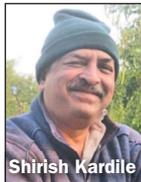


From the Board

Inspire India's Children to Ensure a Sustainable Water Future



Shirish Kardile

The Cuyahoga River, flowing through Cleveland, Ohio, was once one of the most polluted rivers in the United States, as indicated by the many times it caught fire—13, starting in 1868. The river's final fire occurred on June 22, 1969, shocking many Americans and inspiring Congress to resolve the issue of land and water pollution, not just in Cleveland, but throughout the country.

The tremendous public outcry resulted in the National Environment Policy Act, which was signed into law on Jan. 1, 1970, and helped establish the US Environmental Protection Agency later that year. The federal government wasted no time in passing vital environmental laws, including the Clean Water Act in 1972 and the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974. During the next 30 years, working tirelessly, water professionals made tap water safe and rivers swimmable throughout much of the country!

India's present water scenario is a reminder of America's past. Lakes in cyber cities like Bengaluru are catching fire, and many rivers are oozing toxic foam and

becoming sewer drains. The government is pouring money into improving the nation's water infrastructure. However, these efforts are made null and void because of an ever-increasing population and a lack of coherent management policy at the central think tank. For comparison's sake, during these happenings, India has sent a space capsule to orbit Mars, a first for the country.

Maybe young and democratic India's priorities were different initially, and one can't debate the pride of becoming a sovereign and strong nation first. However, India's newfound respect in the world is severely diminished by the nation's pathetic drinking water and sanitation situation.

To crack the jigsaw puzzle of India's total water solutions will require many and mighty efforts, but there is hope. Indeed, if the world's mightiest democracy could do it in the past, why not the largest in the present!

No doubt, it will be a long haul. Even by a conservative estimate it will take 50 years to achieve a basic American-style water infrastructure for even half of India's 1.3 billion strong souls. During the beginning of America's water system buildout, AWWA had started educating children as

a part of its overall water education policy. We Indians can copy that idea, knowing that when the elder Indian generation is on the verge of becoming complacent and too tolerant, the children will renew their confidence and enthusiasm.

Naturally, all kids love water. We just need to guide them to adore and respect it. We must give them the big picture of the water cycle and how a human being is part of it. See how easily, playfully, and innocently they adopt cellphones, laptops, and other gadgets. We must ensure they dream fearlessly and ferociously of sparkling water and kindle the hope of an improved lifestyle.

Toward that end, AWWA's new *Water Wonderful* children's workbook is just the panacea. AWWA has taken great efforts to develop current versions of the workbook in English and Hindi for India. The text is simple, the illustrations are child-like, and interactive sections will enhance a child's creativity. Once kids become friends of water, they'll share their secrets and thoughts. As they grow up, they'll start learning about happy and angry waters!

Once they reach adulthood, this Indian generation should be forever grateful for not having a guilty conscience in their sunset years. They'll know they played a valuable role in helping to solve India's water crisis and to ensure, if not sparkling water for their generation, surely for future ones.

AWWA is currently seeking sponsors to help distribute *Water Wonderful* throughout India's schools.

"I urge any corporate, government, or community-based entity that wants to promote safe drinking water throughout India to help sponsor *Water Wonderful's* distribution in schools throughout the country," says AWWA CEO David LaFrance. "We need to instill the value of water in these children from an early age."

—Shirish Kardile,
AWWAIndia Strategic Board Chair

