

# **WATER CRISIS IN ASIA PACIFIC REGION AND VIABLE ROLE OF MUSEUM EDUCATION IN WATER MANAGEMENT**

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In fact, this presentation has been prepared in the theme of *Asia and Pacific Museum Education and Water Shortage*<sup>2</sup>. Based on that it is true to note that museum education is a specialized field devoted to developing and strengthening the education role of non-formal education spaces and institutions such as museums. Its main aim is to engage people in learning experiences to generate their curiosity and interest on their artifacts / objects and collections. It is because, the public dimensions of museum lead them to perform public service of education. Which would be a term that in its broadest sense includes exploration, study, observation, critical thinking, contemplation and dialogue.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, any museum from Asia Pacific and world would be a school of informal set up but very effective education which may consist of history (of war, peace, drought , cultivation, industries, water crisis , etc) , culture and heritage . It is also true to recall that museums are very useful institutions to generate public awareness and conflict mitigation initiative as well. The presentation will discuss water politics holding between China and South Asia. Likewise, Asian continent or Asia Pacific region gets three global folds as:

- EMERGING ECONOMIC SUPER POWER WITH LARGEST POPULATION**

The political economy in the world has tended to change in every turn of century because until the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe was leading but from around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century America excelled Europe in its economic might. Predictably, the power is shifting from America to Asia in a couple of decades' time for China to take the lead, India trying every means to take the lead. Therefore Asia is sure to emerge as a strong economy in the world.

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<sup>2</sup> This paper was prepared for the ICOM-Iran conference. But the scribe did not go Iran due to personal interest.

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Museum\\_education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Museum_education)

- **LIKELY SUPER POWERS CONFLICT ZONES IN NEAR FUTURE**

On its part, apparently, America does not like to let go its long held super power status, and in order to retain the status, it has opted to a policy of setting a spark of conflict in the Asia Pacific region to prevent the countries there to come in good terms by means of its increased presence there. Its recent attempt to ignite conflict among the Arab Countries and embitter relations of Iraq, Syria, Iran and Gulf countries is a glaring example of its policy. Its major move is to prevent ties to happen between China and India and by play of other countries to stop China's economic development. America's unspoken plan is to set India against China, to prevent ties to happen between China and Japan, to engage North Korea and Japan in conflict, to stall the likely unification of two Koreas, to incite North Korea to war so that it can increase its military presence over there. America and the West want war to break out from Asia. And if their wish works they want China and India, North and South Korea and Japan to engage in the quagmire of war. Let us wish this will never happen and the Asian countries will read the West and America's intent.

- **THE WATER CRISIS IN THE REGION**

Asia Pacific region, the world's most populous continent, is also the most water scarce continent after Antarctica. Water-related problems are particularly acute in this region and experts project that reduced access to fresh water will lead to a cascading set of consequences, including impaired food production, the loss of livelihood security, large-scale migration within and across borders and increased geopolitical tensions and instabilities. Similarly, in the Middle East region, water is one of the most valuable and vulnerable natural resources. Water shortage and the increased demand associated with uncontrolled development, intensive agriculture, mass tourism, overpopulation and over-consumption results in a complexity of interrelated problems affecting social, economic and natural aspects of everyday life. In other words, it seems problem is getting unavoidable.

## **MIDDLE EAST**

The Middle East is a water stressed region whose natural resources are becoming increasingly vulnerable with increased demand of development, agriculture, tourism, overpopulation etc. Even the main reason for Iran's rapidly declining water resources due to rapid population growth. On the otherhand, Jordan has the third lowest reserves in the region. The United Arab Emirates faced with a growing population has invested in desalination of projects and is harvesting rainwater. At an international water conference in Abu Dhabi in 2013, Crown Prince General Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan said: "For us, water is [now] more important than oil."<sup>4</sup>

