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"OWNERSHIP-WISE FRP PAYMENT PERFORMANCE OF SUGAR FACTORIES IN MAHARASHTRA DURING THE 2024-25 SEASON"

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ABSTRACT

Drought in Maharashtra is not merely a natural calamity but also a man-made problem. Because human decisions and policies have intensified water scarcity, even in regions that receive reasonable rainfall. While nature provides the rainfall, human decisions determine how that water is stored, distributed, and consumed. In Maharashtra, experts often describe drought as a policy and management disaster rather than just a lack of rain. Maharashtra's geology consists of hard basalt rock, which does not hold water easily. Humans have exploited this limited resource at an unsustainable rate. Despite having the highest number of dams in India (over 1,800 large dams), Maharashtra's irrigation coverage remains strikingly low (around 18%) and Most of the farmers still use flood irrigation, where the entire field is soaked with water. This is highly wasteful compared to drip or sprinkler irrigation, which can save up to 50% of water. To overcome this problem, Paani Foundation launched the 'Satyamev Jayate Water Cup' competition in 2016. The main objective of this research paper is to study the methodology of this competition, the social changes it brought about, and its contribution to sustainable water management. This competition is not limited to just water conservation; it has proven to be a process that transforms the rural mindset and creates a people's movement in water management.

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INTRODUCTION:

Most of the agriculture in Maharashtra is dependent on monsoon rains. However, in the last few decades, Agriculture in Maharashtra has been plagued by numerous problems. These problems concern not only the farmers but also the future of the entire society. Approximately one-third of Maharashtra falls under the semi-arid climate zone. After the formation of the state of Maharashtra, the government made efforts to bring as much land as possible under irrigation. Inadequate irrigation systems and increasing dependence on wells and canals have proven dangerous for agriculture. Water conservation efforts have not yet been effectively implemented in the state and the country. For many decades, Maharashtra, especially Vidarbha and Marathwada, has been facing severe droughts. Despite government schemes and funds, lack of planning and insufficient public participation resulted in persistent water scarcity. Against this backdrop, film actors Aamir Khan and Kiran Rao established the Paani Foundation. They adopted the 'Water Cup' competitive method to permanently overcome drought. The core idea of this competition is that "drought is not just a natural problem, but a man-made one, and we ourselves can end it." It focuses on making villagers self-reliant by providing them with technical training in water conservation. To combat drought, the Maharashtra government has also implemented several initiatives such as 'Stop Water, Absorb Water', and some social organizations have also taken the initiative to overcome drought. The Paani Foundation also launched an initiative in 2016 to make Maharashtra state drought-free and started working on water conservation and water management in the drought-affected areas of Maharashtra. Water is a fundamental resource for life and is essential for human existence, agricultural development, industrial progress, and environmental balance. Although the state of Maharashtra in India is blessed with geographical and climatic diversity, water scarcity has remained a long-standing problem. More than 60 percent of the state's area is arid, and many districts are frequently affected by drought. Uneven rainfall, improper management of water resources, overuse of groundwater, increasing population, and climate change have intensified the water crisis in Maharashtra. Traditional water conservation methods have been neglected, and modern lifestyles have disrupted the natural water cycle. Against this backdrop, government measures alone are insufficient, and there is a strong need for sustainable water management based on public participation.

It was out of this need that the NGO Paani Foundation launched the Water Cup competition in 2016. This competition brings people together by creating a competitive environment for water conservation work in rural areas.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To study the concept and methodology of the Paani Foundation's Water Cup competition.
2. To analysed the water conservation measures implemented through the Water Cup competition.
3. To study the social and economic impacts of this initiative on rural communities.
4. To highlight the importance of the Water Cup competition in sustainable water management in Maharashtra.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This research is based on secondary data sources. These include official reports of the Paani Foundation, government water conservation reports, books and research articles, newspapers and magazines.

