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## Ritualistic Practices and River Pollution: A Case Study of River Tawi In Jammu District

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**Abstract:** Social and religious practices and festive events are habitual activities that structure the lives of many communities and groups in India. Pilgrimage tourism and related activities are integral part of Indian culture. India's chief source of water, its more than 400 rivers, is swiftly becoming unsafe for both drinking and bathing. While industrial pollution plays a major part in this worrying trend, religious practices and rituals in the pilgrimage places is also playing an important role. The river Tawi which local people in Jammu consider a holy river has become victim of such practices. The river has a great religious and historical importance and is the main source of drinking water in Jammu city. Various social and religious practices, rituals and festive events in Jammu involve variety of forms: worship rites, rites of passage, birth and funeral rituals and seasonal ceremonies. These activities mostly take place on the banks of river Tawi. During the religious festivals and other ritualistic occasions or offerings flowers, decoration materials, polish, painted material, polythene bags and food offerings are dumped into the river resulting in pollution and causing damage to its aquatic life. Every year a twice religious ritual is being followed in Jammu in which the immersion of deities, earthen pots (Sakh), waste material after keeping them for days at home takes place. All these social and religious practices have resulted in polluting the river. The present research paper is an attempt to focus on the impact of various religious practices in polluting the river Tawi in district Jammu.

**Keywords:** Religious, Social, pollution, festival, Water, Rites.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Water is and had remained the best of all things since the inception of civilization. The importance of this statement has become evident in the present world. Throughout history the water has been considered a natural resource for human survival. Water is the prime necessity and no can imagine life without water. But today our natural water resources are getting polluted gradually. The main cause of water pollution is human activities in one way or the other. The preset study however mainly focuses on the effects of religious practices on water. Like many of India's rivers, the Tawi River serves multiple purposes for the millions of people who live along its banks. Hindus, the predominant religious group in Jammu, believe that the Tawi is the holiest river and that its sacred waters have healing and restorative powers. They use the river for religious rituals and rites. People in Jammu also rely on the Tawi's waters for food, drinking and bathing water, transportation, and agriculture. As a result, raw sewage and other biological waste have long contaminated the river. Over the years the Jammu city has grown mainly due to rapid pace of urbanisation, these "natural" pollutants have become more of a problem. Tawi River also called as Surya Putri in ancient text, is a major tributary of Chenab River and an important river in Jammu region. The Tawi rises from Kalpas Kund of Seo Dhar in the Baderwah in Doda district, then descends to Sudh Mahadev and finally merge with the Chenab River in Sialkot in Pakistan.

India's chief source of water, its more than 400 rivers, is staggeringly becoming unsafe for any activity in it, including extreme loss of animal life among environmental degradation combined with sickness and disease. While industrial pollution plays a major part in the popular recent trend of worrying, religious rituals associated with Hinduism also plays an impacting role. Physical cleanliness and spiritual well being revolves around the Hindu way of life. Hinduism encompasses multiple different beliefs among those that most Hindus do share is the importance of striving to attain purity and avoiding pollution as much as possible. This is attained with the use of water and reading from the Vedic texts; the most sacred rivers are the Ganges, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri and Tawi. A vital component of worship for Hindus is to give gifts to the deities. Statues of Hindu gods,

flowers, pots, and other objects are thrown into Indian rivers daily by hundreds of thousands of people without a second thought. Funeral grounds are always located near rivers because it's mandatory to cremate the dead and scatter their ashes in water. Hindus universally believe the deceased will not attain salvation if the last of their remains are not immersed in the sacred waters. Morning cleansing with water is an obligation with purity in mind. Tarpana is when the worshipper makes a cup with his hands and pours the water back into the river while reciting mantras. Then they take sips of the water and begin to say the morning prayers. Every temple has a pond or body of water near it and people are supposed to take a bath before entering the temple of worship (CatholicOnline, 2014). The illustrations of the many daily uses of water and how the toxicity levels began to increase hopefully provides insight on the severity of the crisis at hand.

