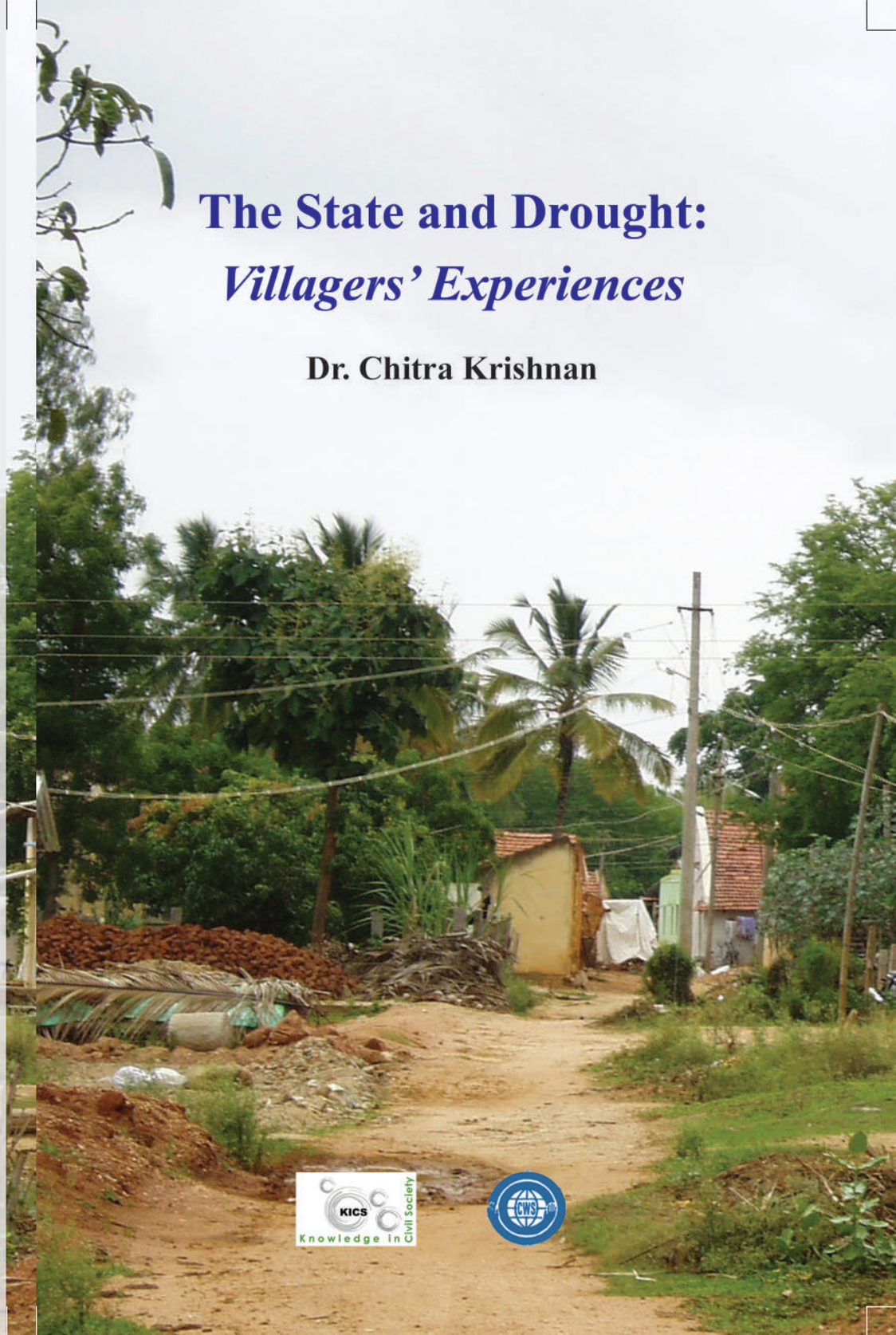
Chitra Krishnan *was trained as a civil engineer at IIT Madras following which she worked on water resource issues in rural Kerala before pursuing her Master's in Environmental Engineering in USA. Her working stints in different rural contexts and an organic farm in the USA influenced her markedly in her research quests. She completed her PhD from IIT Delhi on the traditional irrigation system of South India (tanks and anicuts). Her research publications include "Irrigation Infrastructure: The Case of the Tungabhadra River". She is currently practising dryland agriculture in Tumkur district, Karnataka and is involved in research studies looking at design and implementation issues of irrigation infrastructure from below.*

Knowledge in Civil Society (KICS) *is a public charitable trust registered in India in 2010, but active as network of NGOs, grassroots activists, academics, researchers and policymakers since 2005. KICS provides a platform for promoting dialogues on science and society issues in India through workshops, research studies, publications and specialized documentation efforts towards a people-centric science and technology policy. KICS functions as a network of over 120+ organizations and individuals and as such is coordinated by a core group of ten members which includes academics, activists and policy specialists, and a Board of five trustees. KICS has carried out several projects in this manner funded by national and international networks.*

Centre for World Solidarity (CWS) *strives to promote a human dignity based, gendered and eco-sustainable approach that will advance people-centred governance, livelihoods and management of natural resources. This will be achieved through partnering, nurturing and collaborating with civil society organisations and other stakeholders at various levels. It adds value through its partnership in promoting good governance, effective systems and also gains in enhancing its relevance through regular engagement with its partners, networks and fellows, functioning from six states, who bring to CWS the grassroots reality, tribulations and challenges.*

The State and Drought:
Villagers' Experiences

Dr. Chitra Krishnan



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Once underway, the dedication of my team members, Geetha and Yatish, was commendable. As first time writers, at times they felt overwhelmed and daunted by the task but never gave up. They were goaded and guided by my other team member, Prashant. Owning up the project, he played a key role – holding initial discussions, helping Geetha and Yatish think each story through carefully, reading the initial drafts, making suggestions to improve their clarity and then translating the stories into English. When these stories had to be collated, Pradeep, at short notice, manoeuvred through the crankiness of the software diligently and deftly.

As part of the project, KICS organised two Sharing Sessions – the first in Bengaluru on January 16, 2014 and the second in Secunderabad on July 14, 2014. These sessions were enhanced by Dr. AR Vasavi (Senior Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library – New Delhi) and MV Ramachandrudu (WASSAN – Secunderabad) chairing the sessions in Bengaluru and Secunderabad respectively. Joseph Satish of KICS not only handled the logistics but went out of his way to interest a larger audience for the Sharing Sessions. Vinod, Veena and Jacintha of Centre for Education and Documentation (CED) were kind hosts for the first session. John Dsouza's enthusiasm to record these sessions and then intelligently edit the videos – hours and hours of work – was heartwarming. Nemani Chandrasekhar, Bhagirath, Anusaya and many others ensured that the second session went smoothly.

The initial draft of the report was vetted by Pankaj Sekhsaria and Joseph Satish. Their candid feedback was valuable for improving the report. I am also indebted to Manasanayana for thoroughly reading the Kannada report and giving his feedback.

Prof. C. Shambu Prasad of XIMB was supportive all through and requested Prof. M. S. Sriram of Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB) to write a foreword to this report. Prof. Sriram read the Kannada report, was enthused and promptly agreed. His insightful foreword enriches the report and I am very thankful to him.

Chitra Krishnan

FOREWORD

Development Interventions Moving Beyond Numbers

M S Sriram[1]

The set of stories brought out under the intellectual leadership of Dr. Chitra Krishnan are very important, particularly in the current context of "development" as a mantra. These are important not only because they are very personal and local, but also because they are indications of the universal. Development Intervention is always a tricky business. The concept of development as defined by the State could be at variance from the definition of development by the civil society organisations and both these could be different from how it is perceived by the *"beneficiaries"*. When we talk of *beneficiaries* the development literature talks about this set of individuals or families as if they are a monolith. However the so called *beneficiaries* are individuals, households, people in flesh and blood, people with feelings, aspirations, constraints and difficulties. Each of them has an independent story to narrate, each community has their own travails and tribulations and joys and excitement. Therefore while it is important for us to look at interventions that are centralized at various levels, it is also very important for us to understand how it manifests in lives of individuals.

In a recent book titled "Mass Flourishing" Edmund Phelps traces the story "economic development" by looking at vast amounts of data on how economies across the world flourished. The basic thrust of the book is that Industrial revolution and the resultant centralization of work-place led to greater exchange of ideas, which led to innovation and larger economic growth. He has data to back his numbers up. At the same time Phelps is conscious of the harmful side effects of "economic development". While on the balance – as he argues – the benefits of "development" far outweigh the side effects and therefore they should be welcome, it is important for us to recognize and be aware of the side effects. Unfortunately these cannot be captured by data. The individual stories get bulldozed by numbers like

1. *Visiting Faculty, Centre for Public Policy, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore.*

agricultural productivity; self-sufficiency; import substitution; innovation; economic growth; prosperity and such other descriptors. Tolstoy's famous first line in his iconic novel Anna Karenina reads thus: *"Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."* So unless we understand the stories of unhappy families, the development story continues to be incomplete. So Phelps seeks refuge in literature of that time to understand the "collaterals". He finds these in the novels of Charles Dickens (Hard Times); the poetry of Blake; the novels of Mary Shelly and Zola. Therefore it is important to revisit our concept of development, and development intervention through stories. Stories narrated by the people themselves give a sense of identity – a face to the faceless acts of intervention carried out by the State.

The five stories that form a part of this booklet bring us thick descriptions at how interventions are perceived at the level of the community. It also gives us a flavour of how something that could be seen as "development" over a short horizon might not indeed be favourable in the longer horizon. Look at the poignant story of Canal Irrigation: Bridging the Last Mile. It narrates a complete cycle of what was perceived as "development" – getting water for irrigation; a change in the way agriculture is perceived due to the availability of water and eventually the insatiable need to ride the tiger – of wanting more and more water almost to the extent that it becomes unsustainable. At the end of the story we find that there is a realisation for moderation, but one has reached a level of activity that moving towards moderation may actually not be a choice.

The story of the *Anganwadi* worker gives a totally different flavour to interventions. The *Anganwadi* types of interventions are non-invasive interventions. They are facilitative in nature and usually do not upset the status-quo in the economic and social life of the community. Therefore it is quite likely that these "facilities" are ignored, or the people who are supposed to benefit from the intervention show apathy. How do we actively engage with the "entitlements" as provided by the State? How do we even get to know what our entitlements are? This story raises very important questions of how a good and well intentioned design might falter on the ground. A good design builds in local accountability and elements of social audit. But the flaw is that there is one more step beyond the design – that step is making the elements of the design of the programme transparent and getting it into the centrality of local, decentralised governance systems.

The next two stories are a familiar farce played out. The employment guarantee works and subsidies under the Total Sanitation Project both these

are a well-intentioned, fairly well structured interventions – mostly non-invasive and voluntary – but they are subject to misuse and even subjected to ridicule. These are individual stories which question the basic assumptions in design and beg for the plugging of implementation loopholes.

The story of the rural water supply raises fundamental questions of the debate of centralisation and decentralisation. It seems to tell us that if there was decentralisation, with local level accountability – flashes of this was evident in the *Anganwadi* story – there could be some benefits. The question that needs to be asked is whether accountability is to be sought purely within the framework provided for the involvement of the so called *beneficiaries* or the seeking of accountability could be on a much wider canvas.

Each of these stories tells us how the well intentioned "schemes" could fail at the ground level. It gives us some insights on how some of the programmes could be managed. It also gives us some cross learnings – on how the rural water supply design could benefit from the accountability architecture of the *Anganwadis*. These stories are rich, come from experience, the experience has specificity – a face, a place and an instance from the real life. These stories should not only result in immediate action at the level of specific instance, but should also inform the larger design and policy space.

The effort of getting people to write in their own language, narrate their own stories and putting these stories in the larger public domain is commendable and I am particularly enthused to examine if this could be a part of a regular discourse on impacts and evaluations. These are distinct from the case studies that come in as boxes, these are stories narrated by people themselves and therefore it is an important and rare opportunity to listen to the unheard voices.

INTRODUCTION

This project, supported by the Knowledge in Civil Society (KICS) Trust, articulates the experience and understanding of villagers regarding decentralisation and development as evident in their own milieu. KICS has, in the past, encouraged learning and sharing in various sectors of development which have an element of Science & Technology—water resources, agriculture, health & nutrition, architecture/construction, energy etc. As is well known, in most of these sectors, the State has policies and programmes for rural areas. How these programmes are viewed and engaged with by its beneficiaries, is the subject of this micro-level study.

That the delivery of government programmes has fallen short and suffers from corruption, lack of accountability and transparency is widely acknowledged. Belabouring those points is not the intention here. Instead, the attempt is to slip into the shoes of, say, a thoughtful villager and attempt to answer the questions: What hinders or prevents a villager from being a part-time activist in his/her own milieu? What is the labyrinth they must walk through, and what knowledge and skills must they possess and what support can they hope for from their own people?

Five stories relating to different rural development schemes are compiled in this report. Two villagers, in their spare time, donned a role as authors and wrote their experiences in their own words in the local language. This was a new experience for them, having never tried to write before[2]. Each narrative was then edited and contextualised and also translated into English by the Coordinator. The implications that could be drawn from each of the stories were also added by the Coordinator to bring it to a final form.

