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Avinash Kumar



Avinash Kumar has completed his Ph.D. in International Investment Law from the Dept. of Law & Governance, Central University of South Bihar. His research work is on "International Investment Agreement and State's right to regulate Foreign Investment." He qualified UGC-NET and has been selected for the prestigious ICSSR Doctoral Fellowship. He is an alumnus of the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. Formerly he has been elected as Students Union President of Law Centre-1, University of Delhi. Moreover, he completed his LL.M. from the University of Delhi (2014-16), dissertation on "Cross-border Merger & Acquisition"; LL.B. from the University of Delhi (2011-14), and B.A. (Hons.) from Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi. He has also obtained P.G. Diploma in IPR from the Indian Society of International Law, New Delhi. He has qualified UGC – NET examination and has been awarded ICSSR – Doctoral Fellowship. He has published six-plus articles and presented 9 plus papers in national and international seminars/conferences. He participated in several workshops on research methodology and teaching and learning.

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THE IMPACT OF DIWALI CELEBRATION ON THE YAMUNA RIVER

AUTHORED BY - NIYATI PATEL¹ & DR. RESHMA UMAIR²

ABSTRACT

Diwali the festival of 'lights', is one of the most widely celebrated festivals in India, marked by fireworks, traditional rituals, and a sense of community in the country. Meanwhile, the environmental impacts of Diwali celebrations in urban areas such as Delhi have been a major issue for the general public as the air, substances, and public health suffer. The paper offers a discussion on the direct and indirect impacts of Diwali celebrations on the Yamuna River, with the part of pollution, cleanliness of the water, and the river ecosystem as the main aspects, being the primary objective. In addition, the paper reflects upon the way in which the immersion of idols, disposal of firecracker waste, and the ritualistic practices of devotees during Diwali lead to the degradation of the river. Moreover, the research also reviews and communicates the policies applied as well as the actions taken to minimize these effects along with proposals for more sustainable celebration practices.

KEYWORDS

Diwali Pollution, Water Quality Degradation, Environmental impact, Impact of firecrackers, Government measures for Yamuna Restoration.

INTRODUCTION

The Yamuna River, one of the most significant rivers in India, is both culturally and religiously important. It is a source of sacred purity for millions of Hindus and its region provides the life breath for many communities in northern India. Sadly, the main problem is the river's ecosystem; however, urbanization, industrial pollution, and religious practices have been the primary drivers that account for the degraded water quality and the river's health. Diwali, which comes often accompanied by the peak of the pollution season, climaxes during that time in the region, further contributing to the mounting environmental challenges of the Yamuna. It is also

¹ Student, Amity University Uttar Pradesh

² Assistant Professor, Amity University Uttar Pradesh

famously associated with the immersion of idols made of non-biodegradable material; overuse of firecrackers; and religious offerings in the river. These events contribute to the degradation of water quality and carry consequences toward the local ecosystem, public health, and well-being of the river.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have shown the environmental impacts of celebrations of Diwali, mainly on air quality and water quality. The immersion of idols during festivals has been found to be one of the biggest contributing sources of river system pollution, as PoP idols contain harmful chemicals and dyes that leach into the water. Singh et al. (2015) worked with this topic. In addition, waste containing firecrackers with harmful heavy metals, sulfur, and carbon compounds has been proven to pollute air and water during Diwali festivities.

Environmental groups like Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan have, time and again, brought forth how water polluting practices short change the Yamuna - a loss not just for its ecological system but also in the concept of 'losses in livelihood' for people who are disrupted by these pollution inputs who depend upon its resources. The Delhi Pollution Control Committee and the Central Pollution Control Board have also carried out numerous researches to confirm the peak levels of water contamination right after the fervent celebrations of Diwali with the presence of alarming concentrations of heavy metals and chemical pollutants.

