

Water: A Christian Faith Reflection

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Water Today:

This 21st Century is marked by the development and progress based on modern Science and Technology. But this neo- development and neo-economical policies do not allow the people to drink Water from the springs. The rivers' water polluted by the industrial waste, the de-forestation global warming result and the "nil-rain falls" affect the ground water table. The media of this era is forcing us to drink water from the 'packed bottle'. This reminds us the Jesus' words in St, Mathew 7: 9-10 "... *if there any one among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?*" (NRSV). I guess, Jesus would not have thought that the age would come like this. Other wise he would not have uttered these words. Because, if a child asks for *food* today, the parents are forced to give *pizza or lays chips*. Or if a child thirsts for *water*, we give the chemicals like *Pepsi and Coke*, which are causing danger'. Now rivers are dying, and are sold to the multinational companies. So we as natives of this land are denied of on access to the source of Water. All the faith traditions are considering this element as blessing, sacred, powerful and even as God. Water is not only the political issue but faith issue also. Many can avoid politics and survive but not Water, because it is part of our lives. This paper is an attempt to help us to look the issue of Water from the faith perspective and make us to respond to it.

Water in Different Faiths:

All the polytheistic or pluri-theistic faith traditions considered water as a sacred element. In Hinduism the creator appears after the waters and water appeared after the creator, and they are born from one another (Rig Veda 10.121 Vs 7ff).¹ The same idea is found in II Peter 3: 5-6. "*They deliberately ignored the fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water...*"(NRSV)

And also in ancient-near-east monotheistic faith traditions like 'Jewish faith tradition' and 'Abrahamic faith tradition', Water is a matter, by which all things are made and Water is the one which purifies and qualifies human to have a proper and cordial relationship with God.² And in Abrahamic faith tradition Water is considered as heaven where God Almighty is dwelling. In Genesis 1:2 we read "... *the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters*".

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¹ Betty, Radice (Adv.Ed.), *The Rig Veda*, Penguin Classics, London, 1981. P.26.

² Naser, Faruqui (EDs), *Water Management In Islam*, P.15ff.

The Extra-scriptural faith traditions also consider water as an element, which helps humans to obtain real spiritual purification.

Water in Judeo-Christian Faith Tradition:

As we know the “Middle East” and “Near East” lands are mostly ‘deserts’. It is obvious that there were Water scarcity. So for the people of that land Water is expensive, important, unique and needy. The main source of Water in Palestine is rainfall. This moisture is carried up from the sea in clouds and fall on the hills as rain or snow. This supplies the spring and streams. The Bible was written in that part of the World, where there was no Water.

The rivers in Palestine are mostly small and have little or no Water in summer. Springs mostly supply water to the villages; but in case that is not sufficient, cisterns are used. And limestone is found in many areas; Wells and ponds or pools are not very common. This is why the wells and other water storage systems in the Bible have got names of the diggers. E.g. in Gen 21: 19 *Pool of Beersheba*, Gen 24:11 *Isaac’s Well*, John 4:6 *Jacob’s Well*, John 9:7 *Pool of Siloam*, Joshua 15:9 *The Waters of Nephtoah* etc.

Water in the Bible:

As we have seen earlier the scarceness of Water played an important role in the faith journey of the people of the Biblical era. Since water was something that goes with ‘fate’ it was understood by many ways. And it has become the main component as well as symbol in their faith interpretations. Let us see some of them.

Wrath of God:

The prophet Elijah, Jeremiah, and Haggai predict drought as punishment from God (1 Kings 17:1, Jeremiah 14: 1-6 and Haggai 1: 10-11). But conversely the rainfalls are seen and considered as a sign of God’s favor and goodness. The reason for the droughts was seen from the human sin against God. Even today the ‘human’s ecological sin’ bring drought to the world.

Danger and Death:

Water was often associated with danger and death, as in the story of the great flood, the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea and the fear of the Sea and Deep Waters expressed by the Psalmists as in Psalms. 32:6ff. In our context the Dams in the River Cauvery bring death and danger between Tamils and Kannadigas and Dams in Zuttleg brings division between the people of Punjab and Himachal and even People of Tibet.

Polluted Water:

Polluted Water is undrinkable, and it was also a very serious issue when the People of Egypt were affected by plagues, when the water of Nile River turned to blood (Exodus 7: 14-24). And when the Israelites left red sea and came to ‘Mara’, they found

the Water of that land was bitter and made a complaint to Moses to perform a miracle. Only upon the collective faith response, the act of God made bitter water into sweet (Exodus 15:22-27). If there will be a collective response towards these issues, the strength will make us free.

