

Hapless people...

Sinking Society...

*Listening to people,
Walking along many paths,
What we saw of our beloved Maharashtra,
Just sunk our hearts.*

Is Maharashtra Sinking?

A report of a two month Padayatra, *and follow up work after the Padayatra*, across parts of rural Maharashtra, listening to people and reflecting on the situation of drought, poverty and haplessness...



Preface

Dear Reader,

It is with a great sense of responsibility tinged with trepidation that we present you a report on the Padayatra that we undertook on the issue of drought in Maharashtra. The trepidation comes from the gigantic task of relating to you what we saw, experienced and learnt. This Padayatra was a result of deliberations and a two year process called Dushkaal Hatawu : Manoos Jagawu (Eradicate Drought : Save Humanity).

We came up with the plan of the Padayatra because we wanted to get close to the people, eliminate all barriers of communication and bring the issue of drought to the forefront. We looked at the Padayatra as a medium for mobilising people, understanding their issues and identifying possible ways to address them. For us, the Padayatra is one of the initial steps in the war on drought.

This Padayatra went through 151 villages across 9 of the poorest districts in Maharashtra, interacting with the villagers. It went through large irrigated villages, small villages dependent on rain-fed agriculture, villages abutting towns, hamlets of nomadic tribes and small adivasi settlements. The Padayatris stayed in 55 of these villages. In 48 of these, advance teams of 4-5 members, went in for an assessment of the situation and opening a dialogue with the people. Inspired by this Padayatra, activists from tribal areas of Yavatmal undertook a similar 12-day Padayatra that interacted with villagers from 42 villages across 4 talukas (Schedule V areas) in Yavatmal district.

People from all walks of life were involved in the Padayatra. Civil society organisations, development professionals, IT professionals, doctors, government functionaries, students, volunteers from rural and urban areas and thousands of villagers were involved in the two month activity. It has been a tremendous learning process. No person connected to the Padayatra was left untouched.

After the Padayatra, a cross section of the people involved discussed their findings. We have tried to capture these findings in this report. *All the information in this report is based on discussions with villagers.* We present this report on behalf of all the people who were involved in the Padayatra. Through this report we wish to share our experience and learning. We wish to share the pain and suffering of the poor. We wish to stimulate you to join us in the process of eradicating drought. There are millions of poor waiting patiently for support of people like us. We owe it to ourselves.

We dedicate this report to the nameless, faceless and voiceless suffering poor who face the ravages of drought all their lives.

The credit of this report goes to each and everyone involved with the Padayatra. We, as authors, have just organised and penned the collective thoughts.

Makarand Sahasrabuddhe and Kaustubh Devale (GreenEarth) and Ranjit Deshmukh (Volunteer),
On the anniversary of the Padayatra 2007.

The printed version of the report is too huge to be uploaded on the website efficiently. This version has the same text and has been specially created for web readers. In case you want a print copy, write us.

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Introduction

We are seeing worsening hunger, thirst, haplessness, and exploitation in all parts of Maharashtra. At the same time we are witnessing unprecedented growth in the service sector, largely benefiting urban areas. This growth has caused the rich-poor divide to widen. Society is ailing. We choose to call this situation 'drought'. We are clear that drought is not just lack of rainfall or failure of crops. We have therefore tried to operate in a broader perspective by incorporating issues of fodder, work and haplessness of people. It would not be wrong to say that 'drought' is a pivot around which we want to raise the plight of the poor.

No man is an island, entire of itself..... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind..... and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls.... it tolls for thee. – John Donne

Around a year or so back, civil society organizations belonging to the network under the Poorest Area Civil Society (PACS) programme mobilized themselves to try and address this issue. This process led to the Dushkaal Hatawu : Manos Jagawu forum. Members of the forum initiated social action to alleviate the issues of the poor. This was mainly in terms of obtaining work under the Employment Guarantee Scheme, ensuring that tankers reached the water-starved villages, rectifying irregularities in the Public Distribution System etc. They also tried to draw attention of the government to the issues of drought and how it affected the poor. These efforts have been sporadic, sparse and have therefore not resulted in generating adequate momentum that would grab attention towards the issue. All the time when these developments were in progress we had a feeling of disquiet. There were three primary reasons for that:

1. First, we were approaching the problem with a top-down approach. It was also the reason why we were not able to fire the imagination of the common people to take action.
2. Second, we were taking actions aimed at disaster relief. We were providing temporary solutions; band-aids where, perhaps, radical surgery was required.
3. Third, the urban civil society was seemingly unconcerned about the issue of drought. This society was immersed in its own issues of pollution, congestion, poor quality of life, increased crime without perhaps realising that the **core issues** in both urban and rural areas were the same.

In our field visits and consultations, it became increasingly clear that the common people, who were most affected, needed to act. There was a need to engender a process that would give people hope - hope to enable them to shake off their haplessness and take charge of their lives.

This need led to the conception of the Padayatra. We critically examined this idea over 5 months all the while interacting with various sections of society, consulting experts, exploring options. By October 2005, our minds were made up: the Padayatra would commence on 1st January, 2006.

We prescribed ambitious goals for ourselves. We decided that through the Padayatra we would

- Look at the issue of drought **through the eyes of the people.**
- Explore long term and **sustainable solutions** to the ailments of society.
- **Involve urban civil society** in the process.
- Draw attention of the media and government to the issues of the poor.

Looking back, we feel that the Padayatra managed to fulfill all these objectives, albeit with varying degrees of success. In the subsequent sections we shall share with you our findings, our analysis of the core issues and some long term actions that have emerged.



The Padayatra was launched at the crack of dawn on the 1st of January 2006 from a small hamlet, Kasari in Ashti Taluka of Beed district in Maharashtra. It went through 151 villages, from 24 talukas in 9 districts covering a distance of 944 kms in 59 days before culminating at Gandhiji's Ashram in Sewagram on the 28th of February 2006. Two days were spent in discussing the issues and determining probable line of action. Over 12,000 people from all walks of life were involved directly with the Padayatra. Eminent persons from the field of social development participated in the Padayatra. On the 2nd of March 2006, 150 of the Padayatris assembled at Dikshabhoomi at Nagpur where they were administered an oath to eradicate drought by Retired Justice Chandrashekhar Dharmadhikari.

Everyday the Padayatris would start at sunrise after the morning prayer. They would walk from one village to the next and normally reach by around noon covering 15-20 km. On reaching the village, they would partake lunch and rest awhile. Late afternoon, the Padayatris would meet groups of people from various sections in the village. A village meeting would be organised late in the evening. The process in the village would normally end by 11 pm when the Padayatris would retire for the night, only to begin the next morning.

In 48 of the 55 villages assessment teams went in 2-3 days prior to the Padayatra to study and have a deeper understanding of the issues of the people. The teams, comprising 3-5 trained members, would inform the villagers of the Padayatra, its aim and initiate a dialogue on the issue of drought. When the Padayatra reached the village, the assessment team would brief the Padayatris of the situation in the villages and the key concerns of the people, especially the poor. These issues would then be discussed in the village meetings.

After the Padayatra, the assessment teams and Padayatris met for a three-day workshop in Pune where the findings of the Padayatra were consolidated. GreenEarth (seven members participated in the Padayatra for the entire duration) was asked by the DHMJ forum to prepare the report of the Padayatra.

Shikharwadi, a small village near Dhangar Javalka village on the padayatra route. Population - 550. Number of people left in the village - 100. When we reached the village, there were no men or women to greet us. Only children and their grandparents. Where were all the people?

We went to a small hut. The sun was setting. There was one light bulb. Luckily, there was electricity. The 12 hour power-cut was yet to start that day. Sumantai, an old lady, was holding her granddaughter in her lap. The little girl was running a fever. We asked Sumantai where the little girl's parents were. Her son and his wife had migrated to Gujarat for 6-7 months. Why did they migrate? Weren't there any jobs in that area? Didn't they have land to cultivate? "Yes, we have about 5 acres of land, but then, there is no water." Isn't there a small dam just across the village, filled with water because of the good monsoons? "Yes, but it benefits only the people downstream. Our land is upstream. There is no money to install a pump." So do these migrant workers save enough money to get back to the village? "No, they barely make enough." Then why do they leave their children and the aged by themselves in the village for months? Was Sumantai going to take the little sick child to the doctor? "Kay Saheb, there is no doctor in the village and the nearest hospital is 5 km away. She will get well by herself."

Then we met Rekha. She is 10-12 yr old. She doesn't know how old she was because she didn't go to school. She lived with her younger sister and brother. Where were her parents? They migrated to Gujarat with their youngest baby sister. She cooks and takes care of her two younger siblings. What? A 10-12 yr old girl running the house! What kind of injustice is this where school going children have to take care of themselves and their siblings, when this is their age to learn, to play, to be carefree?

The Experience

Padayatra. A journey. A quest to understand rural Maharashtra. We walked to meet people, listen to them and live with them. What did we experience? The following is an attempt to put forth the experiences of all those who were part of the Padayatra. We have tried to put in words the essence of the pain and suffering, hunger and helplessness, disparity and unfairness, irregularities and corruption that we saw. We wish to convey the harsh yet real picture of a section of rural Maharashtra, one of the most developed states of India.

(Names of all villagers mentioned here have been changed.)

Pain and Suffering

Hunger, the darkest manifestation of drought. It stared us in our face, in every village we visited. Little children with stunted growth, malnutrition writ all over their faces, elders so frail they could hardly walk, women, the pillars of our society, not knowing if they would be able to feed themselves and their children the next day. In our attempt to reach the ‘last’ ones in the village, the bottommost of the socio-economic strata, we saw hunger. Stark hunger. Not enough to eat, in a country with an agro-based economy. Not enough to eat, in a country with granaries bursting with grain.



