

SIMPLE INNOVATIONS LIKE THE TAP HAVE DISTANCED PEOPLE FROM PROBLEMS AT THE SOURCE

# See life through a water prism

Rohini Nilekani

World Water Day has come again. Did we do anything differently about our use and abuse of water since the last Water Day? At the gross level, it appears not. Because, in the context of India, this past year was one of interspersed drought, inflation in food prices, increasing evidence of ground-water depletion and plummeting water quality, rising agitation about river pollution, etc. At least 100 million of our citizens had no assurance of the safety of the water they drank every single day.

Yet, I believe, now, in 2010, that issues of water have finally come to the centre stage they deserve in all conversations. Whether it is in the question of our relentless pursuit of economic growth, or in the temporary wisdom of the green revolution, or even in the understanding that there are critical tradeoffs to be made between our water security and our international relations — there is no escaping the overarching influence of water in our politics and social life.

I believe that ordinary people have begun to renewably understand the criticality of water for their well being and for the security of their children's future. It was always so in the past, before technological innovations as humble as the pump or the tap, enabled generations to dis-

distance them from the problems at the source.

In urban India, how many of us actually know and care that the water we take for granted, that we get so upset about if it does not leak into our taps at 7 am, actually comes from a source very far away, possibly depriving many others along the way, until it reaches our homes?

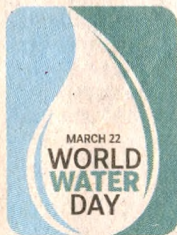
I think many conversations are happening that are looking at how we redesign our cities to be more water sustainable. We know that the Western model of flushing a few grams of nutritious human waste with several litres of water, and sending it down to harm the environment makes little long-term sense.

We know we have a new opportunity to rewrite the urban story through the lens of water.

Water is embedded in everything we do. Ever since the idea of 'virtual water' has gained ground, we have to understand the use of water not just by how many cupfuls or bucketfuls we actually see and use, but through its use in the clothes we wear — and I am told that denim jeans need the most water in their production cycles —



**WATER LESSONS:**  
On World Water Day, Rohini Nilekani, chairperson, Arghyam, an NGO working in water sector, argues for a need to look afresh at issues involving water



## Pratham Books celebrates World Water Day



Pratham Books celebrated World Water Day at Government Urdu Higher Primary School, DJ Halli. The events included reading of *Cauvery*, a book written by Oriole Henry and printed on recycled paper. This was followed by a demonstration of a unique water saving technique. Tippy Tap, a device designed by Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology students, to wash hands with soap using small amounts of water, was installed in the school.

The organisers distributed prizes for the "Conserve our Rivers, Save Water" campaign, which was launched in October last to mark the book's publication. The campaign called upon students, teachers and others to sign up and become Water Champions. Over 1,22,000 people across India signed up.

and the items we use (and often throw) every day.

So this puts a wholly different perspective on water. It means that ALL of us, whether we like it or not, are trustees of the finite water on this planet, and of that share of it as falls on our own country. It means that each one of us will behave with the knowledge that when we use water, we also willy-nilly pollute it and make it that much more expensive to return to its natural state.

This knowledge itself is full of potential for the younger generations to harness. What kind of products, services and systems will next generation entrepreneurs, social scientists, and mavericks bring to the table to address this fundamental issue of safe, sustainable water for all? We look forward to the churn, the innovation that lies ahead.

THE WRITER IS CHAIRPERSON OF ARGHYAM WHICH IS A PUBLIC CHARITABLE FOUNDATION WORKING IN WATER SECTOR  
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