

## UNDERSTANDING WATER SCARCITY AND MANAGEMENT IN THE MARATHI FILM PAANI

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### Abstract

Water scarcity is a critical issue affecting millions of people worldwide, particularly in regions with irregular rainfall and poor water management policies. The Marathi film Paani (2024), directed by Adinath Kothare and produced by Priyanka Chopra, highlights the grave issue of water scarcity in rural Maharashtra. The film, based on true events, portrays the struggle of a drought-affected village that battles against water shortages through sustainable management and community-driven efforts. This research paper examines the film's depiction of water crisis and management, linking it to real-life challenges and solutions in India and beyond. The paper also examines the depiction of the water crisis in 'Paani' and the community-driven management strategies employed to address it. By analyzing the film's narrative and its real-life inspirations, the study highlights the significance of collective action and sustainable practices in combating water scarcity. By analyzing the socio-economic, environmental, and political dimensions of water scarcity, the paper highlights the importance of grassroots initiatives and policy interventions in water conservation.

**Key Words:** Water Scarcity, Water Management, Paani,

### Introduction

Water is a crucial resource, yet its availability is increasingly under threat due to overuse, mismanagement, and climate change. According to a report by NITI Aayog (2018), India is facing its worst-ever water crisis, with nearly 600 million people experiencing high to extreme water stress. In Maharashtra, recurrent droughts have devastated rural communities, particularly in the Marathwada region.

The film Paani (2024) presents a compelling narrative about the real-life struggles of a village facing severe water shortages. Inspired by the success story of Nagdarwadi village in Maharashtra, the film portrays how a determined community, led by a visionary young man, overcomes water scarcity through conservation efforts, policy advocacy, and sustainable management. This research paper analyzes the film's themes, comparing them with real-world water crises and exploring potential solutions for sustainable water management.

### Comprehending the Water Crisis: A Worldwide and Indian Outlook

#### 1. Causes of Water Scarcity

- Water scarcity arises due to several interconnected factors:

- **Climate Change:** Unpredictable monsoons and rising temperatures have led to prolonged droughts and shrinking water bodies (IPCC, 2019).
- **Over-extraction of Groundwater:** India is the world's largest user of groundwater, with excessive extraction leading to depletion and contamination (Central Ground Water Board, 2020).
- **Deforestation and Soil Degradation:** Reduced forest cover and poor land management hinder water retention and recharge capacity.
- **Inefficient Water Use in Agriculture:** Around 80% of India's freshwater is used for irrigation, yet inefficient methods like flood irrigation result in water wastage (Shah, 2010).
- **Lack of Policy Implementation:** Poor governance and delayed water conservation policies worsen the crisis.

In Paani, the village's water crisis is portrayed as a result of both natural factors (drought) and human negligence (poor water conservation). The film serves as a wake-up call for communities and policymakers to take proactive measures.

## 2. Water Crisis in Maharashtra:

Maharashtra is one of the states most affected by water scarcity. The Marathwada region, in particular, has faced multiple droughts in the last decade. Reports indicate that over 20,000 villages in the state experience acute water shortages during summer (Maharashtra Water Resources Department, 2020).

The film Paani is inspired by the success story of Nagdarwadi, a village that transformed its fate through water conservation techniques like watershed management, check dams, and rainwater harvesting. The film emphasizes the importance of self-reliance and sustainable practices in tackling water scarcity. 'Paani' centers on Hanumant Kendre, an ordinary man from Nagdarwadi, a village plagued by drought. The film illustrates the daily struggles of villagers, especially women, who travel miles to fetch water. The scarcity affects agriculture, livelihoods, and even personal relationships, as seen when Hanumant's marriage proposal is rejected due to the village's water problems.

Determined to resolve the crisis, Hanumant collaborates with organizations like Sanskriti Samvardhan Mandal (SSM) and the Watershed Organisation Trust (WOTR). Together, they implement watershed projects, constructing check dams, percolation tanks, and contour bunds to conserve water. The film emphasizes the role of community participation, especially by women, in these initiatives.

