Living with memories of a traumatic night

Ten years have passed since the Kandhamal riots that shattered the lives and dreams of many socially and economically marginalised people living peacefully in one of the hilly districts of Odisha. The women, the main victims of the communal violence, are trying to adjust to the changed situation, but painful memories of that horrific night are hard to erase. A few survivors talk about the trauma they underwent, and the aftermath.

RAKHI GHOSH, Kandhamal/Bhubaneswar

Ten years after the Kandhamal riots, the wounds are far from healed. On 23rd August 2008, Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati, a Hindu religious leader, and four of his disciples, including a woman, were killed in his ashram at Jalaspeta, in Kandhamal District. The following day, unprecedented and gruesome violence was unleashed against the Christian minority community in the area. The targets were mainly Dalit Christians and tribal people, and persons who supported or worked with the community.

Women had to watch helplessly as their loved ones were killed, their houses burnt and their church desecrated by large, slogan-shouting mobs armed with deadly weapons. The communal violence drastically changed the lives of these people. Some have lost their livelihood, some were forced to leave their villages and those who were victims of sexual abuse have still not recovered from the trauma.

The book, Breaking the Shackled Silence: Unheard Voices of Women from Kandhamal, by NAWO (National Alliance of Women, Odisha), captures the narratives of survivors. “Those who have seen the killings of their dear ones during the violence shared their feeling of not only fear, but also loneliness and depression. They said that they found it easier to cope with their situation in life when they were together, but when they were alone, they kept recalling memories of the killing of their dear ones,” the book says.

Speaking of the incidents of that night, a Dalit Hindu woman who was gang-raped by four or five people, says “My life has changed after the traumatic incident. I was in hiding for several years. I am traumatised, sad, depressed and struggling. I cannot forget the incident, no matter how hard I try. I feel ashamed. I continue to be fearful of darkness, loneliness, loud noises and men. I cannot sleep properly at night. I am confused and do not know what to do, as I am fearful of everything and have lost my confidence. I am not happy either. I am not at peace with myself. I am not the same person that I was any longer.”

Another survivor, at her rented house in Salia Sahi.

A survivor at her rented house in Salia Sahi.

Activist Dhirendra Panda, who had seen the violence, aftermath and the plight of this and other women from close quarters, said, “Though she is now working in an institution, she is confused and has lost her confidence. The incident has shattered her completely. She is not at peace, and tries hard to overcome the trauma she has faced. We are planning to go to the High Court [to get justice for her],” Panda says.

Sasmita Nayak another survivor of the riot, lives in a Christian Settlement Colony at Nandagiri. “Life has completely changed now,” she says. “Here we got a pucca (solid and permanent) house, we are enrolled with the PDS (public distribution scheme), we have got an LPG connection through a government scheme, my children attend school regularly. But what we lost cannot be restored.”

The woman, who is from Bettikoka Village, elaborates: “We lost everything – land, house, access to our village and forest. Earlier, we were not worried about our livelihood and food for daily consumption. We had a piece of land where we cultivated paddy and vegetables and for fruits and tubers we depended on the forest. We were living in peace. But today, my husband works as a daily labourer. And there is no certainty that work and income will be available on a daily basis. My children are deprived of nutritious food. We are looking at a blank future.”

Many women who had fled their villages during the violence were unable to return due to fear and lost access to the land that they owned. Anguri Nayak, a survivor now living at the settlement colony in Nandagiri, says, “Many of us had lands in our names in the villages. But we did not return due to fear of further violence and harassment; some of our relatives in the village converted to Hinduism, so they stay in the village without fear. All the Christian families have moved to different places, so we have no one to look after our lands and we don’t know what has happened to the land. Now my husband and I work as daily labourers to eke out a living.”

Households headed by women faced acute financial hardships when they had to leave the village. Some recounts how they had to flee with young children, fearing for their lives, but starved for days without food and water. Sumati remembers: “I was busy with daily chores when I got a call from one of my relatives who advised me to leave the house as a mob was coming towards our village to attack our community. I took my one-year old daughter and rushed to the nearby forest to hide. My husband had gone to Phubhani Town for some work. I was worried for him but there was no means of communicating with him.

Sumati and her daughter

Another survivor at the Nandagiri settlement colony.

Continued on page 3
Women from small farmer households toil on the land without any legal recognition of their rights as farmers. A group of women activists set out to find out more. Here’s hoping that the experiences will enrich and strengthen the articulation of the problems and demands of women farmers and workers.

