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Offering Coins to a Sacred River is a MYTH or any Scientific Reason

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Abstract--From Ancient times, Rivers are not just water bodies, Indians believe rivers as living deities, guardians of lives and symbol of purity. Rivers hold immense cultural, religious and ecological significance. Throwing of coins into rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri, there is a widespread of Hindu ritual which symbolizes these offerings to deities is for prosperity and cleansing of their sins and believes it as a practice which invites good fortune and fulfil their wishes. This manuscript reveals that ancient copper coins dissolved gradually, releasing antimicrobial ions to purify water, settle impurities, and provide essential minerals like copper for human health, as supported by Ayurvedic principles in texts like the Sushruta Samhita. Civilizations flourished along these rivers for water-dependent livelihoods, with ancestors embedding public health strategies into religious customs to ensure community hygiene without modern purifiers. Mostly the currencies were used at that time are made of copper which is an element required to the human health. This offering of copper coins to rivers will be essential to the lives of people as copper would slowly dissolve into the water which helps to pull down impurities and allow clean and fresh water to flow on the top of the river and who drank this water will receive sufficient health benefits. Even now a days even people are practicing such rituals and make it as a home-made practice by keeping some water into copper vessels in night hours and taking them at morning which helps them in maintaining health because copper has antimicrobial properties.

The objective of this article is to revive awareness of copper's benefits, discontinuing polluting practices, and aligning rituals with environmental protection, echoing Namami Ganga initiatives. By demystifying the custom, it highlights ancestral ingenuity in sustainable health and ecology.

Now in modern times, non-copper coins are made up of iron and steel and these metals contaminating water and raising environmental concerns of metal pollution. Modern steel and chromium coins corrode, causing heavy metal pollution, biodiversity harm, and violations of laws like the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, and Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023. Judicial precedents, including MC Mehta vs. Union of India, reinforce the right to clean water under Article 21. The scientific reason behind this act which is practiced centuries ago is of the significant properties of copper coins which has antimicrobial properties and water will be purified, even in Ayurvedic texts, suggests that water can be purified by storing it in copper pots.

Slowly the purpose has lost with time and made it believed in human minds that drinking water from the fountains and tossing a coin into the rivers would provide your good health.

Keywords--Copper Coins, Sacred Rivers, Gods & Goddesses, Cultures, Rituals, Traditions, Water Pollution, Indus Valley Civilization etc.

Aim & Objective-- The aim and objective of the article is to create awareness of "Offering Coins to a Sacred River is a Myth or any Scientific Reason"

I. INTRODUCTION

In Ancient India or during Vedic Period or long before, Ancient Indian Culture is full of ancient rituals and traditions and beliefs. In Ancient India for every custom and practice it is linked to religious belief, logical purpose and scientific reason; unfortunately all these things are embedded in the form of religious custom and very few people those who are icons in the field are only know about the reason behind these beliefs, hence the beliefs are started windling but the old people who followed their forefathers traditions are still passing on these rituals to the next generation and still it is going on. One such ritual/belief is toss coined into a sacred river so that the person who does the same will have good fortune/good luck. Normally the human tendency is they will do the work if there is anything material benefit/profit with them. Here the ancestors said if we throw coin in a sacred river with a good intention and some wish the almighty will fulfill the same. As we good deep into the ancient Indian history right from the vedic period it is full of rituals and traditions, be it a festival, a marriage and even in ones day to day life knowingly or unknowingly with belief or tradition. Many of us perform many rituals. These beliefs and rituals are getting passed from generation to generation without really revealing to them, the purpose of any culture or custom but individual are simply following the same because it was advised by the elders. However, our ancestors right from the vedic period are quite thoughtful and made the customs in the form of culture but with a logical purpose in it.



One such custom that is being followed from generation to generation from the vedic period is “tossing coins into the sacred rivers as we are having number of such rivers (Giva Nadi) as they are named in the name of goddesses like Godavari, Krishna and Saraswati but an exception being Brahmaputra which is in the name of Male”. Normally in India all the sacred rivers are named with female names except Brahmaputra, the reason already mentioned above.

