

A Sociological Investigation of Sanitation and Hygiene Concerns in Prayagraj District's Kumbh Mela

Bhoomi Mishra

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology University of Allahabad.

Abstract

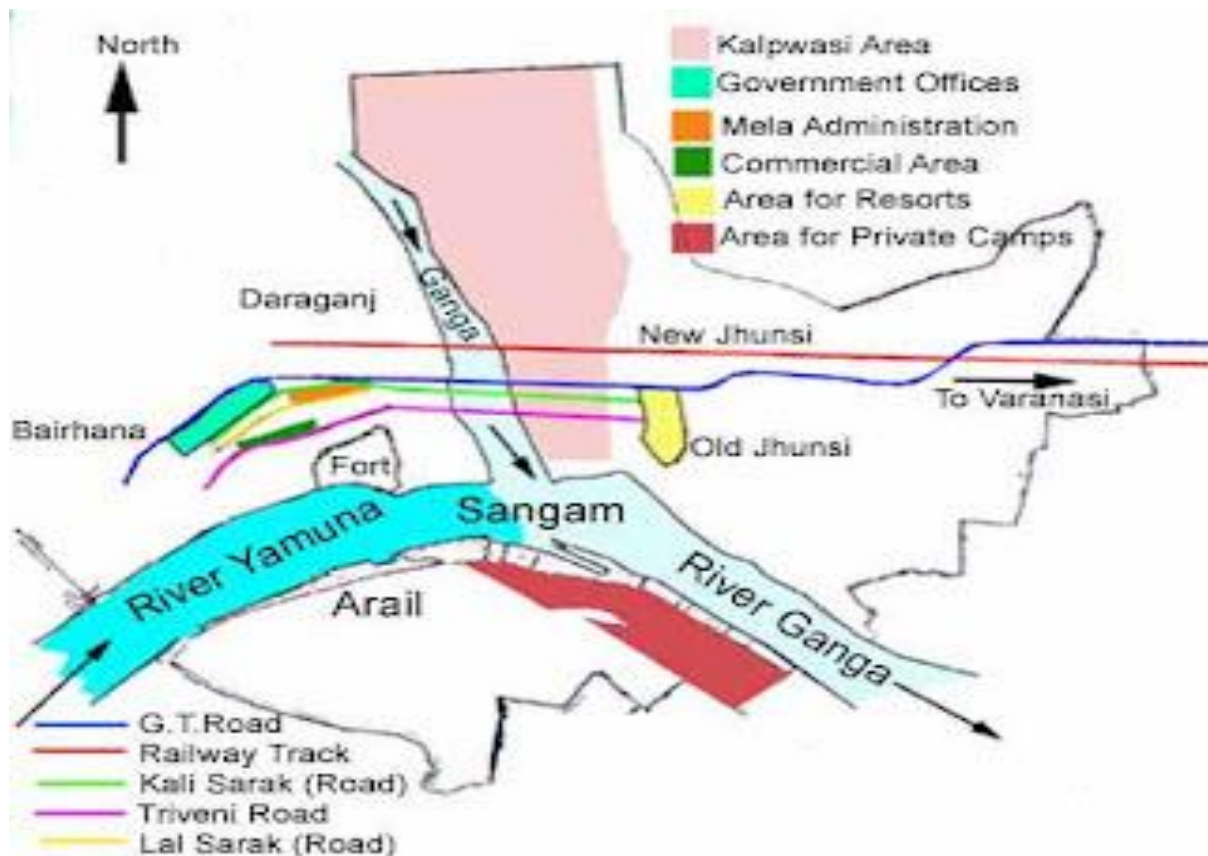
The Kumbh Mela is one of the biggest and most well-known religious events in the world, drawing millions of followers from different countries and serving as a global symbol. The event is ingrained in India's religious, spiritual, and cultural fabric and has been acknowledged by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This article draws attention to the Kumbh Mela's sanitary problems. It aims to explain how cleanliness affects devotees' health and examines the administrative measures taken to ensure sanitation throughout the Kumbh Mela, as there are significant hazards associated with this large-scale event. By creating a clean environment, sanitation promotes human health; nonetheless, poor sanitation poses a serious threat to the concept of a clean pilgrimage.