BHARAT DOGRA, New Delhi

Women from farmer families, particularly small farmer households, work very hard on the land but do not get proper recognition for this. Their names are generally not mentioned in farmland records. With the increasing migration of men from many villages, the responsibilities of the women have increased but even this has not won them better recognition as farmers.

To draw attention to this and related issues, four senior members of a women’s organisation, Ekta Mahila Manch, embarked on a 45-day study and mobilisation tour of India during August-September. The Ekta Mahila Manch is the women’s wing of Ekta Parishad, a national-level organisation which has been working on land reforms and land equality issues for several decades.

The march was led by Shradha Kashyap from Malwa Region near Indore, along with Kasturi Patel from Bundelkhand Region, Shobha Tiwari from Mahakaushal Region in Madhya Pradesh, and Manju Dungdung from Bihar. They have been working for around 20 to 30 years, building local leadership in their communities.

Speaking at a press conference after the march, Shradha Kashyap said women often did not see themselves as farmers because they did not own land. She stressed that it was necessary for women to gain land ownership by having their name included in land title deeds for them to appreciate their status. Also, giving them identity cards showing their status as farmers would gain them legitimacy in institutions serving farmers.

“The women are not able to negotiate bank loans, nor gain membership in producer organisations because the signature of their husbands is required despite the fact that the men are usually working in some other state or city,” said Kasturi. Having faced a lot of difficulties in her own life, she emphasised that women faced discrimination in local communities and in trying to sell produce in the marketplace.

Manju pointed out that even though some of the state laws had already mandated joint titles, women were not able to demand these, fearing that they would be ostracised by their families. Land rights would give them a standing which would help them confront violence in the home.

Some organisations working with deprived women had established how through land rights, asset creation would help the women establish themselves in society. Shobha Tiwari, who has been working independently in the tribal belt of Mahakoshal for the past 18 years, noted that women they met along the route of the march “repeatedly said they had applied to the concerned panchayat for acquiring land title deeds under the Forest Rights Act 2007, but very few had received them.”

She spoke about the lack of access for women to community forest rights as well. As Adivasi (tribal) women were the main collectors of wood from the forest and were in charge of fodder supply for their domestic animals, this was a big problem. Without community lands, catching fish was difficult too, the team found, during their interaction with the fisherfolk in Chilka, Odisha, who faced enormous challenges in maintaining their livelihoods.

Shradha said many women were worried about getting pension, but the bigger issue for them was accessing land so that they could feel settled. This was related to the fact that all landless and homeless people in rural areas, particularly those living under plastic sheets, beside water tanks or on roadsides, required homestead land. The Ekta Parishad was trying to get Parliament to pass a Homestead Act to ensure that the number of absolutely deprived people that continually migrated could be reduced.

During the march, the activists confronted difficult situations but were able to acquire valuable information about the problems faced by women farmers and landless peasants.

Adivasi farmers feed city demand for veggies

K.V. KURMANATH

Many are tying up with agri chains and shifting to growing exotic vegetables while their counterparts elsewhere are struggling with pest attacks, adverse climate and low prices, some Adivasi farmers in Andhra Pradesh, realising the earning potential of commercial crops and vegetables, have switched to cultivating these crops and are even tying up with organised agri-supply chains.

Chintapalli, 120 km away from Visakhapatnam, is a case in point. Moving away from the traditional practices and crops that have never given them sufficient incomes, farmers in this hamlet are gradually shifting their focus to exotic vegetables such as iceberg lettuce and broccoli.

Sinnamma (name changed) is among the 150 or so farmers in the region who grow vegetables such as broccoli over an area of about 100 acres. Though growing vegetables is not something new, it’s the slow shift to the exotic and how these farmers are accessing urban markets that is new. The switch has not been easy, especially considering the hilly terrain in which these farmers work, where water retention is limited.

The farmers have been getting support from the Horticulture Department of Andhra Pradesh, which has tied up with the Ooty-based Lawrencedale Agro Processing (Leaf) for an integrated horticulture development project. The public-private partnership has been formed with a view to supporting small tribal farmers. LEAF focusses on agri-value chains, working with the farmers in the back-end and buying back the produce for organised retail shops. It has been working with small farmers in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, procuring vegetables to meet the urban demand.

Palat Vijayaraghavan, founder and CEO of LEAF, said his firm would help Chintapalli become a key destination for fresh produce. The PPP will provide advisory services and establish post-harvest facilities. “We have about 100 acres under partnership with farmers in the Chintapalli area. Of this, carrot is covered on 75 acres, cabbage, cauliflower and beans on 20 acres and broccoli and iceberg lettuce on five acres. Over a 3-year period, the project aims to cover 500 acres supporting 800 farmers,” he added.