## **SOUTH ASIA**

Whosoever imposes its hegemony over Tibet will enjoy total control over the Himalayan bed and the one who controls the Himalayan bed will obviously have the leverage to challenge entire South Asia. Not surprisingly, the one who can challenge South Asia can also easily do so over the Middle East, East Asia including the Asia Pacific. In the context of China's control over Tibet, its geo-strategic leverage has given it (China) a super power status in the world mainly because of Tibet's geostrategic location with massive water reserves there. Understandably, next to the Arctic Area, Tibet by nature is endowed with massive water reserves. That's why it is often regarded as a third pole as no other country in the world is so rich with water reserves as Tibet. The water reserves in the Arctic region continue to remain unused for human use and benefit but that of Tibet is enough to meet the demand of Middle Asia, South Asia and almost the half of the world's population.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/feb/09/global-water-shortages-threat-terror-war>



Tibet as water source of many countries

On the other hand, the occupation of Kashmir by India has become a never ending conflict in the global war history. To everyone's dismay, Killing of Indian and Pakistani has now become no surprise. In fact it is a fight of ego clash, in my opinion. Indian Army and Ministry of Defense on 29 Sep, 12016 claimed to have blown off seven terrorist hotspots and gunned down several terrorists in a **surgical strike** (according to the Indian version) in Pakistan controlled Kashmir. In a context Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a warning remarked, '**Because blood and water cannot flow at the same time, India according to treaty of sharing of water cannot by any means let Pakistan use it**'. Indian media had done much hype of court's directive of postponement of usual meeting about water sharing from the Sindhu River. To disallow Pakistan from use of water would not just go against the spirit of the water treaty of 1960 in mediation of World Bank but also violate the practice of international law, something akin to announcement of war against Pakistan, Dawn-a Pakistan Daily wrote on 27 September referring to Pak foreign policy advisor and veteran statesman.



Sindhu (Indus) River

The Tribune- another Pakistani Daily on October 1, 2016 wrote that shortly after such threat issued by India, China too on its part blocked the water of a tributary river of the Brahmaputra. The Diplomat, another Daily on September 30, 2016 wrote although China dubbed the of blockade of water at Lalho hydroelectricity project just as a technical act and made it clear that it (China) would not block water from the Brahmaputra River to India, it was a balanced symbolic gestural response to India for its treatment against Pakistan. It goes ahead to write that just in case India takes any move against Pakistan contrary to the Sindhu River Water Treaty, China will feel pressed to adopt similar policy against India.



Bramha Putra River

The 2017 China-India standoff or much talked about Doklam standoff refers to the military border standoff between Indian armed forces and the People's Liberation Army of China over the construction of a road in Doklam, known as Donglong or Donglang Caochang (meaning Donglang pasture or grazing field) in Chinese. On August 20, 2017, Global Times, a sister publication in foreign affairs of the Chinese Communist Party's Bulletin People's Daily wrote China accepted that at a time when China- India dispute was raging, it (China) withheld the exchange of information about the Brahmaputra River water for safety reasons as there had been natural disasters such as floods and landfalls. But spokesperson of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, Geng Suwang on September 12 defended Chinese side by citing reason of difficulty in collection and dissemination of necessary information about it due to destruction of the information infrastructure by the flood in the Brahmaputra River. In an answer to a query, he had made it clear that China would never oblige to its accountability of information because India breached its norm of encroachment in Doklam.



Doklam

The 2,800 km long Brahmaputra River with several tributaries flows through Tibet along its track of 2057 km before reaching India. According to a renowned Indian water strategy expert Brahm Chellani, the war for territorial defense and integrity in the past is now shifting for energy and then for water in the recent time. Most menacingly, it is likely to surge in Asia. Moreover, Chellani deduces that China that has control over the rivers from India to Vietnam and from Russia to Kazakhstan is likely to be one major part in fight for water.