River water not only in India many countries is a source of drinking water in addition to agriculture purpose, forest conservation and pooling the river beds and earth. In short it is nothing but environmental balance. The present outburst of many countries on environmental balancing is long before thought of and applied by our ancestors. How thoughtful they are and how gave importance to the living condition of mankind and living creature and their scientific knowledge and thoughtfulness are still working today in this modern scientific world. As we are aware rivers are the source of drinking water and various human activities like drinking, bathing, washing, cleaning and cooking etc and also these rivers who are perennial provide water for domestic as well as wild animals and to irrigate crops and forests without any discrimination. To maintain such balance our ancestors put a tag on all these rivers as “sacred” and cannot be polluted or made use of otherwise and they have put another tag that these rivers should be worshipped like Gods and Goddesses for these reasons there are many rituals in Kartika Masa, Pournami or full moon and in various festivals. The another important aspect construct a temple of worship near the water resources (rivers) has become the order of the day in Ancient India. And many of the people who follow the traditions offer these rivers, fruits, flowers, coconuts, betel leaves, and kumkum, turmeric etc into the water ways. A sign of respect to the female gods as water. It is not surprising to find in India at places where the river originates, there will be historic temple constructed and people will throng those areas and water flow increases especially the birth place of that river in Hindu Calendar. Though there are many examples some of them are Kanaka Durga Temple Near Krishna River in Vijayawada, Kasi Visveswara Temple near Ganges in Banaras and there are many temples by the side of Godavari that originates from Maharashtra and passes through many states finally to reach the sea.

The other scientific reason behind is the coins are made in copper and copper is having the property of purifying the water and many such other properties when they are thrown into the river, the river water gets purified.

However the present form of coins are made out of iron and such other bio metals. The very purpose of throwing coins into the river is getting faded out. Though there are many other reasons for throwing coins into the sacred river, the one main intention of dropping into the sacred river was probably to show that water is precious and it is as important as money and wealth for survival.

As we go deep into the Indian History we find many dynasty’s and civilizations like Indus Valley Civilization flourished near the river beds and in a way civilization started, when people started living near water beds because in Ancient India thought water is the main source for living in this world.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In an article titled “Can Throwing A Copper Coin into the river bring Good Luck to You? Find out” written by Supriya on June 9, 2020 published in www.dharma.werindia.com, it was mentioned that,

In Ancient India, the currency is made out of Copper unlike today’s metallic coins and notes. According to Ayurvedic Science, the ancient Hindu Medical System (if we drink water from the copper pot after keeping it few hours it will be beneficial for our health. Some health benefits of copper water in our body are

1. Copper Water drinking improves the digestive system.
2. It absorbs iron in our body, which helps fighting Anemia
3. Copper Water slows down the aging process and helps to lose weight
4. It accelerates the healing process of wounds and sore joints.
5. It cures cancer and arthritis problems.
6. Copper water destroys the bacteria or microbes that produce many water-borne ailments.
7. It also stimulates the brain and works well within the thyroid gland.

In the same article, the author mentions that,

“In Vedic Era, Civilization was aware on the health benefits of copper. Therefore, they use to throw copper coins in holy rivers, so that, the water gets charged up with copper properties. Thus people stayed healthy. The goal was to keep the river replenished and the community healthy. But it took religious color to achieve that”.

In another article titled “Coins and traditions: a cross between curse and knife” published in 23 May 2024 6 minutes de lecture, in this article the author explains, the tradition of a coin for knife; a custom that is still very much alive today. To substantiate this argument the author mentions,

“A knife like a fine blade represents power and strength. The Vikings saw in it trust, the Japanese honor that is why giving a knife is a symbolic act, a way of passing on these famous attributes to its recipient”.

In the same article, the author mentions that they would giving a knife bring a bad luck? – the coin a symbolic exchange, a cutlery tradition. The author also mentions that,

“The coin, metallic, solid and of market value, it balances the gesture and brings harmony. A penny, however modest cleanses the recipient of any suspicion of honor or reputation. Exchanging it for a coin is tantamount to buying the knife, an unstoppable remedy for preserving the quality of the relationship between giver and receiver. Accepting a coin removes responsibility for the risks inherent in carrying the blade.”