Leaf, which has a network of 30000 farmers in the southern states, is targeting 100-tonnes-per-day production capacity by the year end from 30-35 tonnes a day at present. It plans to gather information and guide member farmers on what to grow and how much.

Chiranjiv Choudhary, Commissioner of Horticulture (Andhra Pradesh), says that little interventions are helping farmers in adding value and cleaning and providing linkages to markets to realise better incomes. “This can be developed as a model that can be replicated elsewhere,” he told BusinessLine, while announcing the partnership recently.

The state grows horticultural crops on about 16 lakh hectares with a total production of 252 lakh tonnes. It registered a GVA (gross value added) of ₹35,000 crore in 2016-17. “We are expecting this to grow to ₹40,300 crore, showing a growth of nearly 20 per cent,” he said.

(Courtesy: The Hindu BusinessLine)
Using technology innovatively to provide a toilet in every home

Google Earth is a commonly used tool to locate places on a map. But Pratima Joshi, an architect in Pune, uses it to facilitate the building of personal toilets for urban slum-dwellers.

RINA MUKHERJI, Pune

A

rm with a master’s degree from the Bartlett School of Architecture & Planning, and expertise in Building Design for Developing Countries, Pratima Joshi set up Shelter Associates in 1993 to provide a safer and cleaner environment for the urban poor. However, she found data on urban spaces to be woefully limited. There needed to be a starting point. Planning couldn’t be done without understanding the specific needs of the people involved.

So, Pratima decided to map urban slums with the help of grassroots workers. A Geographic Information System (GIS) platform using a Google Earth-based map was employed. The exercise helped Shelter Associates complement the work of local authorities in many cities, and provide much-needed basic services to the urban poor.

However, Pratima and her team identified lacunae when the slums were suddenly cleared away from the concept of community toilets and provide away from the concept of community toilets and provide

individual toilets to slum households. Funds allocated under the NDA Government’s Swachh Bharat Mission since 2014 have helped them push for the One Toilet, One Household (OHOT) model which they now uphold.

Take the case of the Premnagar Market Yard slum in Pune. There are four toilet blocks catering to 769 households comprising 3560 people. In every block, there are eight toilets, evenly divided between the two sexes. But not every family stays next door to the toilet. Besides, there may be old people and children in the homes. When people are in a hurry, they have ablutions and leave for work, school or college, there’s ‘rush hour’ at the toilets too.

The Ranawats family has 11 members living under the same roof – Somaliben and her husband Ramesh, their two sons, two daughters-in-law, and four grandchildren. This is where a toilet is located. It is a one-room tenement, occupied by four members of the family. The Kambles have a similar one-room tenement, occupied by four members of the family. The Kamble’s toilet is just one room and a tiny kitchen.

According to the Swachh Bharat Mission, every household is entitled to a toilet. However, Pratima and her team are more interested in the type of toilet, as well as who will use it.

The Ranawats’ toilet is a simple one, while the Kambles’ is a flush toilet. There is little awareness that different families may have different needs. The idea is that awareness can be raised, and family planning can be facilitated.

The Ranawats have a one-room tenement, occupied by four members of the family. Their toilet is one room and a tiny kitchen. The Kambles have a similar one-room tenement, occupied by four members of the family. The Kamble’s toilet is just one room and a tiny kitchen.

The Kamble family has 12 members living under the same roof – Somaliben and her husband Ramesh, their two sons, two daughters-in-law, and four grandchildren. This is where a toilet is located. The Kamble’s toilet is one room and a tiny kitchen. The Kambles have a similar one-room tenement, occupied by four members of the family.
There was a time when Karim, a local of Koundbal, on the northeastern side of the lake, Ghulam Nabi looked for income from selling nadru in the market. Ghulam Nabi looked for alternate employment and now runs a tea-stall on the banks of the lake. Every day, he collects four cans of drinking water from a nearby spring and makes tea for his customers. He gets around 30-50 customers a day in season.

The 500 or so households in the village were entirely dependent on the lake for nadru and fish. A license fee of Rs 1500 per year has to be paid to the government for permission to extract nadru. As the resources of the lake declined, the local people shifted to alternative sources of income, such as manual labour, carpet weaving, stone cutting, etc.

