



Fluid Transitions: Water's Influence on Societal Transformations

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ABSTRACT:

Water, a fundamental element of life, holds a profound influence on societal structures, norms, and transformations. This paper examines the multifaceted role of water in shaping human societies throughout history and into the contemporary era. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from sociology, anthropology, geography, and environmental studies, the paper explores how water has served as a catalyst for societal change, driving processes of urbanization, industrialization, and agricultural development. Furthermore, the paper explores the cultural and symbolic significance of water in shaping identities, belief systems, and collective memory within communities and use qualitative methods of research. By analyzing historical examples from around the world, the paper elucidates the transformative potential of water as both a source of conflict and cooperation, resilience, and vulnerability. Ultimately, the paper underscores the importance of recognizing water as a dynamic force that shapes the fabric of societies, and advocates for inclusive and sustainable water management practices that prioritize social equity, environmental stewardship, and human well-being.

KEYWORDS: Water, societal transformations, social change, water distribution, access, socio-economic disparities.

Introduction

Water has been a crucial element in shaping societies throughout history, influencing cultural, economic, and environmental aspects. Ancient civilizations thrived on water resources, such as the Nile River and Mesopotamian civilizations. Urbanization and industrialization have increased demand for water, leading to the construction of complex infrastructures and management systems. However, unequal access to water resources has perpetuated socio-economic disparities, with marginalized communities often suffering from water scarcity and pollution. Jackson, et al., (2001). Akbar's visionary initiative and architectural marvel in constructing water facilities at Fatehpur Sikri highlight the importance of water management in fostering urban development and societal growth. By prioritizing access to clean water for residents, Akbar not only ensured the well-being of his people but also laid the foundation for a flourishing township and new civilization to thrive. Conversely, history also offers cautionary tales of civilizations that faced demise due to water scarcity or drought. For instance, the collapse of the Indus Valley Civilization, one of the world's earliest urban societies, has been linked to the drying up of river channels and dwindling water resources. These historical examples underscore the critical role of water in sustaining human settlements and shaping the course of history. They serve as poignant reminders of the interconnectedness between water availability, societal resilience, and the fate of civilizations. Jackson, et al., (2001). Rapid urbanization and industrial expansion threaten water quality and ecosystems. The global water crisis highlights the need for sustainable management and equitable distribution strategies. Climate change, population growth, and environmental degradation further complicate water-related issues. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach considering social, economic, and environmental factors, as well as diverse community needs. Kaushal, et al. (2015). This paper caters to a wide-ranging aspect concerning water and consequently multiple disciplines. Due to the fact that this paper covers social,



economic, psychological, lifestyle, political and administrative and environmental factors concerning water, it becomes a multidisciplinary paper. The wide scope of this research extends as it advocates for a collaborative effort across disciplines to enhance a deeper understanding of water's significance in human life. In this regard, the paper adopted analytical and descriptive research methodology by studying the existing literature both primary and secondary. It evaluated the published newspaper articles and columns related to the issues concerning water and societal impact. The objectives of this paper are as follows:

To investigate the holistic impact of water on human life including social, psychological, political, economic, and environmental.

To investigate the efficacy of water campaigns on governmental initiatives.

Review of Literature

2.1 Water Can Change the Society

Water is a crucial resource impacting health, agriculture, industry, transportation, economy, quality of life and culture. Access to clean water is essential for maintaining public health, preventing diseases, and reducing healthcare costs. Water ecosystems provide essential services like water purification, flood regulation, and biodiversity habitat provision. Protecting and restoring water ecosystems can enhance climate change resilience, maintain biodiversity, and support sustainable resource management. Waterways have historically served as transportation routes for trade, commerce, and cultural exchange. Conflict over water resources can lead to tensions, but it can also foster cooperation and peacebuilding efforts. Pahl-Wostl, et al., (2007).

2.2 Campaigns Regarding Water

A number of campaigns for water have been initiated throughout different eras. The United States Government, USAID, and the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ) have launched a public awareness campaign titled "Promoting Water Resource Conservation and Management in Mid and Western Nepal." The campaign promoted community ownership and partnerships to address water management issues, such as water source depletion, destructive fishing practices, conflict between water users, and agricultural productivity decline. The campaign focuses on managing freshwater resources and conserving biodiversity in the Rapti, Karnali, and Mahakali River basins in the Mid and Far Western regions of Nepal. The campaign will use various communication methods, including a weekly TV and radio program, an online information portal, and town hall meetings. The campaign portrays local champions working to conserve and sustainably manage freshwater resources. myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com (2018).