Keywords: Administrative, Devotee, Sanitation, Cultural heritage, Cultural shift, Spiritual.

INTRODUCTION

From the earliest civilisations to the present, believers have been strongly drawn to sacred locations. These centres are where people congregate for religious purposes. Hindus have also been drawn to their sacred gods since the beginning of time. Hindus consider the institution of pilgrimage to be a long-standing and enduring religious tradition in India. Millions of pilgrims are drawn to the numerous holy sites located throughout this nation. Visits to these hallowed locations mark some of the most important moments in their religious lives.

Religion has always played a significant role in human experience and is an essential component of all societies, influencing how people interact with their surroundings. Religion is a belief system that influences how people view the world and, as a social institution, it symbolises a way of interacting with others. As a result, its adherents are assimilated into its organisational structure. Places where people have a spiritual connection to the divine are valued by religions. The holy land serves as a destination of pilgrimage, and those who follow it go there to reaffirm their faith in that sacred setting. Prayag, which is regarded as a pilgrimage site in Hindu Sanatan religion, is one such location.



Every year during the month of Magh, millions of pilgrims come here to celebrate Magh Mela. It appears that environmental damage is not accidental rather it is founded on well-established philosophies and religious traditions. Dust is everywhere in places with strong winds. Many respiratory conditions are brought on by these dust particles for Mela residents. All of the trash produced by cleaning, cooking, and washing should be disposed of properly, but this is not always the case. The risk of infectious illness transmission is high. People do not always use the restrooms, particularly youngsters; they merely go into open air which pollutes the environment. Sweepers are responsible for sweeping excrement into pits, and this adds to their workload.

However, people also use polyethene and plastics, which are harmful to the environment and ultimately to the inhabitants of Mela. Even in times of adversity, the unhygienic surroundings, extreme cold, and loud noises are all likely to negatively impact the health of the residents of Mela. It is thought that teaching the Pilgrims proper hygiene habits could be a tool for creating a clean and green India. Controlling environmental factors is part of sanitation. Human activities and ecosystems are closely tied to each other. Unhygienic behaviours lead to environmental degradation, and contaminated or degraded ecosystems are the source of numerous human diseases that have a detrimental impact on people's health. According to Robert E. Park (July, 1936), human society is a byproduct of human society and influences how the culture limits symbiotic (i.e., biotic rather than cultural) social order. The natural or ecological social order's limitations are predicated on (1) the political, (2) the economic, and (3) the moral spheres. In 1963, Odum made an effort to define the connection between ecosystems and human society. He claimed that the impacts of massive environmental changes brought about by human activity at the local level progressively spread to the regional level and eventually led to irreversible environmental conditions. According to environmentalist Ramchandra Guha, who presented the two concepts of ecological

socialism, environmental degradation is not limited to the industrialised world. One is an environmentalism of survival and subsistence, which is profoundly distinct from its western equivalent. The other is having access to a lovely and clean environment to improve "quality of lives." NGO's and the State of Uttar Pradesh have been crucial in resolving Mela's issues. To ensure that Mela runs well, the state government has established a special administrative body and built a temporary city with roads, electricity, water, police stations, medical facilities, and sanitary amenities. However, there are serious hygienic dangers associated with this large gathering. To address Mela's sanitary issues, further development is required.



Review of literature

Kanaujiya, A. K., & Tiwari, V. (2022). This demonstrated that there are a variety of difficulties associated with large-scale mass gatherings. In addition to discussing the government's attempts to manage sanitation, this study sought to identify the types and causes of infectious disease transmission. During the 2019 Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, they discovered that infectious diseases such lung infections, fever, skin disorders, and dysentery are spreading because of the large number of people gathered there, the limited space, the strain on the sanitation system, and the solid waste management. They added that although government and non-governmental organisations' efforts have grown over time, they are still deemed to be insufficient. The COVID-19 outbreak compelled the administration to consider how to organise large-scale gatherings in the future.