Just outside Ghulam Nabi’s tea-stall is a small market of street vendors. Sipping tea, Abdul Gani Kuchay, a 71-year-old street vendor, reiterates that he had learnt from his elders that there were 1200 springs within the water body. In the past, people used water from the springs for drinking and other household purposes. “These springs have become weak now. No one uses the lake water, not even for use in the availability of tap water depends on the availability of electricity,” he says. He feels it would be of great help to the community if the springs are restored.

Another street vendor, Mohammed Majbool, says that some springs have been encroached upon and others have dried up. The output from the springs declined immediately after a concrete wall was put on the periphery of the lake. Another reason for reduced discharge was the underground trench dug for latrines/toilets he feels.

Ghulam Nabi, too, blames the concrete structure for the situation. In his opinion, the veins of the springs have been blocked. He emphasised the need to educate the local community that encroachment or pollution of the lake would put their sustenance in jeopardy.

Many villages around the water body do not have safe drinking water. While some villages (Koundbal, for instance) lack tap water, residents of others (like Gratbal) allege that the tap water supplied to them is not properly treated. Even after reporting it to the concerned quarters, only cosmetic measures were taken to address the issue, say the locals.

Women from Koundbal Village have to walk a couple of kilometres to reach the closest spring to collect water for drinking and other household purposes. A group of women from Gratbal, while washing clothes in one of the springs alongside the lake, say they prefer spring water for drinking and other household purposes.

Irfan Rashid, Majid Farooq, Mohammad Muslim and Shakil Ahmad Romshoo in a research paper, Assessing the Impact of Anthropogenic Activities on Manasbal Lake in Kashmir Himalayas, published in the International Journal of Environmental Sciences, observe that various anthropogenic activities in the catchment area of the lake had tremendous ecological and socio-economic importance, and represented the way people treat the lake ecosystems in the Himalayan Region. The water quality of the lake, it says, was deteriorating and changes in the distribution of flora and fauna have been significantly affecting its trophic status. The degradation had serious implications on the livelihood of the people dependent on services and goods based on the water body.

The researchers say Koundbal is significant among the villages that surround the lake as it is situated on a hill made up of a huge proportion of limestone. The run-off from the hill infuses huge quantities of calcium into the lake. Most of the families in the village work in limestone quarries / kils in the area and the stone quarrying and kils work has a direct bearing on the water quality of the lake and also leads to environmental degradation that has negative implications on human health.

Most of the diseases people in the region are prone to related to the respiratory tract, the researchers add. Pollutants released from the quarries and kils affect biodiversity, particularly fish species in the lake. A species of fish, Ram Gurun (Bortahibd), which was found in abundance just a decade ago, is now extinct in the water body, the researchers add.

Open defecation in the adjoining areas, and use of soap and detergents while washing clothes in the spring waters, affect the flora and fauna of the lake, cautions Akther Hussain, an environmental researcher, adding that government should seriously look into the matter. Quoting local sources, he says that there are 1200 springs within the lake and about 100 springs around it. The majority of these springs had been encroached on.

The Manasbal Lake located 30 kilometres from the city centre is said to be the deepest lake (at 13 m depth) in the Kashmir Valley. It is about five kilometres long and a kilometre wide. The lake is also connected with the River Jhelum, considered the lifeline of the Valley. The surface area of the lake is reported to have declined to 2.67 square kilometres.

Ninety-nine percent of potable water in mountainous areas comes from springs, says Seema Ravanbale, head of Innovate Project, People Support Institute (PSI), Dehradun. At some places, springs are used for minor irrigation purposes, like watering vegetable gardens. "But the springs have been neglected and at most places they are dying," she says. No agency has specific data on the number of springs but, according to rough estimates, there are around three million springs in the Himalayan Region.

Climate change, changing land use patterns and deforestation are some of the reasons for springs drying up, she says. High intensity rainfall leads to flash floods and recharge of groundwater is not happening.
Communicating, working together, and aiding diversity in creativity

Project Pankhi, a unique bid to connect local artists with their peers across the country, was held from August 1 to 6 in Bhopatpur Village of Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh. A joint effort by the Sasatwa Foundation based in Bhubaneswar and Rekha Smriti Trust from Azamgarh, it was organised at the community level. A special exercise to bring artists and village women together to help the latter unleash their creative energies produces stunning results

ADITI PANDA, Bhubaneswar

The Rekha Smriti Trust was the brainchild of Jaya Gaur, an ardent art lover. The aim was to foster rural development by creating self-employment opportunities through art, craft and design in Bhopatpur. Sasatwa Foundation was started by Satyabhama Majhi, an accomplished artist in Odisha, for the development of women and children through art. It was designed not only to transform the mindset of village women and children towards art but also to bring about a radical change in the lifestyle and socio-economic status of the community, especially the women, through painting.

