# The inheritance of water— one generation at a time

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The Lahore we inherited has borne the consequences of careless water usage by previous generations. Our depleting water resources are a constant hanker for anyone who understands what’s coming our way. Undermining the consequences of irresponsible actions and delayed policies continue and we constantly underestimate the power of intergenerational care.
The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in 2011 is a prime example for us to learn from and change our behaviour. The tragic incident left authorities startled by the potential implications of radiation on the residents in the city. While evacuations were announced, the workforce in the nuclear power plant was still exposed to emissions that could cause cancer over a span of a few years.
The Skilled Veterans Corps, composed of about 500 pensioners, all over the age of 60, who were skilled engineers, volunteered to replace the younger workforce for cleaning. They argued that they do not have enough time left on earth and that their sacrifice would protect the country from losing its developing manpower. Such empathy from one generation to the other—from the ones who built the country a resource, to the ones entrusted with the responsibility of looking after it—is exemplary for nations that want to live conscious of their actions, big and small.
Despite the water crisis being a constant red flag since independence, little was done out of consideration for the generations to come. Our elders talk about how the Ravi River used to course proudly around Lahore in their days, and how, today, it has shrunk. What they forget to notice is the negligence on their part, or perhaps lack of awareness, due to which water conservation practices were never employed.
As traditions, customs, and principles were passed down from one generation to the other, sustainability of abundant natural resources was that one right each generation was denied. The effect of the absence of conscious sustainable practices on the part of our ancestors have started to reveal themselves. In the moment of crises, we are clinging tight to our traditions.
One of our many traditions is “good first impression to guests”. Hence, we are obsessed with cleaning porches with open faucets. Don’t believe this? Come to Lahore you will see front porches shining brighter than the country’s future, if the same practices continue. This abuse and heedless consumption of water is just the tip of the iceberg—which is melting in the Arctics, by the way.
At the domestic level, water is devalued to the extent that we think we will never run out of it. We are delusional when we think that water is infinite. We value water so little that we dump tons of sewage, agricultural and industrial wastes into natural streams and rivers that not only support biodiversity but also provide drinkable water. We lose tons of water through leakages in pipes, water ducts and channels and yet nobody bats an eye.
Why are we so unbothered by the urgency of water conservation? Why are we not terrified by projected water scarcity in Lahore? There is no sense of value to this incredible resource and no guilt towards the reckless exploitation of a natural asset crucial to life. It’s easy to say ornate things like: “if you haven’t seen Lahore, you haven’t been born” but it is way too hard to protect the grandiosity of a city we claim to love. We have become so autocratic in our negligence that we would rather blame the government than hold ourselves accountable to a practice ingrained in our everyday lives.
Our priorities have always been out of proportion. In a capitalist society, we take things for their face value: a person with the shining lawn, the perfectly watered plants and a spotless car will be the one we respect more.
Imagine being so ignorant, you decide to prioritise your social upkeep over a national crisis. Imagine being so selfish, that instead of playing your part to conserve water for your next generations, you waste gallons every day to look presentable in your neighbourhood and guests. Imagine being so self-destructive, that you endanger the livelihood of your own generation for a temporary appeal.
We should be terrified by the horrors of the water crisis, that will surely strike our children and grandchildren. We should be able to imagine them plunging into dry spells and water deprivation, yearning for the buckets of water we once wasted on floors that eventually get dirty. We should be scared of being so criminal in our domestic practices, that we jeopardize their lives and destroy their sense of peace. Yet…washing cars on the weekend gives us mental peace.
Think you are not a culprit? Ask yourself these questions. Do you wash the car or porch with an open faucet? Did you provide the mandatory recharge well in your newly constructed house? What is your reaction on the news of new and efficient water infrastructure and hence additional cost in bills? When you think about the next generations, is your thinking limited to the good status of your children, like purchasing a piece of land in a new private housing scheme? Or do you want a sustainable community for their future? Does the act of washing a car with an open faucet give you joy or anxiety? In your social life, are you more concerned with impressing your peers or what is best for you and your generations to come?
Act now. Time and water; both are running out.