### **WATER WOULD BE LIKE A CONVENTIONAL BOMB**

Guardian, a British Daily in December 12, 2014 brought out a news commentary that China inaugurated the longest ever manmade 2, 400 km canal and tunnel way constructed worth \$ 48 trillion. China has almost the same number of dams as the world. By constructing a dam in the upper part of the Rivers: the Brahmaputra serving as the sole water source for the entire Arunachal and Assam Provinces of India, and Mekong known as the lifeblood for the South East Asia, China can push the lower coastal countries into water strain region. Not just



Mekong River

that. It can, without spending a bullet in fight, control over the water sources of Tibet to hold the coastal countries hostage, and for India it is an alarm bell of tragedy.

China alone is the source of origin of 40 international rivers 16 of which flow down to other countries whereas only 40 percent water from the 11 rivers originated in China and flowing down from other countries reach India. Of the total water resources of India, Tibetan source counts about one third. Therefore, any agreement or disagreement between the two countries about water from the rivers flowing down from Tibet to India and those originated in Tibet, flowing through Nepal to India is a question of crucial importance for the country. One third of the water from the rivers otherwise flowing down to India is now being brought to the water scarce area of China which has constructed 20 huge dams and 40 others are in process of construction to its 8 biggest rivers for water use.

It is equally likely that China can halt its ongoing construction of dams and canals for a time being in order to turn to use its water reserves as weapon to cause floods and massive landfalls to Indian border side. Any such action on the part of China can leave millions of people dead within hours, the havoc more disastrous than could be done by any atom bomb. Asia since a long time period has witnessed several such explosive strategic centers. A combination of multiple reasons, since the end of World War II, say for example the

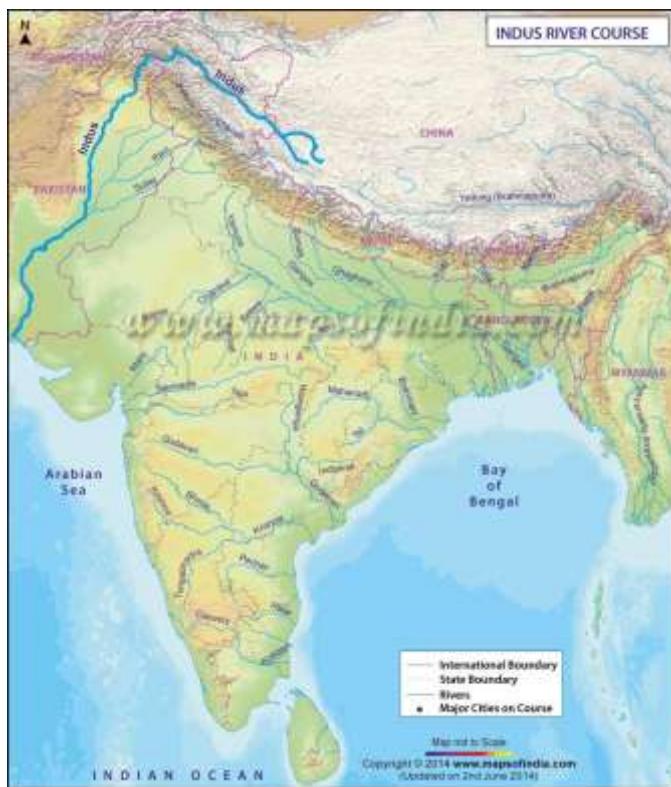
increasing economic and military might and pride of superiority of India and China, the emergence of new partners/ arch enemies by the competition thereof, the fresh leverage of China as lord of the water reserves, the countries sharing borders with China but possessed of atomic prowess and passing through tense relations in all make Tibet an explosive center in the region.