2. *Being novice authors, they needed guidance in organisation and presentation of their narratives - although the content was entirely theirs.*

Although the stories seem varied, belonging to different sectors[3], there are connections. In all of them one aims to understand – (1) What is the actual nature of involvement of beneficiaries? (2) What are the potential spaces provided for them to engage with the scheme? (3) The results of their involvement (or lack of it) and (4) The influence of other actors in bringing about results. In examining these aspects, one tries to throw more light on the theme of collective action - when is it needed, when could it be expected and why not.

The settings for these stories are villages in a semi-arid part of South India - Tumkur District, Karnataka. So drought is a never-to-be-dismissed backdrop for the stories. In fact a recent drought prompted the project itself.

The first story on Canal Irrigation is the longest. KICS had supported an earlier study titled "Irrigation Infrastructure – A view from below", which dwelt on how different kinds of conflicts are being addressed and governed in the operation and maintenance of riverine schemes. While the concern there was on the larger aspects – dams, anicuts and main canals on the Tungabhadra River, the story here goes much farther - literally up to the last mile of a minor canal. It shows that the design and delivery of irrigation projects bring forth a set of problems that only farmers 'walking the last mile' are familiar with, not the wider public.

The second story relates to health and nutrition of pre-school children. The anganwadi, a state-run institution existing in almost every village in the country, caters to these children through an anganwadi worker and helper (ayah). This story chronicles the attempt to change an incompetent anganwadi worker which doesn't happen easily.

The last three stories – dealing with MGNREGS, Rural Sanitation and Rural Water Supply - are schemes implemented through Panchayati Raj Institutions. In these stories, terms such as GP Secretary or GP PDO often appear. Rural folk take these terms and their context and meaning for granted – while urban folk may be unfamiliar with the terms. A brief explanation is thus necessary.

The (73rd) Constitutional Amendment in 1992, formally established panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) as a third level of federal democracy[4]. The

3. *Often, a sector specific analysis suits academics, bureaucrats and activists, but this loses relevance at the village level. For inhabitants of a village - meant to benefit from many of the schemes - all schemes are mentally lumped together and perceived as "sarkari schemes"*
4. *Such State Acts had existed earlier (in some States) but had now to conform to the Constitutional Amendment.*

three-tiered Panchayati Raj local-governance system envisaged in all States, meant that each State had to draw up its own Panchayati Raj Act. As per Karnataka's Panchayati Raj Act[5] (KPR), the three tiers were to be called – Zilla Panchayat (ZP), Taluk Panchayat (TP) and Gram Panchayat (GP). It is the lowest tier – GP - that concerns villagers the most.

Typically comprising of a group of between 5 and 10 villages, a GP is constituted for a population of 5,000-7,000 (with one elected representative – GP member - for every 400 persons). Although the GP members are elected once in five years - much of the executive power is in the hands of State appointed officials. Every GP has a full-time Panchayat Development Officer (PDO)[6] and Secretary who are officers of the Government, with the PDO as the apex official in a GP. So the GP office runs as a government office and this is how it is viewed by rural folk – for example, without the GP Secretary the Gram Sabha[7] cannot be held, without the signature of the Secretary or PDO no applications from beneficiaries are accepted or sanctioned etc.

The MGNREGS story presents the somewhat baffling reluctance of potential beneficiaries from coming forward to participate in the scheme. The case of Rural Sanitation is next and points to differences in implementation in neighbouring villages, which seems hard to comprehend. The last story chronicles the decline of drinking water supply in one village over a decade - from abundance to scarcity - and its attempts to address it.

These stories represent only a subset of all the kinds of stories that unfold in the country's rural areas, with respect to rural development schemes. Since no special actors or peculiar conditions are present, it is possible that such stories – with some variations - are common.

This project report is in two parts. Part 1 is in English, where all the five stories are translated. Each story is preceded by an introduction based on reports and government guidelines which describe the scheme. The end of each story is followed by a section titled Ruminations where the coordinator draws out the implications of the story. Part 2 is in Kannada and contains just the stories without any introduction or commentary by the coordinator. Thus Part 2 is shorter than Part 1.

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5. *KPR Act was passed in 1993 and amended in later years.*
6. *Originally there was only a GP Secretary. Since 2009-10, PDOs have been appointed to accelerate implementation of rural development schemes.*
7. *As per the KPR Act, each village is to have a Gram Sabha (GS) that should meet at least twice a year and among other tasks, discuss budgetary provisions, make recommendations and consider and approve GP plans.*

A NOTE BY THE STORY WRITERS

The two of us, authors of the stories, are small farmers resident in two adjoining villages of Tumkur District, Karnataka. (The villages are approximately 100 km from Bangalore). This is our first attempt at writing since we finished SSLC some ten to fifteen years ago. In the beginning we were immersed in the world of our households and our villages (what kind of awareness could there be from the idiot box that the TV is?). Subsequently, in recent years, we have associated with some educated friends from the city who have moved to our village. Thanks to them, our awareness of the outside world and our understanding of our world have increased. They have been encouraging us to think more deeply about the world we belong to. These reports are a fruit of that thinking. While the impetus for these thoughts came from them, the thoughts themselves are our own. We were at times, personally involved in the attempts at addressing the problems referred to in the reports. The drought mentioned is our first one since we took charge of our respective households.

J Geetha
YR Yatish

The State and Drought: Villagers' Experiences

CHAPTER ONE

Canal Irrigation
Bridging the Last Mile

In rainfed farming, re*turns are fraught with uncertainty. So the desire to irrigate at least some part of one's land is acute and universal in rainfed regions. It can reach such proportions that farmers are willing to face extreme risks – financial and physical – in the hope of sourcing irrigation water.*

The quantum of water needed for irrigation is large yet the financial returns from such use are small. Depending on the crop, the water extracted from each borewell can vary greatly. However, 20,000 liters a day would be almost the lower bound of that range.

Announcement of a new irrigation project thus, not only gives mileage to politicians but is favourably received by farmers. After years of delay, cost escalation and corruption, when the project starts functioning; there is still the proverbial 'last mile' that farmers have to bridge.

For a lucky few, availing water from a canal irrigation project is a plain and simple matter. Direct the water to your fields through channels and pipes and await the release of water. For others, it can be so complex that despite arduous effort and heated negotiations, the result is sometimes only a trickle of water - much more so in drought years.

The following narrative chronicles the situation faced by farmers at the tail end of one canal irrigation project. It covers a period of six years but focuses mainly two water scarce years. With a farmer as the primary narrator, it centres around the village irrigation tank (a common property resource) and the drive to fill it with canal water. The tank, its value, changing cropping patterns and their effects and the vulnerability of farming, all naturally enter the narrative.

Our village irrigation tank

Our irrigation tank in the village of Nammurukere, in Tumkur district, is spread over about 50 acres (Fig. 1.1). While the tank is hundreds of years old, our memory of it dates from 1985. Every year, till about 1995, the tank

would fill up and overflow through its spillway (Fig. 1.2), towards the end of the monsoon. In fact, we remember that in 1992, the tank overflowed after a single night's downpour. On the tank's eastern bund is the temple of Kalleswara. Whenever the tank was brimful, offerings were made from this temple to the overflowing spillway. For us, a tank filled with water to its brim is as a temple consecrated. Truly for farmers, their village irrigation tank is more important than their temple.

In those years, during the rainy season, paddy was grown in about 50 acres below the tank – supplementing the rains with tank irrigation. After the

Fig 1.1: Our village irrigation tank when full

Fig 1.2: A tank's overflowing spillway

tank's water was all used up, cattle would graze for months in the tank-bed. Some wild plants which grew in the tank-bed then, were sustenance to the poor. You could appease a day's hunger eating 'seebe gadde', a tuber not to be found now. In summer, the transportation of fertile silt in tractors, from the tank bed to farmers' fields, was a common sight.

After 1995, the number of years when the tank filled up has gradually declined. There may be several causes for this. We feel that rainfall has come down. Bunds, raised in gardens and fields, have reduced inflow to the tank. The deep and long channels dug under the Canal Irrigation project also hold back runoff that used to flow to the tank.

At the same time, since 1995, our irrigation-needs have also been rising. All the farmers here, as per their living needs and according to their capacities have planted 200 to 1000 areca trees, 50 to 500 coconut trees and bananas. For their daily expenses they have taken on one to ten hybrid milch-cows per household. The cows need large amounts of fodder. (Hence, farmers use their irrigation water for these crops and have stopped growing paddy.) There are about 100-150 such households around this tank and they have a minimum of 250 borewells between them.

With much water expended on these trees and fodder in summer (in particular), the water level in these borewells has been falling. Twenty years ago, open wells and borewells around this tank had water even at 25 to 30 feet. Now, water is not found even when 500 ft to 1000 ft deep borewells are dug. However, if the tank is filled brimful once, then existing borewells sustain their yield for two more years. Although, the annual farm-income of a household such as this may be Rs. 1 to 1.5 lakh (before expenses); the years when all this income reached our hands, are few. Since borewells again and again go dry, all the accumulated money, is spent on deepening or digging new borewells.

The Canal Irrigation Project: Initial years (1996-2005)

In earlier years our village irrigation tank filled up with the monsoon rain. Now, it has come to pass, that the tank can only be filled up by a Canal Irrigation Project – a scheme intended to benefit public water bodies like our tank and thus the community as a whole.

Although the Canal Irrigation scheme made its appearance by 1996, that tanks in our neighbourhood might one day be filled by canal water remained beyond our imagination. As the earthmover dug channels[8] here and there, we remember some farmers grumbling about their lands being needlessly wrecked (Fig. 1.3) - because, for one, we believed the canal water to be intended only for faraway, large tanks. And for another, farmers laughed

1. The words canal and channel are used interchangeably in this narrative and mean the same.

Fig 1.3: Channel created by an Earthmover

at the notion of water through canals for their tanks which, till then, got filled each year with the rains themselves. Only when engineers assured us of the possibility of canal water for our tank also, and later installed an escape gate near our tank, did our hopes awaken.

Canal digging was at some places not finished on time – for various reasons. Farmers had to be paid compensation for channels passing through their lands. But some land-owners – mainly migrants to cities, driven there by poverty, bad yields, etc. – heard of this rather late. Work was stalled until they could be paid. In some other cases only partial compensation was paid initially. The concerned farmers then prevented work until they were paid in full. There were also the ubiquitous cases of delays by contractors and also other reasons best known to the government agencies implementing it. Finally ten years later, in 2006, some tanks of our neighbourhood were filled by this irrigation scheme. By now our areca and coconut plantations too had spread and our water needs too had shot up. Naturally the thought arose, 'can we bring distributary water to our tank also?' (Box 1.1 & 1.2)

We move mountains to fill our tank: 2006

October 2006. The rains had been deficient that year. Until Hirekere, the distributary had been cement-lined by then and water easily reached the escape-gate leading to the tank in this village – but flowed no further. The reason - for about 100 mts after the escape-gate for Hirekere tank, the concerned farmers had not permitted any channel-digging in their lands because they had not been fully compensated for the lands they would lose.

We realised this and other obstacles in the way of our tank's filling, when some of us from Nammurukere and Chikkanakere walked the entire five-kilometer stretch from Chikkanakere to Hirekere. A telephonic plea for help to the concerned irrigation department officials elicited no commitment for the present – no digging and lining work could be undertaken during the rainy season, they said – only a promise for the next.

Box 1.1: Picturing a distributary

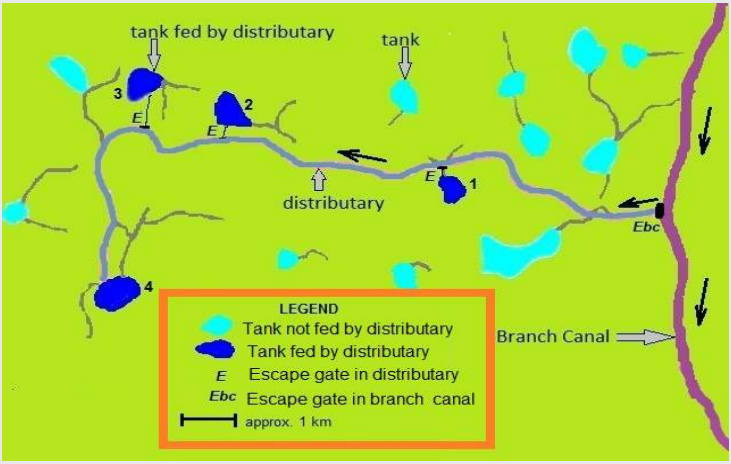
A dam across a river, typically, has one **main canal** on either side, i.e. the right and left banks. These canals may be 100 to 200 km in length. Each main canal has two to three **branch canals**, along its length. Further, each branch canal gives rise to tens of **distributaries**. A distributary might be between 20 to 50 kms in length.

Fig a: An escape gate in a canal

Fig. b: An escape gate with its attached screw visible

Water is released from a canal to its distributary through an **escape gate** (Fig. a & b). Flow through an escape gate can be increased or decreased by turning a screw attached to the escape gate. One full turn of the screw raises the level by one **thread**. However, even when an escape gate is fully closed, some leakage of water through the gate is inevitable.