Jaya Gaur took the initiative for Project Pankhi, and achieved it with the help of Satyabhama Majhi as well as Sidharth Mohanty, a designer based in Bhubaneswar who has vast experience in social development programmes.

"As an artist we display our work in galleries but when we are doing community art projects in villages or rural areas, it is a totally different experience. I strongly believe that positive thought and positive work always yield positive results. That's exactly what happened in this village. We decided that the best thing was for the women to do their drawings on the walls. The result is this amazing wall art. Every colour of their minds and souls is reflected on the walls. Bringing a smile to others' faces is the best thing to do in life. A big thanks to Jaya Gaur who is genuinely trying to bring more people into this initiative and change their lives through it," says Sathyabhama.

The drawings were inspired by traditional art forms like alpana or the wall art they customarily do during weddings, or by their regular household activities like cooking and cleaning. The artists helped them use their imagination to paint the murals. Three artists helped create the sculpture park for children based on the theme of Education Through Play.

Within the space of a week, with active community involvement, the local village women and children created murals and a children’s park. Aditi Bhattacharjee from Nagpur, says: "It was a great experience working in the village. The women and kids were very enthusiastic, loving and caring. They were very confused in the beginning. Some of them actually said that they had never held a pencil. But after the wall painting was finished, they were happy and satisfied with their work. That makes us happy and gives us immense satisfaction. The love and adulation they gave is unforgettable and cannot be expressed in words."

A local artisan at work. Providing the finishing touch.

When Satyabhama and I visited Azamgarh in June to conceptualise Project Pankhi, I knew I was a part of a revolution. As a project planner, I really appreciate Jaya Gaur for taking this noble initiative, contributing to the betterment of the village and for making me a part of it," says Sidharth Mohanty, artist / project planner. "In this one week at Bhopatpur, I was very thrilled to see the village women come up with such honest, innocent, forms of expression, and depict them in vibrant colours on the wall. The result has been very satisfying. The artists worked tirelessly giving every support to the villagers. Even the sculptors have done a great job. I am now looking forward to Project Pankhi’s next venture,” he adds.

Explains Mumbai-based Kalyani Uday, “Initially, when we asked the women of Bhopatpur Village to draw on paper, they were quite reluctant as most of them hadn’t ever touched a pencil in their lives. But with a little motivation from the artists, they gradually started expressing themselves, making various drawings on paper, creating motifs and forms related to their rural culture, surroundings, etc. I personally felt it was important for their work to represent their true personality and emotions and it was important for them to be honest while expressing those emotions on the walls. Thus, while working, I tried to be a part of the village by making friends with the women. The result was outstanding. Project Pankhi gave the women a great opportunity to prove their creativity.”

Prof M.S. Swaminathan receives World Agriculture Prize

Professor M.S. Swaminathan, founder of the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Chennai, was awarded the first World Agriculture Prize at the 11th Global Agriculture Leadership Summit in New Delhi recently. He received the award from India’s Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu at the event hosted by the Indian Council of Food and Agriculture. The M.S. Swaminathan Junior Research Fellowship — to be awarded from 2019 onwards — was also instituted on the occasion.

Talking about the fellowship, Prof Swaminathan said that the cash associated with the prize would be used for creating fellowships at MSSRF at the post-graduate level, to convert the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into field-level accomplishments. The fellowship would help promote linkages between agriculture, nutrition and health, through a Farming Systems for Nutrition programme.

The fellowship would be an opportunity for young scholars to address the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including eradication of hunger and climate change. The five areas considered for the fellowship are: the UN Sustainable Development Goal 2 of Zero Hunger, Farming System for Nutrition (FSN), genetic garden of bio-fortified crops and halophytes, bio-valley for curative and culinary diversity and eco-technologies for eco-enterprises

Research scholars may submit their applications to the executive director, MSSRF, at executivedirector@mssrf.res.in, by November 30. A monthly stipend of ₹25000 will be provided.

(Courtesy: The Hindu)
A success in fish farming and a remarkable journey for tribal women

There is a reason why water bodies are considered a resource. From the water they provide to the many living organisms they support, water bodies are constantly supplying us with things essential to our survival. They also provide livelihood as this story of some enterprising tribal women in a remote village in Andhra Pradesh exemplifies. Until a few years ago, they were collecting and selling firewood from the forest for Rs 40 a day. After adopting fish rearing recently, they became so successful that they have begun to win laurels for their business exploits.