Endemic Suffering. Little girls having to walk for many a mile to fetch water, hence, being late for school. The pain in their eyes for having to quit school because their mothers wanted them to do household chores.

The drudgery women face throughout their lives. Their relentless commitment to their families as they uncomplainingly go about cooking, cleaning, working in the farms, taking care of their children. Yet, they receive no recognition, whether it is their low labour wage rate, lack of decision-making power in spite of holding office, dowry or the harsh atrocities that they face everyday from a patriarchal society.

The subtle and often overt exploitation of the dalit, nomadic tribes, adivasis and other marginalized communities. Their frustration of being forced to live in a society that looks down upon them. Their forced acceptance of the inequalities in society and the unequal distribution of resources and wealth.

In Katoda village of Arni taluka in Yavatmal district, children of the Pardhi community are denied access to the village school. In Ganjpur village of Dharur Taluka in Beed district, the dalit community is not allowed to draw water from the community well. And to think the practice of untouchability is illegal, not to say immoral.

The helplessness amongst the old ones, neglected by a society so busy to make ends meet. They have the least priority be it healthcare or social security.

Bandubhau, a 53 year old man, from Raiwadi in Loha taluka of Nanded district. He looks 70. For the past several years, Bandubhau has not had dinner. Not because there is no food, but to avoid having to answer the call of nature in the middle of the night. With his night blindness, going to the fields in the dark is not an option. There is neither toilet in his home nor a public toilet in the village. Such a simple need as a toilet and for the lack of it, an old man has to sleep on an empty stomach. This is the state of village elders in almost all the villages we saw.

These were the people, the girls and women, the marginalized and the aged that we saw, the ones most affected in a crumbling society.

Discontent and Haplessness

Agriculture is the base of rural India and often, the only source of livelihood for majority of the rural people.

Agriculture is in crisis. No farmer, big or marginal, adivasi or traditional, is content. They are a resigned lot. Agriculture, the fulcrum of rural prosperity, has become an unviable and unsustainable option.

Traditional agriculture was mainly subsistence farming, where the farm was a balanced ecosystem. Human requirements were less and abuse of natural resources was limited. Livestock, organic manure, local seed varieties and mixed cropping pattern were used. Today's agriculture is much different. **Market oriented and credit-dependant farming, chemical fertilizers, pesticides and hybrid seeds are the norm.**

Land holding has reduced significantly due to divisions within growing families. A majority of farmers are still dependant on the monsoon rains for a good crop since irrigation facilities are limited. One bad monsoon, whether it's insufficient or untimely, is enough to cause widespread damage. It could take a farmer up to 2-3 years to get back to normalcy.

We found water shortages in many villages that we visited, in a year that experienced the best monsoon in recent years. Farmers with 2-3 acre land holdings and no irrigation find it difficult to break even. With the advent of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, the input costs have gone up with increasing prices.

Ganpatbhau, 45 year old from Latur district, is a frustrated farmer today. Till about 15 years back, he used to cultivate udid, moong, jowar, sesame, tur and cotton in the traditional way. His focus was more on cereals and oilseeds than cash crops, which satisfied his family's needs. From integrated cropping pattern, Ganpatbhau switched gradually over the last decade to cultivating more cotton. The initial years were profitable. However, the yield started going down, which forced him to use more and more chemical fertilizers and pesticides. As his input costs rose and yield declined, his profits started dwindling. Three years back, he switched to soybean... another cash crop! The soybean yield dropped from 10 quintal/acre to 4 by the third year. Today, cash crops do not yield any profits nor does the crop pattern satisfy the food-grain requirements of Ganpatbhau's family.

Technical know-how does not reach the farmers, and they have to depend on the input dealers for information. The government agriculture extension officer rarely visits any village. He is usually

found with the dealers at the Taluka place. Farmers have to depend on knowledge from within the family or from companies with vested interests.

Heavy fertilizer use has reduced the fertility of the soil, and farmers are forced to use more and more of it, year after year, to get decent yields. Farmers have become dependent on hybrid seed varieties whose costs are completely governed by corporations. Unlike the traditional seeds, these seeds have to be bought season after season.

With no control over the market, the price of their produce fluctuates, often at the mercy of the traders adept at manipulation. **Increasing input costs, falling yields and unfair prices, result in low or no profits.** The losses are greater in the case of cash crops like cotton and sugarcane, where inputs are higher and payments are dependent on the cotton federation or sugar factories.

Cotton farmers from Pahur village in Ghatanji taluka of Yavatmal district are quite frustrated. Cotton farming, as it is practiced here has very high input costs. High Yield Variety seeds (Bt. Cotton), chemical fertilizers and pesticides, apart from daily-wage labour and other charges for water usage and tractor/bull usage amount to a hefty input cost bill. Input costs have gone up to about Rs 5000 per acre for cotton. Average output per acre ranges between 4-7 quintals. In comparison the price paid by the cotton federation fluctuates each year between Rs. 1500 to Rs. 2300 per quintal. Farmers are not allowed, legally, to sell their produce to any trader except the federation. Cotton farming is becoming quite unpopular with the farmers due to lack of timely payments by the Federation and dwindling profits from cotton farming.

In the case of cotton, farmers are often not paid for 3 or more months. Corruption is rife right from grading the cotton to making payments to the farmers. This is the government cotton federation, whose mere existence is to ensure farmers a fair price for their produce. But there is no accountability warranted, not from the government, nor from the farmers, whose weak voices can never be heard unless there is unity amongst them. **Unfortunately, there is no unity, no organization that lends a voice to the farmers.**

We did not see much unity even at the village level either. When the farmers of Malegaon (Beed district) were duped by fake sunflower seeds, they could not take any action against the trader. All they succeeded in getting was replacement bags, after the season was lost. In most cases, farmers didn't know their rights, due to lack of information as well as education.

Increasing input costs and stagnant produce prices have resulted in high credit needs and ever-increasing debt. **In every village that we visited, most of the farmers were in debt.** Many are defaulters with the local banks and credit societies. In Hayatnagar (Hingoli district), the District Credit Cooperative Bank closed down due to non-repayment of debt to the tune of Rs 50 million. Farmers resort to local moneylenders, where they can get easy and fast loans even though they have to mortgage their lands and pay exorbitant interest rates to the tune of 10-25 % per month. Many a farmer has lost his land to moneylenders. Of course, the loans are not just for farming, but also for relatively huge amounts of dowry and marriage expenses as well, a part of our culture!

In many cases, the farmers have drawn the crisis upon themselves. In places where there is irrigation, farmers have switched to water intensive cash crops. There has been unchecked drilling of tube wells. Uncontrolled pumping of water for irrigation in the quest for more profits has led to depletion of ground water reserves that will take years to replenish. This short sightedness on the part of farmers is already costing them dear, with many a tube wells lying defunct.

In Malkaranja village of Osmanabad district, we saw one tube well nearly 1200 feet deep! Farmers in search of water for irrigating their water-intensive sugarcane farms have been indiscriminately boring tube wells. Tube wells are increasing in absolute numbers as well as in density. Malkaranja villagers would be some of the worst exploiters of ground water resources. The ground water level is going down steadily over the years, and yet, there are no alarm bells ringing. Today, there are around 300 tube wells spread over 500 hectares of farms. In the last ten years, the number of tube wells has increased from 100 to 300 and their depths have increased from 300 to 650 feet. How does the village let this massive exploitation of water go unchecked? Why do they not think about sustaining precious water reserves? What are the future generations going to depend on? What about the policy that limits tube well depth to 450 feet; one tube well in a radius of 100 metres and not more than three tube wells in a radius of a kilometre? Isn't the Talathi or government official responsible to enforce this policy? Aren't the villagers themselves responsible for this exploitation? Who would accept responsibility for replenishing these water sources?

We saw irrigation schemes that were benefiting only those few that were downstream from percolation tanks or those who could pay the water tax and electricity charges to pump water from irrigation canals. Power cuts lasting 12 –16 hours have frustrated the farmers, who many a times, have to water their farms during odd hours. In some cases, where the farmers paid their charges, the frustration was justified, in others, where “tapping” into electric lines was common, it was not. In the Schedule V areas, adivasis find it difficult to survive only on agriculture. Traditionally being hunters and gatherers, they have little know-how of agriculture. Most have received small plots of land mostly on sloping and infertile areas under the Land Ceiling Act of the sixties. Diminishing forests and lack of access to Non Timber Forest Produce has left them with little choice other than agriculture. It is difficult for them to sustain themselves by cultivating their own lands. They are forced to supplement their income through labour.

Tidhari Pod is a Kolam adivasi settlement near the village of Dongar Kharda in Yavatmal district. Most of the fertile land around the ‘Pod’ or settlement is owned by ‘Izardars’ or landlords from Dongar Kharda. Unable to sustain themselves from their own infertile lands, almost all the adivasis here work as labourers on the Izardars’ farms.

We saw widespread discontent amongst all these farming communities for many reasons noted above. Agriculture has changed since the green revolution. All the inputs are governed by outside factors, and the concept of saving seeds for the next season or using organic manure is largely lost. Livestock numbers have gone down drastically as was seen in villages like Ganjpur (Beed district), Kali (Yavatmal district) and Wapti (Hingoli district), as the role of animals as part of the agriculture process has reduced. Distress sale of animals is one of the first signs of an economy on decline. **“As food insecurity increases and people are under more stress, they will often begin to change what they do with their assets (resources or wealth) and how they produce food or income,” according to the Famine Early Warning Matrix developed by Canadian Food Grain Bank.** As per the matrix, people undertaking distress sale of livestock and other assets are placed in the highly vulnerable category.