Sketch of distributary: taking off from a Branch Canal and tanks fed by it



Tanks fed by the distributary (as numbered in the adjacent sketch*) 1. Hirekere, 2. Chikkanakere, 3. Nammurukere, 4. Moolekere* (Distributary length: approx 20 km.)

Box 1.2: A canal in undulating land

Water in the distributary must flow over undulating land without needing pumping (i.e. by gravity). So in low lying areas, the ground level is raised by creating a bund of sufficient width and height. Then the distributary is dug through the bund (Fig. c). Conversely where the ground level is very high, the channel has to be dug very deep (Fig. d).

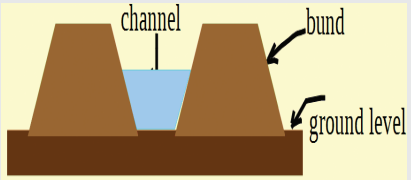


Fig c : Low-lying area: Bund raised and channel made above ground level

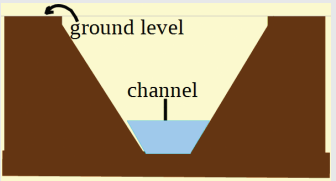


Fig d: High ground: Channel made deep below ground level

Fig. e: Low-lying area, channel lies above ground level with suction pipes placed in it

Fig. f: High ground: Channel lies much below ground level

But we did not lose courage. The intransigent farmers who prevented digging in their lands were won over, when we offered them money pooled amongst us. We hired an earthmover to dig a channel through these lands. Beyond that, for the rest of the way, a channel had already been dug – but it was unlined and now its floor was filled with silt. The earthmover was to remove this silt, but became stuck in the wet silt and extracting it turned out to be a three-hour-long ordeal in itself. Now it became clear that there was no recourse but to manually remove the silt, only then water could flow.

The difficulties encountered

The channel floor could often be 40 to 50 feet below ground level and steeply sloped (Fig. 1.4 & 1.5). At such locations, bringing the silt all the

way out would be too uphill a task. When there was only about two feet deep silt, we managed to place it carefully on the channel's adjoining sloping walls themselves without the silt slipping back to the channel floor, but this proved impossible where the silt was much more. At such locations, we erected a temporary retaining net on the sloping walls by planting stout posts vertically and using coconut fronds horizontally. The silt was then piled behind this 'net' and thus did not slip back on to the floor.

Fig1. 4 Channel floor: 40 to 50 feet below ground

Fig. 1.5: Steep slopes of the channel

Work proceeded slowly. For 15 to 20 days, 40 to 50 men had to work continuously from 8 in the morning to 6 in the evening to remove the silt from the 2 km unlined stretch of the channel. On these days even food arrangements were inadequate. Sometimes a few generous people arranged for rice to be cooked on the spot. On other days, when even this was not to be had, we worked on puffed rice purchased by our GP member.

You can imagine how hard the labour must have been. It is with a sense of disbelief that the mind now goes back to the events and efforts of those days – Did so many of us come together then?! And work voluntarily thus?! (Box 1.3)

The reward for our efforts

Finally the water flowed, first to Chikkanakere and then on to Nammurukere tank. Over a period of a month, our tank filled up to three-fourths its capacity. And within 15 to 20 days of this, previously dried up borewells – of those who had laboured to bring the water (and those who had not) – brought forth water again. And in the joy at this sight, was forgotten all the earlier toil!

Box 1.3: Staking our very lives for water

After labouring thus, pleased with themselves, people expected to see water flowing easily to their tanks, but another obstacle, this time a life-threatening one confronted them. At four locations in this two kilometre stretch, the channel tunnelled under over-lying roads through five to six feet high box-culverts. (Now, as is wont with our people, the channel is used as a vast refuse bin by farmers around it, and is filled with thorns, boulders, dead branches and such like. This debris, mixed with silt, had been pushed by the rushing water against the entry to these box-culverts, thereby blocking further flow of water.) Water, unable to find its way forward, had come to a halt at these mouths.

Fig g: Box-culvert: 5 to 6 feet high

Fig h: Box-culvert lying 30 feet below overlying road

Some 30 to 50 feet below the road surface, these culverts with 5 to 6 feet high blocked entrances, had backed-up water deeper than a man's height ((Fig. g & h). There was no way out but to extricate the debris by hand; but the freed water might then hurtle the man to his death inside the culvert. So people hesitated to enter the water.Practical wit of the villagers came to the fore now. Two makeshift ropes were prepared by tying together, several dhotis. Then two men, each with a rope firmly tied around his waist, were lowered into the water by eight to ten others standing atop the culvert. The two suspended men slowly pulled out whatever thorny branches and other debris that they could. What could not be pulled out had to be pushed into the culvert, using thick poles. In this manner, at each box-culvert, it took two to three hours of work before finally the water could flow smoothly.

Irrigation department officials had promised to line the channel with cement before the next monsoon. Not keen on a repeat of their labour of this year, the villagers submitted a plea to these officials. In response to repeated pleas, the channel was lined in the summer of 2007 (Fig. 1.6). Consequently water flowed smoothly in October of 2007 and our tank overflowed that year.

Fig 1.6:
Channel after being lined with cement mortar

Search for water in 2012: A tragi-comic drama

In the following four years (2008-11), water was released to our distributary for a month or two, starting in October and our tank did receive water from this. One year it even overflowed. Anyway, since these were also years of sufficient rainfall, we did not worry much about water, nor did we go to the escape-gates to monitor them. But 2012 was a year of very poor rainfall, and how different the situation became!

Where the drama begins

The events we narrate are of Oct 2012, at the end of a bad monsoon and looming acute water scarcity. Water had been let in the Branch Canal. Of the allotted span of 30 days, water had flown through the Branch Canal to the tank in Hadagal town for 10 days. We heard that the distributaries below and above us had received water; however no water had entered our distributary.

So we went to the escape-gate in the Branch Canal, at Timmanahalli - which allows water into our distributary - only to hear from the Works Supervisor there, that there was no order to release water into our distributary (Box 1.4). We then went to meet our MP for help. His telephonic request to the irrigation department officials, on our behalf elicited only this response: "Water is to be released into the Branch Canal only for drinking purposes of Hadagal town". But our MP countered, "The need of these people too, is for

Box 1.4: Dramatis Personae:

The chief protagonists: 150-200 men, from the villages of Hirekere, Chikkanakere, Nammurukere and Moolekere, who gathered together in the struggle to bring water to the tanks of their villages. These are the four medium sized tanks fed by the distributary.

Minor actors: A few smaller tanks unconnected to the distributary also acquired some significance. Some villagers of these tanks joined our play, clamouring for their share of water in this time of scarcity.

Constant winners: Those owning farms and paddy fields along the distributary itself, nearer its upper reaches. They use suction pipes where the distributary is raised above the surrounding land, and submersible pumps when it passes below, to draw a part of the flowing water intended for elsewhere. *With one such drawal every 40 to 50 feet, perhaps even a quarter of the water was used up in this way*.

Political players: It is to the **M.P.** and **M.L.As** that the villagers go with their pleas for water. Panchayat level representatives lack the authority, to bring pressure to bear upon irrigation department officials. In this play, the MLA of Summanakere and the MP of our district were active.

Irrigation Dept.: In the play, but with little influence on it, was the **Works Supervisor**. (He is in-charge of the day to day running of the distributary. Above him is the Assistant Engineer (**A.E.**) and higher up is the Executive Engineer (**E.E**).) The **A.E.** And **E.E**. - key participants in their way – only counted in the extent to which they could be acted upon.

drinking. Let there be no literal following of rules and orders; instead, to the extent possible, share the water among all the needy."

That day, 150 to 200 of us - the farmers from the four villages whose tanks were fed by the distributary – had started from our homes early in the morning, and after meeting the MP, had enthusiastically arrived at the Timmanahalli escape-gate past eleven in the morning. But no water had been released into our distributary! The Works Supervisor insisted that he had still not received any orders to release water. Then there was a flurry of phone calls: between us and the MP; from the MP to the higher officials; and from the latter – the MP reassured us – an order to the A.E. to arrive on the spot and release water for us. After an eager wait of an hour, there was still no A.E. to be seen. Why was this so? Something was fishy.

Politicians manipulating engineers

Finally, (as if by prior agreement), the A.E. arrived from the left and simultaneously the MLA of Summanakere also arrived, but from the right. Pleased as the people were at the sight of the A.E., they were surprised to see the MLA. His constituency did not even cover the villages of Hirekere, Chikannakere or Nammurukere. Was his aim to settle old scores with Moolekere or an anxiety to secure us all water? - This was not clear. But the people only wanted water to be released, regardless of who helped them in it.

What we found was that the MLA harshly berated the A.E. in our presence, and told him to release water for us! Heeding the MLA's word to release water, the A.E. had the escape-gate raised by 15 threads (turns of thread). But the MLA insisted that the gate be raised even higher, arguing that that otherwise water would not reach the tail-end. The A.E. pointed out that he had strict instructions not to release any more water than this. But the MLA forced the A.E. to let the gate be raised by a further 5 threads, "in order to", as he said, "fulfill the needs of the people."

The pleased villagers began to wind up and return. To their surprise, this very MLA now photographed the A.E. as having contravened orders, a position that he himself had forced him into, and later complained of the latter's disregard of rules to the higher officials! Are you mystified? You will see the mystery unravel itself before the end of this narrative.

Some discord, then mutual accord

The water released at Timmanahalli, first reaches the escape-gate to the Hirekere tank, then it reaches the escape-gates for Chikkannanakere, next Nammurukere and last Moolekere. Now the people of these four villages began quarreling, "Mine first, mine first", over the water. Finally their leaders got together to stop the quarrel and work out a compromise: the remaining 20 days, for which the water would flow in the distributary, was to be shared at a quota of 5 days per tank. And the villages were to take turns in the order in which their escape-gates were located.

Looking for a free lunch

Hirekere had had its five days' share of water. On the sixth day, the escape-gate at Hirekere had to be closed so that water could move down the distributary to the Chikkanakere escape-gate. But just then there arrived, for the first time, those from a village near Hirekere – their small tank could fill

from the overflow of the Hirekere tank, although they had no right to the water and there were no channels linking their tank to the distributary itself. But they demanded their share of water and redirected the flow to their tank. When people from Chikkanakere came there and referred to the previously-made agreement, they were threatened with a beating. Chikkanakere could enforce the agreement only after it filed a police complaint and secured police presence at the Hirekere escape-gate. Thus did the flow reach Chikkanakere tank.

A mystery unravelled

Ten days had passed, and the turn of Chikkanakere had ended with its tank partially full. Nammurukere, whose turn came next, gave up its turn in favour of Moolekere, in recognition of the unremitting efforts of the latter. In fact, on the first day at Timmanahalli escape-gate, those of Moolekere had arranged lunch from their village for all the 150 to 200 people of the four different villages gathered to demand water for this distributary: surely one good turn deserved another.

But even as water reached Moolekere, release of water was stopped at Timmanahalli itself, as per orders from above. The reason for this order: the complaint lodged by the Summanakere MLA, with the photo he took of the A.E. raising the escape-gate by 20 threads, against the permitted 15 threads (as described in an earlier section).

The villagers of Nammurukere and Moolekere heard of this order from the Works Supervisor, when they had gone to Timmanahalli escape-gate and met him there. So they once more sought the MP's aid. After talking to the A.E., the MP uncovered the workings hidden from them.

Who had, in the presence of the assembled crowd on the first day, insisted to the A.E. that he raise the escape-gate beyond the prescribed 15 threads? The Summanakere MLA! And who had photographed this and subsequently complained to the higher-ups? The same MLA! Indeed, two-fold was his motivation. One was his aim to secure public support as the popular leader who fought to bring them more water. The other was his determination that Moolekere – whose majority had not voted for him – should get no water! Therefore his scheme: to first release more water and please the public; then to have the release stopped altogether by complaining against this very excess water, after foisting the responsibility for this on the hapless A.E. (In actuality, the excess release had been brought down to the allotted release soon after the MLA and the crowd had left on the first day itself, we later learnt.)

The MP persuaded the higher officials in the irrigation department, that the unlawful excess release was politically motivated – therefore not to be blamed on the public – and ensured that water was once again released into the channel. But the water woes of Moolekere were not yet at an end.

'Twixt the cup and the lip

On the twelfth day, when water was again released in the distributary, the jubilant villagers of Moolekere returned to their village, while yet retaining the caution to leave 10-strong patrols at each of the upstream escape-gates along the way: none of the preceding tanks had filled during their allotted turns of a mere five days, so there was a risk that those villagers might break the prior agreement and again divert the water to their tanks.

But the recompense for all these efforts was a mere one day's worth of water to their tank. For the Summanakere MLA was still determined to keep the water out of Moolekere. He now instigated a nearby village, Solekere, which had a small tank, saying, "you too will get water, if you dig a channel to your tank today itself." The water-scarce village was only too willing to listen: hiring an earthmover to immediately finish a one kilometer long channel, its villagers now rose to claim the water that Moolekere had struggled long and hard to secure. Now it was the 13th day. Finally tiring, and in a gesture of goodwill, Moolekere returned its turn to Nammurukere (remember that Nammurukere lies upstream of Solekere too) and allowed the latter to receive water for all the remaining days.

