.” He also helped translate sacred Buddhist texts from Tibetan into Mongolian so that they could be understood by ordinary people.

His social work included combining religious faith with education and economic progress, as he founded secular schools, built artificial lakes and dams, workshops for stone carving, silk production, weaving, carpentry and metallurgy, as well as agricultural facilities. He also managed to transform Tamsagbulag into a regional cultural center.



Ganga Lake holds spiritual, historical and religious significance for the country, while also serving as a link between the cultures of the two peoples, Indians and Mongolians!



For Mongolian Buddhists, the lake serves as a living “spiritual link” to India, the birthplace of

Buddhism, thus bridging the two cultures through the transfer of sacred water.

Both Ganga Lake and the Ganga River are important pilgrimage sites. At both locations, the devotees go to the banks to perform rituals, leave offerings, and pray.



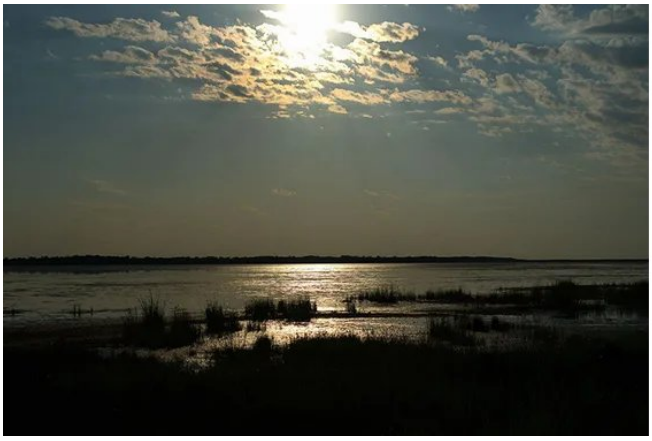
Ganga Lake is supplied by 21 different natural springs and many Mongolians consider its water to be blessed, pure, full of divine energy and healing—just as the water of the Ganga River is considered.

Finally, every autumn, thousands of migratory birds, mainly swans, gather at this lake before flying to India.



In India and in Hindu tradition, as is well known, the swan is called hamsa or hansa and

symbolizes spiritual purity, wisdom and the ability to distinguish the true from the false. The swan is considered the sacred vehicle (vahana) of the god Brahma, the creator of the universe and of Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom, the arts and literature. It is also a symbol of the human soul and its solitary journey towards spiritual liberation and enlightenment.





Mongolian nomads view the gathering of swans as an annual, mystical affirmation of the spiritual bond between the two countries, India and Mongolia! In Mongolia, Tibetan Buddhism, or Lamaism, is deeply intertwined with traditional Shamanism, or Tengrism, and its followers worship the elements of nature and consider mountains and waters as spiritual entities. Ganga Lake, or the “Lake of a Thousand Swans,” is a protected, sacred place for them!

For the past 12 years, a festival has been held once a year in September with the aim of raising awareness about the conservation of the Ganga Lake ecosystem. Members of the Dariganga community showcase their traditional products, dance and sing to the accompaniment of the traditional stringed musical instrument morin khuur.





Prepared (including photographs) by Konstantinos Kalaitzis