Research Methodology: It uses a qualitative and quantitative analysis. Data collection is done at various governmental agencies such as the CPCB along with local organizations concerning environmental facets of dissolved oxygen, pH levels, COD, and harmful chemical concentrations within the water bodies prior to, on, and after the celebrations of Diwali. Interviews and surveys were made with the local communities, religious leaders, environmental activists, and government officials to understand the impacts of the activities related to Diwali on the Yamuna River.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Idol Immersion: The greatest contributor to the Yamuna River pollution is the immersion of idols during Diwali. Such idols are primarily made from plaster of Paris, which is not biodegradable and contains toxic paints in it. The chemicals dissolve in this water; as soon as

they enter the river, a huge amount of its quality degrades and aquatic life gets damaged. Apart from this, functioning of idols also involves flowers, incense, and other things that add to organic pollution in water.

Firecracker Residue: The burst of firecrackers is the most prominent feature of Diwali, which will not only lead to air pollution but also to water contamination. As toxic chemicals in fireworks like barium, strontium, and copper fall into the river during post-Diwali clean-up activities, long-term harm can be inflicted on the river's ecological environment by altering the chemical structure of the water and killing the very life that is present.

Diwali has been observed to significantly elevate the levels of total dissolved solids (TDS), biological oxygen demand (BOD), and chemical oxygen demand (COD) in the Yamuna River water quality studies. All these reflect a decline in the support capacity of the river for aquatic life. An increase in pollution from firecracker debris that contains harmful substances such as lead and mercury, which leach into water, exacerbates water pollution.

Loss of Biodiversity: With rising levels of pollution in Yamuna, water species-its source of subsistence-do suffer a dire impact. The NEERI has been studying the Diwali effects on pollution and the resultant loss of aquatic biodiversity, the fish and plants. Toxicity within this realm diminishes the ability of the biodiversity in the water by damaging the very same delicate balances that the ecosystem looks to for healthy diversity.

Public Health Implications: The pollution in Yamuna water has major public health implications. The spread of waterborne diseases is mainly on account of the chemical pollutants and debris causing contamination such as cholera, dysentery, and typhoid. Respiratory problems increase due to the poor air quality remaining during Diwali, which impacts primarily the weak and frail lot, including children and the elderly.

Policy and Mitigation Efforts: The Indian government and local authorities have taken several measures to mitigate the environmental degradation due to Diwali festivities. Some such measures are as follows:

Firecracker Regulation: The Supreme Court of India has issued orders regarding the regulation of fire crackers, including controlling their sale and limiting their permissible hours of use. Delhi also partially banned fire crackers for the year 2021 to check air pollution.

Use Eco-friendly Idols: Environmental groups have called for the use of eco-friendly idols made of clay or biodegradable materials. Some local governments also devised programs for idol immersion in specific artificial tanks rather than directly in the river.

Public Awareness Programmes: Many NGOs have done the campaigns about Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan to increase public awareness regarding the ill effects of idol immersion and using

firecrackers. These campaigns reduce the practice of polluting Yamuna during Diwali celebrations.

SUGGESTIONS:

- **Promote use of eco-friendly idols:** Local governments should emphasize clay idols and avoid any further induction of non-biodegradable materials.
- **Stricture regarding firecrackers:** Expansion of regulation over firecracker production and sales, coupled with a high level of enforcement, would reduce air and water pollution.
- **Develop sustainable immersion practices:** More artificial ponds for idol immersion should be created, and idol waste should not be allowed to enter the river.

CONCLUSION:

The festivity of Diwali mainly contaminates the Yamuna River through practices like idol immersion and use of firecrackers. Such activities contribute towards the degradation of water quality, loss of biodiversity, and risk to public health. Despite some success being realized through such regulations and educational campaigns by the government, these practices need to be more widely sustainable in order that, on the brighter side, Diwali might continue to be there for generation-to-generation celebration without compromise in both cultural traditions and environmental health. To reduce the pollution associated with this festival, strong enforcement of environmental laws along with public participation, and more innovation in eco-friendly practices, are required for the Yamuna River.

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