S. KIRAN, Visakhapatnam

In Visanagaram District's Pachipenta Mandal, near the state's border with Odisha, lies the nondescript Kodikallavalasa Village. Bereft of any substantial development, it is close to the Peddagadda Reservoir, a medium irrigation project built on a tributary of River Suvaramukhini, which is a tributary of Nagavali.

Fish rearing was the occupation of the men-folk but they made very little out of it, just enough to eke out a living. Things changed substantially with the intervention of an NGO: Centre for Aquatic Livelihood – Jal Jeevika. In association with the Tata Group's philanthropic arm, Tata Trusts, they introduced them to efficient ways of fish farming. In partnership with the local fisheries department, the programme began in January 2016 when Tata Trusts' field lead Padmakar Bojja began discussions with the local fisheries cooperative society.

During his conversation with members of the Neelammathalli SHG, Padmakar suggested to the women that they take up the cage method of fish rearing. Initially, they were reluctant and it took much persuasion for about 40 women to attend a meeting with the district fisheries officer in March that year. To impress upon them the economic potential of inland fisheries, they were taken on an exposure visit to Dimbhe Reservoir in Pune, Maharashtra. There, they saw how rural women had begun earning Rs 6000-8000 per month by following the NGO’s recommendations. After the trip, 10 women from Kodikallavalasa showed interest in learning the method.

Jal Jeevika organised trainings for them and showed them how to build a cage with locally available materials such as bamboo (e-commerce platforms sell fish cages for as much as Rs 1.2 lakh.) It educated women about constructing cages and about cage culture, its maintenance, ornamental fish rearing, managing fish feed, disease management, etc.

With the aid of the state fisheries department, extensive capacity-building measures were taken and the women set about looking after a cage in rotational shifts. Their efforts began to yield results and they could spot maturing rohu fish in the enclosure. However, they were unaware that when these fish grow in size, they would be capable of jumping out of the cage and to the reservoir. The women recognised the problem only after much of their fish stock disappeared. They held discussions and decided to use their old saris to cover the cage.

Unfortunately, that was not the end of their monetary setback. Not long ago, they had released 10 lakh fish spawn in a pond with government aid. But drought hit soon after, drying up the pond. The women had to transfer fish seeds to the cages. In fact, it was the first time that they were seeing a cage. With guidance from Jal Jeevika, they oversaw the growth of about one lakh sale-ready fish seeds but a disease struck with women's rising stature in his community, poisoned the enclosure and brought their progress to a screeching halt.

One of the women involved in fish rearing, Misala Bangaramma, says that they almost gave up the venture after that episode. She says, “Once we got over the shock, we summoned our resolve to go ahead with the endeavour as that was the only way we could make a decent living and teach others how to do the same.”

Learning by trial and error, the women of the SHG demonstrated perseverance, which paid off on October 9, 2017 when they sold 5000 finger-sized young fish, weighing about 65 kg and earned Rs 10800.

Neelkanth Mishra, the founder of Jal Jeevika and an Ashoka Fellow (fellowships are awarded to social entrepreneurs who solve social problems), says this is a remarkable journey for tribal women who had nothing to do with fisheries, yet ventured into this field, learnt the tricks of the trade and finally succeeded. He acknowledges that it took them almost a year and a half to deliver results but contends that the confidence it has instilled in the women is remarkable.

Ratlalamma of Neelammathalli SHG says, “Earlier only men-folk of our community would catch fish and sell them and the women would know nothing about how much money they were making.” She compared those days with the present, where men as well as women sell fish, contribute to the household income and are aware of their finances.

Women’s success in fish farming has inspired men, too. Rao says now the men’s cooperation group is also working on developing a sustainable income. “They are so inspired and driven by the economic potential of pisciculture that now they want to be the best fishery cooperative in the district,” he says.

Buoyed by the success story of Kodikallavalasa Village, Mishra says his NGO wants to engage 16000 ponds across the country for inland fish rearing this year. In 2017, Tata Trusts and Jal Jeevika introduced more than 160 rural people in four districts of Andhra Pradesh (Visakhapatnam, Visanagaram, Srikakulam and Anantapur) to efficient ways of fish farming. According to the NGO, such local enterprises fetched about Rs 1.1 crore in a year.