Nagla B.K. (2015), "Sociology of Sanitation" – Scavenging is discussed in very little detail in the third chapter of the book, "Sanitation, Health, and Society," which only introduces the concept. Scavenging and the issue of scavengers have thus been thoroughly examined in Chapter 5, "Social Structure and Sanitation." Since performing sanitation labour doesn't involve any talent, the author has provided reasons for the persistence of scavenging the main.

Kanaujiya, A. K., & Tiwari, V. (2022). Are mass gathering events hot spots for spreading infectious diseases: The Kumbh Mela experience. The large gathering presents a number of difficulties, including the potential for infectious illness transmission, as this paper has highlighted. In addition to discussing the government's initiatives for health and sanitation management, this study attempts to determine the types and causes of infectious diseases. The study, which was supported by secondary data from a variety of reports, examined relevant literature, peer-reviewed publications, Prayagraj Mela Authority reports, and related websites. To identify trends and conduct comparative studies among different Kumbh and Ardh Kumbh Melas, both qualitative and quantitative analysis have been conducted. According to the study, infectious diseases such as fever, skin conditions, dysentery, and acute respiratory infections spread during the Kumbh Mela because of the large number of people, the limited space, the strain on the sanitation system, the unsanitary living conditions, the solid and liquid waste produced during the Mela, and the social and religious psychology of the pilgrims.

Jain, P., & Seth, P. (2024). India's national sanitation policies: Evolution, impact, and recommendations. Asia-Pacific Journal of Rural Development- In India, the public sector has made it a priority to eradicate open defecation (OD), and this study detailed the behavioural patterns associated with household conduct. In order to do this, India introduced the Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP), its first national sanitation program, in 1986. Swachh Bharath Mission-Grameen (SBM-G) was begun in 2014. SBM-G is regarded as the biggest toilet construction and behaviour modification mission in the world. The literature on the thorough evaluation of the creation and effects of these policies is still lacking, despite the size of the policies that have been implemented. This article examines how India's sanitation policies have changed over time and how well they work in terms of sanitation outcomes like toilet adoption and access. In order to offer suggestions that may be helpful in creating future sanitation regulations, the lessons discovered from this investigation are essential. India has prioritised sanitation since ancient times. The finding of lavatory remnants in the Indus Valley sites served as evidence for this. However, a general lack of interest in handling rural water and sanitation problems caused sanitation to lose priority throughout colonial times. In 1947, less than 1% of the 300 million people living in India had access to adequate sanitation. Since the 1981 census showed that India's rural sanitation coverage was barely 1% and its urban sanitation coverage was 27%, these figures stayed stable for a long time (Government of India, 2014). The percentage of households in a community that own a toilet is known as sanitation coverage.

World Health Organization. (2023). Global water, sanitation, and hygiene: Annual report 2022. World Health Organization-Sanitation, cleanliness, and safe drinking water are essential for human health and welfare. In addition to being essential for good health, safe WASH supports livelihoods, dignity, and school attendance while fostering resilient communities with healthy surroundings. Untreated excrement contaminates surface and groundwaters used for drinking, irrigation, bathing, and household uses, and drinking contaminated water damages health by causing diseases like diarrhoea. Evidence suggests that lowering the number of deaths from diarrhoeal diseases can significantly improve health by increasing service levels for safely controlled drinking water or sanitation, such as regulated piped water or connections to sewers with wastewater treatment.