(The schemes of the Summanakere MLA are not to be taken as active villainy on his part. He simply sought to bring over to his side, those electorally opposed to him in Moolekere.)

The rowdy youth of Nammurukere lose patience

Of the days remaining, water flowed to Nammurukere for two days. It became clear that the flow was not adequate, and that – just like the preceding tanks – Nammurukere tank too would remain only partly filled at the end of its turn. But some over eager youth of Nammurukere wanted to see the tank full. Without informing anyone, they reached Timmanahalli escape-gate at midnight, and contrived to surreptitiously raise the gate much beyond the 15 threads (not a manually trivial task).

Upon discovery of this the next morning, an angry A.E. stopped release. And before we could regroup to demand release once again, news came that

the main canal had breached in another district upstream of us. There remained no question of water even entering our district!

The uncertain future

With our irrigation tank receiving little water last year, and rains being deficient this year as well, as many as 30% of the borewells running two years ago, have already gone dry by now. Another 40% may go dry if the tank does not fill up this year. (Fig. 1.7) Then areca and coconut trees around will die; finding water for daily domestic consumption may become difficult too.

Fig 1.7: An empty tank bed: portending a grim future

Even thirty years ago, our grandfathers grew all their need to such an extent that all they usually purchased were jaggery, sugar, salt, matches and some clothes. Not much money was at hand; but not much need for it was felt either. And now, filled with the desire to move ahead like all the rest, we abandoned all those crops of old and rushed forward to plant only areca and coconuts. They are needed for generating cash; as for how living is possible without much cash, this is nowadays even beyond conception. Even if this Canal Irrigation scheme, then yet another one, brings us more and more water, the consequence will only be a corresponding rise in our demand for water and our consumption. And scarcity will be our condition once more. Will there be no end to this chase after the chimera of water?

Ruminations:

This narrative described the events along one distributary of a canal network. The distributary receives water for not more than three months in a good year and only three weeks in a low rainfall year. It has been designed to fill a few medium-sized community irrigation tanks along its length.

In a water-scarce year, we find that these tanks, authorised to receive water from the distributary did not get their allotted share – even after the

beneficiaries acted collectively and voluntarily. Naturally one wonders – could it have been different? How so? These questions lend themselves to examination from a variety of vantage points.

Much of what transpired had its root cause in the dependence of the tanks on the canal network. Twenty years ago, these tanks received more runoff and more often filled up, partly or entirely – solely from rainfall. (At that time the distributary had not even been excavated.) Why are these tanks receiving less runoff from rainfall? Has the rainfall distribution changed in two decades? Is runoff prevented from reaching a tank due to bunds and canals? Or are there other causes? There are no answers yet for this important research question.

(The socio-economic context that prompts high-water-use cropping pattern is an important factor but too big an issue to take up here.)

Given that the tanks depend on the distributary, what are the sources of iniquitous distribution? Three factors emerge from this narrative – engineering design, allocation rules and strange as it may seem; voting pattern during state elections.

Anyone who can extract water from a flowing canal will do so – this inescapable truism is clear to anyone on the ground. Preventing "unauthorised claimants" from extracting canal water is akin to the task of Sisyphus.

Keeping this in mind, it becomes clear why, by aligning the head reaches of the distributary through low lying areas, an irretractable source of inequity was created. The head reaches receive the most water for the longest time. Did the designers not realize that farmers with lands close to the canal will get undue advantage? Though unauthorised, these scores of farmers use suction pipes (running 24 hrs a day without power) and pumpsets to extract the flow. Upto a quarter of the flow is drawn out this way.

Allocation rules too appear to be made thoughtlessly. The parent Branch Canal allows water into more than 25 different distributaries along its length. The official policy favours the largest tanks first and then the medium sized ones. Thus the smallest tanks are neglected. Given that large, medium and small-sized tanks all lie within any given area of the region and that farmers have similar landholdings with similar needs, whether their tank is large or small – the unfairness of such policy is markedly visible on the ground; particularly in times of scarcity.

So, the official stance in that drought year was – that the Branch Canal was carrying water meant only for the drinking water needs of a large town (via its large tank). This stance – locals knew - was unenforceable and served only to fool the gullible. Some of the Branch Canal water must have been extracted by all who could.

Some distributaries did however receive water. The allocation – quantity, duration and sequencing – was a mystery to locals. So when this distributary remained dry while its neighbours were receiving water, it could not be taken lying down. Finally, though water was released to the distributary, it was many days less than its neighbours, leading to inter-distributary inequity.

The extra complication in this case was the determination of an MLA to use all means to deny water to the tail-end tank. He influenced the Irrigation Dept. Engineers adversely for his purpose. The nexus between engineers and politicians is of course, well known. But viewed from below, it can even be necessary. So long as the Irrigation Dept. acts arbitrarily/ unevenly regarding allocation and when locals have no way of engaging with or influencing Dept. officials, their only recourse is to use "people's representatives". However, this is double-edged because the "people's representative" can be patently biased and work against local needs, through the Dept.

The situation would have been different if politicians did not know which polling booths voted for them and which did not. That way a village or ward cannot be singled out for punishment. Quite often though, if your village did not vote for the elected candidate, you can expect to be treated with disdain if you approach her during her five year term. This fundamental issue in our electoral process has far reaching implications and can be a source of inequity.

CHAPTER TWO

About Anganwadis:
A mother's learning curve

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is a long-standing Centrally-sponsored programme that commenced in the 1970s. Each State runs this programme through its Department of Women and Child Welfare or similar department. Until 2009, the entire administrative cost of the ICDS programme was borne by the Central Govt. Even now 90% of the funds come from the centre.

"ICDS is the only major national programme that addresses the needs of children under the age of six years. It seeks to provide young children with an integrated package of services such as supplementary nutrition, health care and pre-school education. Because the health and nutrition needs of a child cannot be addressed in isolation from those of his or her mother, the programme also extends to adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers.

These services are provided through ICDS centres, also known as "anganwadis".[9]

To implement the scheme, each district of a State has a Deputy Director and each taluk (or block) has a Child Development Project Officer (C.D.P.O.). Under the C.D.P.O. come Asst. C.D.P.O. and Supervisors. Below them are the Anganwadi worker and helper who run an anganwadi.

The anganwadi, an institution set up in every village, is a means of providing health care and nutrition and education for very young children. Its effectiveness depends on the quality of the service provided. In following account, a mother narrates the situation of her village anganwadi and the efforts to change it.

One day I visited my friend Savita in her village. "Chinnara mela" had been organised in their anganwadi that day. I had accompanied Savita to

9. *From Primer titled: SUPREME COURT ORDERS ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD:, October 2005*

watch her daughter participate in it. As we walked back after the programme, talking of this and that, Savita asked me, "Are such programmes held in your anganwadi as well?"

In reply I said that all the children of 25 to 30 anganwadis gather together at one anganwadi for this annual event. When it came to our turn, the programme was conducted in our village as well. As for the organising itself, this is the job of the taluk level official, the C.D.P.O.

My detailed response surprised her: how did I know so much? In the past I had been no less ignorant than her so I said, "Informing myself had slowly become necessary."

"Why so? What good can knowing of anganwadi matters be to us?" was Savita's rejoinder.

"Your question brings back to my mind the earlier situation of the anganwadi in our village", I said, "- during my daughter's first year at the anganwadi, I took no interest in it at all. I would then have been entirely ignorant of such programmes. Recollection of my indifference then leaves me angry with myself. Gradually, some changes came about in our anganwadi. I too was involved in them. Let me tell you of all that."

"When, seven years back I moved to that village after my marriage I knew nothing of its anganwadi. A few years later it was time for my daughter to be sent there. Just like the other mothers was I: took my daughter there at 10 in the morning and brought her back at 4 in the evening. For lunch the children then got a porridge prepared from the ground flour of a few kinds of roasted seeds (supplied by the Government). My daughter did not like this and would come back home, crying hunger. And I would grumble a little about the anganwadi and find her something to eat – only to this extent did our anganwadi figure in my life. Is there any benefit from the anganwadi, either for the children or for their mothers? Is our anganwadi functioning properly? - Such questions only slowly arose in my mind. Yet where, and from whom, were answers to be had? And perhaps I had no business or right to ask these questions - thinking so, I remained quiet.

The anganwadi has been running in our village for about 30 years now. About 10 years ago it acquired a building of its own (Fig. 2.1) Gangamma served as the anganwadi-worker for almost 20 years, but Gowramma has been ayah right from the start.

Gangamma, the anganwadi-worker was physically-handicapped, and a hypertensive and diabetic to boot. Therefore her involvement in the

Fig 2.1: Anganwadi Building

children's play and learning activities was less than full-blooded. Around this time the state-government's Bhagyalakshmi-bond scheme had been announced. (Under this, a fixed sum is given to the first two daughters in BPL families when each turns 18, upon production of a bond made out at their birth.) It was Gangamma's responsibility to make out these bonds (Box 2.1). But what all the mothers of the girls who were to get these bonds had to go through!

Application forms for these bonds were filled by Gangamma. But her unsteady hand as she did so was a sorry sight. Birth-dates were wrongly entered, and names were spelt incorrectly. Only after these forms returned from the office to which they were submitted did the mothers realise this. Getting them corrected was an uphill task. Later the mothers were forced to find out the date of distribution of the bonds by themselves, and to pick these up themselves.

Box 2.1. Services provided through Anganwadi

(For other than enrolled children)

- Newly born girl child in BPL family – securing "Bhagyalakshmi bond", a special fixed-deposit of the state government
- Lactating mothers – providing nutritious food and kits
- Pregnant women – distribution of nutritious food, securing mother's card, arranging ambulance transport for delivery and financial assistance for it
- Using grant from Health Dept. towards village sanitation measures – like cleaning drainages - with health of anganwadi children as focus

Witnessing all this, some parents raised a ruckus at the anganwadi office. Many times they wrote their complaints, and asked for a replacement of Gangamma. Sometime later the C.D.P.O. (who is in charge of all the anganwadis of a taluk) came. He reprimanded Gangamma for not attending meetings or maintaining records, and threatened to fire her. But nothing changed; we were disappointed to see that his was merely an empty threat.

By 2011-12, Gangamma's health deteriorated significantly. She had written no records for a year – even walking became difficult for her. Repeated complaints to the C.D.P.O. yielding no action, we finally threatened to lock up the anganwadi. Only then did he force her to resign.

After her, who?

"An immediate replacement can't be found. In the meanwhile, the worker from the neighbouring anganwadi shall come here thrice a week." said the C.D.P.O. In accordance came Kempamma.

At this time some reforms were begun by her. A 10-member committee was formed – I was one of the four mothers in that committee. (I did not know until then that each anganwadi was to have a committee with 10 members. These members had the right to look into, and correct, minor malfunctioning. Anything beyond this they could take to the C.D.P.O.) Some order was brought in among the children. Mothers' meetings were held. Committee-members began to inspect the receiving of provisions, and check their quality.

This improved state sustained for a month or two. But gradually Kempamma's frequency declined to once a week, then even to once a fortnight. "What is to become of the children?" we remonstrated with Kempamma, "and ayah Gowramma is no substitute, for she is too old, and an illiterate to boot." To which Kempamma replied, "So you talk of your rights to me - who taught them to you in the first place! My frequency and involvement – when I am in charge of two anganwadis – can only be thus, and no more. Go to the C.D.P.O. if you seek a solution."

So we wrote; and made phone-calls. The C.D.P.O. could only say, "A new worker is no vegetable to be picked instantly off a shelf. You must give me time." Concern for the children was clearly not his! So some mothers stopped sending their children to the anganwadi, and the others would take their children back home for lunch. For Gowramma did not have the food-room key; in any case, measuring out the daily allotted ration was beyond her. Kempamma, who had the key, would measure out 3-days' ration on her occasional visits. And the children had to go home when this was used up.

I was sad at this state of affairs and angry as well. A friend and I chanced to bring this up with an old respected acquaintance of ours, and she revealed something to us: each State has a Court-nominated advisor, with the authority to visit anganwadis; contacting him might be of some help. So we got the man's phone number, and he promised a visit. But we kept this to ourselves.

The advisor makes a sudden visit

Kempamma was absent that day. The sudden visit of the advisor was a shock to everyone. His name was Siddappa. Starting with the children, he then called together the mothers and learned of their grievances. He hardly rang the C.D.P.O. to inform him of his arrival when, within minutes, the C.D.P.O. came scurrying!

Then Siddappa elaborated in thorough detail the rights of the mothers and the facilities supposedly available to the children (Box 2.2). Only then did we become aware of how beneficial the anganwadi can be. And the one and only plea, of all the parents there, was for a full-time worker. Siddappa sought a few days' time, and the C.D.P.O. agreed to act within this.

Here should be mentioned Rangamma - married into our village, and an anganwadi worker in a small village of adjoining Summanakere taluk. But since her own son went to school in our village, for the past couple of years she had vainly sought a transfer to our anganwadi. On this day her people presented a request to Siddappa for her transfer, but the C.D.P.O. went no further than a vague assurance.

