

Yamuna pollution: Religious rites cannot clash with our ecological responsibilities

In what has become a sad annual feature, the [Yamuna is once again in a terrible state](#) as a result of the immersion after the Durga puja festivities. There more than 200 puja pandals in Delhi and in spite of the guidelines issued by the National Green Tribunal (NGT), most continue to flout them with impunity. It is the same case with other festivals and immersions such as Ganesh pujas as well. The [NGT guidelines](#) for idol immersion state that only clay should be used for idol making, and not baked clay or plaster of paris, etc. It also discourages the painting of idols, and goes on to say that the “use of toxic and nonbiodegradable chemical dyes for painting idols should be strictly prohibited.” All cloth, flowers, decorations made of paper, plastic and other non biodegradable materials should be removed before immersion. The 22-page document lists in detail the rules to be followed, the responsibilities of the state pollution control boards (SPCBs) and the pollution control committees (PCCs).

Since there is no testing of materials that are used in the manufacture of idols and puja committees are not under pressure to conform to the guidelines, every year the problem recurs, causing even more damage to a river that is already in its death throes. There are easily implementable solutions to the problem of festival debris in the river. Since it is impossible to police every last inch of the river to ensure that immersion of idols is taking place with adequate ecological sensitivity, it would be prudent for implementation agencies to take with them as partners the Durga puja committees and the idol manufacturers. Ensuring that harmful chemical dyes and non-biodegradable materials are not used in the manufacture of idols will be an excellent step in ensuring that they don't end up in the river.

It is also important for citizens to remember that they have a stake in ensuring that these guidelines are followed. The river is a lifeline of the city, and their contribution to preserving it will only help them in the long run. It is the responsibility of the citizens and committees to ensure that the pandals they visit and endorse take into account these vital considerations before they fulfil their religious obligations. It appears as though law enforcement officials may be somewhat reluctant to stop or punish those performing religious rites. It is our duty to ensure that our religious rites do not end up clashing with our ecological responsibilities. If our religious rites are to be sustainable, they must be ecologically responsible.

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