In Christianity, it is believed that “40 days of Christmas, Pancakes, fill the plates. Festa Caldelarum, the festival of candles, the origin of the word Chandeleur, was a pagan festival celebrating the return of light (the days getting longer). The roundness of the pancakes symbolized the roundness of the sun.”

In another article titled “Is there science behind the origins of the traditions of throwing coins into water for good luck?” published in Quora digest, the author very clearly mentions about throwing of coins into the river that,

“Not from luck point of view, but science behind as follows.

In ancient times, most of the currency was made of copper, unlike the stainless steel coins of today. Now, copper is a vital metal for human body as it helps in metabolism and we all know that our body cannot synthesize copper. Hence, the supply for absorption must come from outside.

Tanks and rivers were the only sources of drinking water in ancient times. Throwing copper currency in them was one way of our fore-fathers ensuring that we intake sufficient copper on daily basis. Also, copper helped settle the dust particles to the bottom, thereby making drinking water available on top. In those times water purifiers were not present and river were clean. People consumed its water for drinking and cooking.”

In this article titled “19 logical reasoning behind some beliefs in India” written by Ashwani Iyer on March 13, 2015 published in www.purathani.wordpress.com

It was mentioned about 19 logical reasons behind some beliefs in India like joining both palms together to greet (Namaskara), Wearing Toe rings of Indian women (Mattelu), Applying Tilak on the forehead (Sindhur), significance of bells in Temples, Story behind worshipping Tulasi Plant, Why do we worship Peepal Tree, Start with spice, end with sweet, Applying Mehendi, Henna on the hands, Celebration cleaning during Diwali, Sitting on a floor and eating, Why not to sleep with your head towards North, Surya Namaskara, Ear piercing, application of Sindhur or Vermillion, the scientific explanation of touching the feet (Charansparsh), Why should Tulasi not be chewed with teeth, Sesame seeds of Jaggery, Why do Indian women wear bangles etc., though they are inherited from ancient Indians as belief, custom, if not followed it will creates bad but each one is having its own scientific reason and makes good to the body. It clearly shows that some of the customs mentioned above are considered to be myth by the present generation because not knowing their importance, scientific reason and health to the body and in turn whole community is lost has to be revived for the good of the society. Of these throwing coins into a river is one of the most sacred thing because in Ancient India most of the currency used was made of copper unlike the stainless steel coins today. Throwing coins in the river was one way our fore fathers ensured, we intake sufficient copper as part of the water as rivers was the only source of drinking water. Copper is a vital metal very useful to the human body. It become a custom ensured that all of follow the practice.

The article also mentions that,

“Whatever may be the logical reason we Indians we really love our customs and followed to be healthy and wise.”

In another article titled “The spiritual Indian why Hindus throw coins in river: Throwing copper coins in river by Hindus” written by Amit Dassana on February 2, 2016 published in www.thespiritualindian.com, it was mentioned that,

“Throwing coins into rivers is an ancient custom in Ancient India and Hindus still throw coins in rivers while visiting places of worship. Many people think that throwing coins bring them good luck but it is not true.

In olden times, most of the civilizations prospered on the banks of mighty rivers, without the support of river, the community life was difficult because they needed water for farming, cooking, bathing, washing clothes or for other purposes like pottering or making homes. So water was the lifeline of Ancient Civilizations. At that time the currencies were made of copper, according to Ayurveda, if we keep water in copper pot and drink it after few hours then it is very good for our health”.

“The other benefits of drinking water stored in copper pot are,

- a) It slows down aging
- b) Good for weight loss
- c) Kills the bacteria or microbes which causes many water borne diseases
- d) Helps the digestive system
- e) Stimulates the brain and also good for working of Thyroid gland.
- f) Helps in absorption of Iron and thus infighting anemia and helps to heal the wounds faster and finally
- g) Good for fighting cancer, arthritis and for inflamed joints.”

The same practice of throwing coins in rivers is followed in many countries not only in India, worldwide like UK, Germany etc.