With fertilizer and hybrid seed companies making a push, the farmers fall prey to concentrating on short-term profits and not on long-term sustainability. Farmers are wary of adopting traditional and organic farming methods despite being aware of the benefits. They say it takes time to change over to organic farming and they cannot afford to lose any season. There is no relevant education for the agriculture community and the school education that they get plays little or no role in helping them earn their livelihood.

Prakash from Dhanora Kale (Parbhani district), "We have studied till 12th grade, how can we work on the farms?"

Youth in the villages prefer not to work on the farms because they look down upon it and see no future in it. They prefer to be unemployed after their education rather than working on the farms. It is their last resort of employment. Today, there is no prestige associated with agriculture. Farmers do not see any pride in agriculture. Society does not look at agriculture as an important and dignified economic activity. Farmers are taken for granted. They are looked as objects of exploitation by input dealers, traders, bank officials, moneylenders, government functionaries and every other person they come in contact with. It is perceived as the lowest rung of economic activity. Farmers do not encourage their children to take up farming. It is no longer a profitable venture nor a dignified way of life.

Loss of Livelihood

With increase in population and a crisis-ridden agriculture, people are struggling to find decent sources of livelihood. Farm labour wage rates for men are a meagre Rs 50 per day. It is even worse for women at Rs 20 per day, when they toil just as hard as men. The traditional 'Balutedar' system wherein the carpenters, ironsmiths, barbers, 'chambhar' (cobbler) earned their living, is no longer a viable economic option. From the social point of view, the 'Balutedar' system has always been exploitative.

Maintaining livestock for economic purposes is no longer viable. Dairy was a major source of livelihood. However, fodder unavailability due to water shortage and distress sale of cattle led to dwindling numbers of livestock. **In Wapti, the numbers have gone down from 1800 to 400 over the last 10 years, while in Raiwadi, they have declined from 5000 to 700 in the last 15 years.**

Lack of relevant education and vocational training has resulted in an increase in the unskilled work force.

There are no other livelihood options available in the villages leading to a collapse in the livelihood system.

Lack of employment opportunities within the village are forcing people to look for employment outside. Seasonal migration of work force, especially from the district of Beed for sugarcane cutting on farms in Western Maharashtra, is common. These sugarcane cutters receive an amount in advance from the 'agent' or Mukadam' and they work to pay back that amount. In most cases, they are left with debt and are obliged to work for the same 'agent', the following year. They end up living in stark and sparse conditions. Alcoholism is rampant. Their children suffer in education. In villages like Shikharwadi (Beed district) and Ralga Tanda (Latur district), 80% of the village work force migrates for 6-7 months in a year, leaving the grandparents and little children to take care of each other.

During the 1972 drought a minor irrigation dam was built in Ralga Tanda of Ahmedpur taluka in Latur district. This dam is capable of providing sufficient water to irrigate the entire village lands. However, only a few big farmers downstream from the dam benefit from it. The remaining cannot afford to pump water or pay its usage charges. They only get one Kharif crop after the monsoons and are forced to migrate in search of livelihood. 70-80% of the populace migrates for 6-7 months every year leaving their children and old to fend for themselves. The contrast between the dam waters and few sugarcane farms on one side and dry arid land and locked houses on the other was very stark. Why should people, especially the aged and children face severe hardship and suffering when there is ample water available in the village?

In other cases, entire communities like the Wadar community of Gaul Bazaar (Hingoli district) migrate to big cities to work on construction sites.

In villages like Palvan (Beed district) that are close to towns, villagers tend to commute daily to these economic centres to work as labourers. In such cases, their interest in the overall village development is low. Quick money has led to increased levels of alcoholism and gambling.

Collapse of Institutions

About 6-7 years ago farmers of Malkaranja village, Osmanabad district used to supply nearly 2000 liters of milk every day to the district dairy co-operative. However, late payments from the district level cooperative and malpractice (both at the time of gradation to determine fat content as well as determining whether milk has gone sour) led to the farmers losing trust in this dairy co-operative. Since then, the number of livestock has reduced because it was no longer a profitable venture. The milk production in Malkaranja declined and today the supply is down to only 200-300 liters a day, most of which is sold to teashops and hotels at the taluka place. We experienced similar stories in other villages like Raiwadi and Gaul Bazaar. An excellent means for supplementary livelihood was killed by unethical and illegal socio-economic gains of a few.

Throughout the Padayatra, we did not see a single functioning dairy. Corruption by a few, delay of payment by the district cooperatives and lack of knowledge about livestock management and veterinary care led to the collapse of all cooperative dairy ventures. Once successful dairies are now almost defunct. People are still reeling under the debt from the cattle loans and the interest payments are mounting. They have lost faith in dairy ventures.

The sugar factory of Balaghat (Nanded district) and the ginning mills of Pusad and Kali (both in Yavatmal district) have closed down, leaving hundreds of farmers in a lurch. Mismanagement and corruption has led to huge amounts of tax payers' money going down the drain. It has severely affected the local economy. The loss was not only for the farmers, but the labourers and society as well. However, farmers were the biggest losers, since they were part of the cooperatives. That means they owned a part of these factories, and had to absorb the losses.

We experienced anomalies in the government institutions as well. Panchayat Raj Institutions that are established to place the decision-making powers with the people and work for the people were seen as working for an elite few. Even though there are women representatives on the Gram Panchayats, their presence is only because of the reservations. Their sons or husbands or some other

village elder takes decisions on their behalf. These proxy Sarpanchs are audacious enough to introduce themselves as the real Sarpanchs. There are also non-resident Sarpanchs who live in nearby towns.

We met 21 women Sarpanchs of whom none but one were allowed to participate in the decision-making.

The Panchayat Raj system if executed properly would provide good representation for all communities and women. The Gram Sabha is a forum where each and everyone in the village can be heard and decisions can be taken for the overall village development. Mahila (women) Sabha is statutory in Maharashtra and its decisions are binding on the Gram Sabha. **We did not witness the occurrence of a Mahila Sabha nor it influencing the decisions of the Gram Sabha in any of the villages.** Committees like the Gram Shikshan Samiti (Village Education Committee) and the Water User Committee can monitor education and water usage respectively. However, these committees were functioning in very few villages. Because of a lack of unity amongst the villagers and vested interests of a powerful few, the system does not work for the overall good of the village.

All this points to a collapse of institutions. This collapse has resulted in tilting the balance of power further into the hands of a few individuals who “control” the village and dominate collective decision making at the village level. Institutions like the Gram Sabha were meant to devolve this skewed power relations at the community level but we did not experience this during the Padayatra.

In no village did we see active and vibrant Self Help Groups (SHGs). SHGs are meant for women to come together at the village level, resolve their problems and empower themselves. However, most of these groups did not have active participation and were only used for saving and taking loans at low interests. Even these activities were manipulated by the members’ husbands for personal gains.

If government and cooperative institutions were seen failing, traditional institutions like Bhajani Mandals (traditional religious groups at village level) and Jaat (Caste) Panchayats were seen to be working. Is it because these cultural institutions are built around collective interests rather than self-interest? Are the government and cooperative institutions failing because of an attitude in achieving personal gains and lack of ownership, while failing to seek collective interests?

Irregularities Everywhere

In a bid to provide employment in rural areas, the Government of Maharashtra introduced one of the most progressive acts in history, the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS). Under this Act, any adult in rural area can demand work and the government has to provide an opportunity for unskilled manual work within 15 days and within travelling distances on projects like water conservation, harvesting, land development and rural connectivity. These projects are aimed at rural development and drought proofing, at the same time providing rural employment. The projects, can in fact, be suggested by the Gram Sabha, i.e. the villagers themselves.

There is complete ignorance about EGS and its provisions. The villagers do not participate in the decision-making. Those working on the EGS sites are exploited by being paid lower wages. No pay structure according to the scheme, fake muster rolls, no information board, lack of first aid equipment and child labour was witnessed at each of the five active EGS sites we visited.

We visited an EGS site near the village of Godhala of Ahmedpur Taluka in Latur district. It was payday. The labourers were watching the site inspector doing vigorous calculations, none of which they could understand. All they did was put

their thumb impressions on the register while accepting the payment. One batch of labourers was not present, and we witnessed one person putting his thumb impressions for all of them, while accepting their payments. After enquiry, we found that he did not represent them. The EGS Act specifies rates for different types of land to be dug, transportation rate if it is more than a particular distance, rental rate if the workers bring their own tools, sharpening rates for their tools. None of the labourers were aware of these rates. A group of men had lifted huge boulders and yet received payments according to the 'soil rates'. They were arguing about the rate, yet they did not know the rate they should expect.

The EGS projects themselves were not engineered correctly in many cases. In Naigaon (Beed district), all 10-percolation tanks built under EGS were dry and work on the 11th was in progress. It is not just the government which is responsible, but also the villagers who are supposed to keep a tab on the quality of the projects being executed within their village boundaries. These projects if executed properly, could solve major water issues of the villages. Indirectly, it is also our responsibility, since the money for these projects comes from the Professional Tax we pay.

We saw other failed government irrigation projects like the one in Wagdarwadi (Nanded district) where all seventeen bunds on a river were either washed away or broken by the farmers to save their farms from being flooded in the monsoon due to poor engineering. Unfortunately there is no accountability for the success of these projects after spending lakh of rupees of taxpayer money.

