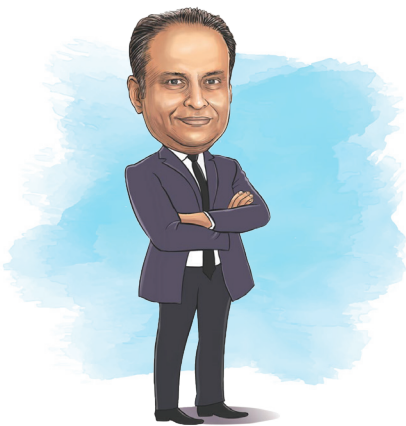


Water Also Needs “Respect”



Asok Kumar G*

If one respects something, one tends to take it seriously. It is a trait ingrained in us.

In India we are taught to respect our elders, teachers and even some plants/trees like Tulsi and Baniyan. Respect had always been part of India's culture. Hence, “Respect” could be a very good tool to bring in any behavioural change. Taking a cue, in addition to the universally accepted 3Rs - Reduce, Recycle and Reuse for water conservation, we at National Water Mission (NWM) added two more Rs - Recharge and Respect to make it the 5Rs of water conservation.

Traditionally, water was respected in India. In all Pujas of Hindus, water is a key element. Every puja begins with invoking the blessings of our sacred rivers - “Gange cha Yamune chaiva Godavari Saraswati, Narmade Sindhu Kaveri jalesmin sannidhim kuru.” In temples tirth or holy water is offered a Prasad. In Hindu pantheon of Gods, Varuna is god of water and Indra, the king of gods himself, is the Lord of rains. Most temples have attached tanks/ponds. Water bestowed with

holy status is tirth or Jal and not paani. As a popular song goes, “maano tho ganga maa hei, na maano tho behta paani.” Hindus offer Ganga-jal to persons who are about to die, so that they attain moksha. Tirth/Jal is offered in all yagnas and as tarpan to ancestors. Water is holy for Muslims and Christians as well. In Islam, water is considered a vital blessing from Allah, symbolizing life, purification, and mercy and is essential for wudu before daily prayers and ghusl. Quran refers to water reverentially. In Christianity, water is a powerful, dual-natured symbol representing cleansing, purification, life, and the Holy Spirit. Sacrament of baptism signify spiritual rebirth and washing away of sins. Indian Kings built stepwells. Water was indeed respected.

But how did the mighty water fall from grace lately? In the current lingo, to convey something is wasted frivolously, we say “Usse paani ki tarah baha diya” or “wasted like water”! Water is now treated as if of no value or respect and is wasted.

Jal, when flows through public tap or in drains is just “Paani”, deserving no respect. We waste Paani by letting it overflow from our overhead tanks; from leaky pipes and taps. The Non-Revenue Water (NRW) in most Indian cities is over 40%, which means 40% of the “value added water” supplied by municipalities and water-boards are not accounted for due to leaks in supply systems, non-billing or corruption.

Water should also be protected from pollution. Polluted water can cause diseases. Industries wash off their wastes in water, a universal solvent, and let it out to waterbodies without treatment. Plastics and solid wastes also add to pollution. Emerging Contaminants - microplastics,

antibiotic residues, oils spills, heavy metals, arsenic etc- are other pollutants. Polluted waterbodies reduce the already shrinking sources of good water.

We should realize that water is not an infinite resource. If water is not managed well, it could be a constraint to our Vikasit-Bharat dream. Steps that can improve Water Use Efficiency include: Reduce its usage; Manage efficiently the Supply side (Catch-The-Rain, where it falls, when it falls to recharge ground water; build dams to store flood waters etc) and Demand side; Ensure Water Circularity- Reuse and Recycle. Along with this, like salt in cooking, we need to “Respect” water.

How can you make one respect water? Well, the first step will be to acknowledge its importance; that it is not an unlimited resource. Acknowledge that we have to spare good water for our next generation, as was done by our previous generations, whose generosity we are enjoying now. Avoid wastage. Value water. Price water appropriately. Pay for it. Cross-subsidise it for poorer sections to ensure universal access to clean water. Even a token payment made can enhance its respect, and reduce wastage. Start with the young - Involve their teachers, school. Include water in their curriculum. Water warriors, women who suffer to collect good water for cooking and drinking could be used as agents of change. We cannot waste or pollute water, for our sustainable future.

The first 4Rs of water conservation may involve technology, but the fifth R - Respect is not expensive and can start from home.

Let us pledge to Respect water, always.

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