

The value of water



The story of how village residents revive a well and nurture a tree.

The village is a small habitat of about 122 people and is off a National Highway by a kilometer in parched Kolar district of Karnataka. The water situation is difficult and the summer heat causes people to quarrel near the supply points as the volume is meager. The borewells have reached 1,000 ft. and the drinking

water has to be pumped a kilometer to the village. An overhead water tank stands in mute testimony to an infrastructure designed for better times while the water has run out.

Inspired by Grama Vikas an NGO, **Gunashekhar** of the village of Doddaganahalli has taken up the de-silting of two old open wells. Overtime they had fallen into disuse with people throwing rubbish into it since the source for water had shifted to borewells. Now, in desperate times, the village was looking to its old friends for help. After the de-silting both the wells have started to yield water.

Cleaning process

About 5,000 liters a day, enough for the domestic needs of the population. The villagers are busy adding limestone to the waters to clean it, they say. It is an old practice around open wells forgotten but being revived.

Women gather and joke that they had forgotten the exercise of lifting water and anyway it was better than paying and joining a gym. Schoolgirls are washing clothes around the well using the water carefully and judiciously. It is vacation time from schools.

The clothes wash water drops from the well platform into a small pit near a tree trunk and collect in a pool. Here is old Narayanappa, all of 85 years, thin and bent with age scooping the water into two small containers. He then walks about 300 meters to a few saplings he has planted and pours the wash water carefully around the root zone. He has mulched some of the area to prevent evaporation loss. The saplings have green leaves and are surviving the summer heat thanks to a person who cares and does not allow any water to go waste.

The young girls washing the clothes seem oblivious to the work of the old man and he also does not talk much. By hauling water about 60 feet the young ones have learnt the value of it. As they observe the well seeping slowly and filling up gradually they are forced to use the water as it comes and becomes available.

Those who are privileged to get water when they open the tap unfortunately seem to lose all information on how scarce water actually is. How do we regain this communication? One small way seems to price water so as to capture its scarcity value. Are our institutions up to it? Unlikely when you see how subsidised water is and how wastefully it is used by those who can afford it.

Meanwhile, true water heroes like Narayanappa continue to use it carefully and nurture trees. His one wish is to get a coconut sapling so that he can take care of the Kalpavriksh. A humbling experience it is to meet such good people. We must learn from them for only then will we be able to cope with the great water crisis that is upon us. That would be water wisdom.

The above story was written by Vice-President of Grama Vikas Shri.S.Vishwanath which was published in THE HINDU news paper.

Doddaganahalli is ChildFundIndia sponsored village.

Mr.Gunasekhar is a parent of a Sponsored child called Pavithra.