The government is set to introduce the Integrated Water Resource Conservation Management Special Programme to address the depletion of drinking water sources due to earthquakes and climate change. The Ministry of Water Supply has prepared a campaign for water resource protection and conservation, aiming to conserve large reservoirs and promote rainwater harvesting knowledge. A policy will be developed to protect trees and plants in water resource areas, and a special programme for processed drainage systems will be introduced. A nationwide campaign for quality testing of drinking water is also being prepared. The Terai-Madhes Tubewell and Purity programme is being implemented to manage drinking water resources effectively for disadvantaged households. english.onlinekhabar.com (2022). The Nepal Water Conservation Foundation (NWCF) is a non-governmental, non-political, and not-for-profit organisation that employs research, publications, and advocacy to safeguard public interest and address issues pertaining to the environment, climate change, water, energy, and disaster risk reduction. Over the years, NWCF has broadened its focus beyond solutions for the management of natural resources, rivers, and watersheds to encompass climate change, gender issues, renewable energy, and air pollution, among other significant environmental concerns. www.fao.org (2023)

Water conservation campaigns are global efforts to raise awareness and encourage water-saving practices. They include educational initiatives, public service announcements, and social media campaigns. These campaigns focus on addressing water scarcity, ensuring safe drinking water,

preventing waterborne diseases, and improving public health. They also address water quality issues, climate change, and water resilience. Youth engagement campaigns empower young people and students to advocate for water conservation. Corporate and industry initiatives also run water campaigns to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility. Tosi Robinson, et al., (2018).

2.3 Water and Societal Upliftment

In the enlightening study, Darling et al. (2018) shed light on the indispensable role that water plays within society, shaping various facets of human existence and civilization. From a societal standpoint, water emerges as a lifeline, indispensable for public health and sanitation, constituting a fundamental necessity for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene. Its provision of clean water stands as a cornerstone of human rights, pivotal for curbing the proliferation of waterborne illnesses and enhancing overall quality of life. Moreover, water assumes a pivotal role in agricultural practices, serving as a cornerstone resource for irrigation and livestock farming, thereby sustaining food production and security. Societies have historically harnessed waterways for transportation, facilitating trade and cultural exchange, while also serving as avenues for recreation and leisure activities, thus fostering economic growth and societal cohesion.

2.4 Water and its Psychological Impact

In their insightful study, Ramsay et al. (2012) illuminate the profound psychological effects of water on individuals, spanning emotions, cognition, and behavior. They highlight how water serves as a catalyst for relaxation, tranquility, and stress relief, with activities like swimming, bathing, and simply being near water bodies offering therapeutic benefits. The availability of clean water is intricately linked to concepts of dignity and self-esteem, underscoring its importance for mental well-being.

Further delving into the psychological ramifications of water scarcity, Khodarahimi et al. (2014) elucidate the myriad ways in which this phenomenon impacts various facets of life. They detail how water scarcity manifests physically through dehydration, fatigue, and heat-related illnesses, as well as the increased risk of waterborne diseases such as cholera and typhoid fever, leading to adverse health outcomes and mortality rates. They also underscore the compounding effects on personal hygiene and sanitation, which compromise health and heighten the risk of infectious diseases transmission. The psychological impact of water scarcity is palpable, as individuals grapple with feelings of stress, anxiety, and insecurity about the future. The burden of water collection, particularly for marginalized groups like women and children, exacts a physical and mental stress, fostering feelings of frustration and helplessness.

Water scarcity in communities can lead to social stigma, discrimination, and competition, exacerbating feelings of isolation and alienation. Conflicts over scarce resources can escalate into interpersonal conflicts, causing social unrest and violence. The lack of water not only impacts physical health but also psychologically, contributing to stress, anxiety, and mental health disorders. Addressing water scarcity requires holistic approaches, promoting sustainable water management practices, and addressing social, economic, and environmental factors. Brewis, et al., (2021)

2.5 Water and Lifestyle

Water plays a crucial role in shaping lifestyle choices, habits, and consumption patterns. It influences dietary preferences, energy consumption, and urban development. Access to clean water is essential for industrial activities and commerce. Cultural norms, socioeconomic factors, and environmental awareness influence lifestyle choices.