Box 2.2. Facilities provided for children enrolled at an Anganwadi

- Nutritious food – Sprouted green gram and groundnuts, wheat paayasam, lemon rice
- Akshaya Paatre scheme – Villagers permitted to volunteer vegetables, rice, pulses etc. for the anganwadi children's meal
- Hygiene – Soap for washing hands, clean drinking water and toilet
- Education – Toys, study materials, "learn while you play" materials

As he left Siddappa had some advice for the mothers:

- roasted groundnuts, and drumstick leaves, are very good for children,
- until the coming of the new worker, the committee-members may take it in turns to oversee the children and inspect Gowramma's cooking, and
- write of any insoluble problems to the concerned official and retain a copy of this, to prevent the official from later denying that he received the complaint.

As per Siddappa's advice, we took it in turns to be at the anganwadi and teach the children, to oversee Gowramma's cooking, and to ensure that she cooked drumstick leaves.

What became of the few days' time sought?

Even after a few days, there was no news from the C.D.P.O. of a new appointment. When I called him once, and spoke again of locking the anganwadi if no appointment was made, he merely grumbled that the loss then would be ours, and cut the call. When I called Rangamma, she said, "Your C.D.P.O. has signed all the needed forms but one, and makes me run around endlessly for this last one. When I went today I was told that he is in a meeting." So I had to call Siddappa and complain. "The C.D.P.O. is in no meeting, only in a village-fair 4km away", said an angry Siddappa and promised action within two days, and once more warned the C.D.P.O.

Finally, in early 2013, Rangamma was appointed. She has enthusiastically taken up the learning and play of the children. She has held mothers' meetings every month. She informed us of a grant of about Rs. 20,000 under the village-sanitation scheme of the Health Department, and showed us a pamphlet from the Women and Child welfare department spelling out the uses this money could be put to. Committee-members, the worker, and our GP member together decided to buy with this money some materials useful in the anganwadi; in this manner, we put the money to good use.

The present situation

Nowadays the food in our anganwadi is usually good, and includes groundnuts, milk, and sprouted seeds. Children go happily to the anganwadi (Fig. 2.2). A child, when he/she leaves the anganwadi to join the first standard in school, has learnt the numerals from 1 to 100, the alphabets of English and Kannada, and the multiplication tables of 2 and 3.

There is scope for further improving the conditions in our anganwadi. However, when a minor failing of the anganwadi worker or in the children's food is brought up in mothers' meetings, the mothers themselves are rather lukewarm and unenthusiastic.

Fig 2.2: Children inside anganwadi

"We send our children to the anganwadi to free some time for ourselves" - some mothers have still not grown beyond this attitude.

The benefits of the anganwadi, even as it is now, are still manifold. Inspite of this, our people pursue private nursery-schools. If 20 children come to the anganwadi, 5 go to private nurseries. And there are 2-3 who attend neither." I had come to the end of my long narrative.

Saying, "I never knew there was so much to an anganwadi", Savita lapsed into thought as we reached her house.

Ruminations:

The central problem here was to dismiss the incompetent anganwadi worker and get another one in her place. For this the parents of the children attending the anganwadi came together and made oral and written complaints to the concerned official. But this was insufficient. It needed the intervention of an outsider, a court-appointed advisor to pressure the line department officials. Even there, persistence was required to finally effect the change.

ICDS does provide spaces for participation and involvement by mothers of the children and other village elders. They are given powers of monitoring and deciding expenditure of grants. Mothers are to meet monthly to look into any issues in the running of the anganwadi. But these mothers, mostly young women married into the village, and thus not very influential or powerful in the village hierarchy, are hesitant to voice any complaints or confront the higher ICDS officials.

In the decade and more when the anganwadi worker was incompetent and the anganwadi was dysfunctional, no parent found it worth their while to discover how anganwadis in neighbouring villages were running and whether improvements might be made in this one. This brings us to a major bottleneck. The indifference of mothers (and the rest of the inhabitants), their inability to value the anganwadi as much more than a place that keeps kids away from home during the day and provides a meal. Thus they are not interested in utilising all the amenities and spaces provided to them by the scheme. The composition of the mothers' committee keeps changing every year as children pass out of the anganwadi and new children enter it. This also contributes to indifference or temporary interest by mothers. (It is insufficient to have only one or two of the mothers active and interested, since they are overruled by the majority.)

Such an indifferent attitude is convenient to ICDS bureaucracy which feels no compulsion to supervise and ensure that the anganwadis run well. Even if there are oral complaints by parents, they can be ignored by claiming they were never made!

Since Anganwadis cater to a marginalised section - i.e. very young children, the quality of service depends primarily on the work-ethic and sincerity of the Anganwadi worker and helper. Thus the choice of worker and helper has to be made very carefully.

CHAPTER THREE

MGNREGS:
Panchayat-Centred or People-Centred?

The MGNREG Scheme needs little introduction. Beginning in 2006 in 200 districts, it has covered all districts of the country since 2008. Its novelty is said to be its bottom-up, people-centred, demand-driven, rights-based design[10].

As per the MGNREG Act, the principal authorities for planning and implementation of the Scheme are the three-tiered Panchayati Raj Institutions – the District, Block and Gram Panchayats. Every Gram Panchayat (GP), after considering the recommendations of the Gram Sabha (GS), is to prepare a development plan and maintain a shelf of possible works to be taken up under the Scheme as and when demand for work arises.

The GP has to forward its proposals to the Programme Officer, a Block level appointee, for scrutiny and preliminary approval. He has to allot at least fifty per cent of the works in terms of its cost to be implemented through the GPs. After consolidating the project proposals prepared by various GPs, the Programme Officer prepares a plan for the Block under his jurisdiction and forwards the same to the District Programme Coordinator. In the month of December every year, a labour budget for the next financial year containing the details of anticipated demand for unskilled manual work in the district and the plan for engagement of labourers is prepared by the District Programme Coordinator and submitted to the Zilla (District) Panchayat; from there to the State, which in turn forwards it to the Central Government.

The procedure for a job seeker is to apply and obtain a Job Card for his household at the GP office. Now, as a Job Card holder, he can apply for work whenever he wants - and obtain a dated receipt for his application. The GP must assign him work within 15 days. If he is given work, wages are to be disbursed on a weekly basis or in any case not later than a fortnight after the work is done. If he does not get work within 15 days of his

10. MGNREGS, Operational Guidelines 2013, MoRD, Dept of RD, GoI

application, he is entitled to unemployment allowance. While the Central Govt. bears 100 per cent of the unskilled labour cost and 75% of the material cost of the programme, the State Govt. has to bear the cost of the unemployment allowance.

On paper it seems like a well thought out, comprehensive plan, so why would job-seekers not come forward - and what happens then? A villager recounts the implementation of the scheme in his village, from the time it first started.

We first learned of MGNREGS in 2009, when the peon in our GP office appeared at our doors proclaiming, "You shall be provided with job-cards. You will have to be photographed for this". When we asked "Why?" - he elaborated, "you will be issued job-cards with your photographs. This will give you a chance to work under the employment guarantee scheme." So all of us were photographed.

But even after a year, there was no further information from the GP office; nor did we make any enquiries. Only some contractors got wind of the scheme. They undertook some works under this scheme. But these contractors were unable to secure the money due to them so they came to us. "I had submitted your job-card number, so I need your signature now to secure my money", said one such contractor to us. Naturally we sought to know why he had submitted our job-card numbers, and he answered, "because I know you and trust you. Since no manual labourers are to be had, I used machines for the work, although this is not permitted. Please come along and obtain my money for me." What was in this for us was our next question. He promised each of us a hundred rupees so we signed where needed, and thus ended our involvement with the scheme.

Awareness of MGNREGS grows

At this time we knew little of what a job-card was, or what we could gain from it. Once, during a discussion in the Gram Sabha, the GP Secretary brought this up. At the end of the meeting, we pressed him for more information about all this. And he explained: if three members of a household had job-cards, then they could take up bunding or planting of saplings in their fields and get money from MGNREGS for this.

"At the talk of money even corpses come to life". Will simply having job-cards secure us money? Who will do the work itself? - this question did not occur to us at all. Unwilling to labour hard when machines can be easily hired for the work, we got the work done by machines – reasoning that the

contractor, after doing the same, nevertheless got money – and rushed off to the GP office, thirsting for money. The GP Secretary stopped us in our tracks. "Use of machines is strictly prohibited," he said, "and before taking up the job you should submit an application at our GP office with your job-card number. Within 14 days of the submission we will send word that you may start the work. We will monitor the progress of the work by photographing it at various stages. Only by following these rules will any money come to you." (Box 3.1).

Box 3.1: Why MGNREGS is a matter of ridicule here

Unlike earlier times, those willing to work hard - particularly for smaller returns - are few. Copying city-folk, we too have fallen prey to living mechanised lives and are heavily dependent on machines (earthmovers, tractors etc.). The preference is for easy work and easy living - acting as brokers for any and every manner of transaction; as cooks for wedding-feasts and taking up contracts for small jobs.

The few willing to slog, get Rs. 250/- a day as wages with breakfast and lunch thrown in. Wages are paid immediately and there are no hassles of filling out forms or running to the GP office for endless photos. Contrast this with MGNREGS where the wages are Rs. 174/- per day, payment is after 14 days and filling a job-application form, taking photos, trips to the GP office etc. are necessary.

That is why some job-card holders do not know their job-card numbers or how to get money under the scheme. So MGNREGS has become a matter of ridicule amongst our people. But if the present drought persists, and wage-labour is harder and harder to get, perhaps they will turn to this scheme. Further, prompt payment of wages and raising the wage significantly may draw more people to MGNREGS.

Yet some clever villagers submitted the due applications but used machines for the work. When called to inspect the work, the GP Secretary again disallowed the work since machines were used. But these clever ones then bribed the GP Secretary and posed a few job-card holders as working: the needed photos were ready. Through such crooked means, they got money under this scheme.

In 2012 we were all asked to open a 'zero account' in the GP office (Fig. 3.1). Nothing matches the fascination of a freebie; so off we rushed - only to hesitate when told that an application had to be filled out and submitted for this! Finally these accounts were opened after each of us slipped in Rs.

Fig. 3.1: A Gram Panchayat Office

20/- along with the application form and its attachments, to the peon in the GP office. But we made no use of these 'zero accounts'.

MGNREGS money used to be disbursed by cheque. But in 2013 we first received money in our 'zero accounts' – when the second installment of the NBA scheme (for building toilets) was regarded as MGNREGS work and deposited into these accounts.

By this time, we came to know that within 14 days for any work done under MGNREGS, money would be deposited into these accounts. We further learnt that any group of ten job-card holders could apply for road repair, silt removal from cattle ponds etc. To the best of our knowledge no such group has taken up any such work here.

Wage-labourers and Contractors: A Symbiotic Relationship?

A few more capable amongst us, used to take up small jobs of the farmers on a contract basis. Now they have also become small contractors under MGNREGS (Box 3.2). They get the work done using machines, since manual labour is hard to come by here. When submitting an application for a work announced by the GP officials, they searched for the needed job-card numbers in the GP office itself. At this stage, those whose job-card numbers had been used thus would have no inkling of it.

The GP officials awarded the work with no qualms, only too happy to have their palms greased in the process. Their one fear was that their higher-ups might arrive on an inspection. So they warned the contractors to have ready, a band of labourers with tools in hand, to satisfy the inspection team; otherwise work could go on using machines. How much was transacted between the contractors and GP officials to obtain such timely warning remains unknown to us.

Box 3.2: The birth and growth of a local MNREGS contractor

Suresh drove the tractor for us in those days, when our occupation was the loading of tractors with silt and delivering it to farms and fields. After some years of this, when the JCBs (earthmovers) arrived here, Suresh hired himself out with JCB owners.

Some practice at money-reckoning – rental rates versus diesel and other expenses, etc. - made Suresh good with numbers. And over frequent trips to the taluk headquarters, the desire to turn into a contractor grew in him. At first, he undertook small contract jobs for local farmers – bunding or bringing silt for them. Before long, he became a contractor proper. Developing contacts at the GP office, he executed some of the small works taken up by the panchayat.

In 2008 he acquired some understanding of the working of MGNREGS. There is no place for a 'contractor' in this scheme nor are machines to be used. For each work, a group of people are to submit an application, labour with their own hands, and receive the wages due to them – this much is generally known. But how are works under this scheme to be executed if there is no labour available? This was the reason for Suresh's emergence as an "MNREGS Contractor".

For appearances sake, all was as per MNREGS rules: there was an application from a group of job-card holders, the work was executed, and, during inspection, labourers could be seen working hard. But the reality was that Suresh had this work executed just like any other contract job he took up.

What were his profits from this? The material – gravel, cement, sand, etc. - for any work is to be purchased from GP-authorised suppliers. The amount billed for the purchased materials directly reach the shop-owners' bank accounts. This is usually about 40% of the contract amount. Of the remaining 60%, what remains - after the machinery rentals are paid and something is shared with the pretend-labourers – is his profit.