Environmentalists and river experts have been campaigning against these the river water pollution especially idol immersions for over a decade now. Judicial interventions in the past, however, have not yielded the desired result. Every year, after Ganesh Chaturthi, Durga Puja and Kali Puja, Navratas, the biological oxygen demand (BOD) levels in rivers increase dramatically. Traditionally, the idols were made of mud and painted with natural colours. But now many are made using plaster of Paris (PoP) and coated with harmful paints containing heavy metals, all of which end up in the rivers on these festivities. According to non-profit Toxics Link,

## **2. IMPORTANCE OF RIVER TAWI**

Flowing through the city of Jammu, Tawi divides the city into two parts, old city and new city. The water of Tawi River is the main source of water for the entire city. There are five bridges over the river, two from Gumat to Vikram Chowk, one from Bhagwati Nagar to Balli Nallah other connects Gujjar Nagar with Bahu fort area and the last one is on the city bypass near Nagrota. After flowing through the Jammu City, Tawi crosses the Pakistan and joins Chenab River. Tawi River of Jammu and Kashmir has great religious and historical importance attached to it. Through the city of Jammu, the Tawi River flows along the left bank of the Chenab River. It is in fact, one of the major tributaries of the River Indus and one of the important rivers & lakes of Jammu and Kashmir. The total catchment area of the River Tawi is more than two thousand and one hundred square Kilometres. The total stretch of the river adds up to 141 Kilometers and it falls within the following districts: Jammu, Doda, Udhampur. Although the Tawi enhances the beauty of Jammu, the river itself has been polluted by ill usage by the residents and some ritualistic practices. The main concern now is to clean up the river and give back to it its original crystal clear look. The Tawi river was famous for Trout Fish but with passage of time they have got extinct and the quality of water has been so much degraded that it is not suitable for bathing. In earlier days, the river was the sole source of potable water supply to the town. In the rainy seasons, the water took some time to settle. The tiny particles used to settle down before the water was used for drinking. Now-a-days there are very few people, who could think of taking a dip in once holy and sacred Jammu Tawi. As much as 26 mgd (million gallons per day) water is pumped from the Tawi to cater to the needs of drinking water in Jammu. This is done at Sitlee (20mgd), Dhountli (4mgd) and Boria (2mgd) water treatment plants. Sitlee and Dhountli are located before the river enters Jammu, while Boria is located in the old city area, where the river enters Jammu. Most of the famous religious Ghats of the the river are situated after this point, there is atleast one that is right next to the Sitlee Plant (PHE, Jammu).

## **3. MYTHOLOGY OF THE RIVER TAWI**

King of Jammu with the blessings of 'Bawe wali Shri MATA KALI JI'. Most Hindus of Jammu city at present perform 'MUNDAN' ceremony of their children at DEV STHAN of 'PEHAR DEVTA JI' also called with love as 'BAWA PEHAR' having HIS sthans at various places in Jammu region but main place at near village KATAL BATAL near Nagrota. Temple has pictures of Pehar devta along with Snakes and goddess Kali. People offer food over there to fishes in form of wheat balls and pray for there well being and prosperity. Tawi river transverses through and divides Jammu city in two parts. The old Jammu town is located on the hill overlooking river Tawi. The new town is across the river. Tawi River is a major source of drinking water for the old city. Untreated sewage in Jammu pollutes Tawi river as it passes through the city (Tawi River, Jammu & Kashmir, 2016).

## **4. RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE OF WATER**

Water has a central place in the practices and beliefs of many religions for two main reasons. Firstly, water cleanses. Water washes away impurities and pollutants, it can make an object look as good as new and wipe away any signs of previous defilement. Water not only purifies objects for ritual use, but can make a person clean, externally or

spiritually, ready to come into the presence of his/her focus of worship. Secondly, water is a primary building block of life. Without water there is no life, yet water has the power to destroy as well as to create. We are at the mercy of water just as we are at the mercy of our God or gods. The significance of water manifests itself differently in different religions and beliefs but it is these two qualities of water that underlie its place in our cultures and faiths.