The study conducted by Jahura, Islam, and Mostafa (2023) explores the impact of water scarcity on domestic water use in the Barind Tract region of Bangladesh from a sociological perspective. The Barind Tract is known for its vulnerability to droughts, making water scarcity a pressing issue for communities living in the area. The researchers aim to understand how water scarcity affects domestic water use practices and the socio-economic dynamics surrounding water access and management in the region. The literature review of the study likely delves into existing research on water scarcity, domestic water use, and sociological perspectives on water management. It discuss previous studies



highlighting the socio-economic and cultural factors influencing water use behaviors in drought-prone regions, particularly in rural settings like the Barind Tract. Additionally, the review explores theoretical frameworks and conceptual approaches used to analyze the complex interplay between water scarcity, social structures, and community resilience. Promoting sustainable water use is essential for mitigating environmental degradation and preserving water resources for future generations. Swanson, et al., (2020).

2.6 Equality and Water Distribution

Achieving equitable water distribution necessitates the implementation of comprehensive strategies that address the complex socio-economic and geographic factors contributing to disparities in access to clean water resources. The challenge extends beyond mere provision to encompass considerations of quality, reliability, and sustainability, particularly in regions grappling with environmental degradation, population growth, and climate variability. In rural settings, where infrastructure is often rudimentary and institutional support may be lacking, communities confront multifaceted obstacles to water access. Beyond the physical distance from water sources, issues such as inadequate storage facilities, limited purification mechanisms, and unreliable supply networks compound the challenges. Moreover, socio-economic disparities intersect with geographical factors, exacerbating inequities as marginalized populations bear the brunt of water scarcity, hindering their socio-economic development and perpetuating cycles of poverty. Conversely, urban areas, while typically benefiting from more extensive infrastructure networks, contend with their own set of complexities in ensuring equitable water distribution. Rapid urbanization strains existing systems, leading to increased demand, overexploitation of resources, and degradation of water quality. Additionally, socio-economic disparities manifest within urban contexts, with marginalized communities facing barriers to accessing clean water and sanitation services due to informal settlements, inadequate public infrastructure, and financial constraints. Addressing these disparities requires a multi-dimensional approach that integrates social, economic, and environmental considerations. Investments in infrastructure development, technological innovation, and policy frameworks are crucial, but must be complemented by efforts to enhance community engagement, promote inclusive governance structures, and foster participatory decision-making processes. Moreover, interventions should prioritize vulnerable populations, ensuring their voices are heard, and their needs are adequately addressed in water management initiatives.

Addressing water inequality requires implementing policies and interventions that prioritize marginalized populations, promote community participation, and invest in sustainable water management practices. By promoting inclusive governance, capacity-building, and infrastructure development, societies can work towards achieving equitable access to water resources and fostering social justice. Luh, et al., (2013). & Cumming, et al., (2018).

Conclusion

Water plays a crucial role in public health, sanitation, and economic activities, but disparities in distribution perpetuate social inequalities. It also impacts individuals' psychological well-being, with water scarcity causing stress and anxiety. Addressing disparities across rural and urban communities is crucial for achieving equality in water distribution. Inclusive governance, community empowerment, and investment in water infrastructure are needed to bridge these gaps and promote sustainable resource use. Water being the most important life supporting elements, its scarcity, inefficiency, inadequacy, cleanliness, can lead to health problems, food shortages, lifestyles issues, psychological distress leading to social disturbances. The observation of historical system of water supplies indicates that the government plays a crucial role in providing free, equitable, and clean water to all. Thus, several campaigns have raised this concern and made the government take the initiative of providing water to remote areas. Water-related campaigns and advocacy efforts play a pivotal role in driving positive change and promoting awareness. Stakeholders and government must adopt integrated and holistic approaches that address socio-economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions of water management to ensure resilient and inclusive societies for present and future generations.



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