According to the Andhra Pradesh government, inland fisheries sector is providing livelihood to about 14.5 lakh people in the state. In 2014-15, fisheries contributed to 5.4 percent of the gross state domestic product. The southern state is number one in fish and prawn production in the country. The state's long coastline (974 km) and productive freshwater bodies (3.4 hectares of ponds and tanks; 0.9 lakh hectare of freshwater Kolleru lake; 2.4 lakh hectares of reservoir area; and rivers and canals running 11415-km-long) provide immense potential for fish rearing. With guidance and government support, these water bodies are capable of uplifting communities that live around them.

( Courtesy: India Water Portal. The writer is the executive director of a Visakhapatnam-based NGO, Vikasa, and a member of 101 Reporters, a pan-India network of grassroots reporters.)
A lot has been discussed about the acute water crisis in many parts of India. But who would have thought some villages in rural West Bengal would have to depend on a neighbouring nation for water? Thanks to administrative failure, four villages surrounding the Bandapani Tea estate in Alipurduar District of West Bengal, around 600 kilometres from Kolkata, get water from Bhutan for their daily needs.

At Aiba basti, villagers like Gisna Kundu (in picture) wait for hours to get their water carriers filled.

Wild elephants also destroy the pipe. “Wild elephants are quite regular in the area where the pipe is located. They often damage the water pipe. It adds to our inconvenience as we have to invest in repairing it. It normally takes many days to repair as mechanics are not easily available here as this is a remote area,” says Shekhar Gowala, a student who has the responsibility of collecting money for the repair of the pipe.

Villagers say that it often gets difficult to collect water from the pipe as several people from the neighbouring villages also depend on it. “People from other villages also come here to take water. It is riskier to go inside the deep jungle during the night because of wild animals,” says Damini Minj (22), a Kalibari resident. The alternative is a tap located at the slum, Aiba basti, which is about eight kilometres from the villages.

Minj says she, along with other women, travels three to four times a week to Aiba basti for water. “We go by bicycles or walk. We start the journey even before the break of the dawn to avoid the crowd at the daybreak to collect water. We sweat profusely while cycling with 30-40 litres of water filled in the jars.,” Minj says the path to the foothills is fraught with dangers of elephants and other wild animals. “The stretch is muddy and full of potholes which make it difficult to ride the bicycle with heavy water-filled jars. Moreover, we are at a constant risk of being targeted by wild elephants and snakes. The government has done nothing for us. The political leaders come and make promises during elections and disappear after that,” she adds. Villagers say that the majority of the 13-15 hand pumps installed in four villages do not work and even the operational ones give dirty water not fit for drinking.

At a proposal from the administration can be gauged from the fact that it has recently constructed a water tank in Kalibari which works only with the solar energy. “It is a sheer mockery of our miseries. The water tank is able to draw water from underground only when the sun is strong. We have to stand in a long queue for several hours to get a bucket of water with a prayer on the lips for sunshine. They should have connected it with electricity,” fumes Gisna Kundu, a homemaker.

Apart from potable water, villagers also have to make perilous journeys multiple times for daily chores such as washing clothes. “The situation gets worse in summers when the demand for water is high. It is daunting to travel kilometres with heavy buckets of water. We often have to make several trips to get water for our daily chores. Mostly the women folk have the responsibility of bringing water as men are out of the house for work. The women, men and children also have to travel to other water sources in the deep jungle during the night because of wild animals,” says Gope, a Jungle Line resident. Ajay Khara, the local gram pradhan (village head) of Bundapani concedes that the problem is grave but says that the administration has already been informed. “We have already alerted the concerned authorities about the problems faced by the people. They have assurred that they will take adequate action to solve the water crisis.”

Tannay Biswas, the block development officer of Madarhat, under whose jurisdiction Bundapani falls, agrees that the entire block is reeling under water crisis and a proposal has been sent to the government to install more tube-wells. “Almost all the blocks in my jurisdiction is facing water crisis. We have already asked the state government to accept our proposal of installing more water pipes in the area,” he says. He, however, refuses to speak much about the problems faced by people in Bundapani citing that he has been newly transferred to the area and is yet to understand it fully.