#### 4.1 Buddhism

For Buddhists symbolism and ritual is pointless because they seek spiritual enlightenment that comes from seeing the reality of unreality. Water does however feature in Buddhist funerals where water is poured into a bowl placed before the monks and the dead body. As it fills and pours over the edge, the monks recite "As the rains fill the rivers and overflow into the ocean, so likewise may what is given here reach the departed."

#### 4.2. Christianity

Almost all Christian churches or sects have an initiation ritual involving the use of water. The Catholic Church, however, believes that a real change occurs at baptism - it is more than just symbolism - it is at baptism that Catholics believe that the stain of original sin is actually removed from the individual. The use of water is important for its own symbolic value in three ways: it cleanses and washes away dirt, fills everything it enters as God fills those who are immersed in Him and we need water to survive physically as we need God to survive spiritually.

#### 4.3. Hinduism

Water in Hinduism has a special place because it is believed to have spiritually cleansing powers. To Hindus all water is sacred, especially rivers, and there are seven sacred rivers, namely the Ganges, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri. Although Hinduism encompasses so many different beliefs among those that most Hindus do share is the importance of striving to attain purity and avoiding pollution. This relates to both physical cleanliness and spiritual well-being.

Pilgrimage is very important to Hindus. Holy places are usually located on the banks of rivers, coasts, seashores and mountains. Sites of convergence, between land and river or two, or even better three, rivers, carry special significance and are specially sacred. Sacred rivers are thought to be a great equalizer. In the Ganges the pure are made even more pure and the impure have their pollution removed if only temporarily. In the sacred water distinctions of caste are supposed to count for nothing, as all sins fall away. Kumbha mela is a pilgrimage of Hindu devotees and is held every three years at four different places in turn - Hardwar, Nasik, Prayaga and Ujjain. These places are believed to be where drops of *amrta* - the nectar of immortality fell to earth during a heavenly conflict. The Ganges river is the most important of the sacred rivers. Its' waters are used in *puja* (worship) and if possible a sip is given to the dying. It is believed that those who bath in the Ganges and those who leave some part of themselves (hair, bone etc) on the left bank will attain *Svarga* (the paradise of Indra). The river is said to flow from the toe of Vishnu to be spread into the world through the hair of Shiva. Funeral grounds are always located near a river. For Hindus, morning cleansing with water is a basic obligation. Physical purification is a part of daily ritual which may, in the case of *sadhus* (Hindu holy people who renounce the world seeking Brahman), be very elaborate. *Sodhana* is also necessary if caste rules have been broken, for example if someone drinks from the same vessel as a member of a lower caste, and before *puja*. Every temple has a pond near it and devotees are supposed to take a bath before entering the temple.

#### 4.4 Islam

In Islam water is important for cleansing and purifying. Muslims must be ritually pure before approaching God in prayer. Some mosques have a courtyard with a pool of clear water in the centre, but in most mosques the ablutions are found outside the walls. Fountains symbolising purity are also sometimes found in mosques. In Islam ritual purity (called *tahara*) is required before carrying out religious duties especially *salat* (worship).

#### 4.5 Judaism

In Judaism ritual washing is intended to restore or maintain a state of ritual purity and its origins can be found in the Torah. These ablutions can be washing the hands, the hands and the feet, or total immersion which must be done in 'living water', i.e. the sea, a river, a spring or in a *mikveh*. In Temple times ablutions were practised by priests,

converts to Judaism as part of the initiation rites and by women on the seventh day after their menstrual period. Priests had to wash their hands and feet before taking part in Temple services. The ritual washing of hands is performed before and after meals and on many other occasions.

## **5. THE CASE STUDY**

According to WHO about 80% of all diseases in human beings are caused by water; therefore a regular monitoring of such water bodies is very essential for physicochemical and microbiological analysis to know the suitability of water under use not only to check the outbreak of diseases and occurrence of hazards but also to prevent the water from further deterioration. Therefore, the present study was conducted to analyze the effects of religious activities on river Tawi. The water of river Tawi clearly depict that there is an increase in the value of water quality index after the religious human activities due to increase in the values of nitrates, turbidity, BOD, TDS, total alkalinity, total hardness, and MPN and decrease in the values of DO. Out of eight water bodies studied three were found to be under good water quality status and four (1, 2, 6, and 7) were designated under the medium water quality status whereas site 8 fell under the category of poor water quality after the religious activities. The sites with good WQI status (sites 3, 4, and 5) may be considered suitable for bathing purpose (Bhatnagar et al., 2016).

