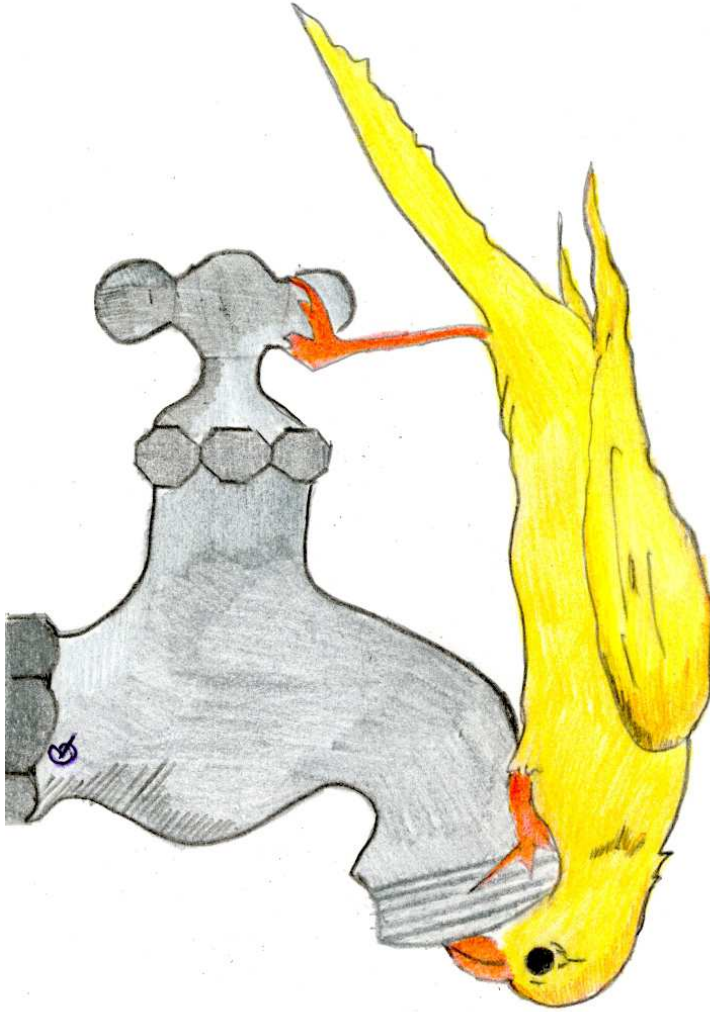

WATER FOR ALL & OTHER POEMS



G Venkatesh

*For my mother and father -
Mr. and Mrs. C R Govindarajan,
who taught me to value
and appreciate everything on
the surface of this earth as a gift
from God...water as well.
This compilation is in their honour.*

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The poems (or doggerels, if you may), in this compilation have water as the *leitmotif* – the common strand running through all of them. The language and the construct are intentionally lucid. Poetic license has not been availed of, in order to reach out easily to a much wider readership than conventional, contemporary poetry does. Illustrations in the form of photographs and sketches have been used, and the poems and accompanying titbits of factual information, in their capacities as the rational counterparts, places them in context.

Water has possibly been taken for granted over the years. Its value has been known only when the ‘well has run dry’, so to say. But during the last couple of decades, the long-overdue realisation of its importance has slowly dawned upon the world. It behoves one and all to seriously contemplate upon and feel grateful for every drop of water that makes our lives liveable in the true sense of the term. What you will read in the pages that follow are excerpts from this compilation.

I am keen on reaching out to potential publishers / magazine or newspaper editors / NGOs who may be interested in publishing this compilation or sponsoring its publication for that matter – for-profit or for-charity. The poems have been introduced and critiqued in forewords by well-known people associated with the field of water and sanitation. I shall look forward to hearing from interested parties at venkatesh_cg@yahoo.com and/or Venkatesh.govindarajan@ntnu.no

2011

Venkatesh¹ , Trondheim (Norway), Year-

1. SON SETS DAD THINKING



Early in the morning before going to school,
little John went to pee and poo.
He flushed once, twice, thrice and a fourth time;
papa Jack had to disapprove.
'Don't keep flushing, son; once is enough,
you do not waste good water ever.
We are lucky to get water everyday,
without it, there are millions who suffer.
'If it is good water, Daddy, why do I
use it to flush my poo down the drain?
Why don't we use dirty water instead,
from puddles which form outside in the rain?'
'I have no time to answer,
you're getting late for school, John.
Hurry, take your satchel and get going,
else, the bus will be gone.'

¹ Venkatesh works in the Department of Hydraulic and Environmental Engineering at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim (NTNU) as a postdoctoral researcher.

At night when he went to bed,
Jack's thoughts kept him awake for long.
'How come it never occurred to me -
this question raised by little John?'

2. ACID FOR GRATIS



One rainy morning
in 2024,
the laboratory ran out
of H_2SO_4 .
Class starts at
quarter to nine.
It is already
eight thirty-nine.
Jack looked out
wondering,
at the dark sky
thundering.
He sought and found
a way out.
Acid rain from
heaven's spout.
'Every cloud has

a sulphur lining,'
he smiled sarcastically
at the modified saying.

POINT TO PONDER

The escalating level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is making the world's oceans more acidic, Government and independent scientists say. They warn that, by the end of the century, the trend could decimate coral reefs and creatures that underpin the sea's food-web. Although scientists and some politicians have just begun to focus on the question of ocean acidification, they describe it as one of the most pressing environmental threats facing Earth.