Establishment of Paani Foundation:

Paani Foundation is a non-profit organization founded in 2016 with the mission to make Maharashtra drought-free and prosperous. It was established by the core team of the TV show Satyamev Jayate, including Aamir Khan, Kiran Rao, and Satyajit Bhatkal (CEO). To transform villages in Maharashtra facing severe water scarcity into water-abundant villages, and to help the state cope with drought, the core team of the TV series Satyamev Jayate established a non-profit organization called Paani Foundation in 2016. During the filming of Satyamev Jayate, the team explored the severe water crisis in Maharashtra (specifically in Episode 12 of Season 1). They realized that while the science of watershed management existed, it wasn't reaching the people at scale. After the show ended in late 2014, the team spent an entire year traveling across Maharashtra. They consulted with water experts like Dr. Avinash Pol and organizations like WOTR (Watershed Organisation Trust) to understand why government schemes often failed and how a people's movement could succeed. The foundation was officially announced at a press conference by Aamir Khan and the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Devendra Fadnavis. It began as a pilot project in just three talukas (Ambejogai, Warud, and Koregaon) before scaling to thousands of villages.

This organization has been working for the welfare of the rural population of Maharashtra since 2016. Paani Foundation is a non-profit social organization established in 2016. The team of the television program 'Satyamev Jayate' took the initiative to establish the Paani Foundation. The founders of Paani Foundation are actor Aamir Khan and his former wife Kiran Rao, while Satyajit Bhatkal and Reena Dutta are the CEOs of the organization. Lancy Fernandes is the head of training, and Dr. Avinash Pol is the chief mentor. Suresh Bhatia and Christopher Rego are the creative directors, and Swati Chakraborty Bhatkal is the head of social media. Rather than providing money or building dams itself, the foundation acts as a mentor, equipping villagers with the scientific knowledge and social skills to solve their own water and agricultural crises.

Satyamev Jayate Water Cup Competition:

Satyamev Jayate Water Cup (the most famous Water Cup competition, organized by the Paani Foundation in Maharashtra) is a unique "people's movement" model designed to solve drought through decentralized watershed management. In 2016, the Paani Foundation conducted an experiment to see if people could overcome drought on their own by understanding and learning the science of watershed management. For this purpose, the Paani Foundation organized a competition in various villages across Maharashtra. From 2016 to 2018, the 'Satyamev Jayate Water Cup Competition' was organized annually by the Paani Foundation in various villages across different districts of Maharashtra. Every year, the winning villages in this competition are awarded substantial cash prizes. Therefore, the Paani Foundation has significantly contributed to the development of the rural economy of Maharashtra and in combating drought.

Objectives of the Satyamev Jayate Water Cup Competition:

1. **Drought Relief:** To make villages 'tanker-free' by eliminating their dependence on water tankers and external aid.
2. **Rainwater Harvesting:** Capturing every drop of rain where it falls to prevent runoff.
3. **Scientific Training:** To provide villagers with simple and scientific training in hydrology.
4. **Public Participation:** To bring the entire village together for voluntary labour, setting aside caste, religion, and political differences.
5. **Decentralized Water Storage:** To increase the groundwater level by conserving rainwater where it falls, instead of building large dams.

6. **Ecological Restoration:** Encouraging tree plantation and the creation of protected grasslands to restore the local ecosystem.

COMPETITION FORMAT

Satyamev Jayate Water Cup, initiated by the Paani Foundation, is a gamified model designed to convert drought-prone villages into water-abundant ones through community mobilization and decentralized watershed management. The Satyamev Jayate Water Cup competition was usually held during the summer months (April-May), when farmers have less agricultural work. Before the competition, the foundation provided four days of residential training to selected villagers. This training covered technical aspects of water management (e.g., contour levelling). The competition lasted for 45 days. During this period, villagers had to carry out water conservation work through voluntary labour. The aim was to encourage villagers to undertake tasks such as digging trenches, constructing earthen dams, soak pits, and compartment bunding through voluntary labour, without relying on the government or other NGOs. The competition is scored out of 100 points. Points are awarded not only for work done with machines, but also for various factors such as voluntary labour, soil testing, water budgeting, and nurseries. The Water Cup competition has brought about unprecedented changes in rural Maharashtra.