In Bhatumba village in Pusad taluka of Yavatmal district, 90 acres, which is more than 50% of cultivable land in the village is still without irrigation, despite having a Kolhapur Type Weir as well as a canal from the nearby Pus dam. However, today, the canal is blocked and its gates destroyed. Some farmers have diverted the canal water directly into their fields, when they are supposed to pump the water and pay water usage tax. Is it neglect on the part of the farmers or the irrigation department or both?

The Kolhapur Type Weir constructed at a cost of Rs 2.5 million is also dry because its gates were not lowered in time to catch the water after the monsoons. The villagers had no knowledge about Water Usage Committees. The irrigation department blamed the villagers for not cooperating in lowering the gates, while the villagers claim that they were never informed to do so. Such lack of responsibility has resulted in no irrigation for the farmers.

If irrigation projects had failed, so had drinking water schemes. In villages of Wapti and Sodegaon (both in Hingoli district), ambitious projects of water tanks and pipelines lay dry because of bad engineering and lack of maintenance. In many villages, there was no source of clean drinking water after the month of January, this in a year that experienced the best monsoon in recent years. Many of these are tanker fed, where hierarchy and power dictates how much water one gets. If external factors like nature and schemes were responsible for water shortages, so was the attitude of people. In many places, where there were water tanks, the faucets (taps) were stolen and water was seen flowing out indiscriminately. We received complaints of water shortages from these same villages, yet we saw complete lack of collective responsibility and value for water.

The predicament of Harwadi villagers is quite ironic. The village of Harwadi is situated along the river Manjra, 7 km downstream from Latur city. This river used to

be the traditional source of drinking water for the village. Today, untreated sewage from Latur city is let into the river and has made the water unfit for drinking or any other purposes. It has also contaminated the tube wells that are the alternate sources of drinking water for the villagers. Ironically, a pipeline carrying drinking water for Latur city residents passes 1.5 km from Harwadi. Yet, the villagers never got a water connection. They do not even get the services of a tanker because the collector of Latur has declared the district as 'tanker free'. Hence, the villagers, mostly girls and women have to walk for at least 1.5 km to access drinking water. This highlights the disparity between rural and urban areas, the lack of planning and care for the environment. In the end, the villagers of Harwadi are robbed of their basic right of access to clean drinking water.

There were no water schemes in all the 12 villages visited in the Schedule V area (parts of Yavatmal district).

Proper implementation of government schemes and money combined with a sense of collective responsibility can ensure that there is access to clean drinking water for all, a fundamental right of every citizen.

Another major irregularity that we saw was in the Public Distribution System (PDS). In none of the 55 villages, PDS was functioning effectively. This system was designed to help poor and marginalized people to have access to food grains and other necessities at subsidized prices. Due to corruption and government apathy, the benefits do not reach its intended populace. 'Below Poverty Line' cards were not available to those who were entitled, instead were available to ones who were economically stable. The helplessness amongst the people was evident and their inability to fight the system added to their frustration.

There were many schools where the teachers did not come on time or were altogether absent. With the villagers not taking much interest, the 'Gram Shikshan Samiti' or Village Education Committee that is supposed to keep a tab on the school proceedings, was defunct in most villages.

In one of the localities of Pahur village in Kalamb taluka of Yavatmal district, we visited a primary school, classes from 1st to 4th grade. There was only one teacher that was appointed for the entire school. That's one teacher for four classes. This teacher does not live in the village and is an hour or two late for school every day! Yet the villagers do not complain about him. They are satisfied that at least this teacher comes to the school every day. The earlier teacher would only attend occasionally. So, this time around children get a chance to be formally taught. Why is this allowed? What stand the villagers can take regarding this ironic system of education? Why are the children and their future held to ransom at the whims of a teacher and the Education Department?

Irregularities in the health sector were also stark. In many villages, attendance of the medical representatives is irregular and facilities, inadequate. In most Primary Health Centres, untrained attendants deliver medical services including injections.

In the Primary Health Centre at Kali (Yavatmal district), women lay on the floor after family planning operations or their deliveries. There was no nurse or medical

attendant in sight. Babies were swinging in makeshift cradles. The rooms were extremely dirty. There was no water available at the centre.

Inequity and Inequality... A Way of Life

There is a huge gap between rural and urban facilities. In urban areas, while there are primary, secondary and tertiary medical services, only primary services are available in the rural areas. For many rural people, these services are available only on select days when the medical officers visit their villages. This is most evident in the number of home deliveries in the villages.

Rural schools are also inferior to urban ones, in terms of quality education and infrastructure. We asked a simple arithmetic equation to many a student, from fifth grade to twelfth. 981/9. Most students could not answer correctly. We wondered how this level of basic schooling is going to help them in the future.

Most schools did not have functional toilets for the children. In some schools like the one in Wagdarwadi (Nanded district), the drinking water was contaminated. The quality of school was directly related to the interest taken by the teachers. Teachers from most schools did not live in the same village, but in nearby towns, so their own children would go to 'better' schools at the urban centres. Such was their confidence in the schools that they taught at. The level of schooling available, primary, middle and high, depends on the size of the village. Children from smaller villages have to walk sometimes for 5-6 km to go to their secondary schools in the neighbouring large villages. Their education suffers especially in the monsoon. The effect is worse on girls where parents are keen to get them married than give them a decent education resulting in higher dropout rates.

While there was inequality between men and women, we also experienced great inequity between different communities. Marginalized communities do not have much say in decision making. Dalit communities live in a separate area of the village. We experienced subtle as well as overt casteism, whether it's in access to water or other facilities. Even the NGOs working with marginalized communities have adopted an exclusionist approach rather than bringing the whole village together.

The Grip of Culture

Our experience of rural society was extremely patriarchal. **Women face inequalities with respect to men in every walk of life.** Sons are preferred to daughters. Parents do not attach importance to their girl's education. Girls are treated as liabilities and are married off as soon as they reach puberty. Sometimes, the child marriage takes place at an even younger age.

We met a little girl named Sunita in a small village. She was 8 yrs old. What caught our eye was the big 'mangalsutra' that she was flashing, the necklace signifying marriage. Child marriage is against the law, but this is so ingrained in culture, that she being the daughter of the 'police patil', a law enforcement government official, came as no surprise. A married eight year old girl!

Dowry is a common practice and rates depend on the amount of land the groom owns, irrigated or non-irrigated or the groom's education and job. Huge loans would be taken or land sold, just to host a big wedding for the village and pay dowry to the groom. Even in tribal villages, the culture of

dowry has seeped in, when traditional tribal culture had the groom to pay the bride's family, a couple of generations back.

Women have no place in the decision making process. There is no active participation in the Gram Sabhas. **Women's wage rates are less than half that of men's at Rs 20 per day, when they work just as hard.** Atrocities and domestic violence is common, alcoholism amongst men being the primary reason. Hence, alcoholism was cited as one of the biggest issues in our discussions with the villagers.

Most villagers had a general apathy towards sanitation and cleanliness. Overflowing clogged gutters and gray water let out on the dirt streets was seen in many villages like Kali (Yavatmal district) and Mendha (Osmanabad district), posing health hazards through mosquitoes and flies. In majority of the villages, we were welcomed by the pungent smell and sore sight of human feces lined along the approach roads. There were no toilets in the villages, and where there were, they were non-functional, because of shortage of water, poor engineering or the mere resistance of the people to use and maintain them. Women and the old are the most affected by this, especially in the monsoons. Due to lack of privacy, women are forced to answer nature's call in the open either before sunrise or after sunset. Most common space for ablutions is the public approach road. However, it is very uncomfortable if any person or vehicle happens to pass by. The women are forced to stand up so as to protect their dignity. This restriction leads to health problems. We failed to understand why the villages have not come together to build toilets and provide a safe, clean and convenient place for all.

People are spiritual and contribute generously towards religious gatherings or temple repairs and renovations, but fail to come together to build the necessary infrastructure in their village. There is a dearth of initiatives taken by villages to come together and build a clean and prosperous village where people from all communities live in harmony.

AND, Yet There Is Hope...

Yet amongst all these failures and negativity, we saw humanity. In all the villages we visited, people welcomed us warmly, with 'Lejhim' and traditional music, and flowers and banners. They arranged for our accommodations and provided us with food. They were eager to converse and share their views and issues. In villages like SonManjari (Nanded district), villagers took oaths to come together and work for the betterment of their villages. Such actions to tackle issues, whether it was banning alcohol or digging percolation pits for their gray water for better sanitation. This showed the power of people coming together, sharing of information and acting on it.



We also saw a few instances of brilliance where individuals or entire villages had resolved their issues successfully

In Nagdarwadi (Nanded district), the village Sarpanch had got the entire village together to execute a watershed development project with the help of an external agency. Now, this village has irrigation all year round. The villagers participate actively through the water committee. Women have active Self-Help groups.

Schools of Malkaranja (Osmanabad district) and Ganjpur (Beed district) were seen as model schools with five star ratings. The teachers are very dedicated and deeply involved in the students and work for the betterment of the schools. Parents of the students too actively support the schools.

There are a few progressive farmers practicing organic and traditional farming. Subhash Sharma's farm outside Yavatmal is a great example of traditional natural farming. By using contour farming techniques, water channels and farm ponds, he manages to save and absorb every drop of rainwater. He uses organic manure and uses inter cropping to counter pests.

In Pahadi Daiphall village, we came across sugarcane farming with relatively less water by using contour farming and other techniques.