## Portrayal of Water Management in the Movie Paani:

### 1. Water Conservation Driven by Communities

One of the key themes in Paani is the power of community-driven initiatives.

The protagonist, inspired by real-life social reformers, mobilizes villagers to implement water-saving techniques. These include:

**Rainwater Harvesting:** Capturing and storing rainwater to replenish groundwater.

**Watershed Management:** Preventing soil erosion and enhancing water retention through afforestation and contour bunding.

**Recharge Dams and Soak Pits:** Constructing small barriers to recharge aquifers and sustain water flow during dry seasons.

These techniques mirror real-world initiatives like the Pani Panchayat movement in Maharashtra, which has successfully implemented water conservation projects in drought-prone areas (Shah, 2007).

## 2. Importance of Leadership and Awareness

In Paani, the protagonist plays a crucial role in educating villagers about the importance of sustainable water use. This reflects real-world success stories such as Rajendra Singh, known as the "Waterman of India," who has revived several dried-up rivers through traditional water conservation methods (Singh, 2015).

Awareness campaigns and local leadership are crucial in tackling water scarcity. Villages like Hiware Bazar in Maharashtra have demonstrated how disciplined water budgeting and participatory governance can lead to long-term sustainability (Pathak, 2018).

## 3. Obstacles in Enforcing Water Management:

While Paani showcases the successful revival of a village, it also highlights challenges such as:

- Resistance from villagers due to lack of awareness.
- Political interference and bureaucratic hurdles.
- Climate variability and delayed monsoons.

These challenges are similar to those faced in real-life water conservation projects. However, with sustained efforts, community engagement, and government support, such challenges can be overcome.

## Insights from Paani for Practical Water Management

### 1. Blending Traditional and Contemporary Methods

The film emphasizes the revival of traditional water conservation methods, which can be integrated with modern technologies like: The narrative of 'Paani' is inspired by true events in Nagdarwadi. In the late 1990s, under the leadership of Hanumant Babu Kendre, the village undertook significant water conservation efforts. These initiatives transformed the drought-prone area into a model of water management, showcasing the impact of collective action and sustainable practices.

**Drip and Sprinkler Irrigation:** To reduce water wastage in agriculture.

**Desalination and Water Recycling:** In urban areas to enhance water availability.

**Satellite Monitoring:** For tracking water levels and planning conservation strategies.

### 2. Government Measures and Policy Changes

India has several water conservation programs, including:

**Jal Shakti Abhiyan (2019):** A government initiative to improve water conservation and supply.

**Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):** Used for building water conservation structures in rural areas.

**Atal Bhujal Yojana (2020):** Aimed at sustainable groundwater management.

The success of such programs depends on proper implementation, transparency, and

community participation. The film Paani reinforces the importance of government and community collaboration in water conservation.

### 3. Water as a Fundamental Human Need

The United Nations recognizes access to clean water as a fundamental human right (United Nations, 2010). However, in many parts of India, water is still a privilege rather than a right. The film Paani highlights the disparities in water access and stresses the need for equitable distribution policies.

### Conclusion

The Marathi film Paani is more than just a cinematic portrayal of a village's struggle for water; it is a powerful commentary on the real-life water crisis faced by millions. The film serves as an inspiration for adopting sustainable water management practices, promoting community participation, and pushing for effective policies. 'Paani' serves as a poignant reminder of the water challenges faced by rural communities and the power of collective action in addressing them. The film underscores the importance of sustainable water management practices and the role of community involvement in overcoming environmental crises.

By analyzing the film's narrative and connecting it to real-world challenges, this research paper underscores the urgent need for action. The lessons from Paani—rainwater harvesting, watershed management, and community-driven conservation—are not just solutions for a fictional village but practical strategies that can be replicated in water-scarce regions worldwide.

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