



Water, Women and the Dynamics

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Abstract:

The context of women, water and their dynamics is the intertwined graph of women living varied ways reflecting the cultural, social, and economic standards. The dynamic dependence of women on water is complimentary to the inclusive growth cycle of life, as water dominates the globe. The modern women personate, their individuality in economic empowerment, nurturing capabilities, mental healing and access to personal hygiene. With time water has become expensive and scarce which leads to its storage, collection as well as maintenance inevitable. In accessibility of water there is this performing factor of domestic responsibilities and gender power dynamics. In recent topography, it is evident that the availability of easy access to water can actually help sustain core gender based nurturing roles.

Key words: Water, Women

The Multifaceted Connection Between Women and Water The relationship between women and water is an intricate tapestry woven with threads of social, cultural, religious, and environmental dynamics. Water, as a fundamental resource for sustaining life, has long been symbolically tied to femininity due to its nurturing and life-giving qualities. This association is not only practical but also deeply embedded in cultural traditions, spiritual beliefs, and economic practices, making it a cornerstone of the humanities. At a practical level, women's lives are intimately connected with water through their roles as caregivers and managers of household resources. Across the globe, women are often responsible for fetching and managing water for their families, a duty that reflects the nurturing essence traditionally attributed to femininity. Access to clean water and sanitation is also critical for women's health and hygiene, particularly during menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. The absence of these resources can severely impact their well-being and dignity, underscoring the vital need for equitable access to water.

Beyond the physical realm, the connection between women and water extends into the spiritual and cultural domains. In rituals and traditions, women often play central roles in practices involving water, symbolizing purification, cleansing, and renewal. Artistic and literary representations frequently associate women with water, portraying them as muses or protagonists who embody its life-sustaining properties. This cultural depiction reinforces the symbolic bond between women and water, celebrating their roles as custodians of life and harmony. In Indian mythology, the association between women and water is particularly prominent through the

reverence of water-related goddesses. The Ganges River and Yamuna River personify purification and renewal, while Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge and Arts, symbolizes the flow of creativity and enlightenment. Lakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity, represents abundance and fertility, while Parvati, the Goddess of Love, reflects nourishment and protection. These deities illustrate the multifaceted roles of women in nurturing life, fostering growth, and ensuring the continuity of existence.

The relationship between women and water also intersects with environmental concerns and power politics. Women often serve as stewards of water resources in rural and agricultural communities, positioning them as key participants in sustainable practices and ecological conservation. However, patriarchal structures and societal norms can limit their voices in decision-making, impeding progress toward equitable resource management. Recognizing and empowering women in this role is essential for addressing environmental challenges and promoting economic emancipation.

In conclusion, the connection between women and water is both practical and symbolic, reflecting a dynamic interplay of cultural, spiritual, and environmental dimensions. This relationship underscores the importance of gender equality in resource access and management, not only to improve the well-being of women but also to foster sustainable development and harmony in society. Water, as a life-giving force, continues to mirror the resilience, creativity, and nurturing essence of women throughout history and across cultures.

The Symbolic Role of Water in English Literature
Water has long served as a profound and versatile symbol in English literature, contributing richly to

the characterization and discourse within narratives. Across a spectrum of classic works, water represents freedom, transformation, emotional awakening, and deeper existential struggles, underscoring its significance as a literary element. In Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck's journey along the Mississippi River becomes a pivotal symbol of his transition from childhood to adulthood. The river embodies freedom, adventure, and moral growth, providing Huck a sanctuary where he learns to navigate both the literal and metaphorical currents of life. (Twain, 1884) Similarly, in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, the sea becomes a powerful symbol tied to the protagonist, Edna Pontellier. Her relationship with the sea reflects her longing for independence, self-discovery, and liberation from societal constraints. The water symbolizes Edna's emotional awakening, serving as both her escape and her ultimate resolution in her quest for autonomy. (Chopin, 1990)

In Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, the vastness of the ocean serves as a metaphor for the protagonist Pi's spiritual and existential journey. Stranded on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger, the ocean symbolizes the unknown, faith, and the resilience of storytelling as a means of survival and understanding life's complexities. (Martel, 2001)

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* highlights the transformative relationship between water and its protagonist, Celie. Water becomes a metaphor for healing and empowerment, marking Celie's progression from a state of oppression to one of independence and self-love. Its symbolism underscores her emotional renewal and growth. (Walker, 1982) In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, water is a representation of control and restriction. The scarcity of water becomes a metaphor for the oppressive regime's grip over women's bodies and reproductive rights. This interplay emphasizes the profound loss of personal autonomy and the broader impacts of systemic repression. (Atwood, 1985)

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* uses water to symbolize the elusiveness of dreams. Gatsby's longing for Daisy is reflected in the iconic green light across the water, a symbol of aspiration and the unattainable American Dream. The water serves as a barrier, accentuating the chasm between ambition and reality. (Fitzgerald, 1925) Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* portrays the ocean as a symbol of the search for meaning, humanity's struggle with the unknown, and the complexities of obsession. Ishmael's voyage on the Pequod is marked by the vastness of the ocean, which reflects both the grandeur and unpredictability of life's mysteries. (Melville, 1851) Finally, in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, water takes on a symbolic dimension representing childhood innocence. Scout