In Salegaon village, there were bore recharge experiments, while in Pothra, roof top rainwater harvesting was practiced

We came across varied issues, yet in some corner or another, we saw instances where people had overcome them. These instances were few, but it showed that given the right resources, information and most importantly, the resolve of the people, any issue could be overcome. Most of the people we met were extremely passionate and eager to overcome the 'drought' of their lives.

Summary

We started on the Padayatra with an intention to learn from the people the way they are leading their lives and the compulsions that are making them hapless. Our experience over the sixty-one days of this Padayatra has been invaluable not only in understanding the issues of rural Maharashtra, but also in transforming the way we look at and lead our own lives. The people were extremely generous in sharing their lives with us. Many hoped that we would help them; give them that hand to pull them out of this drought of their lives. We felt their pain and suffering. There is widespread discontent and haplessness. Loss of livelihood options leave people wanting to migrate or starve. The collapse of institutions, private, public and government alike has compounded the problems. Irregularities and corruption is prevalent everywhere. Inequity and inequality has been a way of life leading to exploitation of the weak. Lastly, the tremendous grip of culture prevents many to look beyond what's so. Yet there are marvellous examples of people's initiatives, individual as well as collective, to overcome their issues. We came across plenty of passion and eagerness amongst the people to come together and overcome this drought. Hence, we feel that there is hope and the war on drought can be won.

The Analysis

Throughout the Padayatra we saw pain and suffering in the eyes of the people. Livelihood systems and institutions of all forms have collapsed leaving people dissatisfied and frustrated. Irregularities and inequity is part of every day life for the marginalized and women. Inequality and oppression thrives under the guise of culture. However, even within this darkness there were some beacons of hope; people struggling to make a difference, people with their conscience alive, people who have hope that all of this will change for the better.

This is an attempt to analyse and understand the state of affairs that we witnessed during the Padayatra. For the analysis, we had two options open to us. One was dealing with the issues, as they appeared, in sectors – drinking water, agriculture, women, aged etc. The second option was to look at the cross cutting themes that lead to their manifestations as issues in the various sectors.

The first option, we believe is inadequate in understanding and dealing with the root cause of the issues. Too many institutions, be it government or NGOs think in terms of sectors. We therefore see exclusive interventions in health, education, drinking water, agriculture, human rights, women etc. For example mid-day meal schemes are designed to attract children to school without understanding that the root cause for absence is probably the complete irrelevance of formal education to life. Thus children do get attracted to the school but only till the mid-day meal is distributed. Classrooms lie vacant after the break. The only issue that the mid-day meal then targets, to some extent, is hunger and malnutrition.

Life however cannot be divided into sectors. The woman who is abused at home is the same woman who has no sanitation facility. Her child is malnourished and out of school. Her husband migrates in search of work. Her family is indebted. For her sorrow is not compartmentalised; there is no reason why the intervention should deal with only her issue. Girl children have to walk for 2-3km to fetch water and hence, are late to school, and eventually drop out. Here, issues of water shortage and culture forcing girl children to do household chores are necessary to tackle for effective education of girls. It is not our case that single interventions should tackle all issues; but it is reasonable to expect that the rationale and strategies be based on a holistic understanding of the problem. That, from what we have seen, does not happen.

We chose the second option of focusing on the cross-cutting issues. These cross-cutting issues, single or a combination of them, are behind most of the tribulations we encountered, be it scarcity of drinking water, collapse of livelihood systems, children dropping out of school or child marriages. We propose to address these issues holistically.

Lack of Accountability

Most people, from government functionaries who are corrupt to moneylenders that charge exorbitant interest rates, from doctors and teachers who remain absent to ordinary farmers who exploit natural resources, do not feel accountable to anyone. It is not that our system and laws are not in place. If our system worked as it was designed and our laws implemented, there would be accountability. The ground reality that we witnessed, however, is far from that.

One manifestation of this is an **almost complete collapse of governance at the grassroots**. Panchayat Raj Institutions that are designed to represent the people, function as hand maidens of the rich and powerful. The Gram Sabha, which holds the Panchayat Raj institutions accountable and

whose decisions even a Collector cannot overrule, is the voice of the people. In almost all villages we went to, the Gram Sabha had never been held. In most villages, where the post of the Sarpanch had been reserved, decisions were taken by someone powerful in proxy.

Cutting edge government functionaries do not feel accountable and answerable in any way to the people who ultimately pay their salaries. This is the reason why teachers don't teach, doctors are never present in the Primary Health Centres, the talathi undertakes the 'paisewari' while sitting in his office at the taluka head quarters. This situation is compounded by the fact that **there are almost no instances of stringent action being taken against erring officials.**

Leaders (people's representatives) ignore the very people whose cause they are expected to champion. There is no system of recall and in light of the fact that people rarely have a choice, leaders are also safe from punitive action.

Even sugar and dairy cooperatives that were established for the benefit of the farmers are not accountable to them. A few powerful people make their fortunes in these cooperatives using government incentives and people's money without making them into viable and successful institutions. Hence, most of such cooperatives in the state are dead.

Corruption is the norm and people believe that nothing is possible without bribery. Why else would a farmer who has lost all his crop to hail be forced to bribe the district bank manager for release of his meagre compensation (Dhanora Kale, Parbhani)? Farmers have to regularly bribe the cotton graders at the cotton federation for assigning the appropriate grade to their produce. Irregularities at the Public Distribution System shops go unchallenged.

There is no mechanism for redressal of woes. People do not know what to do in the face of oppression. Many a times they are semiliterate and in fear of government officers. There is no evidence that corrupt officials are made to pay for their misdeeds. All they can do is be silent and suffer. They have been suffering for generations and are prepared to continue in the same vein. It is not surprising that people have lost trust in government – elected or appointed.

Another manifestation of this is gross mismanagement of available resources. Strategic thinking, prioritising of issues and commitment to alleviation of poverty would have definitely resulted in better impact of development interventions. Most of the development projects are driven by technology and a top down approach. **There is almost complete lack of involvement of the local people in design, planning and implementation of schemes that are ostensibly meant for their benefit.** Government and NGOs are both involved in this mismanagement. Many a times, technology has been harnessed incorrectly. That is when you have check-dams created at points where water cannot be accumulated (Naigaon Mayur, Beed). There is no working mechanism where the local people can hold the development corporations and agencies responsible for the success of these schemes. All this results in is wastage of investment and shattering of people's hopes.

Also, people as individuals are neither accountable to their own selves nor society at large. Why else was the 'police patil' of a certain village not held to task for marrying off his 8 yr old daughter? Or a farmer penalized for boring 40 tube wells in his farm to tap into the common ground water resource of the village?

Lack of Information and Inadequate Knowledge

Ignorance is bliss! Is it really? **There is complete lack of information about entitlements and rights.** In course of the Padayatra we saw that what people did not know could ruin them irrevocably. Farmers getting duped by seed vendors in Malegaon, Beed, because of lack of knowledge of better brands or the risk of buying hybrid seeds. Workers getting paid less than they are due under EGS (Godhala, Latur), simply because they are not aware of the rates, though the law states that the rates need to be displayed at the respective EGS sites.

People did not have access to any information; indeed there were no channels or media to carry this information to them. The village residents do not know their rights and how the system works. Government sources like the Gramsevak, the doctor and the agricultural extension officer rarely transfer information to the villagers. They must be in fear that if information reached the people, they would lose some power. **The print and electronic media is too busy with irrelevant issues and covering incidences in lives of celebrities to undertake the function of education of the masses.** This is why fashion shows attract over 500 media personnel and farmers' suicides don't even rate as 'news'.

Simply put, there are no channels of information or knowledge for a common villager. She or he is then prey to unscrupulous elements and vested interests. Farmers have to depend on advice from input dealers simply because they have no access to technical information or scientific knowledge. Which fertiliser dealer is going to advise the farmer not to use chemical fertilisers?

Village students after graduating from high school are considered educated but are in no position to earn a livelihood based on their high school education. There is no relevant education that say, teaches them agricultural best practices or vocational training. In most cases, they have to depend on the traditional knowledge passed along in the family. In Adivasi farming families, it is even worse where the agricultural knowledge is less than 100 yrs old.

The rich and the powerful in the village have access to information and also the skill to use it to their own advantage. This is why government schemes for the poorest of poor, are enjoyed by those who are economically and politically strong.

Lack of Collective Ownership and Responsibility.

A common observation that we made was that **people felt no sense of collective ownership or responsibility beyond their own self or home.** There was no collective responsibility towards their community. What else could be the reason for taps being stolen from public water schemes? Or school classrooms being used by villagers as latrines? It is not enough to bemoan the fact, however true, that people were not involved in the decision-making, planning or implementation. One failed to understand why the obvious was not evident to the people. If water drained out because the taps were stolen or the pipes were leaking, who would suffer? Surely not the engineer from the sanitation department. If children's classrooms were unclean, whose children would suffer? Surely not the children of the education department officer. Why was there such utter callousness and disregard? What is in the psyche that makes an individual care for personal property and not for public property? Is it enough to hide it with the phrase 'tragedy of the commons'?

There were many instances of this lack of ownership and initiative. Women trudging many a mile to fetch water when the village well was not in use because no one had taken the initiative to de-silt it

(Kharab Dhanora, Parbhani). Village development funds wasted on arches and community centres when the Primary Health Centre was in a state of disrepair (Kali, Yavatmal). Ground water over-exploited by boring tube wells to incredible depths, over 650 ft, and in large numbers (Malkaranja, Osmanabad). Pollution of drinking water sources due to release of sewage from a neighbouring city (Harwadi, Latur).