War and Water:

In warfare it was a common practice to cut off a city water supply as Josaphat did with the wells of Moab (2 Kings 3: 19-25). The similar events take place even now. And there is an unfortunate prediction that the third world war will be on the sharing and capturing of the water resources.

Water for Cleansing:

In every faith tradition Water is considered as a cleansing element in the 'spiritual life'. Priests were washed at their consecration (Ex 29:4), special ablutions were demanded for Priests on the Day of Atonement (Lev.16: 4, 24, 6) and of all men for the removal of ceremonial pollution (Lev. 11:40, 15:15, and Deut. 23:11). In Hebrew 10:22, Water is connected with the baptismal cleansing for the forgiveness of sins. Even in our traditions we can see the adherents of another faith go for pilgrimage to the water spots for washing out their sins.

Water is Spiritual Refreshment:

Water is also a symbolic of God's blessing and spiritual refreshment. This can be noted in many places in the Bible. E.g. (Isaiah's vision of the return to the redeemed to Zion) Isaiah 35:6-7 "... *For Waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water...*" And another reference from Isaiah 41: 17-18 "*When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights and fountains in the midst of valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water*".

Water is Spiritual Need:

Psalmist says in Psalms. 42:1. "*As a deer longs for flowing of streams, my soul long for you, O God*" This is a unique faith expression of the people in Bible. Because water only satisfies our thirsty need no other material. No human in the world would say 'enough' for any of their wants except 'Water'.

Water and Women:

Even today the Women and girls are walking a long distance and spend hours together ever-single day to provide the household with water. Not only now even during the biblical ages also women had similar experiences. The experience of the Samaritan woman in John's Gospel (4: 1-15) and Rebecca in Genesis 24: 15-21 are dealing with water and life. So it is so obvious that women play a vital role in the utilization, provision,

management and save of water in the Society. Along with the other oppressions the water problem also oppresses women today. But women are the best water managers, each and every women of today are very well in how to utilize and manage the available water. The women are very practical teachers to the family in teaching hoe to manage water. Especially the forth-coming generations Children are to be educated and encouraged in water management and to use the water in a very responsible manner.

Water is Right:

Water issue is the basic human right issue, because water is essential for life. We see poor and village women are running after the water tankers even in the midnights. Some times they force the government to provide, at least minimum water supply, by the strikes and disturbing the traffic, marching to the local authorities and they mostly achieve these demands to an extent from the governments and local authorities. The biblical characters like *Hagar* in Genesis 21: 14-21 is a classical example of fighting with God for water. Who made the Biblical God to provide water in the dessert! And in Exodus 15:22-27 the Israelites made God of the Bible to purify the undrinkable water into drinkable water. These incidents show the responsibilities of the God of the Bible in fulfilling the thirst of the people, because Water is the basic and fundamental right of each and every individual human being to have enough water for their thirst.

Water is Life:

In John's Gospel Jesus is portrayed as 'life'. The same Jesus in the same Gospel says that He is the living Water, because Water is life. This concept can only be understood by the people who live in the context of scarce of Water. Prophet Jeremiah describes God as "*the fountain of living Waters* (Jeremiah. 2: 13 and 17:13)". And in John 4:14 Jesus says that "... *but those who drink of the water that I give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life*". According to John the living water is water for life, which liberates the people from their bondage. This life giving water will satisfy the thirst of the needy. And God-self is the only component who satisfies the thirsty one. So it is very easy for us to understand that God-self is water.³ We all believe that we are all created in the image of God (Gen.1: 27ff). The image of God should not be understood by the physical image but by the attributes of God. If so when we see God as Water, which gives life to the Society, so we will have to reflect that Image also.

Faith Application for Action:

We can live without politics but not Water. The ancient Greek Philosopher says "one could never put one's own feet in the same river water twice." This saying talks about the ever-changing natural character of Water. Waters are forever moving, cascading down mountains, flowing over the plains at a snail's pace, the levels rising and falling with the seasons, on their journey to the sea. . This life giving characters are to be reflected in faith journey. '*Water is Life*' and '*God is Water*' are supposed to be considered as Gospel rather, which are to be made known to the Society. And also the church or any other faith community is to be made spiritually sensitive to this issue. We

³ James L. Mays, (Gen.Ed), Harper's Bible Commentary, Harper, San Francisco, New York, 1988. p.1052.

just cannot use water as we want, because Water, which we use, is not our ancestral property. It is Biblically a 'gift' of the 'Creator' for all living beings.

***“Water is our blood and marrow
Water is not a commodity
Water is gift of the Creator to all living beings
To be shared, to be valued
And
To be protected
For our corporate survival
Let us celebrate life with water.”⁴***

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⁴ M.J. Joseph “Poem on Water”, Displayed at ECC Whitefield, Bangalore.