

WATER

WHY IT MATTERS

Shona Bagai



A Note from Dr R K Pachauri

Water is Earth's most precious and critical resource. Throughout history, it has played a crucial role in the origin, well-being, and progress of civilizations. A basic need at the individual level, water is equally essential for society and the economy to thrive. Whether it is ensuring security of food supply, freedom from ailment, or smooth operation of industrial activities, water is a necessity in each case. A life-sustaining element, it is deeply embedded in the Indian ethos. After all, India derived its name from the great River Indus.

Even though about 70 per cent of the Earth's surface is covered with water, acute shortage of this "liquid of life" is one of twenty-first century's jarring realities. With global climate change and rapid increase in world population, demand for water is swelling by the day. However, supplies of freshwater are finite—in fact, dropping as we speak—while threats like pollution, oil spills, and acid rain keep contaminating the limited water resources at our disposal.

It is estimated that before 2025, India, a land once known for its rivers, will be included in the category of countries experiencing acute water scarcity. The reason is not only our burgeoning population, but also the manner in which we have taken this priceless resource for granted, and the ways in which we have overused and misused it.

As we proceed towards the last few years of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Life" (2005–15), there is a general consensus that the biggest obstacle ahead of us is how to bring about a change in our attitude towards water—the way we look at it and the way we manage it.

This book is a small step to affect that change. It introduces young readers to the world of water and emphasizes why treating this precious resource with care is indispensable for our personal health and our planet's well-being. As they leaf through the pages, I hope readers will be encouraged to contribute in their own small way to conserve our planet's water resources, keep them free from pollution, and ensure people have easy access to clean water.



R K Pachauri
Director-General, TERI
Chairman, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change