People have come to depend on external interventions. The welfare state has promulgated this for the last six decades. They seem to be of the opinion that someone else will come in to support them and solve their problems. **Most do not accept and acknowledge these issues as their own.** There is absence of any semblance of collective ownership and responsibility for the state of affairs. While blaming other factors, government and fate being at the forefront, people tend to forget that they are as responsible.

The real tragedy is that all stakeholders involved are sacrificing their tomorrow and not even getting a better today in return.

People add to their own woes by not pausing to think about tomorrow in their own lives. What can the obvious over-exploitation of non-replenishable ground water mean? Why does a farmer ruin his land by overuse of chemical fertilizers? There are only short-term goals and no long-term vision. As a farmer in Malkaranja, Osmanabad aptly put it, *“We are more interested in surviving today... tomorrow may take care of itself... or it may not... we will deal with it later”*.

Lack of Unity.

Romantic films and books have long eulogized utopian ideas of villages in India being homogenous societies. The idyllic, innocent, rural life is always contrasted with the disjoint, lonely and aimless lives of people in cities. This is the conditioning with which a majority of the Indians have grown up. This is the image that is carried into rural areas. However, these concepts take a severe jolt when one looks closely at the realities. The fact is that **society in rural areas is as fractured, if not more, as the urban society.** Think of a criterion and you will find division.

Men and women have clearly unequal space and say in public (and we daresay private) life. Caste considerations, now toned down at least in most parts of Maharashtra, hold clear and unchallenged sway over people’s transactions. This divide is not reducing in any way, if anything it is increasing. Landowners are clearly a different class as compared to the landless and artisans. In fact irrigated landowners are clearly the uppermost class of people.

In short the society is fractured and slowly being conditioned by circumstances to think in terms of narrow self-interests. **Many of the external entities, which come in as harbingers of development too contribute to this fracturing.**

It is not anybody’s argument that homogeneity is a must. Communities should have a right to opinion and differing with others. However, when these differences spill over and affect the greater common good, one is forced to think. When is one going to sink their differences in the face of a common enemy? It is getting increasingly difficult to mobilize the community to reflect and act on issues that affect it in its entirety. No one has the energy to think beyond ‘what is in there for me?’ A dangerous fall out of this is that opportunists and self-serving people use the natural divisions,

enlarge them to its breaking point and end up feathering their own nests. **The poor and unempowered remain so.**

No 'True' Leadership.

One of the most striking observations was that there is almost complete lack of true leadership at all levels. There is a vacuum at the top; be it political, spiritual, developmental or thought leadership. There is no one who commands respect even in small communities. There is no leadership within the community. No one who thinks about the collective good. No one whose farsightedness and vision are talked about. No one whose morality is unquestioned. **No role models for the youth to emulate.**

Most political leaders are power hungry and looking out for personal gains and glory. Those that try to bring about a few changes, lack vision, many times because of a lack of exposure to what could be possible. Many lack the urge to bring about transformation and are satisfied with the status quo. **In every habitat and home, people expressed their anger and discontent with their 'leaders'.** Most people were convinced that their leaders had only personal ambitions in mind; in fact the chance of personal aggrandizement is what was attracting many a youth to political processes and not the desire to improve the lot of the poor.

Hold of Traditions and Cultural Baggage.

We described the inequities and inequalities that we saw in the Padayatra. We have also spoken of the oppression of the marginalized and the women. **We found both the persecutors and persecuted justifying and rationalizing their positions and actions.**

Why else would a woman submit to violence at home and accept it as part of married life? Why would a farmer sink in the morass of debt to pay dowry and spend beyond his means in the marriage of his daughter? Why would a dalit family work uncomplainingly under inhuman conditions and bondage in the house and fields of the upper caste landlords?

The command of culture and religion is strong. **Instead of giving strength and succour to people, these are being used divisively and to continue oppression.** There is perhaps a need for a cultural revolution.

Summary

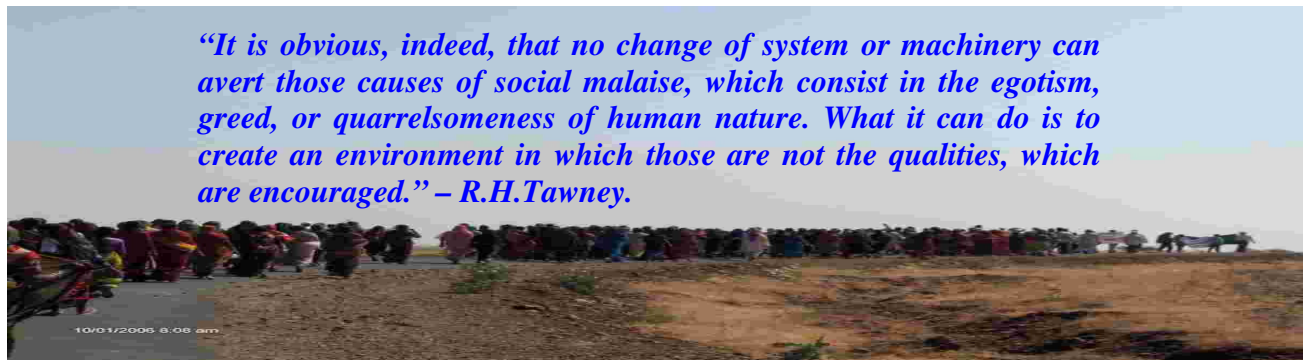
Our analysis of the observations and experiences of the Padayatra is based on cross-cutting themes. It cannot be divided into sectors like water insufficiency, food insecurity, unemployment, etc. We believe that analysis in narrow sectors has not worked till date. We believe that the issue of drought be analysed in its entirety and its solution also be devised in a comprehensive manner. Addressing the cross-cutting issues, will in turn deal with their manifestations as issues in the various sectors. If people come together and unite, they could take collective decisions to address their water issues, increase accountability of government officials and teachers, eliminate corruption and solve a number of other issues. If right information and knowledge is dissipated, people will have a choice between organic or chemical farming, demand the right wages from EGS schemes and make informed decisions about their resources and environment. A holistic approach and a strong resolve from the people can do wonders in transforming the society. We discuss our proposal for the way forward in the next section.

The way forward

Our analysis of looking at the cross-cutting issues, as outlined in the previous section entails a holistic approach. Accountability, knowledge, ownership, unity, leadership and culture are in a way, societal attributes. They define a community and a society. The lack of accountability, knowledge, ownership, unity, leadership and the burden of certain aspects of culture are issues that we believe are responsible for the bane of society. These cross-cutting issues are all interconnected. Mismanagement of resources is not just a lack of accountability to other parties, but also a lack of collective ownership and responsibility, and in some cases, lack of relevant knowledge. The collapse of governance is not just a lack of true leadership, but also a lack of unity amongst the people to hold the government institutions accountable to them. Collapse of agriculture and other livelihood options is not just a lack of knowledge but also a lack of accountability on the part of the traders and cooperatives. With all these interconnections, any approach that emerges must be robust enough to address all these issues.

The sheer intensity of these issues makes one feel a bit dejected and hapless. There is danger of being overwhelmed with the enormity of the problem and can put the development actor at a loss of where to start. However, all is not lost. It cannot be lost. We have to believe that these issues can be overcome, must be overcome. Our actions have to be based on this belief.

In the concluding part of this report, we are putting forth an approach that we shall be adopting in our war on drought. The strategies demand co-operation and co-ordination of a wide range of stakeholders.



In line with this, we do not claim that the approach that we are putting forth will rid the rural society of all its ills. Nor do we claim that this is the only way of approaching the issues. We do believe, however, that it will create an environment where people will get a good chance to improve their lives, earn a decent living, stop exploitation and take care of their environment and resources for generations to come.

Our approach is based on the conviction that the issues be addressed holistically. The strategies and interventions will touch all sections of the population at the same time. We will work with a long term vision that is based on peoples’ aspirations of a better life. Our strategies will revolve around creating an enabling environment where people empower themselves. We will be facilitators, only till the point that people need inputs. Ultimately people will have to take charge of their lives, if the transformation is to be truly sustainable.

Lastly, we are proposing an approach that involves all sections of society, from rural to urban, individuals to institutions, intellectuals to financiers, government to industry. The rural society cannot be alienated from the urban. The repercussions of rural issues are felt in the urban society one example of which is migration extending to cities. The health of our cities depends on the health of our rural areas. It is hence important to look at our society as a whole. Individuals to institutions can make a difference by joining the efforts and providing solutions. Intellectuals with know-how can provide knowledge and the financially secure can lend a helping hand.

We propose five measures that will lead towards eradication of drought, the way we have defined it. Each of these have equal importance and a specific role to play.

Community Mobilisation and Organisation

The first of the primary pillars for sustainable work is community mobilisation and organisation. By community mobilisation, we mean facilitating the community to come together, work towards their own betterment and overcome common issues... in the process empowering themselves. This could initially entail a continuous presence of an external development catalyst and sustained work with the community. It would primarily involve helping people to build up hope and trust that their situation would transform. Community mobilisation would involve identifying potential leaders and helping them realise their potentials. It would involve working with the pre-existent factions and getting them together. This goes one step beyond unifying certain narrow sections like women, farmers and marginalized sections of the community. Such artificial segregation may work in the short term. However it does not augur well for the long term because it creates factions within the community. Community mobilisation is mobilising all communities at the village level and beyond. It further means working towards common decision-making for the interest of the community as a whole.

