



Editorial

Toxic Troubles: Effluents Being Dumped in Bandi River, Pali, Rajasthan

Raaz Maheshwari

Department of Chemistry, SBRMGC, Nagaur, Rajasthan

Yet another river is dying, this time in the environment minister's constituency. Not long ago, Bandi in Pali district was a seasonal river. Every monsoon it recharged the wells in the area crucial for farmers surviving on agriculture. But for quite some time now the groundwater is being contaminated by chemical effluents from the textile industry, rendering the soil barren for almost over 120km around the river — a development that is fanning a farmers' agitation.

This has been happening despite Rajasthan high court orders in 2004 and in 2008 that no untreated water shall be released into the river. Ironically, the river falls in Sumerpur assembly segment in Pali district, represented by state minister of environment BinaKak.

Water tests done by the administration show total dissolved solids (TDS) touching 7,000-8,000 mg per litre, rendering it unfit for consumption. TDS limit for human consumption is 1500mg/l. Effluents from Pali flow about 55km downstream, making the groundwater in several riverbank villages unfit for irrigation or drinking.

"We have been waging this battle for the last eight years. The river has turned into a chemical-laden 'nullah' and despite good rain all over the state this river has not got any water. Despite the HC order there are about 600 units functional in Pali but only 16 have approval of the state pollution control board. Instead of the permissible 36 (million litres per day) MLD the industry is discharging over 50MLD of untreated effluents in to the river," said Mahaveer Singh, general secretary, Sri KisanParyavaranSangarshSamiti.

In absolute disregard to environment, three out of the four common effluent treatment plants (CETPs) don't have consent to operate since March 2011, he said. "Textile dyes are toxic, highly stable and do not degrade easily and are not removed by conventional wastewater treatment methods. Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) staff took samples of water from several points, ranging from CETPs, drains from industries, wells and hand pumps in villages downstream. These samples were tested for heavy metals in the CSE pollution monitoring laboratory," said Mahaveer. The CETPs are managed and maintained by the Pali Water Pollution Control Research Foundation (PWPCRF) Trust, which is one of the very first co-operative pollution control measures in the country, and was initiated by the industry itself. "The trust has given an affidavit to run the CEPTs within the permissible standards and capacity. They have been prosecuted once in the past and if they don't meet the standards, we would take required action," said D N Pandey, member secretary, Rajasthan State Pollution Control Board (RSPCB).

Besides, the Nehada dam that was built for storing monsoon runoff to enhance irrigation of that area is today the death-knell for agriculture. "Because of accumulation of industrial effluents at the dam, it has become a reservoir of polluted water," said Mahaveer. Our repeated pleas to the industry to recycle their polluted water and follow the HC directions to make the industry zero discharge have fallen on deaf ears. Despite spending Rs 15 crore on cleaning water at the CEPT run by the industry, the water is being released in to the river without treatment," he said. District collector Neeraj Pawan said, "We are trying our best to mitigate river pollution. We have taken many measures and in the last six months and dismantled industry expansion that was illegal after 2007. But we still have a long way to go." (Courtesy: Singh, R. TNN; TOI, Jaipur, Rajasthan).