One year, Suresh gravelled a short stretch of village road and built a compound for the village school. The total value of these two jobs was about Rs. 2 lakhs, and after paying out as above, he was left with a profit of Rs. 30,000. The previous year he had cleared a stretch of roadside thickets at a cost to himself of Rs. 40,000, but no bills were paid out to him. The inspection team found that the thickets were growing back and rejected his claims. So his final "profits" after two years added up to a loss of Rs. 10,000!

Yet, none of us have our job-card on hand – they lie in the GP office! The GP officials have not come forward to give us our cards and we have remained indifferent too, not pressing for our cards. Does this come as a surprise? The reason is only this: there is no ill will amongst us – small farmers, wage-labourers and contractors. After all, these contractors are from amongst us, only somewhat bigger. Though they use our job-card numbers, they get no payment without our signatures. On occasions of inspection too, they need us to pretend to be wage-labourers on the work. For our co-operation at these two stages, they share a part of their profit with us. We are also able to get information about how much the contract was for and what their profits were (Box 3.3).

Box 3.3: Works completed under MGNREGS

In our village a number of works have been executed under MGNREGS funds in the past 5 years. A couple of roadside hedges (of the invasive lantana shrub) have been cleared and two cattle ponds have been desilted. A total of about three to four kms of different village roads have been gravel-topped or macadamised. At the household level, 25 of a total of 350 families have raised bunds and planted saplings in their fields and about 200 toilets have been built.

Ruminations:

The reluctance of job-card holders to take up MGNREGS work seems baffling at first. It becomes understandable when one considers that no instance of timely payment of wages is locally known. Additionally, awareness about the scheme came in bits and pieces and was partly inaccurate – that too only from the GP secretary. Non payment of wages in reasonable time and lack of adequate awareness, together make MGNREGS degenerate to just another government scheme – despite its transformative potential. (Hard labour and unattractive wages are the other major factors explaining the reluctance of job-card holders to come forward.)

Villagers see that the GP Secretary is key to implementing the scheme. He accepts applications for work. Sanctioning and then monitoring the progress of work also seem to be in his hands. Yet he has no incentive to be proactive and provide clear information at GS meetings regarding the MGNREGS scheme. The elected GP members too have little reason to spread awareness of the scheme in the village - either because they are not sufficiently knowledgeable themselves or in a position to ensure prompt payment of wages or because of their interest in colluding with contractors and the GP Secretary.

Yet funds for the GP can be accessed if the necessary paper-work and a willing contractor are present. Since the cost of executing MGNREGS work through machines is about 30 to 40 per cent cheaper than through workers, the incentive for local contractors to take up works is high. However payments finally come only to job-card holders, so the contractors need the co-operation of job-card holders - to that extent MGNREGS does put a minimal power in the hands of the beneficiaries.

If the works themselves - however spiritlessly implemented - do improve the natural resource base of the villagers to help them face a subsequent drought better, then they are to be welcomed. In this case, going by the list of works completed in the village, only that of planting saplings could help in drought -proofing. But the saplings are growing poorly or have died, since no care was taken after planting. MGNREGS provides no funds for maintenance of any assets created.

When convergence of MGNREGS with other schemes was allowed, then a number of households did in fact benefit as the next story shows.

CHAPTER FOUR

Rural Sanitation:
Scrap pages from a Toilet-journal

The Central Government's interest in rural sanitation goes back to the World Water Decade (1980s). In 1986, Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP) was launched. As a supply driven, high subsidy and infrastructure oriented programme with low financial allocations; the CRSP had little impact on the gargantuan problem. The experience of community-driven, awareness-generating-campaign-based programmes in some states and the results of evaluation of CRSP, led to the formulation of the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) approach in 1999.

TSC advocated a shift from high subsidy to a low subsidy regime. The strategy was to make the Programme 'community led' and 'people centered'. A "demand driven approach" was adopted with increased emphasis on awareness creation and demand generation for sanitary facilities in houses, schools and for cleaner environment. The strategy aimed to meet the sanitary hardware requirements in an affordable and accessible manner by offering a wide range of technological choices. TSC thus exhibited a paradigm shift.

Implemented in a campaign mode - TSC took a district as a unit so that 100 percent sanitation coverage could be attained which would result in significant health benefits. Coverage in a Project District was expected to be "saturated" in about five years but could take longer if needed. Commencing in a pilot mode, TSC (in 1999-2000) covered just a couple of districts in each State (adding upto 39 districts in the country). There was a jump for 4 years, between 2002 and 2006, when the scheme added an average of hundred districts each year. In 2012, TSC was renamed Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA) and the funding for it increased more than four-fold.

NBA is to be implemented in phases with start-up activities. Upto 15 % of the funds are to be made available for preliminary IEC work – viz. using folk media, mass media, wall paintings etc to create a demand for better sanitation. A revolving fund in each district is envisaged. These funds can be provided to SHGs and co-operatives that can give cheap loans to

members and/or set up Rural Sanitary Marts (RSMs) and Production Centers (PC). Individual households can choose from a menu of options for their household latrines. The built-in flexibility in the menu of options gives the poor and the disadvantaged families an opportunity for subsequent upgradation depending upon their requirements and financial position. Subsidy is increased and MGNREGS funds are allowed for the construction of household latrines. Inspections and Social Audit are also in the NBA agenda.

Like the MGNREGS, each district has to make a project proposal that is scrutinized and consolidated by the State Government and transmitted to the Central Govt. (Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation) as a State Plan for NBA each year.

How the NBA scheme unfolded in two neighbouring villages is reported in the story below. Belonging to two different GPs, the scheme played out differently in each village.

What is a toilet?

At first we had no awareness of what toilets are for – we had imagined them to be spaces for bathing. People went to farms and fields for excretion. With time, modern ways reached our village. By 2005, television had come to our village and publicity about toilets began through official channels. Documentaries and plays on TV made it clear that women can be spared the embarrassment of defecating in the open, if there were toilets at home. It is then that we came to know that toilets were meant for defecation. We also found out that under the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA) scheme, every household was to have a toilet.

However, we had no clear and definite information about this scheme and thus learnt much later of the government's financial assistance for the building of toilets. One-upmanship is common now in villages too – for example, a household buying a TV prompts the neighbour to do the same. So when in 2009, the first household built a toilet, others soon came up, until there were eight toilets in the village. There it halted.

Toilets constructed thus, afforded much material for indignant gossip among some of our village's ancient grannies. "It is one thing for hemmed-in town folk to have shit-pits right in their houses, but shouldn't our children here show more sense? We have our gods in the house, and to now have a shit-pit alongside, and to go into it! Enough it was to take but a mug of water and wander off into the vast open spaces – even a bucket of water is not

sufficient for the stink here! O Mallakka, these times and these ways are not for us. You, Kallakka, don't you agree? And right by the wall of the holy temple will our toilet have to be, it seems..."

What had been just words for us till then, took concrete shape in 2009, when cement-rings to line the toilet-pit were given in the neighbouring village. But that village belonged to another Gram Panchayat (GP). Greater publicity about NBA by our GP took off in 2011-12. At the same time, people themselves came forward to build toilets because over-crowding in villages meant less and less space for open defecation. These toilets cost about Rs. 14,000 to build. (Box 4.1)

Box 4.1. A Latrine: Construction costs

Step 1: Making and lining a 6 ft deep pit	
Wages for digging pit	*Rs. 400*
4 cement rings to line the pit	*Rs. 1600*
Cover for the pit	*Rs. 400*
Step 2: Placing toilet chamber and connecting to pit	
Toilet chamber	*Rs. 350*
Pipes, elbows etc	*Rs. 400*
Step 3: Superstructure	
Labour	*Rs. 4800*
(4 days work for 2 masons &d 2 helpers)	
One Thousand Bricks	*Rs. 3600*
Sand and 3 bags of cement	*Rs. 1950*
Door, window	*Rs. 700*
Total cost	***Rs. 14200***

Fig i: A toilet built under MGNREGS and NBA

When to build a toilet:

It is the responsibility of the GP members to keep in mind the welfare of all, when they learn of a new scheme. But in our village of a hundred households, a few were favoured over others. As mentioned earlier, by 2009 our village already had eight toilets. Sannappa had one of these. "Financial assistance is for toilets to be built now, toilets constructed earlier may get about a quarter of this amount", so it was said in the GP office. Telling us of this, our GP member, advised us to dig toilet pits so that the GP secretary

could take photographs of these when he came. He suggested to Sannappa to dig another pit, for which he would get him full assistance too.

Accordingly, some households dug pits. When the GP secretary came to take photographs, our GP member was at the forefront, leading him to take photographs only of those who had voted for him (and of course, Sannappa's too.) The others, who had dug pits, were forced to bribe the GP secretary before their pits were photographed.

Slowly more toilets began to be seen in our village. Some people were able to build them with their own funds, others borrowed the needed sum. After constructing toilets, a few dared to visit the GP office to get their promised financial assistance. The only answer they got was, "you will definitely get it some day". It was the same when the GP's Project Development Officer (P.D.O.) was asked in a Gram Sabha meeting, "When will newly-constructed toilets get financial assistance and when will previously-constructed ones do so?" His answer, "Some day they all will get it", but when will that day be?

Sannappa paid the needful bribes to obtain the first two installments. A few others also received both installments, some – just one installment. Some who took loans to build toilets are still empty-handed.

The neighbouring village: a luckier lot?

The village neighbouring ours is larger - has about two hundred houses and belongs to a different GP. There, in 2009 itself, people were asked to sign in the GP office, take their cement rings and told to dig toilet pits (Fig 4.1). The effort in digging a 6 ft deep pit is not trivial. Such a pit takes two men a whole day to dig if the soil is soft but when the soil is hard and rocky, it takes two days of labour. After digging pits with such effort, no information was to be had even after many weeks and months. So some closed the pits they had dug. Some others turned their toilet pits into garbage pits.

Fig 4.1: A six feet deep toilet pit encased with cement rings

Two years later, in 2011, their GP members had the 'already-closed-pits' reopened and asked those who had not yet made pits to do so now.

At this stage, toilet chambers were issued from the GP office and signatures taken. The GP members stayed at the forefront, ensured that all pits were photographed when the GP Secretary came. In their lead many households built toilets.

From another village of this GP, came reports that previously constructed toilets too would receive full financial assistance. Insisting on fairness the GP member of this village pressed the GP Secretary, "If in any other village in this GP, previously constructed toilets are given full financial assistance then those in this village should get the same."

Subsequently even those who had previously built toilets showed freshly-dug pits elsewhere and had their old toilets whitewashed for the official photograph, and were thereby allowed to secure full benefits of the scheme. (There were also those with old toilets who sought no assistance and kept quiet voluntarily.) So barring these, more than 60% of the households in this village have obtained financial assistance from this scheme (Box 4.2) – there has been no great arbitrariness or unfairness in this village.

Box 4.2: Cashing cheques and finding job card holders

The financial assistance of Rs. 10,000/- for building toilets is disbursed in three installments.

Ist installment: From NBA	Rs. 4,700/-
IInd installment: From MGNREGS	Rs. 4,500/-
IIIrd installment: from beneficiary	Rs. 800/-

The Ist installment is given as a cheque. It was common to see many people at the bank trying to cash their cheques. Some did not even have bank accounts. Others had cheques with incorrect names, other errors and torn or damaged cheques. Naturally these were not honoured at the banks. So, the manner in which the cheques were encashed was a surprise indeed. An agent arrived there, offering to cash any cheque if he were given a commission of Rs. 200/- for each cheque. Several people handed him their cheques, without bothering about the question "how can this fellow cash the cheques which the bank will not encash?" They received the money on the spot (minus his commission). The modus operandi of the agent remains a mystery.

The IInd installment comes from MGNREGS. To qualify for this, a household should produce a job-card with three adult household members. And when a household had less than three adult members, it had to be made up from other households. Finding such names and thereby securing this installment was therefore not simple. Some households could produce a job-card with a single member and did not receive this installment.

It needs mention that the GP officials did cast their eyes on the funds of this scheme and decided to withhold unpaid house-tax while paying out the assistance. This was unexpected. Unaware of this, some had borrowed the entire sum, confident that they would obtain the full assistance amount. When they went to the GP office to collect their cheques, they received upto 20% less – the rest being the house-tax they owed to the GP.

What is behind the differences in the implementation of the scheme in these two neighbouring villages? In one village the GP member took the lead and secured the first two installments for everyone. In the other, the GP member only favoured those who voted for him. Hence the financial benefits reached more than half the households in one village while it reached less than a quarter of the households in the other. Was this thanks to the GP member or is the cause to be looked for in the GP office? We have no answers yet.

Can't we manage on our own without any support from GP members? Kalappa's case (Box 4.3) provides the answer.

Box 4.3: Kalappa, poor fellow, builds a toilet

A scheme of the government may be well-intentioned, yet many obstacles crop up during the attempt to use it. A middle-aged farmer (say, he has cleared 10th Std.) managing his household affairs amidst the complexities of the competitive modern world is no babe in the woods. Yet the difficulties he encounters are manifold.