In another article titled **“The myth of throwing coins in rivers and fountains in Europe, Africa and Asia: the consequences”** written by Sarthakgupta published in www.steemit.com, the author mentioned that,

“one of the most common practices in India and few other countries is to throw coins in the river. The logic behind the throwing coins in river making a materialistic sacrifice in return for a wish to be granted. Rivers are considered holy and giving coins is treated to bring good luck. As seen in India whenever a train crosses a river or some other water body, large number of Indians throw coins in water and make a wish.”

In another article titled **“Water in Kannada Folk Tradition”** written by Dr. V.L. Patil, Professor and Chairman, Department of Folklore, Karnataka University, Dharwad – 580003 published in JNU, New Delhi Journal named Epitome: International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, it was mentioned that,

The author in this article is a professor and Chairman of Department of Folklore, Karnataka University, Dharwad has elaborately given the details regarding Water with respect to belief by the Folklore and in many of the rituals water plays an important role in Ancient India and partly now because of mechanized life shows the importance of water and keep it in a purified manner as an Indian gives importance to Panchabutas in which water is one element. Yesterday, today and tomorrow one should recognize that the importance of water and its essentiality for every living organism and it is not possible to imagine the human life and basic business of the folk. In such phenomena, it is the responsibility of everyone to keep the source of water clean and maintain it for the consumption. When you trace out the history anywhere in the Globe especially in India all the ancient civilizations were developed on the banks of some rivers; such as Egyptian culture came up on the banks of river Nile, the Babylonian culture between the regions of Euphrates and Tigris, rivers in Iraq and Indus Valley Civilization of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro on the banks of river Sindhu. It is worth mentioning here that the kings in the ancient India built their capitals near water source like tanks, streams, rivers etc. because our ancestors are well aware of the importance of water and developed and constructed tanks, dams and ponds and protected every drop of water. That is why majority of the rivers called Jeevanadi are given the names of Goddesses and prayers are offered so that they kept away from the pollution. The author also mentions a quite interesting point namely to show the importance of water where in the ancestors have identified and endorsed 16 Samskaras (rituals) for his male members from birth till death such as, birth, marriage and death are the most important functions. The 16 rituals that are mentioned as Shodasha Samskaras. In every ceremony or Samskara the water is essentially being used and consumed. The other functions of water that are being addressed to by ancient Indians are to wash of death of man, an agent to unite the human beings and the won to give him emancipation at the end. It clearly shows the importance given to water and to protect it from pollution they use to pray god and do Yagas such as Varuna Yaga when there is water scarcity. Though there are different ways of doing these by Maharshis, Pandits and Folklore, the main aim is to get sufficient water by appeasing the rain water god namely Varuna.



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The main importance in this article is as already mentioned above how the rivers are being maintained as Jeevanadis not only in Ancient India but now water is being used as a medicine because it has the power to remove diseases and protect from demonic powers. It is the belief of many that one litre pure water on empty stomach every morning many diseases can be cured by putting the water in a copper vessel keeping it in the night. All these things mentioned above illustrates that the importance of water and maintain the resources so that they cannot be polluted and in this regard, the ancients are clever enough to amalgamate this process with religious and customs beliefs so that no one can dare to pollute the water resources, which is an essential element for all the living organism.

III. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This article emphasize and the need for protecting water resources by amalgamating them in the daily rituals and also making it a religious belief by many especially in Ancient India that the rivers and the source of water should be maintained properly and advised them to offer copper coins so that their wish or ambition can be fulfilled by the river goddess. In this way, there is an element of profit motive so that a person whether he believes it or not started throwing coins into the river believing that by offering something to the sacred river, he/she gets more happiness in his or her life, that is why how the luminaries of Ancient India so clever in keeping both the belief and custom, environment in one stroke.

As already discussed above through the literature review we have mentioned so many aspects about throwing coins into a sacred river/water resource in some countries not as a religious custo, or belief but there is an element of scientific aspect in throwing coins; in Ancient India, and majority of the globe the financial transactions took place through copper coins and everybody knows the properties of copper such as it is a crucial nutrient for the body, helps in keeping up sound bones, nerves, veins and resistant capacity. Alongside the coins contain some part of iron it empowers the development of red platelets. Keeping (Throwing) copper coins underneath the water helped in killing harmful bacteria and thus taking care of human health. In Ancient India or in those days in many parts of the Globe water purifiers neither existing nor known to anybody. Hence, our ancestors especially in India, has identified the importance and quality of copper metal perhaps introduced this ritual for the benefit of the mankind. Water kept in copper vessels or drinking water from the rivers helps in digestion because copper is a crucial nutrient for the body.