Finch's experiences with the figurative "water" of innocence and moral guidance from her father showcase the transformation from innocence to empathy, paralleling her journey of growth and understanding. (Lee, 1960)

Through these works, water emerges as a dynamic and layered motif in English literature. It represents freedom and entrapment, growth and struggle, innocence and transformation. By reflecting the human condition and the depths of emotional and spiritual journeys, water continues to be a powerful element that enhances literary narratives and enriches the understanding of character and context. **Women and Water: Challenges and Empowerment in the Subcontinent**

In the subcontinent, the connection between women and water reflects a striking dichotomy, marked by both challenges and opportunities. Traditionally, women bear the responsibility of collecting and managing water for their households. This task, while essential, is physically exhausting and time-consuming, often consuming hours of their day and limiting their ability to pursue education, employment, or leisure. This reliance on women as water carriers underscores the heavy burden imposed by societal and structural inequalities.

Despite these challenges, access to water has the potential to empower women economically and socially. When clean water is readily available, women are freed from arduous routines, enabling them to engage in income-generating activities, contribute to their families' financial stability, and actively participate in their communities. Water, thus, transforms from a burden into a catalyst for empowerment, highlighting its pivotal role in shaping gender equality.

However, the changing climate adds a new dimension to the struggle women face. Climate change disproportionately affects water availability, particularly in regions with already limited resources. As patterns of rainfall shift and droughts become more frequent, women find themselves grappling with the dual burden of managing diminishing resources while adapting to the environmental challenges. These pressures destabilize living conditions and exacerbate existing inequalities, underscoring the urgency of addressing climate resilience.

Amid these adversities, women are emerging as leaders in water conservation and management. Across various communities, women are at the forefront of promoting sustainable practices, advocating for water preservation, and engaging in community-driven solutions. Their leadership highlights their resilience and their critical role in ensuring equitable access to water for current and future generations.

Nonetheless, the alarming prospect of water scarcity in the future demands immediate attention. The lack

of water resources could disrupt not only individual lives but also societal progress as a whole. To mitigate this crisis, comprehensive measures must be taken to secure water access, empower women, and promote sustainable practices. The relationship between women and water in the subcontinent is, therefore, both complex and profound. While women face considerable challenges, their role in water management holds the potential to drive economic and social change, fostering resilience and progress in the face of an uncertain future. Addressing water scarcity with a gender-sensitive lens is essential for ensuring sustainable development and equity.

The report of NITI AAYOG 2018 highlighted in the article “Water policies in India: Past and present” by Aarti Khambete directs at the disproportionate water future in India.

The NITI Aayog report predicts that the country's water demand will be twice that of the available supply by 2030, affecting a large section of the population and leading to around 6 percent loss in the country's GDP. As per the report of National Commission for Integrated Water Resource Development of MoWR, the water requirement by 2050 in high use scenario is likely to be a 1,180 BCM, whereas the present-day availability is 695 BCM (NITI Aayog, 2018). (Khambete, 2023) In consideration with the above information what country like India needs to understand is the prime problems of economic and water disparity. In the widely studied water poverty index five components are studied including the nation's resources, access, capacity, use and environment and based on this calculation India is ranked 120th out of 122 nations for water quality. (Ashish Chopra, 2023). This position itself is indicator of the worst scenario that the country faces in terms of availability of water and its parity based on the patriarchal canons. Let us understand the tact of water division in gender roles of men and women, the living articulation of masculine and feminine traits that has been constantly changing, and is primarily challenged for its regressive commands towards feminine body that gets continuously constructed in the name of body, image and beauty. In the aspect of beauty, the objectification of women is central and core of gender stratification as the women are raised to nurture, serve, care and protect. (Blumberg, 1984) In these stereotyping women are obsessively conditioned right from birth to oblige towards the patriarchal dictums that subjugate them to the arduous required tasks that they accept in the disturbing conscience of sacrificing nature of nurturing that if I don't do this who will?

Women's concerns in the water sector are articulated around their domestic roles and subsumed under notions of “household” and “social equity.” The larger questions of water rights of

women, both in terms of access and control over decision-making, remain unaddressed. (Paul, 2017)

There must be a contemplation on the statement that the access to water for women is also dominated by man and such circumstances of women are rooted in patriarchy. Patriarchy can be defined as societal, conceptual and ideological paradigm which deliberates and accepts men as superior, higher and socially dominant to women beaming men as so-called patriarchs. The typical society has this system in which the male acts as the chief authority figure. He dominates social organization, and holds authority over females, families, and possessions. The masculine dominance is intermingled six factor design of misuse of power and extreme gender exploitation. These interdependent factors are household, paid employment, the state, male-on-female violence, sexuality, and cultural institutions. (Rawat, 2014)

The social, cultural and familial framework of Indian framework is:

- Home life: Women's contributions at home are undervalued, and housewives are often not given the respect they deserve. Men, as husbands and other relatives, sometimes take advantage of this setup. In households where women's roles are undervalued, men may control decisions about accessing or managing water resources, sidelining women's needs or contributions.
- Workplace: Women face inequality at work, like getting lower pay or worse jobs compared to men. In regions where women work in water-dependent jobs, unequal pay or poor access to resources may limit their ability to secure sufficient water for work or home.
- The Government: The government often supports unfair systems by being slow to act when women face injustice. Lack of government intervention in unfair systems can mean inadequate infrastructure, like water pipelines or wells, in areas where women are disproportionately affected.
- Violence: Society tolerates violence and discrimination against women, treating them as lesser, and the state doesn't always step in to stop it. Violence and societal norms, cultural beliefs may restrict women from freely accessing shared water sources, or they might face harassment at public water points. This societal control can make something as essential as water an ongoing challenge.
- **Sexuality and objectification:** Patriarchal norms enforce heterosexuality and punish other preferences, while also objectifying women as tools for men's pleasure. Patriarchal norms might overlook women's basic needs, emphasizing male priorities instead. Additionally, women in non-traditional roles or relationships might face added stigma, further limiting their access to communal resources like water.

- Culture: Cultural institutions enforce patriarchy by dictating how women should act in public. This includes setting rules like dress codes or restricting their freedom to move freely in society. These behaviours are often presented as cultural or moral guidelines but ultimately limit women's independence.

This systemic discrimination can severely impact women, especially in areas where access to water is already limited.

Even though we do agree that patriarchy is not constant and the gender relationships are constantly evolving, patriarchy isn't a fixed system, and gender roles have shifted over time. However, the structures of male dominance often adapt and persist in new forms, whether in homes, workplaces, or cultural norms. Progress is being made, but the pace and extent of change vary widely across societies.

Women generally need more water than men for several reasons: The foremost is physiological reasons that includes hormonal fluctuations, reproductive system and body composition as they generally have a higher percentage of body fat, which requires more water to maintain proper hydration. They face hormonal fluctuations causing hormonal changes throughout their menstrual cycle, pregnancy, and menopause, which can affect their hydration needs and then the reproductive systems require more water to support menstrual cycles, pregnancy, and lactation. Pregnant and breastfeeding women require more water to support babies' growth and milk production. Women with heavy menstrual bleeding, endometriosis, or other reproductive health issues may require more water to help alleviate symptoms. Other factors include women, physical activity, climate and environment and living needs. The general recommendations of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine recommend three eminent points: Women aged 19-50 consume at least 2.7 litres (91 ounces) of water per day, Pregnant women consume at least 3 litres (101 ounces) of water per day and breastfeeding women consume at least 3.8 litres (128 ounces) of water per day. (National Academics Sciences Engineering Medicine, 2004)

Therefore, addressing water access inequality is not just about meeting a basic need; it's about protecting health, promoting equality, and empowering women to lead fuller lives. In consideration, water as a central element in a dystopian scenario holds immense potential for exploration. Since water is essential for survival, its scarcity or control can shape societies in profound ways. Imagine a world where access to water is restricted to the elite, and others must barter, fight, or submit to authoritarian rule to obtain it. The denial or unequal distribution of water exacerbates existing gender inequalities and limits women's ability to lead nourished, healthy, and independent lives. The intersection of

patriarchy and water scarcity can be observed across various dimensions:

Control and Power: In patriarchal societies, men often dominate decision-making around resource allocation. When water becomes a scarce and valuable commodity, male-dominated systems may further marginalize women, leaving them dependent and disempowered.

Burden on Women: Women are typically responsible for household water needs. In water-scarce areas, they must often travel long distances to collect water, reducing their time for education, employment, or rest. This physical and emotional burden entrenches their subordinate roles and limits opportunities for personal growth.

Workplace and Economic Impact: Women involved in agriculture or informal sectors reliant on water face significant challenges during water shortages. Unequal access to water resources hinders their productivity and contributes to economic disparities between men and women.

Health and Hygiene: Limited access to clean water directly impacts women's health, particularly during menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. Poor hygiene due to water scarcity can lead to preventable health issues and perpetuate societal stigmas around women's needs.

Safety and Violence: Women often face harassment or violence when accessing communal water points in unsafe or male-controlled spaces. The scarcity of water amplifies these risks, as competition for resources intensifies.

Environmental and Policy Exclusion: Despite being key contributors to water management in many rural communities, women are often excluded from environmental decision-making processes. This exclusion reinforces unsustainable practices and deepens the crisis. By tying water scarcity to patriarchal systems, the dystopian scenario becomes not just a battle for resources but also a critique of how entrenched gender inequalities can magnify suffering during crises. Exploring this connection highlights the importance of gender equality in resource management and disaster preparedness.

By recognizing the profound connection between gender and water, we can pave the way for more inclusive, resilient, and equitable societies. The crisis of water scarcity, when examined through a gendered lens, is not just a challenge to be managed, but an opportunity to reimagine systems of power and create a more just and sustainable world.

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