

Role of Natural Water Channels in Delhi

Water has formed the spine of development over the ages with habitations clustered around perennial sources of water- rivers, *nallahs*/ storm water channels and other natural water systems.

In our country water has acquired mythological as well as religious significance in the mindsets of the people. It is surprising then that these natural features have been ignored and often consciously left out of the developmental planning proposals for the city of Delhi.

These channels served as *blueways* to convey the excess rainwater to the river and hence were a vital source of fresh water. Today this valuable resource is transformed to a negative urban space often serving as squatting ground for the migrant population in the city.

There are 17 such major drains that convey their contents to the River Yamuna that is the main source of water supply as well as drainage for the National Capital Territory of Delhi.

Like the storm water drains, this river too has suffered at the hands of the so-called process of “urbanisation”. For the last couple of years efforts have been made and proposals put forward to develop the river front into a scenic stretch –to turn the city back to its river-as was the case uptill the 19th Century in the history of the city.

It is obvious that no riverfront proposal can be successful unless the water in the river is cleaned up. Doing this by setting up treatment plants at the outfall points of the drains that are carrying large volumes of run off becomes a huge task by itself.

If the pollution cannot be controlled at its source it would seem feasible to treat the water stretch by stretch along the respective drains thus minimising the pollution load of the discharge in the river. Further in time of increasing population and depleting open spaces, the land abutting these waterways seems to offer a feasible opportunity for the development of active/passive green areas, urban forests etc.

IMPROVEMENT THROUGH EMPOWERMENT?

-RESTORING THE NATURAL DRAINAGE CHANNEL NETWORK OF DELHI

Public participation in Planning projects

The next question is how can the natural drainage network be restored and what role could the citizens living in its vicinity play in the process?

In this country public participation is not a process that is easily incorporated in the Government Planning Policy and is restricted to more localised projects being handled by NGO’s. Hence it is a challenge to offer this key role to the citizens irrespective of the fact that they are the ones ultimately affected.

With proposals for riverfront development on the anvil, it becomes imperative to decide the role and extent of the contribution of the public in the process.

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