A) Increase in Water Storage

The primary rule is that the work must be done through community volunteering. Villagers of all ages and backgrounds work together to dig and build. Thousands of villages have come together to create the capacity to store millions of litters of water. The groundwater level in many villages has increased significantly. In areas where there was previously no drinking water available during the summer, it is now possible to grow two crops.

B) Social Changes

The Satyamev Jayate Water Cup is widely regarded not just as a water conservation project, but as a social engineering experiment. By using a competitive, gamified model, it forced deep-rooted social structures to shift in order to achieve a common goal. Drought usually forces the youth to migrate to cities like Mumbai or Pune for unskilled labour. During the 45-day peak, many youths returned to their villages to participate in the festival of the Water Cup. Women's participation in this movement has been significant. Women also began leading the Gram Sabhas (village meetings), often being more persuasive than men in mobilizing the community for morning labour. The power to plan water resources came into the hands of the people.

C) Economic Impact

The availability of water has led to an increase in agricultural production and boosted the dairy industry. The Satyamev Jayate Water Cup has generated a profound economic shift in rural Maharashtra. By treating water as natural capital, the competition moved thousands of villages from a state of tanker dependence to agricultural surplus. The most immediate impact was the transition from single-crop to multi-crop cycles due to increased groundwater levels. With year-round water, farmers moved from low-value rainfed crops to high-value horticulture (grapes, pomegranates) and vegetables, significantly increasing their annual income.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS:

While the Satyamev Jayate Water Cup is celebrated as a landmark movement in community-led conservation, it has faced several complex challenges and inherent limitations that eventually led to the evolution of the competition. Although this initiative has been successful, there are some challenges. Structures created through voluntary labour need to be maintained year after year, otherwise silt accumulates and reduces their

capacity. In many villages, the availability of more water led farmers to switch to water-intensive cash crops like sugarcane or banana, which quickly depleted the newly created reserves. Some villages that won the cup found themselves facing water scarcity again within a year or two because they managed the supply (harvesting) but neglected the demand.

Villagers living at the top of hills (often poorer families) sometimes faced continued scarcity because water storage structures (like nala bunds) are naturally more effective at the bottom of slopes. Maintaining the intense energy of voluntary labour (Shramdaan) beyond the 45-day competition proved difficult. Once the excitement of the contest faded, maintaining the structures often fell to the wayside. thousands of structures were built rapidly by non-experts using voluntary labour, some structures suffered from poor engineering or locational errors, leading to leakages or early siltation. Structures like Contour Trenches (CCTs) and farm ponds require regular desilting. Without a long-term maintenance plan or dedicated budget, these assets can become ineffective over 3–5 years. Maintaining the village's enthusiasm after the competition ends is a challenge. (For this purpose, the 'Satyamev Jayate Samruddha Gaon Competition' was later started).

CONCLUSION

The Paani Foundation's Water Cup competition proves that, when society comes together to solve its own problems, dependence on the government decreases and sustainable development occurs. This initiative is not just about water conservation; it is an excellent example of the proper utilization of human resources. This competition will be recorded as a 'water revolution' in the history of Maharashtra's water management. This 'decentralized and people-participatory model' is extremely guiding for facing the challenges of climate change in the future. The Paani Foundation's Water Cup competition has proven to be an effective and people-oriented solution to the water crisis in Maharashtra. This initiative has proven that sustainable water management is possible with the help of public participation, voluntary labour, and scientific water conservation techniques. It is the need of the hour for the government and non-governmental organizations to expand such initiatives on a larger scale.

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