A NOTE ON THE PILGRIMAGE PRESSURE ON MANSA DEVI HILLOCK OF HARIDWAR

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The present study assess the impact of religio-touristic activities on Mansa Devi hillock. Famous temple of Goddess Mansa Devi is situated on the top of Bilwa parvat and visited in normal days by around 5000-10000 pilgrims and during festive days the number of pilgrims may rise around 2-3 Lakh or even more, which enhance the problems of solid waste and its has been seen on the surrounding thickly forested areas, which are reducing fast due the reckless cutting of trees for various developmental activities. During past two decades occurrences of landslides, heavy soil erosion, and forest fire have become a major problem for the concerned area.

The pilgrimage in the Himalaya is the oldest form of tourism. Pilgrims travel to different sacred places for satisfying their aesthetic and spiritual needs. On the other hand with changing concept of pilgrimage, people are traveling to Himalayas also for spirit of adventure, enjoyment and to gain healthier environment. A few decades ago, some areas of Himalaya were unexplored, remote due to scarcity of roads and vehicles. But now situation has changed as all facilities are available in the form of road, vehicles, accommodation and hotels everywhere. All these facilities have motivated a large number of pilgrims to find access to remote areas of forested Himalayan region. Haridwar is one of the most favourite pilgrim spot for the majority of Indians. A large number of pilgrims visit round the year as tourists ordering hundreds of occasions of sacred festival days and family rituals¹. As a result on account of increasing human activities, pressure of transportation, conveyance etc. all parts of Haridwar city proper with its sacred sites temples and hillocks come under heavy pressure².

In Haridwar, the famous Mansa Devi temple is situated on Bilwa Parvat and the famous Har Ki Pauri is situated almost at the base of this small hillock, separated by few rows of market buildings, railway track and the main road of old Haridwar. Anyone can easily reach to temple by rope way or on foot. Physiographically, the temple is located on the eastern slope of WSW-ENE on Bilwa parvat extending between N 29° - 57'.540'' longitude and E 78°- 9'.909'' latitude with the elevation of 1423 ft from the sea level. The peak season of pilgrims is May- August; about 52% of pilgrims to Mansa Devi Temple come in these months. Construction of ropeways and regular influx of people to Mansa Devi temple appears to be impacting eco-biological and aesthetic scenario of the hillock³. Various antisocial elements like pickpockets and cheaters spoil the social atmosphere of the place, temporary shops at the top have very bad impact on the hillock. One of the main damage caused by tourism in the region has been on the surrounding thickly forested areas, which are reducing fast. Due to reckless cutting of trees in the forest area, large area along the roadside has been eroded and pilgrims at time also use the short cuts to go to temple which is very harmful for the vegetation, because large number of flora is being uprooted each day by these pilgrims. During past two decades instances of landslides, heavy soil erosion, forest fire have increased in the concerned area. On any normal unfestive day the number of pilgrims and tourists is around 5000-10,000. But this number swells to as high as up to 2-3 lakhs on any festive or auspicious day, like Ganga dusshera, Baisakhi, Makar sakranti and Navratra etc.
Pilgrims offer different type of offering at the temple as- raw and dry coconuts, milk, flowers, flags etc. All these offerings at the end of day is dumped in the side valley of the hillock to decompose naturally or turns open to rag pickers. The offering to the deities of the temple includes a large number of synthetics and chemical materials, which are bound to cause chemical reactions during degradation and decomposition and this damages the rocks & soil properties. These hillocks are mainly made up of sands, clay stone and conglomerates which are highly fragile. This accelerates the spoiling of land and soil erosion. These problems increase especially in the monsoon season, which are also the months of peak season of pilgrims (May to August). The instances of forest fire have also increased around the temple area, due to the anthropogenic activities. Rope way is also passing through the forest; many people eat various things and throw the wrappers openly in the forest. This attracts monkeys, langurs, jackals, dogs and scavengers of all categories on one hand and physico-chemically pollutes the land area. On the other hand, in foot way due to the insufficiency of civic amenities of toilets etc. the pilgrims at times use the side way of paths, as open toilets, making it foul smelling and along with full of rubbish, plastic packets, bottles and half eaten food etc., contaminating the whole area round the year. It certainly repeals pilgrims. Waste water is discharged openly in improper way due to the lack of proper drains. This also leads to soil erosion of the hillock.

Geologically the temple is located on top of sandstone belt, a master joint trending in NW-SE direction and dipping towards NE at fairly steep angle has removed a part of slope material just adjoining the temple, so the chances of a major hazardous landslide in near future is very high in the study area. There is an urgent need to assess further the future impacts of pilgrimage which will be very useful for the human population and settlement at the periphery of the foothill beside for the terrestrial ecosystem and forest of this sacred hillock.

![Fig 1: Pilgrims reached at Mansa Devi temple in 2008](image)

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is therefore reiterated to the local administration of the state Govt. that the hillock over which the Mansa Devi temple is situated is fast loosing its original structure in terms of its stability, ecological constituents, soil texture at various places due to forest fire, presence of pilgrims and erosion. It is right time to start some remedial measures to restore the environmental status. Some remedial measures are suggested to check the problems of the Hillock:
1. Quick growing plantation for gripping the top layer, to check soil erosion, be carried out.
2. The effluent of water drains must be duly channelised, to check erosion.
3. Retaining wall should be constructed for stabilization of the slope, at the base of hillock.
4. Specific treatment should be implemented for particular location wherever landslides have occurred and to prevent excess soil erosion.
5. Fire resistant plantation should be grown on hillock especially around the temple.
6. Elevated path way should be constructed to go the temple.

REFERENCES