(Courtesy: India Water Portal)

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Away from home, it's a life as hard as the stones they crush

Migrant families along River Lanva in south Manipur face an uncertain future

NINGLUN HANGHAL, New Lamka, Manipur

As Slimyu Kaur and K.G. Singh splash around in the water, their son Charul Kaur plays in the under-5s section of the swimming pool in the Little Mill Club, a 12-year-old snatches the ball from under his mother’s feet, and a 10-year-old daughter, with a yell, hits out at the tennis ball, the mother of three, Pauzachiin, in her mid-fifties, is crushing stones in one of the makeshift tents lining the roadside of River Lanva Bridge in New Lamka (south Manipur). “I cannot begin work early, only after finishing my domestic chores,” says the mother of five.据 she is crushing the small pieces of crushed stone fetched from the river bed and 25 kg of oil tin containers. A t installment of crushed stone is priced at ₹25. Obviously, the more hands to a family, the greater the income. The stones collected in the tin containers are sold to the local customs for construction of houses and buildings. According to Pauzachiin their family rent houses in and around this locality. The family that has been living in their makeshift tent is aware of the demand. “We hear there is talk of evicting us from here!” says Pauzachiin. “But where do we go?” she asks. “What about those who take truckloads of stones and sand from the river every day?” she poses. There has been no serious move until now to ban collection of stones/sand from the Lanva River bed and banks, says Pauzachiin. But on rare occasions, officials would visit the area and tell them to find other work. “But they have not forced us to stop until now,” says Niangngaih, adding, “if they ban us, they must also ban those trucks with huge loads of stones.”

“We do not destroy the river, nor does it get dry or flooded due to our collecting the stones,” asserts Pauzachiin. Any impact because of their work would be minimal, she argues, as against those who use machines for large-scale collection of stone and sand. Pauzachiin also points out that there is natural regeneration during the monsoon. “Stones and sand come along with the river water when it rains and fill up the river beds,” she says. Though there are no restrictions imposed as of now, there is uncertainty. How long will the river provide them stones and sand? How long can they carry on their work on the roadside? Only the sands of time will tell.

“Women of migrant families crush to small pieces stones fetched from the river. Not only have they moved from rural life, coming further and further to Shimla, looking for alternate sources of livelihood. Regular restrictions imposed as of now, there is uncertainty. How long will the river provide them stones and sand? How long can they carry on their work on the roadside? Only the sands of time will tell.”

(Baual) show the way out of thirst

SARITA BRARA, New Delhi

Hundreds of men and women in queue, with plastic buckets, waiting for their turn to get water from the supply tanks. That was the scene witnessed this June in most parts of Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, including the elegant Mall Road that is compared to the streets of London and Paris. The Queen of Hills was starved of water in the peak tourist season as most places did not get supply for around 10 days due to depleting levels at the water sources. As taps ran dry for days, people suddenly remembered their traditional source of water — the baolis or baudis. They made a bee line for the baudis, in and around the town, with cans and buckets in their hands, to get water. (A baudi is a kind of stoned pond where water percolates naturally from the surface of the earth). Though the water crisis eased a bit after the pre-monsoon showers, what it did was draw the attention of the authorities as well as the people to the urgent need to revive traditional natural water sources and conserve this precious resource.

“While there are several baudis in this historic town and its surroundings, water in most of these natural water bodies has become unfit for drinking or has dried up due to sheer neglect. This, despite the fact that the reverence for natural water sources, like baudis, is entrenched deeply in the social and cultural life of the people of the state,” says Krishan Kumar Sharma from Bharol, a village close to Shimla.

“These baudis are sacred to us and Khwaja, the water body (or deities), are worshipped by people in the villages at these natural sources. Special prayers are organised before the advent of summer at these baudis in the belief that the ritual will ensure that the water body does not dry up.” Sharma rues that the new generation does not bother to take adequate care of these natural water resources which are suffering due to neglect and abandonment. However, in many villages, special committees have been set up to protect these water bodies. The Shiv Baudi near Summer Hill under Andhrighi village, which saw a rush of people during the crisis in Shimla, is one such. Sanjeev Thakur, the village head, says that baudis hold a very special place in their cultural and social life. Suman Kishore, the priest of the temple built over the baudi, keeps this one under lock and key for its safety. “But people can draw water from a tap that is connected with the baudi through a pipe,” he says.

In several other baudis too, water is protected by a covered roof with a tap available to access the resource. The deputy pradhan (chief) of Tundal Panchayat, near Kandaghat, explains how, on the first day of the month of Ashad (monsoon season), villagers worship the water deity and prepare special dishes on the occasion.

Traditionally, these water bodies have always been part of the village marriage rituals. After the ceremony, when the bride reaches the village of her in-laws, she draws water from the baudi and offers it to her husband’s relatives, symbolising her official entry into the family. “Earlier there was no piped water supply and since it is the women who fetch water, the new bride would learn from where to fetch water,” explains Sharma. He says that it was not just a ritual, the whole idea of our ancestors was to emphasise the significance of these traditional water sources and the need to preserve them.

(Courtesy: The Hindu BusinessLine)