World Health Organization & United Nations Children's Fund. (2023, June 13). Frontline health facilities faltering without water, sanitation, hygiene, and electricity – WHO, UNICEF new report. World Health Organization-Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services in healthcare institutions are a straightforward, cost-effective intervention that might save millions of lives and avert billions of

dollars in economic losses globally. Safe WASH services help avoid the spread of antibiotic resistance, provide everyone with high-quality primary health care, and facilitate life-saving infection prevention and control measures. However, a recent report published today by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) claims that national efforts are insufficient.

Sharma, P. (2023, November 6). Menstrual hygiene: Draft national policy on supply & disposal of sanitary napkins in schools ready, Union government informs Supreme Court- According to the petition, a significant obstacle to schooling was the absence of sufficient period Hygiene Management (MHM) alternatives; many girls dropped out of school because they were unable to get period products, sanitary facilities, and the shame attached to menstruation. The bench was considering a petition asking the Union of India, the States, and the Union Territories to make sure that all government, government-aided, and residential schools have separate restrooms for girls and sanitary pads for girls in classes 6–12. In addition to calling for free sanitary napkins and restrooms in schools, the petition also called for a three-phase awareness campaign that -

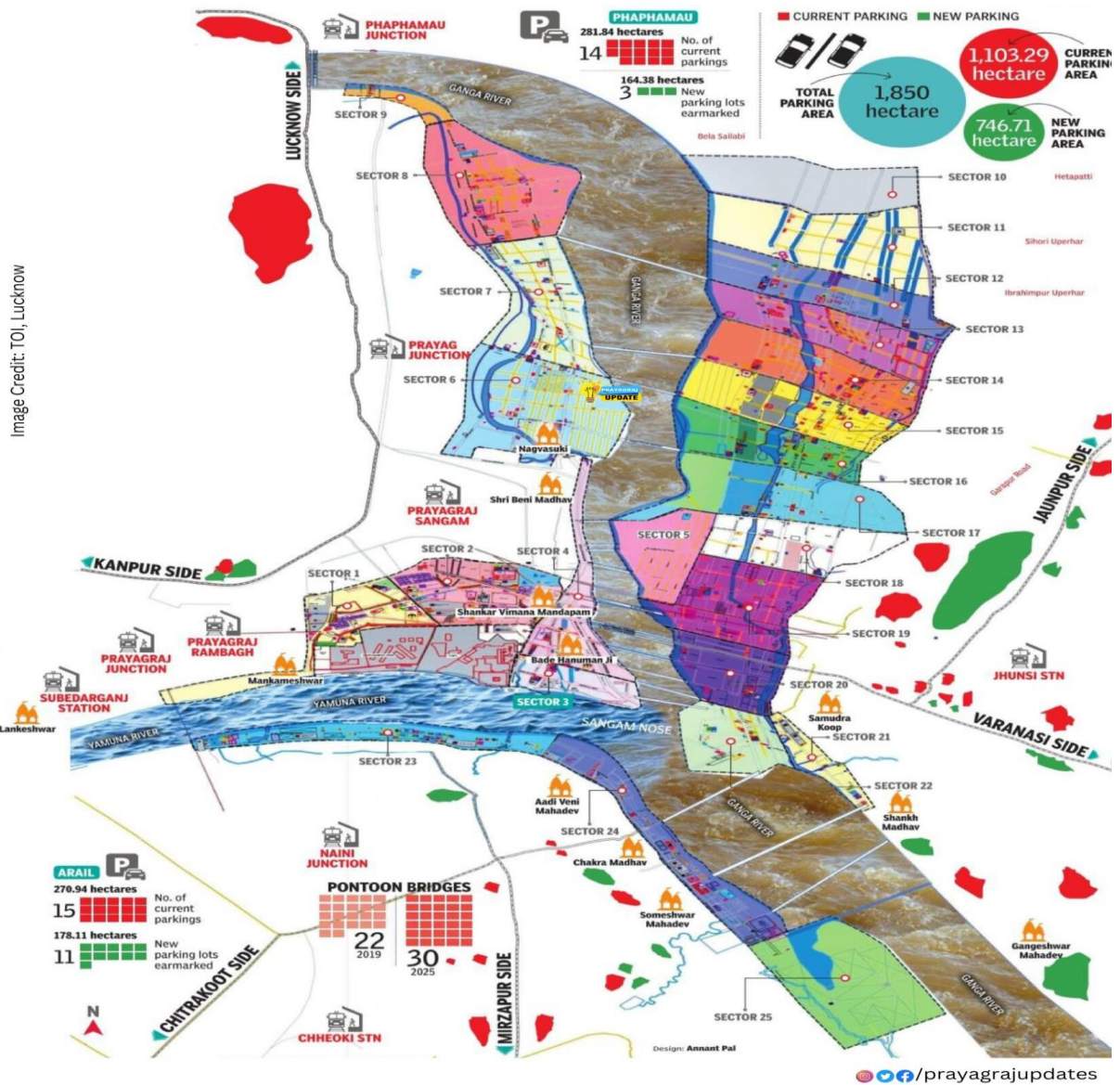
1. Dispels the stigma associated with menstruation and raises knowledge about it;
2. Offers women, particularly in underprivileged regions, free or heavily discounted sanitary goods and proper sanitation facilities;
3. Guarantees that menstrual waste is disposed of in a hygienic and effective manner.

