

# Environmental Education (Public awareness) and impact of some Traditional Knowledge Systems on Environment

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## Abstract

Traditional Knowledge systems are prevalent in our country even today in many aspects. Following old traditions is good in some aspects and bad in some. Many people still follow the obsolete superstitions and cause irrevocable damage to the environment. Those people must be educated in such a way that they realize that the acts performed are damaging the environment. This paper discusses different superstitious and environmental degrading acts that are in practice nowadays and possible solutions to counter them with the emphasis upon the condition of river Yamuna in Agra city.

## Introduction

Burning of cadavers in the cremation ground requires a minimum of 3 quintals of wood, and it takes 3 hours for a body to burn completely. If they are cremated electrically it doesn't cause any pollution nor it is expensive and it is 3 times less in cost and 3 times more effective. In Agra, the Taj Mahal is situated near the cremation ground and about 350 bodies are set ablaze in a month. It causes a lot of air pollution and deforestation for the wood. Wood like neem, sesham, etc. are used in cremation grounds. They are brought from the nearby forests. Approximately 1100 quintals of wood are cut from the forest every month. One tree in a year consumes 12 tons of carbon dioxide. The cost of one quintal of wood is approximately Rs. 380/-, and the charges for cremation in the cremation ground are Rs.200. Including other miscellaneous expenses it costs about Rs. 1500. We can observe one thing: that the following of the traditional system of cremating the body is more expensive and more destructive to the environment (Source: cremation yard near Taj Mahal, Agra).

On the other hand we have electrical crematoria that does not require any wood nor emit any smoke so they do not cause any pollution. The expenses including all the miscellaneous things are approximately Rs.500, which is one third as compared to that of cremation ground. The electrical expenses are paid by the municipal corporation. The ashes are mixed in the river water. In many ghats of Ganga in Varanasi, Triveni Sangam in Allahabad and at some other river banks, the bodies are dropped as such in the river. Some bodies are consigned to flames near the banks of the river. The bacterium *Bdellovibrio bacteriovorus* which keeps the river Ganga clean is becoming extinct now due to increased level of pollution in the river.

Rivers are damaged in many places where they are attached with the temple or a graveyard. Kailash mandir in Agra is situated 2km interior on Agra Mathura NH-2 on the bank of Yamuna. We can see a lot of plastic, polythene bags, flower petals, abandoned idols of lords, etc., thrown haphazardly on the bank and also in the river water. Buffaloes are bathed in the river water that is the source of water to the entire city.

There are fish species which were present during last few decades that now have become extinct so far from Yamuna. There are many industries in the city like leather industries, shoe factories, cold storage, generator industries, petha manufacturing units etc. The wastes of many of these industries are directly or indirectly mingled with the Yamuna water. Dumping yards at the outskirts of the city are causing a lot of pollution because there is no separate disposal of non-degradable products like polythene, plastic, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), etc. There are many townships being constructed along the bank of Yamuna which

household exudates are directly blown into the river.

India is a multicultural country and is a land of many festivals. Traditionally Diwali is celebrated by burning of crackers and many explosives that cause air and noise pollution. Crackers include toxic chemicals like sulphur, magnesium and many others which cause severe air pollution. Explosives cause a great deal of noise pollution that disturbs human beings and biodiversity as well. Government of India banned the use of crackers after 10 pm in major cities but it is violated everywhere.

After the celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi the idols of Lord Ganesha are dipped and left in the river. People feel it as the sacred thing to do, but they are not aware of how much pollution is being caused to the river water which causes death of fishes. Idols are painted with many colors which contains toxic substances like cadmium, lead, arsenic, nickel, ferrous compounds, various chemical dyes, plaster of paris, etc., when they are mixed in water they cause irreparable damage to the river ecosystem. No less than 200 idols are immersed in the river in a city. Celebrations like Dussehra, Durga puja, etc. include the dumping of lot of waste material and also the immersion of idols into the river water.

Traditional system of marriage in India is done by Barat concept. The groom sits on a horse and a singer sings all the songs in loud tone. Loud noises are generated from DJs of the marriages that last all night. Despite rules given by the government that they should be stopped after 10 pm, this rule is violated everywhere in the country. This causes lot of noise pollution and disturbance to the normal civic systems.

Celebration of Holi by chemicals causes diseases to skin. Celebration on a large scale leads to waste into the river. Similarly celebration of many other festivals traditionally, causes pollution to biotic and abiotic resources. Every year lakhs of pilgrims visit holy places like Varanasi, Haridwar, Gangotri, etc., and take holy dips in the river water which they believe to be sacred. Maha Kumbh mela is one of the festivals celebrated at Triveni Sangam, Allahabad where there is the confluence of three rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. People don't understand what level of pollution they are increasing in the rivers. They take baths, wash their clothes, leave ashes and at times they leave the cadavers.

The main cause of all these environmental ills is lack of awareness. Spirituality is the most pious thing one can achieve through inner consciousness that is achieved in a systematic manner. There are lots of spiritual practices that include yoga, pranayam, meditation, etc. that leads us on a spiritual path. Spirituality doesn't include the devastation of rivers by mixing the ashes and dropping the cadavers. It doesn't merely means worshipping and dropping the idol of Lord Ganesha in the rivers. Celebration of Diwali in the other sense is praising and welcoming the return of Lord Ram in Ayodhya after 14 years. It doesn't mean that we have to celebrate the festival by devastating the environment.