Hence, throwing coins into the river was a way of ensuring that our body gets sufficient copper on a day-to-day basis and thus the consumption of copper through water additionally helped in settling the residual particles in the human body. Even the modern times presently, many Indian and Nepali families store water in Copper Vessels in the night and it is being used in the day time. To understand clearly the importance of copper, the chemical element symbolized as Cu is rich in minerals and the good electrical conductor and it is good for certain body organs to keep them active overall and in addition copper adjusts the body and mental liveliness in susceptible framework and copper is a must need nutrient by the human body include the brain and mind.

When you go back to Ancient India when Ayurveda is predominantly made use of health problems, this element of Copper has made significant roots in the Ayurvedic System of health practice. Unfortunately the present system of currency used in majority of the countries, the copper is being replaced by steel and paper, the very element of throwing coins made out of copper in Ancient India is getting windled presently. Presently this religious custom once believed to be a part of life that is throwing of coins into river has been followed today but with the motive of wish fulfillment. However, as already the present coins in India contains 83% of iron or steel and 17% of Chromium. Unfortunately, the metals Chromium is one of the most toxic metal, instead of purifying water, this toxic metal contaminate water and result in many diseases. In my considered opinion, and I request everybody in preventing the loss of worldwide currencies by not throwing the coins into the rivers and polluting them so that the rivers, tanks and ponds are kept free from contamination/pollution. In addition there are some environmental impacts of the present throwing of coins into the rivers because they are made out of steel, nickel plated or chromium due to the following reasons. These present coins having no copper in it when they thrown into rivers they gets corroded in the water overtime releasing toxic substances into the water causing environmental harm such as heavy metal pollution, physical pollution, water chemistry imbalance, harm to cleaning mechanism, impact on biodiversity etc. Here it is important to mention the Environment Protection Act, 1986 and Section 3 of the Act empowers the Central Government to take all necessary measures to protect and improve environment. Throwing non-biodegradable coins can be interpreted as an Act that pollutes the environment that violating the Acts spirit. The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, Section 24 of the Act prohibits the disposal of polluting substances into water bodies.

Section 33A empowers the pollution control board to direct closure or regulation of any activity that causes pollution – including religious offerings if they contaminate water. Municipal Solid Waste Rule, 2016, under this rule Solid Waste and also extend to waste management around rivers, near ghats and public water access areas; Coins especially steel, fall under non-biodegradable waste are prohibited.

Under the newly enacted Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (2023) which replaced Indian Penal Code, Section 229 emphasizes,

“Water fouling and public nuisance,

Who ever voluntarily corrupts or fouls the water of any public spring or reservoir so as to render it less fit for purpose for which it is ordinarily used shall be punished.”

This mirrors section 277 of the IPC and is directly applicable to the Act of throwing coins which corrode and contaminate water.

Section 270-Public Nuisance – This replaces IPC Sec 268 and defines Public Nuisance as

“Any Act which causes common injury, danger or annoyance to the public. Coin pollution, which affects river health and human use can fall under this section.”

Judicial pronouncements and Case Laws:

Many of the Hon’ble Indian Courts actively engaged in Environmental Protection, including River conservation, in which the noted Advocate MC Mehta, a principle person who fought against Environmental Pollution and one majority of the cases and laurels from not only the judiciary but also from common man; some of examples are,

MC Mehta vs Union of India 1988 AIR 1115, SCR (2) 530

The Supreme Court held that, “The right to clean water as a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Indian constitution. The Court emphasized the duty of citizens and governments to prevent pollution in the Ganga and other rivers. Although the case focused on Industrial Pollution, indirectly applies to human activities including religious offerings.

Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum vs Union of India (1996) 5 SCC 647, introduced

“The precautionary principle and polluter pays principle into Indian Environmental Law. Throwing coins a preventable activity could be regulated under the principle. Since it contribute to cumulative pollution.”