Research Methodology

The study is characterised by a descriptive research design. The study's target population is the Prayagraj district's Kumbh Mela. Data gathered from secondary sources is being used in the study. With the aid of data gathering instruments such as interviews, case studies, observation techniques, and narrative approaches, primary data must be gathered. In this study, the purposeful sampling method is employed. Secondary data collecting involves gathering information from scholarly sources such as books, literature, and websites.

Analysis of study

In Mela, there is a clear correlation between religion and cleanliness. Since ancient times, sanitation has been an integral aspect of our culture. Religion served as a vehicle for the dissemination of sanitary and healthful habits across society. Because the religion at the time included hygiene, it was mandatory to practise it. During that period, there was no need for any movement or activity to promote hygienic practices. The sole reason pilgrims travel to the Mela is to achieve Moksha, or salvation, and achieving this requires both physical and spiritual cleanliness. Known as Kalpwasis, pilgrims who spend more than a month of Magh at Sangam endure extremely harsh living conditions, such as living in crude tents and experiencing extremely low temperatures at night. The gender issue of sanitation must also be given careful consideration. These issues are most prevalent in rural regions, and it is concerning that the supply of that has not received enough serious attention.



Conclusion

Researchers investigated the wide range of dynamic and intricate connections between cleanliness and health. In order to understand how societal structures, cultural norms, and individual behaviours affect public health outcomes, the sociology of sanitation and health explores the intricate relationships between these factors. This discipline acknowledges that sanitation is intricately linked to social, economic, and environmental factors, while frequently being disregarded as a purely technical matter. Health and sanitation are closely related topics that are essential to advancing both public health and individual well-being. The concept of a clean pilgrimage and a clean India are seriously threatened and challenged by the unsanitary circumstances of the populace. Inadequate sanitation leads to pollution and environmental deterioration, and an unclean environment has a detrimental impact on human health, resulting in numerous diseases. Therefore, during Magh Mela, we should prioritise sanitation in order to achieve a clean environment and pilgrims' excellent health. In terms of cleanliness issues, it will also be beneficial for the future administration and continuation of any such religious assembly on Earth. While health refers to a state of physical, mental, and social well-being, sanitation refers to the availability of clean water, appropriate waste management, and hygienic living conditions. Having access to clean water is essential

for staying healthy. Waterborne illnesses like cholera, typhoid, and diarrhoea can spread due to inadequate sanitation facilities and tainted water supplies. We must realise that by putting health and sanitation first, we can lower the burden of disease, enhance general quality of life, and build healthier communities. Maintaining medium-quality, "economic water" for the majority of people may be more practical when it comes to home water treatment, which treats small amounts of water for drinking.

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