Chapter 11

Idol Immersion

Issues

Idol immersion during festival seasons like Ganesh Chathurti, Durga Pooja and religious activities during Chhat Pooja cause extensive damage to the river as the idols mostly made of Plaster of Paris, and using toxic paints and synthetic material including plastics are released into the river. NGT has given specific direction to the public authorities to follow CPCB guidelines and the NGT orders regarding the use of material for making idols, use of nontoxic paints and immersion either in tanks built in colonies or by drawing a separate stream of the river. The left over idols and those recovered from the river will be disposed of in accordance with the SWM Rules 2016.

Action Plan

The MC has already given and will continue to monitor its directions as issued to the Divisional Commissioner, NCT Delhi and other public authorities, like MCDs, IFCD, DDA, CPCB and DPCC for establishing a system for giving registration and approval to Pooja pandals. The minutes / instructions issued are at Annexure IX.

1. It was directed that an undertaking be obtained from the organizers about adherence to the CPCB guidelines. In particular, the material which should not be used and the height of the Murti were emphasized in terms of NGT orders and CPCB guidelines.

2. A route map to be followed for immersion should be ascertained and mapped in advance along with the plans for immersion at specific ghats. Departments in charge of sanitation in the MCD will coordinate with Irrigation and Floods so that minimum time lag exists in picking up the immersed idols and sending them to the disposal sites.

3. The DMC, the Delhi Police and Irrigation and Flood Departments have a supportive role which has to be mapped out and shared in advance with each agency so that each organization works in tandem with the other.

4. The Revenue Deputy Commissioner were asked to ensure that the facilities for immersion and retrieval of the Pooja remnants are adequate and the disposal to the landfill sites is prompt.

5. Creating public awareness should be such as would make people understand why it is important to desist from using paints, plaster of Paris and also to ensure that the synthetic material used is not thrown into the river.
6. Bill boards at suitable locations should be also erected highlighting NGT directions and the prohibitions, both in Hindi and English, that applies to plastic bags containing flowers, garlands and other offerings which are being immersed into the river even now every day.

7. The Divisional Commissioner has been directed to prepare a budget and take pro rata contributions from the departments in terms of their responsibilities for abatement of river pollution if needed.

8. Undertakings were asked to be obtained from the Pandal in charges who should be held responsible in case of infringement.

9. The Monitoring committee will appoint teams to visit the ghats on a random basis and put up the findings on the website by location.

10. The I&FC Department has been asked to make available trash skimmer in the river during the period of idol immersion, particularly in the Ghats which receive most number of idols for immersion.

11. The CPCB and DPCC have been mandated to take samples of river water both upstream and downstream of the Immersion ghats independently and submit test reports of water quality along with reports of previous five years so as to assess the impact of awareness creation and enforcement.

12. The Divisional Commissioner has been asked to hold preparatory meetings well before the festival/immersion and submit a report on compliance of directions and CPCB guidelines at the end of each such immersion event.

13. The MC held a meeting after Ganesh Chathurti and before Dussera immersions and was informed by CPCB that the magnitude of increase in BOD varied from 0.3 to 9.5 times. Faecal coliform increased 141 times at individual ghats. However, the connection with idol immersion needs to be looked into if at all. Significant increases in heavy metals, viz Chromium 2.4 times, Lead 12 times and Mercury 15 times were observed post immersion. This shows that use of toxic materials continues in a big way. There is an urgent need to build awareness about how dangerous this can be and for the authorities to be much more vigilant.

14. The DDA and the Irrigation & Flood Department was asked to have videography done of the Immersion Ghats both during the process of Immersion and after the event and submit to the MC immediately thereafter with an analysis of what was going as planned and transgressions where found which would enable better arrangements in future if
needed.
15. The NCT Delhi and regulatory bodies have been asked to propagate use of innovative messages for off river immersion like immersion in small ponds created in RWAs and even in buckets using clean water as opposed to use of river channel. The representatives of DMC and Divisional Commissioner were introduced to the B Block Society of Chitranjan Park as they have been digging a pit and carrying out immersion on a tarpaulin filled with water for 5 years already.

The steps outlined above have already been initiated and will be followed up with the concerned authorities during all the religious/cultural events which have potential for causing pollution in the river.

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