Take the example of Kalappa, a small farmer. He supplements his income with wage-labour and taking up cooking assignments at weddings in nearby towns. The GP office, 3 kms from his village, has to be reached either on foot, cycle or by motorbike as there is no public transport available on this route. Here then, are his travails when he applied for financial support to build his toilet under the NBA scheme.

He came to know that financial assistance was on offer for toilet construction, from his GP member. But no further details: How was the toilet to be built? Were any documents to be produced to secure the assistance? So he made a trip in person to the GP office.

At his first trip the P.D.O. was not there. The peon, whom he asked, instead said, "There is a form here which you should fill. Your election ID card and your Aadhaar card will be needed. But there are no forms now". Kalappa promised to return the next day

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The P.D.O. was indeed there the next day. Kalappa got the form for Rs. 10/- and filled it correctly but the peon did not accept it. Thinking that perhaps the offering was not adequately spiced, he submitted the form and photocopies of his election ID card and Aadhar card, with Rs. 30/- slipped in. This time the peon took the form, only to say, "I forgot to mention this, your Job Card under MNREGS is also required." Kalappa could only helplessly grumble, "Could you not have said this yesterday? Now another trip and more petrol!" The peon went on, "Tomorrow is your only chance to get the P.D.O.'s signature because he is on a week's leave after that."

But Kalappa had a cooking-assignment the next day. A job worth Rs. 250 to be sacrificed for one signature by the P.D.O. Letting go of the job and the money, Kalappa again went to the Panchayat office. Now the P.D.O. was away in a meeting in the next village. The peon was dismissive today and would not tell him when the P.D.O. might return.

Kalappa's intelligence, not to be doubted, caught the peon's hidden suggestion – "Rs. 50/- in the peon's pocket and Rs. 100/- on the P.D.O.'s account; and the peon might himself get me the P.D.O.'s signature." Thinking thus, he quietly took the peon outside and slipped another Rs. 150/- with his Job Card number. The peon was now very friendly and said, "You should quickly dig your pit and tell your neighbours to do the same. In two days, the G.P. Secretary and I will come to photograph the pits."

Kalappa returned to his house and dug his toilet pit. So did a few others. Nothing was amiss with the pit he had dug, but when the peon and the G.P. Secretary came to photograph it, the peon sneered at its supposedly wrong dimensions and refused to photograph it. They went on to the other households with a vague assurance that they would come back at the end. Kalappa followed them as if he had some question to ask them. Another Rs. 200/- exchanged hands and his pit was finally photographed. They then left, promising to send his file to the P.D.O. quickly.

Within a week of this, Kalappa had finished building his toilet but with borrowed money. He hoped to pay back the loans on getting the promised financial assistance from the NBA scheme.

When he went back to the Panchayat office, after a couple of weeks, the peon was singing another tune: the office computer was out of charge. Kalappa was poorer by a further Rs. 300/-.

Two months later, the first installment reached Kalappa. A few months later the second installment also came. Kalappa had to make innumerable trips to the Panchayat office and fill the peon's pocket many times.

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Thus, some of the financial assistance intended for Kalappa did not reach him – a part of it was spent on trips to the GP office, or journeyed further into the peon's pockets! Kalappa had no backers and sought to get his work done by himself. No GP member was there to act for him. Kalappa's fate is the fate of many of the rest of us too. Is it any surprise that many villagers hesitate to make use of even beneficial Govt. Schemes, or that they only move forward when a person with political clout is beside them? So Kalappa's story becomes the norm: a scheme which, in one way improves your lot is in another way a drain - of time and money accompanied by mental strain.

To what extent are these toilets being used?

Although this scheme has rural sanitation for its objective – the goal has not been reached. Households have indeed built toilets but have lagged behind in their use. Only women and children use their household toilets. The aged hesitate to enter them. For many, the fear is that – daily and excessive use of toilets will result in the pits filling up and bring on the unpleasant task of emptying them. For some others, open defecation is a long standing habit difficult to shake off.

The location of toilets near water-sources (bore-wells) is common. There is little understanding that this can cause contamination of ground-water and thus spread water-borne diseases like cholera.

Toilet-complexes for the primary school and anganwadi were built many years before the individual household toilets came up. The anganwadi toilet came up first, over six years ago – but this was used only for a year or two. It then fell into disrepair. Several discussions about this in mothers' meetings have yielded no solution yet. Therefore it has become inevitable for children to run out to defecate in the open even during anganwadi-hours.

The toilet-complex for the primary school was built by the GP six years ago. A grant of Rs. 25,000/- had been secured for this. This complex has separate toilets for the teachers and child- friendly toilets as well. It is well maintained and continues to be used.

Ruminations:

Here the beneficiaries had only to build toilets, either with loans or their own funds and hope they would receive the financial benefit from the scheme.

The question of when to build household toilets was uppermost in the minds of many village inhabitants because of the worry that if you built too early you may not be eligible for the entire subsidy. So the question - whether the subsidy was for 'previously built toilets' also - was an important one for beneficiaries. This is understandable. However, in the Central guidelines for implementation, this question is not even mentioned leave alone considered.

The scheme was sanctioned for the district in 2005-06, so why was there no implementation in these villages for six years, and then why was there a sudden spurt in 2012-2013? The online website shows that no central funds were released to the district for four years. The brief spurt in activities in 2009 in one village, when cement rings were distributed (and no activity the next year), corresponds to the centre releasing its share that year (but not releasing it the next year).

The sudden spurt of activity in 2012-13 can be related to a quantum jump in the central releases that year (over 20% of the total nation-wide funds from 1999 onwards were released by the centre in 2012-13). So despite the "demand-driven" emphasis of the scheme, it was the "supply-driven" release of central funds that mattered most. It was also the increase in subsidy for household latrines that brought forth more activity. This can again be connected to 2012 when MGNREGS funds were allowed to be disbursed for the NBA scheme.

This still doesn't explain why in one GP the financial assistance reached most of the beneficiaries and in the neighbouring GP, there is only a promise that someday they will all get it. This is despite the fact that both GPs received funds to implement the scheme that year.

It is little wonder that when a scheme is suddenly flush with funds for one or two years, the rush to utilise them throws out all possibility of a 'central role for IEC activities', orientation of GP officials, involvement of SHGs, technological choices, inspections, social audit etc – all important in the NBA guidelines issued.

CHAPTER FIVE

Rural Water Supply: *From Abundance to Scarcity*

Rural Water supply falls mostly under the jurisdiction of State Governments, although the Central Government provides a framework, guidelines and some funding. In Karnataka, ground water extracted through deep bore wells is the main source of water supply in rural areas.

The type of water supply scheme depends on the total population of the village – those with population less than 500 are provided with borewells fitted with hand pumps. Villages having population between 500 and 1000 are provided with a Mini Water Supply (MWS) scheme. In this scheme, an electric pump fitted to the borewell allows water to be pumped to one or more small tanks (Cistern) fitted with 3 - 4 taps, from where water can be collected by households. For a population of 1000 and above, Piped Water Supply (PVS) scheme is provided. This has storage & distribution facilities like large overhead tanks and individual household connections.

The Panchayati Raj Act envisages devolution of many functions from the State level to the PRIs. Karnataka State is among the front runners on that score. An instance of that is that the responsibility of operation and maintenance of rural water supply schemes is entrusted to Grama Panchayats (GP). The GPs appoint a "pump operator" from the local village for the operation of the system.

The next story recounts the changes in water supply and distribution in a village over many years.

It is customary in our villages to offer a glass of water to visitors, even if they be strangers. But for a year now, we are prepared to offer even a meal but baulk at parting with water.

Two decades ago, water scarcity was unheard of. Rains were copious and tanks, ponds and wells had water. Drought meant crop failure and food scarcity, not a search for water for household use. And we let our cattle and coconut trees feel no lack of water.

Driven by greed and one-upmanship, farmers here took to growing water-intensive commercial crops like areca nut, coconut and banana on a wide scale. Irrigation needs in summer rose. But during those years of excessive use, we had no conception of the water scarcity lying ahead of us. As time passed, the water level in tanks and wells fell, so we turned to sinking borewells.

It is a deeply-held belief amongst our people that the ground below stores a veritable sea of water. We believe that as long as we adequately propitiate the gods, on no account will they abandon us. Usually the spot for digging a borewell is selected either by calling in a water diviner, or by taking a god in procession and letting god indicate the spot. After that, from borewell digging to bringing water to the house is familiar ground for us. Hiring a borewell rig, installing a motor to suit the obtained yield of water, laying pipelines to bring the water to the house, lowering the motor adequately when the yield drops, lifting a motor and getting it repaired in case of malfunctioning, repairing the starter ourselves – all these are tasks that many in the village can confidently take up.

Sliding into scarcity; in a decade

About 30 years ago, the government drilled two borewells and affixed handpumps to these, to fulfill the domestic water needs of our village. These yielded plentiful water for our needs. We manually pumped the water into pots and carried it to our houses.

Even so, in 2001, our GP member – wishing to curry favour with people – got a borewell sunk with government funds. Over the next two years, three cisterns (each of about 3000 litre capacity) were installed at different locations in the village and connected by pipes to the borewell. By 2003 these were filled with water from the energized borewell and a waterman (officially "Pump Operator") was appointed by our GP to undertake the daily running of the system (Box 5.1). Since the cisterns (Fig. 5.1) were cleaned only once in six months, a separate low open tank (Fig. 5.2) was made for cattle and a drinking water tap provided at its entry.

Fig. 5.1: A public cistern

With no water shortage in those years, the cisterns would overflow into nearby pits. Water was plentiful for all domestic needs. And matchingly extravagant were people in their use of it, with no awareness that one day it might run out.

Fig 5.2: Low tank for cattle with drinking water pipe at entry

Box 5.1: The village waterman

Filling the public cisterns from the panchayat-dug borewell is the job of a local villager called the waterman. Appointed by our GP as "Pump Operator", he is the lowest rung employee and reports to the P.D.O. Our waterman has been in place for about 10 years now.

Fig : A borewell with electrical fittings

With the hours of 3-phase supply being limited (generally 3 hours a day), the waterman is occupied only during this time. Only on rare occasions – due to no power supply during the day or a faulty pumpset – does he have to work at night.

It is his responsibility to report on the need for any repairs or changing of pumpsets when necessary. Another, not-to-be ignored part of his job is the facing of flak from the villagers who are often not satisfied with him.

For this, the waterman should get a monthly pay of Rs. 2500 by the GP – but these payments are delayed, sometimes by 6 months.

By 2009, with rainfall decreasing, the first borewell ceased to yield any water. Then another borewell was dug by the GP. As the number of houses in the village increased, and water-use had gone up over the intervening eight years, the previous three cisterns had grown to eight. For a while this new borewell filled all the eight cisterns. But with more and more borewells all around the village, and irrigation-tanks and ponds not filling up, within two years the yield from this borewell also began to drop. Soon the same eight cisterns would not fill up to even quarter of their capacity.

Falling groundwater levels meant that within no time this second borewell too ran completely dry. The villagers intimated the GP's P.D.O.,

but to no avail. So the women of the village came together, hired a vehicle, and reached the GP office with their empty pots to stage a protest. "We will find water for you within 24 hours" was the assurance. The GP ought to have accordingly turned its attention towards a new borewell. Instead, the extant submersible pump was lowered further, to the very floor of the 500ft deep borewell. The cisterns filled up a little more, to 35% of their capacity perhaps. But soon enough our hopes of an easing of the water-crisis came to naught.

From one temporary arrangement to another

Back to the P.D.O. we went, complaining that there again was no water. From his ivory tower he could only grumble that just a few weeks back he had heard this from us already. Lowering the pump yielded no further water, we explained, and asked him to personally look into the matter. He made a visit the next day, and consulted with the waterman and the GP member. They explained to him that, since the groundwater level had dropped sharply, there was no way out but to either deepen the existing borewell, or dig a new one. The P.D.O. asked for some time, to talk to his highers-up.

In those few days people began to venture out to nearby private farm-borewells for water, disregarding the distance in transporting water to their houses.

Finally, in 2013, the water-supply borewell was deepened from about 500ft to close to 1000ft (Fig. 5.3). The old motor was replaced by a more powerful one. But all to little avail. Over four to five months the yield once again dropped. A cistern would fill up only once every week. Soon, since water would not climb into the cisterns, people themselves connected pipes of smaller diameter to the main supply-pipes, and drew out water. On occasion we even waited up at midnight – or 2AM even – for water.

As we grew desperate for water, the GP member stepped in: since, clearly, the groundwater-level at the borewell had fallen further and the cisterns would not fill, the villagers were to take turns - fifty houses at a time - and collect not only drinking-water but also water for domestic use from the tap earlier reserved for the former. And she personally supervised this arrangement without heeding night or day. The consensus among the people was that this was an effort on her part to garner sympathy before the next elections. In any case water was to be had in this manner for a few weeks only.

For the borewell soon went completely dry. This time the GP member too expressed helplessness. "The ball is in the P.D.O.'s court. If all of you

affix your signatures to an application for a new borewell, I can forward this in the panchayat office. - This much alone I can do," she said. There has been no action after this. Whether the application was never forwarded, or whether we are to await our turn for the digging of a new borewell, or whether the geologist (to locate the point for the new borewell) is not to be found, is unknown to us.

