

“Ganga can always survive and purify herself simply because she is a Goddess” Representation of Spiritual practices in the Ganges River Pollution Problem

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Background Ganges River is known as the world’s most heavily polluted river basin and about 400 million use the water of the river for their daily needs. During the past three decades, industrialization and rapid urbanization have put unyielding pressure on the sacred stream.

Religious significance of Ganga
Hindu Puranas/ texts emphasise Ganga’s ability of purifying and making human bodies disease less after bathing or drinking the holy water of Ganga. The common belief among followers of Hinduism is that water of Ganga absorbs pollution. The religious ritual of floating ashes of a dead person or a dead body is another purifying ritual. There are many other religious festivals that are held each year in Ganga

Background on the pollution problem
According to the Ganges Action Plan which was founded to clean up the river, industrial pollution, municipal sewage, disposal of dead bodies, waste from religious events, runoff from medical waste, fertilizers from agricultural fields and cattle wallowing, wastewater from fast growing urban areas, organic waste, sewage, trash, food and animal remains and chemicals from industries are all dumped in to the River in unknown quantities.

Methodology

Interviews (Structured & Semi Structured)

- Pilgrims who live less than a mile away from Ganga
- Pilgrims from a different city, state or country
- People who use Ganga for just religious purposes
- Priests

Pollution represented in newspapers, journals and books

- Separated in to four categories, pollution through spiritual practices, industries, agricultural practices or general municipal waste.
- Made tables by tallying how many times a article mentions pollution under any of the above categories

References

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Thesis Statement: I argue that it is a widely recognized perception that spiritual practices are contributors of pollution to the Ganges River in non-scholarly writings. On the other hand, scholarly writings perceive industrial and municipal waste as the major sources of pollution to the Ganges River. These perceptions of blame for Ganges pollution may misdirect cleanup efforts.



A variety of trash on the river bank



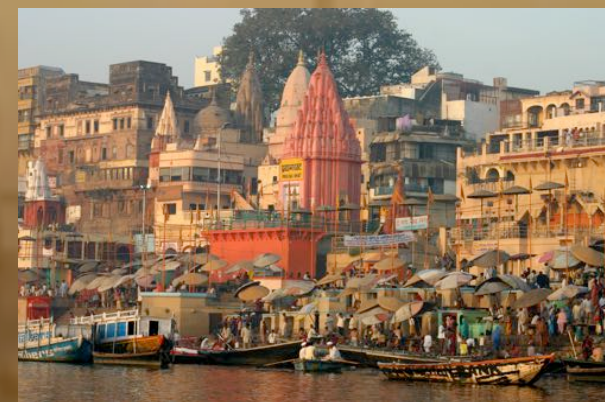
Map of Ganges River



A pilgrim taking a holy bath in the polluted river

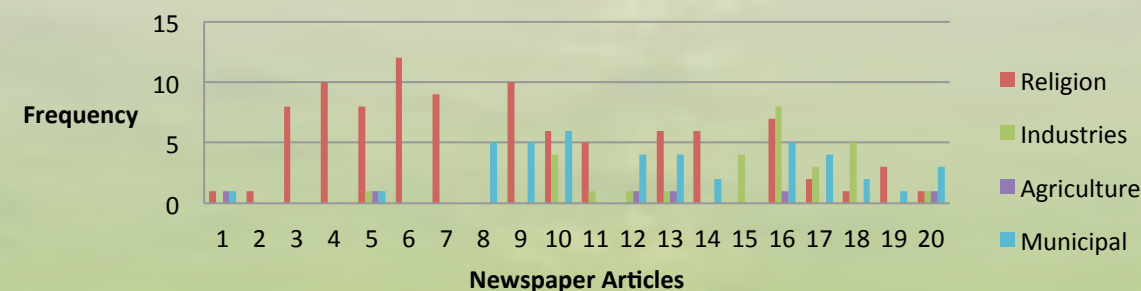


The so called treated sewage water that is released in to the river and used for agriculture

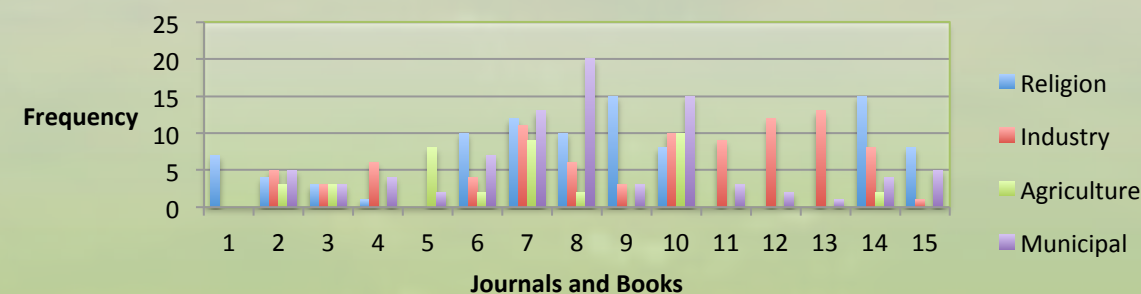


Varanasi – The Holy Hindu City

How is the problem represented in newspapers?



How is the problem represented in Journals and books?



Analysis

- In all interviews with pilgrims who live less than a mile away, people who visit for religious purposes and priests all mentioned that the river is polluted only because of the development that the area is going through and also having poor constructed sewage systems. The pilgrims interviewed two who do not live in India anymore and one pilgrim from another state mentioned the fact that religious practices are also a part of this pollution problem because there are million of people who are using the river during festivals and almost all of their waste during the festival time is dumped in to the river.
- Both article/books and newspaper articles combined the newspaper articles are emphasizing that the contribution to pollution though religious practices is a main issue in the pollution problem whereas in the scholarly journals pollution through municipal waste release and industrial waste seem to represent the contributions of most pollution.

Discussion

- Newspaper articles exaggerated the religious festivals and practices as a main contributor to the Ganges River pollution problem. This can be because India is going through the stage of developing the country and these traditional practices are not in alignment with and they are creating more political complications.
- Scholarly articles proved that the main contributors of pollution are municipal and industrial waste. Scholarly peer reviewed journals and books have more evidence and contain a lot more research and observations. Based on the information they get journals or books are written therefore it can be said that the contribution of religious practices is not the major issue and the focus of the problem should be aimed at finding a solution to solving municipal and industrial waste problem
- Ganges River is currently facing a lot of pollution that needs to be mitigated soon but who can we blame? When the faults of a problem are complicated the action that needs to be taken to solve a problem gets distracted. What needs to be done is to direct people to the actual problem that needs to be solved immediately and can later focus on the perceptions that are still lingering around the problem.