As a method of community mobilisation there could be diverse social actions as the situation merits. The endeavour would be to assist the community in realising its dreams while maintaining a balance with natural resources available with their community and others. Getting a community to unite will lead to accountability of individuals as well as institutions to the community as a whole. It will also lead to individuals taking collective ownership of issues affecting their community and resources.

The Gram Sabha where the entire village community, ideally, comes together and takes collective decisions is an excellent platform for dealing with issues. One of our tasks during the Padayatra was to address the Gram Sabha and had people raise their issues. In many villages, alcoholism figured as a high priority issue, which we had not initially thought was that important. It highlights the importance of a bottom up approach where the people themselves collectively decide the priority of their issues. Unless the high priority issues are dealt with, people will not move on to larger issues of development. After a few days of the Padayatra passing, women of three villages applied for a ban on alcohol with the local police stations. In SonManjari, the priority issue was of sanitation and turbid water; the youth of the village promptly came together, dug soak pits and resolved the issue in three days. All it needed was our external prodding and knowledge about soak pits.

In this movement, urban community members would also be mobilised. This is in the interest of both rural and urban members. We are part of a society that is made up of both rural and urban areas. Neither can remain islands since interests and needs of both are common. Hence, if one were to protect narrow self interest at the cost of other then neither would prosper in the long run.

Community mobilisation involves working with all factions and divisions to overcome the differences in the ultimate self interest of all. After all, isn't ultimate self interest in looking after collective interests?

Information Dissemination

We experienced a widespread lack of information, knowledge and awareness during the Padayatra. To counter this, information dissemination is the second pillar for sustainable work and empowerment of the people. In this, information regarding relevant government schemes and entitlements would be disseminated to the people. This information would cover a gamut of topics ranging from livelihood options, water management to nuances of Public Distribution System at the community level. Successes in overcoming issues in one community will be shared with other communities. Best practices in say agriculture and water management will be spread to other regions.

Information dissemination would be undertaken in a dialogue method. This would involve a study about the relevant issue by the village community, with external assistance. Information dissemination would be an ongoing process. This information would help the community to make an informed choice. Information coupled with dialogue would help in enhancing knowledge base. Enhanced knowledge coupled with action to overcome day-to-day problems would lead to a higher level of awareness. With this awareness would come conscious action.

Harnessing Technologies

Poor management of resources (both natural and man-made) is a prime cause of drought. Natural resource management as well as advanced solutions would assist in the daily fight for survival. We believe that we must shift the very paradigms of solutions. We must look at new areas like solar, wind energy and biomass to help meet energy requirements. Water harvesting, conservation and recharge techniques could be used in helping overcome the water crisis. Many new technologies in harnessing natural resources are being developed, which could be used by the community. Advanced hardware and software technology could be used for quick and cost-effective communication. We believe that a lifestyle that harnesses available resources in a sustainable way would be able to tide over the complex situation. This is where institutions and intellectuals can come forward in not only inventing sustainable and appropriate technologies but also help in their widespread implementation.

Social Watch

There is no mechanism that keeps tab on the successes and failures of the various government schemes and programs. There is no mechanism that will keep track of important development indicators like infant mortality, malnutrition, violence against women, school dropouts etc. Since there is no mechanism, there is no discussion on these issues amongst those that are not directly affected. Invariably those who bear the brunt have no voice. There is a need for a mechanism for social watch that will keep tabs on the pulse of the society. This mechanism should be observing movements in society closely and raising issues that are in public interest. This mechanism is not necessarily institutional. One can have a social watch process at a village level. For instance, a group of youth in a village could keep track of the functioning of the PDS, or allocation of Indira Awaas Houses to the poor etc. Just the fact that someone is watching will lead the Panchayat and Gramsevak to adhere to the rules. Similarly social watch reports on issues pertaining to a large section of the population could be published in the media. For instance, at the State level the social

watch process could track incidence of malnutrition amongst children. The findings, once published, would lead to debate and force government and civil society to act.

The social watch will entail the collection and analysis of information and dissemination on a regular basis. The Right To Information Act may be invaluable in getting accurate and timely information from the government. The community at the village level as well as external development actors will be involved in this process, which will need sustained efforts and a dedicated team.

This process of social watch would trigger a dialogue and debate within the society. It will be useful to monitor the outcome of various initiatives undertaken. It will also act as a check on the resource use by government as well as the society in general. Finally, the social watch would help in providing inputs for future policy making at the high level as well as decisions at the community level. The social watch is expected to increase accountability and ultimately benefit all sections of the society.

Resource Mobilisation

In order to ensure sustainability of efforts outlined above, it is necessary that the human, technical and financial resources be raised from the same society where the resources are going to be utilised. This is the final pillar in our process. It shall help sustain the first four pillars. It will give an opportunity for the more privileged in our society to contribute towards the less fortunate. It is important to point out that the process outlined here does not entail a top-heavy structure. Most of the process involves making sure the system works, the schemes are properly implemented and laws upheld. The development of our rural society is an investment for our society as a whole. Finally, those having time, skills or monetary resources should contribute to the empowerment of those who don't. This is justice. This is a humane thing to do. This is part of our culture. It will also draw us closer as a society.

*We learnt from the Padayatra that no single factor, be it then civil society actors or government or industry, is responsible for the drought in the lives of people. It is a collective failure of protecting collective interests. We envision that this situation can be overcome. It needs confidence that a solution is possible. There is no single solution. The solution would evolve as soon as efforts are initiated with confidence. We envision an enlightened community where all members of the society collectively own their environment and come together to overcome their issues collectively. We believe that Community Mobilisation, Information Dissemination, Harnessing Technologies, Social Watch and Resource Mobilisation are the five pillars for the way forward. All five are interconnected and would need to function together. **This is the reason why we propose Maharashtra Vikas Parishad.***

Maharashtra Vikas Parishad **(A Council for Development of Maharashtra)**

We are aware of the fact that these five pillars shall not create the intended impact if taken up stand alone. We believe that the drought eradication work should be broad-based and encompassing. This work should possess an appropriate momentum. This drought eradication work would be inclusive. It shall have a flowing and dynamic nature. For drought eradication various sections of the society be it then individual citizens, groups of people, organisations, societies, industries, government representatives, cities and villages should come together with the common purpose for development of Maharashtra.

After the Padayatra, there was much thought regarding the future efforts to be undertaken for drought eradication. We feel that a council for development of Maharashtra is the way ahead. This council for development of Maharashtra (**Maharashtra Vikas Parishad**) would be open in nature and shall comprise all those who are interested and concerned for the development of Maharashtra. This open council would focus primarily on deliberations for eradicating drought and developing Maharashtra. It shall not only guide the drought eradication work but also render strength to the drought eradication work at all levels.

Most of the Padayatris, who are young, have decided to put in their entire life for this drought eradication work. This group shall take up the drought eradication work for the **Maharashtra Vikas Parishad**. Drought eradication work as espoused in this report has been initiated in 16 villages, around the Padayatra route, in the last ten months. This drought eradication work has been undertaken, by the Padayatris, without any financial backing. We are aware that without any backing (financial, technical and experiential) from the society, this drought eradication work as undertaken by the Padayatris shall not be completed.



MAITRI is a voluntary organisation with 80G and FCRA facility. This organisation is based on the philosophy of raising local contributions for local issues and has been actively working since last ten years for alleviating people's woes. It is one of the first members of **Maharashtra Vikas Parishad** and has decided to raise funds for eradicating drought. A separate account has been opened for managing these contributions. Audited accounts would be thrown open to those interested on 15th October and 1st May of every year. You can issue cheques or demand drafts on the name of MAITRI. You shall receive the receipt for the same along with the latest report regarding the work. *This report has also cost us a substantial amount for designing, printing and dissemination. Limited copies have been printed due to the lack of funds. If you contribute Rs. 100/- then we can disseminate two additional copies of this report. We appeal you to contribute as much as possible.*

We invite you and your organisation to join the Maharashtra Vikas Parishad and work on any or all aspects of drought eradication.

We did not walk 950 kms in Maharashtra as tourists or as trekkers.
We went there neither to research nor to write an article in the newspaper.

We wanted to connect...
Connect with the soil, with the people, with ourselves...
We knew that the reality was going to be harsh and grim...
We knew what to expect...
Therefore we did not go to see or look, but to connect...

We did connect!

We saw a wounded Maharashtra.
We saw desolate and divided villages, a dying agrarian society and people living in
despair.
Everywhere, We experienced hunger, impoverishment, haplessness, ignorance and no
leadership.

Yet, we feel, this situation is not irreparable...

After the Padayatra, we commit ourselves to eradicate this situation and embark upon
reconstructing Maharashtra...

We believe that anything is possible if we have the commitment, fire and
application...

We know, this will take time.
We know, this needs tremendous organisation and resources.
We know, this demands commitment, passion and ultimate sacrifice.

Yet...

We believe.

We hope you are with us...

Villages visited during the Padayatra.