## **REGIONAL COOPERATION IN WATER USE AND NEPALESE CONTEXT**

What is the sole reason as source of the relentless Maoist rebellion in Nepal, violence ridden north east belt of India, fierce Indo-China competition of energy generation and the nexus of the Muslim terrorists from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh? The short answer to the question is water politics. The root of the conflict reaches as far as water politics. If the water from the rivers originated in the Himalayas and flowing through Nepal and Bhutan were to be harnessed for long term use and development, the rivers have the potential to bring stability and prosperity over the entire South Asia. The hydro potential of Nepal, India and Pakistan combined crosses 20 million Mg. Watt power generation but only a quarter of it has been brought in use. The crisis of confidence among the countries is hindering the massive possibility. Nepal ranks as one of the water rich countries in terms of its water resources. Not surprisingly, if the water released from the reserve system were to be reused for energy generation, Nepal has more hydro potential than one can imagine. Similarly, it would ease the supply, drink of clean water and energy generation if Nepal, India and Bangladesh in collaboration could build large reserves to store water that would otherwise flow further down to meet the sea. Unfortunately, forget about water for irrigation, Nepal suffers from acute shortage of clean drinking water. Needless to say, we in Nepal import electricity from India. Sound water management presupposes competent and accountable governance, but we in Nepal unable to blend managerial competence with diplomatic deft for optimum use of water, are destined to suffer extreme poverty and instability, heading fast to a failed state. Sound water management is the need of the hour.

According to the last president of the USSR Mikhail Gorvachov, there has been a widening gap between the supply status of water and the size of population. As a result, by 2025 about 1, 80,000,000 people will starve of water and another two third of the world population will

suffer water stress which will invite unthinkable problem of political tension, mass migration, acute economic shortage, political instability and threat to regional and international security, all to drag the world to a dreadful scenario. About 60 percent of the water reserves and rivers numbering around a hundred flows through two or so countries out of which only 40 percent of the rivers and reserves of water has been agreed upon for use. UN convention in place clearly speaks about the use of water but China and other South Asian countries have not approved it.



### Origin of Sidhu (Indus) River

In the treaty of Sindhu River water utilization between India and Pakistan in 1960 in the mediation of the World Bank, India sounds liberal but Nepal and Bangladesh have not been able to realize that relaxation. Because there still lingers doubt that India's generosity will remain only on the treaty in third party mediation, if a treaty of water utilization between Nepal, India, Bhutan and Bangladesh is signed in the mediation of the World Bank or any other International organization, it would pave way to the building of common regional

infrastructure for water utilization and would mitigate all fears to generate an environment of trust to ensure regional peace and stability.

## **ROLE OF MUSEUM EDUCATION IN WATER CRISIS MANAGEMENT**

Besides, in my presentations in international forums, I have claimed that museums can be set to act as a peace center to build peace in the conflict ridden countries including water crisis management. And this is possible too.



In the scary context of one country split into many by conflict by natural resources , war and colony, and embittered by feud and contempt now see the possibility of rebuilding/rejoining with a glue of identical culture and civilization. Another aspect not much attended to is that almost 80 percent of the conflicts happen in the poor countries. Search of race, region, religion and language related identity, drinking water, irrigation, and poverty coupled with lack of access to resources fan the fire to conflict. Identity based conflict outnumber the conflict due to lack of basic needs. As referred to above, what one finds is people seek

representational access to resources from their respective castes, religion, lineage, culture and civilization. Such conflicts tend to be detrimental challenging to massive ethnic cleansing.

There are abundant examples of such conflicts in the world. Clear enough, all revolt and conflict have their roots to search of equality in natural resources, identity, and foundation of museums and rewriting of history to some extent calms the fire of fury. Because the museums keep things to represent the ethnic groups, they own up a sense of ‘we-feeling’ to generate a sentiment of collective love and ownership. If government offers a little assistance to set up and operation of museums, they will sustain and grow up.

At the end, undeniably, the stress of water will cause war in different forms in the world. The conservation of the origin and sources of water, minimize its use and shared utility of water can avert the impending war for water. The most important thing is the creation of awareness about the importance of water in order to crisis management, for which the following tips are of use:

- Presentation and public speaking
- Weighing different perspectives through small group work and discussion
- Use strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, estimate and appreciate information gathered
- Use information gathered to reach a conclusion regarding controversial topic and use information gathered to support or enhance a research project.
- Confidence building initiatives through scholars