One of the superstitions that is prevalent in South East Asia is Balidan concept which includes the sacrifice of animals

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like goat, sheep, hen, camels, buffaloes, by a few sects. No one knows what they are going to gain by that but they do as their ancestors did so. They claim it is their tradition. This is done when heavy projects like highways, apartments, bridges, railway lines etc. are about to start with the construction. This can be replaced by coconut or lemon with chilies.

### **Suggestions:**

People should be familiarized with the electric crematoria that helps in the alleviation of deforestation and pollution resulted by them. If they use woods for cremation then at least 10-15 trees should be planted in return in the memory of their loved ones. They should be taught that we are devastating ourselves by celebrating festivals like Diwali with firecrackers. Alternatively it can be celebrated by the distribution of sweets or any way that is not going to disrupt natural environmental conditions. People should be taught that we are causing an irreparable loss to the rivers by dropping the idols of Lord Ganesha and also by taking holy dips in the rivers in a mob especially during *Kumbh melas* and should be encouraged to use paper bags or cloth bags rather than polythene and plastic bags for the daily usage and shopping. If the popular brands start making their carrybags with paper or cloth then automatically people get interest in using them. Normally in Indian scenario paper carry bags are used by roadside hawkers and normal provision store keepers. If they are used by the popular brand stores with the print of their brand on it people automatically get attracted by that and start using them.

Containers made with sand and mud are already in use by many tea vendors in some the railway stations in our country. This has to be implemented all over the country. Government must pass stringent rules to ban the plastic containers and the use of polythene unless it is badly required. Trash management must be maintained properly all over the country. Plastics and other non-degradable items are to be disposed in a separate dust bin. Despite many announcements people do not abstain from using the conveniences of trains when the train is on the platform due to which the station is polluted badly. Such people should be penalized so that they do not repeat. The concept of *Smriti* van should be made understood to the people so that they plant trees in the memory of their beloved ones who have passed away. One tree in the memory of one person leads to the development of a big forest in a decade, which is environmentally very good thing. Every person should be educated in such a way that wherever they see a vacant viable space they should plant a sapling. We must act sensibly in the aspects of environment and spirituality as well. Sensible thinking gives good results rather than doing in other ways. In other words we must act systematically.

### **Conclusion:**

Behind every bit of damage done to the environment, there is human. As we are living on the planet earth it is our responsibility to protect our home from further deterioration.

According to Chinese proverb:

"If you are thinking a year ahead, sow seed

If you are thinking ten years ahead, plant trees

If you are thinking hundred years ahead, educate people".

Kuan tzu (Chinese poet) 500BC

So we can infer that educating people, e.g., environmental education or public awareness is the most important contribution that we must make to resist the further deterioration of the environment.

Environmental education and public awareness is interlinked to sustainable development. As mentioned in the proverb, sustainable development cannot be achieved unless we take the initial step as public awareness. When we educate people today, the same thing is replicated to their next generation and so on. So that the people start understanding the problems faced by the environment and also by the biodiversity and start solving them through many techniques respective to them. Environmental education is not confined to the students of biological sciences, there is no study without environmental education which could be formal and informal ways covering all the sectors of our society.

### **World Eco Tourism Day**

National Zoological Park (NZP) popularly known as Delhi Zoo has celebrated "World Tourism Day" on 27 September 2012 and organized a zoo visit and a guest lecture on "Ecotourism" for the class X<sup>th</sup> students of Birla Vidiya Niketan, New Delhi. The event marked the history, importance and aim of celebrating World Tourism Day around the world. The Director of NZP Amitabh Agnihotri, Education Curator Riaz Ahmad Khan, Education Assistant Saurabh Vashisth and people of NZP welcomed the school group. The group visited the entire zoo and an interactive session was conducted among the director Amitabh Agnihotri, researcher Natasha Sethi and students in order to raise awareness of the role of Ecotourism for the conservation of Wildlife.

The guest lecture on "Ecotourism" mainly aimed to develop an insight about the interdependence of Wildlife conservation and Ecotourism. By implementing eco-friendly or environmental friendly tourism both within and outside the protected areas, one can conserve biodiversity, support sustainable development, have limited environmental impact based activities, create environmental education, employment generation among local people or community participation etc.

The basic principle behind ecotourism is to have a sensitive tourism for social, cultural and economical sustainability with the aim of managing the natural/ cultural resources in a sustainable manner. The application of strict rules and regulations in and around the protected areas should be followed in order to preserve the ecosystem, endangered wildlife species, natural resources, and to control ecotourism activities etc for saving the existing biodiversity for the present as well as for the future generation.

Implementing Ecotourism is of utmost importance as for the first time in India the concept of Ecotourism for the livelihoods of local communities is being proposed in the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2012- 2017). Several guidelines has also been given by the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India to state government, protected area management, tourist facilities/tour operators, temple/ pilgrimage boards, local communities and public /visitors for ecotourism in and around the protected areas.

Wildlife Ecotourism and Animal Welfare -- [http://planningcommission.nic.in/aboutus/committee/wrkggrp12/enf/wg\\_wild.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/aboutus/committee/wrkggrp12/enf/wg_wild.pdf)