The present study was primarily focused on the various religious practices which were being performed at the various Ghats of river Tawi in Jammu city during Navratras. The Ghats would wear a festive look with hundreds of devotees including men, women and children turn up to immerse the idols, Khetr/Sankh and other religious materials in the holy waters after 'Kanya Pujan'. The festival takes place twice a year during April and October months in which the immersion of diety (Sakh) which consist of earthen pot containing vegetation, after keeping them for 8-9 days at home takes place. With the holy sakh people bring all the waste of their home which is somehow connected to the religious practices or othe sacred activities. It mostly consist of religious leftover, plastic bottles, chunris, flowers, leaves, coconut, old diyas, old glass frames etc. All these items are separately packed in the polythene and are dumped in the river Tawi as it is.

## **6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In the present study entitled "Ritualistic Practices and River Pollution: A Case Study of River Tawi In Jammu District", the two busiest Ghats of river Tawi Har Ki Poodhi Ghat and Bikram Chowk Ghat was selected to conduct the study. Jammu city which is known as city of temples was selected as the area of the study. The main respondents in the study comprised temple authorities, devotees, an NGO working for the case of saving Tawi from pollution from the last five year, authorities of Jammu Municipal Corporation and pollution control board Jammu authorities. While interacting with the respondents, the researcher has utilized different perspectives of research methods. The researcher utilized purposive sampling methods for focus interview, direct face to face, close interaction method apart non- participant and participant observation method. The data methods used has also both descriptive and exploratory one, using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Exploratory method is used to establish relationship between important variables and indicators as one goes on exploring about related issues in the focused area of study. While using the above methods of inquiry, the researcher has used purposive sampling method of particular units of the universe so that each unit of selection can be potential interviewee. Temple authorities, devotees, an NGO working for the case of saving Tawi from pollution from the last five year, authorities of Jammu municipal corporation and pollution control board Jammu authorities constitute the universe of study. During the study, both participant observation and non-participant observation employed helped in systematic cross-checking of information. Preliminary data from observation provided the insights and clues necessary for developing interview questions, case studies, etc. It provided the further checking and monitoring of field information like attitude towards, the pollution of the river, concern of authorities and efforts of Ngo.

## **7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

- The study found that there are two governmental agencies that are responsible for controlling the pollution of River Tawi in Jammu city. The State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) and Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC). SPCB being the state level agency is responsible for the control of pollution of river Tawi in entire state while on the other hand as river Tawi passes through the Jammu city which comes under the jurisdiction of JMC they are also responsible for controlling the pollution of river Tawi.