DATE	VILLAGE	TALUKA	DISTRICT
1-Jan-06	Kasari tanda	Ashti	Beed
1-Jan-06	Ashti town	Ashti	Beed
1-Jan-06	Jamkhed	Jamkhed	Ahmednagar
2-Jan-06	Pokhari	Jamkhed	Ahmednagar
2-Jan-06	Shikharwadi	Patoda	Beed
2-Jan-06	Dhangar Javalka	Patoda	Beed
3-Jan-06	Rajuri	Patoda	Beed
3-Jan-06	TalePimpalgaon	Patoda	Beed
3-Jan-06	Rohatwadi	Patoda	Beed
3-Jan-06	Naigaon	Patoda	Beed
4-Jan-06	Charhata	Beed	Beed
4-Jan-06	Palvan	Beed	Beed
5-Jan-06	Beed city	Beed	Beed
5-Jan-06	Ghodka Rajouri	Beed	Beed
6-Jan-06	Ghat Savali	Wadwani	Beed
6-Jan-06	Wadwani town	Wadwani	Beed
6-Jan-06	Mainda	Wadwani	Beed
7-Jan-06	Chinchvan	Wadwani	Beed
8-Jan-06	Pahadi Dhaiphall	Dharur	Beed
8-Jan-06	Pahadi Pargaon	Dharur	Beed
8-Jan-06	Choramba	Dharur	Beed
9-Jan-06	Dharur town	Dharur	Beed
9-Jan-06	Chinchpur	Dharur	Beed
9-Jan-06	Ganjpur	Dharur	Beed
10-Jan-06	Salegaon	Kaij	Beed
10-Jan-06	Kaij	Kaij	Beed
10-Jan-06	Malegaon	Kaij	Beed
11-Jan-06	Kalamb town	Kalamb	Osmanabad
11-Jan-06	Dicksal	Kalamb	Osmanabad
12-Jan-06	Javla Pati	Kalamb	Osmanabad
12-Jan-06	Dev Dhanora	Kalamb	Osmanabad
12-Jan-06	Govindpur	Kalamb	Osmanabad
12-Jan-06	Malkaranja	Kalamb	Osmanabad
13-Jan-06	Govardhanwadi	Osmanabad	Osmanabad
13-Jan-06	Ter town	Osmanabad	Osmanabad
13-Jan-06	Panwadi	Osmanabad	Osmanabad
13-Jan-06	Arni	Osmanabad	Osmanabad
14-Jan-06	Sumbha	Osmanabad	Osmanabad
14-Jan-06	Yevati	Osmanabad	Osmanabad
14-Jan-06	Lasona	Osmanabad	Osmanabad
14-Jan-06	Mendha	Osmanabad	Osmanabad
15-Jan-06	Shivli	Ausa	Latur
15-Jan-06	Varwada	Ausa	Latur
16-Jan-06	Ringani	Ausa	Latur
16-Jan-06	Gulkheda	Ausa	Latur

16-Jan-06	Belkund	Ausa	Latur
16-Jan-06	Malumbra	Ausa	Latur
17-Jan-06	BREAK	Ausa	Latur
18-Jan-06	Tungi	Ausa	Latur
18-Jan-06	Nagarsoga	Ausa	Latur
18-Jan-06	Ausa	Ausa	Latur
19-Jan-06	Budhawada	Ausa	Latur
19-Jan-06	Chandeshwar	Ausa	Latur
19-Jan-06	Wasangaon	Latur	Latur
20-Jan-06	Latur city	Latur	Latur
20-Jan-06	Harwadi	Latur	Latur
21-Jan-06	Javlga	Latur	Latur
21-Jan-06	Selu	Latur	Latur
21-Jan-06	Ramwadi	Renapur	Latur
21-Jan-06	Talni	Renapur	Latur
22-Jan-06	Karyepur	Renapur	Latur
22-Jan-06	Khalangri	Renapur	Latur
22-Jan-06	Godhala	Ahmedpur	Latur
23-Jan-06	Kinhgaon	Ahmedpur	Latur
23-Jan-06	Chikhali	Ahmedpur	Latur
24-Jan-06	Dhalegaon	Ahmedpur	Latur
24-Jan-06	Dhuswadi	Ahmedpur	Latur
24-Jan-06	Khandali	Ahmedpur	Latur
25-Jan-06	Ujana	Ahmedpur	Latur
25-Jan-06	Ralga Tanda	Ahmedpur	Latur
26-Jan-06	DHMJ MEETING @ MALEGAON YATRA	Loha	Nanded
27-Jan-06	Hirabori Tanda	Loha	Nanded
27-Jan-06	Landgewadi	Loha	Nanded
27-Jan-06	Malakuli	Loha	Nanded
27-Jan-06	Wagdarwadi	Loha	Nanded
28-Jan-06	Loha town	Loha	Nanded
28-Jan-06	Raiwadi	Loha	Nanded
29-Jan-06	Dhairi	Loha	Nanded
29-Jan-06	Sonegaon	Loha	Nanded
29-Jan-06	Sonmanjari	Loha	Nanded
30-Jan-06	Sategaon	Loha	Nanded
30-Jan-06	Peth Shivni	Palam	Parbhani
30-Jan-06	Kharab Dhanora	Palam	Parbhani
31-Jan-06	Anjanwadi	Palam	Parbhani
31-Jan-06	Palam town	Palam	Parbhani
31-Jan-06	Kerwadi	Palam	Parbhani
1-Feb-06	BREAK	Palam	Parbhani
2-Feb-06	Ghoda	Palam	Parbhani
2-Feb-06	Someshwar	Palam	Parbhani
2-Feb-06	Phala	Palam	Parbhani
2-Feb-06	Mumber	Purna	Parbhani
2-Feb-06	Dhanora Kale	Purna	Parbhani
3-Feb-06	Banegaon	Purna	Parbhani
3-Feb-06	Tadkalas	Purna	Parbhani

3-Feb-06	Khujada	Purna	Parbhani
4-Feb-06	Purna town	Purna	Parbhani
4-Feb-06	Suhagan	Aundha	Hingoli
4-Feb-06	Hayyatnagar	Aundha	Hingoli
5-Feb-06	Lingi Indiranagar	Aundha	Hingoli
5-Feb-06	Puini	Vasmat	Hingoli
5-Feb-06	Shirad Shahpur	Vasmat	Hingoli
6-Feb-06	Wai	Vasmat	Hingoli
6-Feb-06	Shirali	Vasmat	Hingoli
6-Feb-06	Wapti	Vasmat	Hingoli
7-Feb-06	Potra	Vasmat	Hingoli
7-Feb-06	Bolda	Vasmat	Hingoli
7-Feb-06	Mahisghavan	Kalamnuri	Hingoli
7-Feb-06	Sodegaon	Kalamnuri	Hingoli
8-Feb-06	Warangaon	Kalamnuri	Hingoli
8-Feb-06	Umara (Ugam)	Kalamnuri	Hingoli
9-Feb-06	Kalamnuri town	Kalamnuri	Hingoli
9-Feb-06	Zara	Kalamnuri	Hingoli
10-Feb-06	Shivni (B)	Kalamnuri	Hingoli
10-Feb-06	Tuppa	Kalamnuri	Hingoli
10-Feb-06	Babhali	Kalamnuri	Hingoli
10-Feb-06	Gaulbazar	Kalamnuri	Hingoli
11-Feb-06	Shiur camp	Kinhvat	Nanded
11-Feb-06	Shembalpimpri	Pusad	Yavatmal
11-Feb-06	BREAK	Pusad	Yavatmal
12-Feb-06	Hiwalni	Pusad	Yavatmal
12-Feb-06	Savargaon Bangla	Pusad	Yavatmal
13-Feb-06	Sandawa	Pusad	Yavatmal
13-Feb-06	Mandwa	Pusad	Yavatmal
13-Feb-06	Pusad town	Pusad	Yavatmal
14-Feb-06	Bhatumba	Pusad	Yavatmal
15-Feb-06	Kasola	Pusad	Yavatmal
15-Feb-06	Kali (Daulat)	Mahagav	Yavatmal
16-Feb-06	Wanwali	Mahagav	Yavatmal
16-Feb-06	Khedi	Digras	Yavatmal
16-Feb-06	Kandali	Digras	Yavatmal
17-Feb-06	Kalgaon	Digras	Yavatmal
17-Feb-06	Kathoda	Arni	Yavatmal
18-Feb-06	Belora	Arni	Yavatmal
19-Feb-06	Rui	Arni	Yavatmal
19-Feb-06	Saikheda	Arni	Yavatmal
19-Feb-06	Salod	Arni	Yavatmal
19-Feb-06	Hatgaon	Ghatanji	Yavatmal
20-Feb-06	Pandurna (Small)	Ghatanji	Yavatmal
20-Feb-06	Ghatanji	Ghatanji	Yavatmal
20-Feb-06	Choramba	Ghatanji	Yavatmal
21-Feb-06	BREAK : Choramba	Ghatanji	Yavatmal
22-Feb-06	Kailashpur	Ghatanji	Yavatmal
22-Feb-06	Paur	Ralegaon	Yavatmal

23-Feb-06	MetiKheda	Ralegaon	Yavatmal
23-Feb-06	Tedri Poda	Ralegaon	Yavatmal
23-Feb-06	Dongarkharda	Ralegaon	Yavatmal
24-Feb-06	Raveri	Ralegaon	Yavatmal
25-Feb-06	Ralegao town	Ralegaon	Yavatmal
25-Feb-06	Dapori	Ralegaon	Yavatmal
25-Feb-06	Ramthirth	Ralegaon	Yavatmal
25-Feb-06	Kapasi	Hinganghat	Wardha
26-Feb-06	Kosurla	Hinganghat	Wardha
26-Feb-06	Patri + DHMJ Meeting	Hinganghat	Wardha
27-Feb-06	Bhugaon	Wardha	Wardha
28-Feb-06	Sewagram Ashram	Wardha	Wardha
1-Mar-06	Sewagram Ashram	Wardha	Wardha
2-Mar-06	Nagpur city	Nagpur	Nagpur

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