Fig 5.3: A borewell rig, mounted on a lorry, for deepening or digging borewells

By now some of the private farm-borewells dried up as well. Earlier we used to bring eight-ten pots of water each day from such borewells which yielded plentiful water. Since their yields had dropped by now, and the rains are still some distance away, the concerned farmers are far more hesitant to allow us to take water from their borewells.

Some villagers made a plea to the P.D.O. for some action, since open fighting, for water, was now very likely. But the model code of conduct for the general elections disallows the digging now of a new borewell; the P.D.O. therefore promised to send two tankers of water every day.

The P.D.O. kept his word, and now it was the turn of tanker-supplied water: two tankers every day. This permitted each of us, four to five pots of water. But soon it was down to just one tanker every day, and this at unpredictable times. The very sound of the tanker found all of us rushing out on to the streets; yet, many of us returned empty-handed. We continued to turn to private farm-borewells, or the village hand-pump, for drinking water, and sought the tanker only for other needs.

It was only two weeks before the tanker turned to a mirage. We complained to the P.D.O. over phone; did he not take us seriously, that no tankers were to be seen after a mere two weeks? He then told us of a new arrangement he had sanctioned: Gundappa of our village had approached him. If the GP would pay him for this, he offered to supply water to the village from his (private) borewell for the coming one month (till the passing of the elections). For taking such decisions, the GP can go ahead only with

approval from the District Commissioner/ District-level official. They had agreed; therefore the village-cisterns should again start filling in a couple of days.

So it has been – although, it must be said, the water thus supplied is not adequate. And how long will this arrangement hold?

Such water scarcity is not our plight alone, but affects nearby villages too. In two neighbouring villages, when their public borewells ran dry, the GP arranged to lay pipes to their village from a borewell 4 kms away! Two other villages are tanker-dependent. Some big villages have large overhead tanks (50,000 litre capacity), from which water can be led into the cisterns on occasions of faulty power supply or faulty pumpsets. But now there is not enough pressure to raise the water to fill the overhead tanks.

A future scenario

If such acute water scarcity has developed over the past ten years, how will it be ten years from now? Even as groundwater-levels plummet everywhere, people's lavish consumption has not been reined in. What if the government takes a back seat and the water distribution is left in our hands?

Given the lack of unity in our villages, no one will come forward to take up the responsibility of distribution. For instance, when two months back our GP member took the lead in organising distribution from tankers, a jealous opponent of a different political hue quarreled with her methods, until she felt compelled to halt the tankers for a few days. If this becomes an everyday feature, what will the plight of common-folk be?

There may be greater eagerness if the government assures some backing to those who come forward. To these persons, at least the powers currently vested with the GP's P.D.O. will have to be given: this will keep other locals from needlessly throwing a spanner in the works.

Firstly, water distribution would have to be simplified. Presently eight cisterns, each 8 ft high are spread all over the village. In raising water to fill them, there are leaks and enough loss of water to flow from a 1.5 inch diameter pipe. Instead, a single large 3 ft tall cement tank located centrally in the village is adequate. With ourselves in charge of the water, our village elders may be able to persuade all the villagers to co-operate and even the more distant households will put up with coming here for water.

In our arrangement water will be for all. Even if the rich thrust themselves forward a little, the poor will not budge without securing some water at least. Furthermore, since the sourcing and distribution of water will be in our view, and the persons in-charge local as well, it will be easier for us to bring pressure on them if we find the water to be contaminated. Although we have not worked out the finances for operation and maintenance, the government should grant a certain annual sum to whoever is left in-charge of the distribution.

Ruminations:

While the careless and extravagant use of water by the village over several years is striking, the rising capital cost of supplying water also needs to be noted. At first, a borewell with a hand-pump sufficed for the entire village. There were no leaks, losses or electricity charges to be met. Then cisterns were installed and a borewell with a submersible pump and an electricity connection. Three cisterns had been enough in the beginning but the number grew to eight and is now even more. A second borewell was needed as the first stopped yielding water. When the second one too failed, tankers became necessary and then a temporary reprieve when a fellow villager was allowed to supply water from his borewell for a price.

Poor water quality has not been an issue yet but inadequate supply has now become a serious problem here. A majority of the households in the village each have a private borewell for irrigation[11]. A few of these are near the residential area, others near fields. The public water supply is thus just one more borewell (linked to a number of cisterns). This borewell has to be on government-owned land, say bordering a street but also adjoining private property. Although a rule preventing a private borewell coming up within a 500 m radius of the public borewell is present and known to villagers, the rule is commonly breached. (In the days of copious water it didn't matter and no one complained. Additionally one is reluctant to complain about an acquaintance or friend)

It is clear that the elected GP member has no voice in addressing the water problem. All problems are to be addressed to the GP PDO whose attention is divided as he is responsible for all the villages in the GP. The powers of the PDO in sanctioning a new borewell or the procedure and

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11. Capital cost of digging a borewell and fitting a new submersible pump is presently about Rs. 1.5 lakhs.

time-frame he needs to follow to augment water supply is not clear. So villagers can only complain to the PDO and wait for action.

The operation and maintenance of the water supply is in the hands of the GP but funds are inadequate. The expenditure on electricity charges is high, and repairs and salary of the water man also have to be provided for. Revenue for O&M come from an annual water supply grant from the State and as part of the house-tax collected by the GP from all households. On average, a GP's revenue for O&M is less than 20% of the expenditure actually incurred[12]. In such a scenario, the question of the village meeting the capital cost of new borewells or additional cisterns cannot even be asked.

The issue of rural water supply, a subject of critical importance to the daily life of villagers, is one in which they are not accountable nor given any authority to make changes. As costs rise and water supply becomes precarious, they are becoming increasingly dependent recipients in a field in which they are experts – viz. in the knowledge and skills of sourcing and distributing of water - clearly, an unsustainable way to follow.

12. *See "Decentralised Governance and Service Delivery – Affordability of Drinking water Supply by Gram Panchayats in Karnataka", by D. Rajasekhar and R. Manjula, ISEC Monographs 2011*

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions

All the stories relate to basic needs - water, sanitation, nutrition and pre-school education and livelihoods. In all these sectors, government schemes are being implemented. Several schemes started as pilots in a few districts across the country and later expanded to all districts, countrywide. In the many years of their existence they were revised and new guidelines issued. Yet the learning from the pilots did not get incorporated into the ground-level implementation of the expanded programmes - striking in the MGNREGS & NBA, which got reduced to just-another-govt.-scheme. These two Centrally-sponsored programmes also have websites meant to make their performance transparent. But the data in the websites is unreliable at the level of panchayats. (That is why an initial attempt at buttressing the facts in the stories through the websites was abandoned.)

Considered together, the stories allow for a comparison across schemes as presented in Table 6.1. For each scheme, the table shows who the beneficiaries were, what was the form of their involvement and the results obtained. The presence of "others" did determine results so that has been included in the table. The last column pertains to how the scheme was designed i.e. what was the potential scope for beneficiary involvement that the scheme permitted.

As evident from the table, each scheme has a different group of beneficiaries, ranging from inter-village to intra-village groups. While the canal irrigation case is the only one where beneficiaries are present over many villages, water supply is the only one where an entire village benefits. In all the others, one or another subset (or group) of persons from a village is benefited. In terms of collective action, it is unrealistic to expect the entire village to come together for schemes that target a subset of villagers. It is upto members of that subset to come together. In the anganwadi case this did happen but not among the individual households benefitting from MGNREGS or NBA.

The actual nature of involvement by beneficiaries is in the form of (oral and written) complaints, coming together as a group and threatening action (or else no involvement at all). These cases show that coming together as a group is necessary to bring about desired results. But this alone is not enough - the involvement of an outsider with power is necessary. In three of the cases – Canal irrigation, anganwadi and the NBA, it was the active involvement of appropriate outsiders that ensured the desired results

Scheme	Beneficiaries	Actual Involvement by		Result	Scope for Involvement by beneficiaries
		Beneficiaries	Others		
Canal Irrigation	Farmers, from villages with community irrigation tanks (officially)	Group action	M.P., M.L.A.	Some water reached the tanks but not enough	nil
Anganwadi	Young children (represented by their mothers)	Oral & written complaints & threat of action	A court - appointed advisor	Change of anganwadi worker achieved	Supervision, monitoring & spending grants for anganwadi
MGNREGS	Households with job-cards	Nil	Nil	Jobs completed	Complain about irregularities and request inspection of ongoing work
NBA	Households who built toilets	Nil	A pro-active GP member	Ensured financial benefits in one village	nil
Water Supply	Entire village (women at forefront)	Oral complaints & group action	Nil	Scarcity of water continues	Nil

Table 6.1 Overview of rural schemes

What is vital (and also varies across schemes) is the scope provided by a scheme, for beneficiary involvement. In this regard it is the anganwadi scheme that is best designed. It allows a 10 member committee to be formed and gives it the authority to look into and correct minor malfunctioning. It allows mothers to monitor and supervise the running of the anganwadi and decide how funds are to be used. All the other schemes may have statutory provisions for respective committees to be formed – like village water and

sanitation committee - but provides no authority to them. That ensures that such committees, if ever formed, are useless. That is why statutory provisions for gram sabhas to do social audits for NBA or MGNREGS etc. hold no water - unless they are authorised to take decisions and handle some funds.

These stories also point to another significant lacuna and a formidable obstacle. Even if policy makers provide more scope for involvement (with authority), or design programmes better - indifference from villagers is to be expected. This has to do with their current mental attitudes and value system as described by the story-writers in Box 6.1. Villagers understanding of 'the good life' has changed in the past decade and more and one-upmanship is now paramount. A reluctance or refusal to take some responsibility for their living conditions presents a big hurdle for proactive action on their part. And of course in wanting to pull others down, solidarity is hard to come by. This consumerism is a countrywide malaise (in urban and rural areas), and most people in these villages have succumbed to it.

Yet the memory of living within their means and greater cooperation even two or three decades ago, remains as a reminder to them that it could be different. And there is certainly the rare thoughtful villager here and there, who is not swept away by the dominant mindset.

There may yet come a time when the tide turns and villagers find common cause to come together. And such times are perhaps just another drought away. The stories in this report remind us that coming together will not suffice. There must then be schemes that allow for meaningful involvement by beneficiaries – not just designs on paper.

Box 6.1 *"We are like that only"*

Between a prolonged drought on the one side and mounting expenses on the other, our financial position has become more and more uncertain. Yet, at the same time, a brazen confidence is mounting amongst our people, regardless of whether they are rich or poor, or of higher or lower caste. "Propitiate the gods, and everything will be excused", is what they all believe. Thus the gods take precedence at the start of every undertaking. Every day, in every household, at least half an hour is set aside for puja of the household deities. At the start of the monsoon when ploughing begins, before planting saplings, when digging a borewell and on countless other occasions - a puja is performed. "Can the gods not smile on us, who have done so much for them?" (Sometimes, our relationship with our gods can take strange forms! We are reminded of a man who, during a puja at the start of digging a borewell, warned his god: "If no water is found here, I know what fate to send you to!")

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A sign of this brazen confidence is borrowing money without worrying about the ability to repay. So loans are commonplace – for buying TVs, two-wheelers and latest cell phones that they desire. Also to send their children to English medium "convent" schools or to lavishly celebrate marriages, etc.

Most frequently they borrow by pledging their jewellery in pawn shops or banks. Next are loans from self-help groups; then come crop-loans from banks. The monthly interest rate may be 2% in a pawn shop, 1% in self-help groups (i.e. 24% pa. and 12% pa. respectively). Since people usually earn enough to pay the interest on these loans they do not concern themselves with the repayment of the capital. Why then would there be any hesitation in borrowing money?

Ten years ago, when groundwater was found closer to the surface, there was no need to dig borewells very deep. Further, these borewells yielded water for many more years than borewells dug now. So in those days, raising a plantation of areca nut or coconut did not cost much. Today loans are being taken only to secure the yield (and income) from saplings which have already grown up. Thus the risk is not too high and there have been no cases yet of farmers' suicides amongst us.

Twenty-five years ago, when we were children, our grandfathers hesitated to take loans. They lived within their means - more often than today did they come to each other's aid. Take an instance from farming: when misfortune befell a household, the neighbours joined them to plough their fields and bring home a crop. During droughts, the haves shared to some extent with the have-nots. In cultural programmes, they participated together for village fairs and enacting plays. Thus cooperating, the village felt little need for government schemes. Apart from its fair-price shops, we have no recollection of government welfare schemes from those days.

Nowadays people have dealings with the government in virtually every aspect of their lives - fair-price shops, food and education in government schools, drinking water, canal dependent irrigation, hospitals, building village-temples and houses, cheap household power supply etc. But we take from welfare schemes only what we want from them: not necessarily what they are designed to give. Inspite of such dependence, we do not worry about what might happen if these schemes are withdrawn. Similarly we usually take no interest in the proper running of these schemes. Sometimes when mounting troubles push us into a corner, a few stir themselves to seek a way out but others then obstruct those efforts. When responses or solutions are demanded from panchayat (and other government) officials, they react by stalling and not cooperating.

If you ask about the future we will tell you not to worry - "The god looking out for us: he will look out for us all!"