

● WATER MANAGEMENT

Lessons in transformation

**PALLAVI
MODY**

Professor, SP Jain Institute of
Management and Research, Mumbai.
Views are personal



The story of Satyamev Jayate Water Cup is a lesson in motivational leadership

ON AUGUST 7, a small news appeared in a few news dailies. It was about the announcement of Satyamev Jayate Water Cup 2017 prize. The top three villages were awarded ₹50 lakh, ₹30 lakh and ₹20 lakh, respectively, from among 1,300 villages of Maharashtra. The villages competed to create structures for watershed management and rainwater harvesting. The project was the brainchild of Paani Foundation, founded by actor Aamir Khan and the team of Satyamev Jayate, and supported by the CM of Maharashtra and major Indian industrialists.

Is there anything more to the news? Each year, draught afflicts thousands of villages in Maharashtra. The images of parched land, women walking miles to bring home water and shocking statistics of farmer suicides have the first recall when we think of draught in the state. Though India is classified as a water-adequate nation, water shortage in rural areas is prime cause of miseries. Decentralised watershed management is the scientific solution to the problem. A heartening outcome of this competition is that the villagers realised the solution to water scarcity problem and impending draught is in their own hands.

Satyamev Jayate, Aamir Khan's TV show that started in 2012, raised issues that needed social change. The response to the show was phenomenal as people from various walks of life were ready to make a difference. The team thought if they worked in a specific area on a specific issue, they could be part of a massive social transformation. They narrowed down on the issue of water scarcity and decided to work in Maharashtra.

The story of Satyamev Jayate Water Cup is one that needs to be told. It is a lesson in motivational leadership. It is about thousands of people who participated in the competition and were empowered. The pilot project in 2016 covered 116 villages in three tehsils. This year, they could motivate 1,300 villages in 30 tehsils to participate and make it a people's movement.

Paani Foundation roped in Watershed Organisation Trust as knowledge partner. The team simplified the concept of rainwater harvesting using a model of contoured land. They demonstrated that rainwater would naturally flow away in such a terrain. The task was to trap the water by digging trenches to increase water absorption. The concept was made simple for people to practice. The foundation trained five persons per village. The training had a technical aspect of watershed management, where the specifications for depth, width and length of the trenches were explained. The training included repairs and maintenance of old structures for watershed management.

Over 5,000 people received training over four days in residential camps. The villagers, who had first-hand experience from the benefit of this work in the previous year, became the ambassadors of this movement. People from competing villages learnt as they went through a 'do-it-yourself' course in watershed management and rainwater harvesting.

The second aspect was the leadership challenge. It was the challenge of getting people together for the task. It was a difficult time of the year to sustain the interest of the people for six weeks in the hot summers with temperatures in the range of 40-45 degree Celsius. What is heart-warming is that the foundation succeeded in harnessing the power of communication to mobilise, motivate and make people work.

The period of six weeks became a festival. With a morning alarm of *bhopu*, people would gather by 7:00 am to be transported to the site. By mid-morning, they were served snacks and tea by the volunteers. They were home for lunch, and again on the site in the afternoon. Evenings had meetings with motivational information and entertainment. Several film stars visited the villages to boost the spirits. A programme 'Toofan Aala' was telecast that played videos of stories from other villages.

What the participating villages experienced was unprecedented. It was a realisation that the solution to water scarcity was simple and could be tackled by own manual labour. Hope and confidence were restored and a 'can do' attitude was built. Burying the differences of caste, class and religion, almost the entire village population worked for no financial reward. It was *shramdaan*, offering of own manual labour.

This is a story of working at the grass-roots level for bringing a change. The agents of change management may come from outside, but the impact of this intervention is so strong it transforms lives. Newspapers and social media are full with examples of polarisation in the society. Do we take a note and inspiration from the positive work being done in some pockets? Do we have more change agents forthcoming?