-Juliet Filtering, "Growing Acidity of Oceans May Kill Corals,"
Washington Post, 5 July 2006
(sourced from <http://www.stthomas.edu/recycle/water.htm>)

3. UNPARDONABLE DEED



An ecosystem, neat and clean,
lotus leaves and fish and bird.
Snake in hiding sometimes seen,
buzzing bees often heard.
Chirping birds at eventide.
Yellow butterflies aflutter.
The snake scurries away to hide
as a toddler pitches a pebble in the water.

It was all so enthralling, serene and calm,
But that was yesterday evening.
Today, I see something more,
deplorable, despicable wrong-doing
Haughty man or perhaps mindless woman
of the supreme *homo sapien* breed,
shamelessly stooping down to commit
an utterly unpardonable deed.

4. FORGOTTEN LESSONS



Washing cars, watering lawns
bathing long at wintry dawns.
They sent a lot down the drain
and cried foul at the truant rain.

Those old pipes leaking away,
none was bothered, none did pay.
'Not my problem,' all did say,
passing the buck, the Indian way.

Taps today are running dry.
They blame their fate, and curse and sigh,
grudgingly get their buckets and buy,
privileged few with *hoi polloi*.

The monsoon next year will be strong,
There'll be water in pipes all day long.
Lessons learnt will be forgotten,
and taps turned on with gay abandon.

POINTS TO PONDER

Water and air, the two essential fluids on which all life depends, have become global garbage cans.

-Jacques Cousteau (1910-1997)
(sourced from <http://www.stthomas.edu/recycle/water.htm>)

**The frog does not
Drink up
The pond in which
He lives.**

-American Indian proverb; quoted in Water Wasteland by
David Zwick & Marcy Benstock, 1971
(sourced from <http://www.stthomas.edu/recycle/water.htm>)

**Whosoever wishes to investigate medicine properly, must consider
the water being used by inhabitants – for water contributes much
to health.**

-Attributed to Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, 400 BC

5. NEVER WANT TO BE A TAP AGAIN



Photo by G Venkatesh, in Trondheim, Norway

Hands! Wish I had them
to close myself when others don't,
or the power of speech
to talk to those who won't.
It has been a dozen years or so,
a saga of silent suffering.
Mute witness to callous wastage
that has gone abegging.
I shall soon find myself
amidst a pile of metal scrap.
I pray that I am not recast,
as a helpless kitchen tap.

POINTS TO PONDER

With respect to water, Canadians and Americans suffer from the same disease: We say that it is priceless, but act as if it were absurdly cheap. Most North Americans pay far less for their water than even just the cost of supplying it, cleaning it up and returning it to the environment. Yet subsidizing water use is economically and ecologically disastrous. In fact, heavy subsidization of water in the US is the cause of any water "shortages" that may exist there.

-Editorial, The Toronto Globe and Mail, 23 May 1998
(sourced from <http://www.stthomas.edu/recycle/water.htm>)

Whiskey is for drinkin'; water is for fightin'.

-attributed to Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens)

Nothing is more useful than water. But it will purchase scarce any thing. Scarce any thing can be had in exchange for it.

-Adam Smith, in 'An enquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations'

6. MIRRORING LIFE



Snow atop compact snow,
staying put happily for long.
Baby in her comfort zone,
mother's arms, lullaby song.

Icy stretches throwing off-balance
careless pedestrians and reckless vehicles.
Disobedient teens, erring, impatient,
raising unfailingly their parents' hackles.

Flowing water, as spring blossoms,
young adulthood marching to freedom,
moving onward towards its goals,
fluid flexible, gathering momentum.

Stormy seas get their moments of calm,
basking under the warmth of the Sun.
Old men, in retirement, contemplating,
life's journey from snow to ocean.

And then the warm vapours ascending,
as the Spirit Soul commences its flight.
Clouds form in the heavens above,
to send down snow on a wintry night.

7. FOUR HOURS A DAY



I hear that many people spend,
over a third of their lives in slumber.
Five years sating the palate,
as many in purposeless chatter.

More idle hours criticising and complaining,
about things that do not matter.
Consuming with egregious delight,
all they get on a platter.

Ever since I was four years old,
I have spent four hours everyday,
carrying a pot of water on my head;
that makes its six years to the day!

POINTS TO PONDER

In just one day, more than 200 million hours of women's time are spent on the most basic of human needs – collecting water for domestic use. This lost productivity is greater than the combined number of hours worked in a week by employees at Walmart, United Parcel Service, McDonald's, IBM, Target and Kroger, according to Gary White, the co-founder of www.water.org.

- Sourced from <http://water.org/learn-about-the-water-crisis/facts>

About 66% of the households worldwide spend at least two hours day just to fetch water.

- Sourced from Rural, Municipal and Industrial Water Management, by Dr KVSG Murali Krishna. Reem Publications, India

If water was scarce, and had to be brought from a distance of two miles, that would become *yajna* (sacrifice).

-M K Gandhi in 'The Bhagavad Gita', published by Orient Paperbacks in 1980. ISBN 81-222-0007-9

8. DROPLET IN DILEMMA



Water droplet stopped in its tracks,
on its way down from the cloud,
at a very puzzling crossroads.
A pause to think out loud.
'What's the best service I can render,
for a sense of total fulfilment?
They all need me equally,
for food, drink and raiment.
Farmers need drinking water
but also water for their fields.
They can feed and clothe their family-folk,
only if they increase their yields.
Wish I could vaporise at will,
head back up and wait longer.
Take more time to study the scene
and drop back when the will is stronger.'

POINT TO PONDER

Singapore's 3000-hectare reservoir system loses more than 45 million cubic metres of water annually through evaporation.

-Sourced from Water21 magazine, October 2010 issue, Page 21

Water is involved in everything and influenced by everything.

-Sourced from Water21 magazine, June 2012, Page 12. Attributed to Professor Janos Bogardi, Executive Officer of the Global Water System Project (at the time of writing)