Almitra H Patil vs Union of India 2000 2 SCC 678, While dealing with Solid Waste Management, the Supreme Court emphasized the need to manage non biodegradable waste and urged municipal bodies to control pollution from human activities – including festivals and rituals.

That is why Central Government of India campaigns like Namami Ganga, and clean Yamuna Mission are incorporated in micro level by improving behavioral changes such as Stopping Coin throwing, offering flowers in reusable containers and discouraging the use of synthetic materials during rituals.

However there are other legal formalities that are enforceable on common man who violates such as

- 1) The Environmental Protection Act, No. 29 of 1986, 3, Acts of Parliament, 1986 India
- 2) The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, No. 6 of 1974, Sec 24, 33A , Acts of Parliament, 1974 (India)
- 3) The Solid Waste Management Rules, Gazette of India, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2016.
- 4) Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, No. 45 of 2023 Sec 279, 289, Acts of Parliament, 2023 (India).
- 5) Ministry of Jal Shakti, Namami Ganga Programme, Government of India
- 6) Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, River Conservation Policy Guidelines, 2022.
- 7) Nandini Sundar, Tradition vs Ecology: Rethinking Ritual Pollution in Sacred Rivers, 34(2) Indian J. Env’t L. 145
- 8) Central Pollution Control Board, Annual Report on River Pollution in India 2022-23
- 9) Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Report on Heavy Metal Contamination in Indian Rivers, 2021.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is a age old practice in India and elsewhere globally throwing coins into sacred rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, Krishna, Godavari and Kaveri, many people follow this as a tradition/custom without knowing its origin except throwing coin into a sacred river will bring blessings.

However, if we analyze the custom into a scientific manner, it shows that rivers are vital source of drinking water in Ancient India unlike the present reservoirs, construction of dams, projects etc., are not known. In addition, in Ancient India, coins are made out of copper or copper alloys and those people know the property of disinfectant of copper.



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Hence, throwing copper coins into the river was believed to help maintain the cleanliness of the water, Protection of Environment and make it safe for drinking purpose. This practice is also there in Thailand, Japan and some western countries. Usually throwing the coins in rivers, lakes, ponds, wells, fountains etc. to pray for blessings avert disasters and make wishes. In Ancient India, it started as a belief and custom and a religious practice and also as a superstition but behind the screen there lies the specific act of signs, spirit and sustainability. Many of the civilizations in ancient India globally developed and sustained near river beds because water is the main source for drinking, agriculture and many other things for the mankind to survive.

As already mentioned above, the scientific reason of throwing copper coins into the river has, a) Antimicrobial properties, b) Water clarification, c) mineral intake are some of the scientific reasons in addition to washing away sins and making good wishes are some of the religious beliefs.

As there are no water purifiers as of now today, the only source of purifying water in a larger scale is to throw copper coins into the rivers. In this regard, the Government of India and the state governments have enacted the prevention of water pollution and punishment thereon to protect the drinking water from pollution.

The recent analysis of drinking water from a copper vessel kept for number of hours has many benefits such as a). What drinking water from copper vessels improves the digestive system to this water absorbs iron in our body which helps fighting anemia, c). Copper water slows down the aging process and helps lose weight, d). It accelerates the healing process of wounds and soar joints, e). It cures cancer and arthritis problems, f). copper water destroys the bacteria or microbes that produce many water borne ailments.

To conclude as already mentioned above in majority of the rituals, a person goes through as per the Indian Customs and religious beliefs Water is the main principle element that is being used and hence keep the water away from pollution is the right and duty of every person so that

keeping himself/herself safe and also the others in safe environment.

Indian often throw coins into sacred rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, Krishna, Godavari and Kaveri, many people follow this as a tradition/custom without knowing its origin except throwing coin into a sacred river will bring blessings.

However some analyze that this custom of throwing began that rivers are vital source of drinking water in Ancient India and that coins are made out of copper or copper alloys and copper has the property of disinfectant. Thus throwing a copper coin by custom or belief has its significance maintain the cleanliness of water and it is safe for drinking.

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