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- State Pollution Control Board: SPCB has no guidelines for controlling the pollution of the river Tawi. During the face to face interaction with the chairman of the board, it was noticed that he accepted the view that river Tawi is getting polluted in the Jammu city due to various sources including religious waste but seemed reluctant to shoulder the responsibility on the board rather believed that JMC is to take care of it. According to him public should not throw the religious waste in the river but he had no answer about the solution as Jammu being Hindu dominated area is a source of large amount of religious waste like flowers and other waste packed in polythene on daily basis. Although the board has given the idea of converting it by segregating the biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste and make compost but the SPCB was not ready to take the responsibility of composting. According to the chairman the SPCB have no authority over them and considered it the responsibility of the JMC.
  - Jammu Municipal Corporation: Most of the pollutants which pollutes the river Tawi enters the river in the Jammu city. Jammu city is a highly populated city and JMC is the only agency that is responsible for the control and prevention of the pollution in the city. They have displayed few hoardings for requesting the general public to keep the river Tawi clean and Green but even they don't have strict guidelines regarding the river Tawi which is the only source of water for Jammu city. According to them river Tawi is mostly getting polluted due to polythene and they have no control over it as their manufacturing units are located outside their jurisdiction. They blame the SPCB for the pollution of the river Tawi as they only have the power to take strict action against the polythene manufacturers. As far as the religious waste is concerned JMC also said that it should be converted into compost but refrained from taking the responsibility of doing so due to lack of funding.
  - Disha Young Club a Jammu based voluntary organization has been organizing various activities to aware the passes of ill effects of throwing waste material into the river Tawi which the organization believe is the main source of pollution in Tawi. The organization is active since 2012 and is being taking active part in campaigning on navratas. According to Disha, Jammu city being the city of temples is a source of large amount of religious waste . It is necessary to look for their proper disposal and only viable solution is the converting it into compost but there is only one working composting machine in the SPCB office which is also not accessible to general public. Both SPCB and JMC are deflecting the responsibility of controlling the pollution of river Tawi away from them. It is high time that a special autonomous body should be established to control the pollution of river Tawi.
  - According to the founding members of Disha "our volunteers are college students, university students who personally come to us and be part of the cause. They belong to different religions and have firm belief in this endeavor". It was also observed that the volunteers of Disha would work in two shifts and were seen motivating the devotees about the ill effects of throwing the waste like polythene in river water. Also they would collect the religious material including polythene, chunnri's, garlands, diva's etc from the people at the entry point of each Tawi Ghats. The biodegradable and non biodegradable waste would be collected in separate containers provided by Jammu municipality.
  - The organization claimed and same was confirmed by Jammu Municipal Corporation that in 2016 alone they collected around 25-30 ton waste and handed over to the JMC. Such waste collected otherwise would have polluted the river and harmed both human and aquatic life.
  - View of priests: During the field work priests of two temples one from the shiv temple near Tawi ghat vikram chowk and other from Har ki podi temple were interviewed. Both the priests witness the pollution of river tawi on daily basis as their temples are situated near the river. According to them people should not throw polythene and other waste material in the river Tawi as this river is also known by the name of "Suryaputri Tawi" and is being worshipped by the people. Infact a special arti that is performed on every sunday in which hundreds of devotees participate are always requested not to pollute the river.
  - According to one of the devotee "the rituals on the occasions were once a community affair. For example, 2,000 people used to be a part of a single puja with one idol or sakh. Now, everybody wants to perform a separate ritual with his or her own family. Hence, the number of idols and other material has increased manifold in a few years". It was also observed that over the years due to the influx of migrants from the nearby states who have distinct ways of celebrating these occasions have added to the extra number of devotees taking part in the rituals which have ultimately added more pollution in the river. It was further observed at Her Ki Pori Ghat that these migrants were seen not immersing sakh like the people do in Jammu rather would carry huge idols made of plaster of Paris for immersion. As active participant observants the researchers found the rigid socio-religious

beliefs among the devotees. The devotees did not normally get convinced and listen to the requests made to them about throwing the stuff which they had preserved for this ritual.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The overall primary as well as secondary data and reports as well as records from different organisation like JPCB, WHO, NGO's etc. compiled and reviewed in the present study had clearly identified that the most auspicious and holy river Tawi as well as its all tributaries are fully polluted on the religious occasions like navratas. This is a great loss to our biodiversity and hence it is a great concern for a city like Jammu. Apart from the rules and regulations, acts and laws are made by the central and state government but these are not executed properly. In spite of all these legislations not only for Tawi river and its tributaries but also all most all the rivers have become dumping place of garbage, sewage, plastics and all other waste during various religious festivities. The present study suggests that the executive bodies like municipal corporations, municipal councils, pollution control boards, NGOs have to be more active and participative. Despite the fact that effective remedial measures are there, technologies are available for treatment of waste water polluting rivers, lakes and other water bodies but the mode of effective implementation needs to be strengthened properly. Religion is still an authority in our social setup so it has a part to play. Through religious sermons people should be taught to be Self disciplined, self aware and self responsible on such occasions in society as it has become necessity to protect the river bodies which act as lifelines in the lives of people. .

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