

Revisiting Villages from Northern Western Ghats

Gaps and bridges : overview of development in last 25 years



By



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Acknowledgements

Peeping into the history and learning for the present and future from the same by revisiting the past is not an easy idea to convince. We wish thank Ms. Almitra Patel from Bangalore for her interest in our idea to revisit the villages visited during historical Save the Western Ghats March in 1987-88 in the northern sector of Western Ghats. We sincerely thank Ms. Patel for her immediate financial support to this pilot visit to 10 villages from Northern Western Ghats to develop a long term plan for visiting other areas both in the Northern as well as Southern Western Ghats. Revisiting these areas and remote villages from Western Ghats will help to improve our learning , of development in this ecologically sensitive area and impacts on the communities managing to adapt to newer situations.

Thanks are due to all the sarpanches of these 12 villages visited, local organizations like Shashwat and Maharashtra Aarogya Mandal for their support . We wish to thank all the local people especially women who spent their valuable time and share their thoughts about the burning issues of environment & development in the Western Ghats.

AERF team would certainly like to continue the quest of understanding Western Ghats and work towards the doable , acceptable long term solutions to resolve the issues.

Introduction

The mountain chain called Western Ghats, comprising of 51 districts in six states, runs along the western coast of India across 1600 km. It is the source of water for the entire Deccan plateau and home to 300 million people. Western Ghats or Sahyadri is an ancient, mountain system of India and is one of the 34 global biodiversity hotspots.

With its unique geography and climate patterns, the Western Ghats support an immense amount of biodiversity including 1700 plant species and about 350 animals endemic to this region. The Western Ghats is home to charismatic mega-fauna such as the Tiger, Asian Elephant, Gaur (Indian Bison) as well as flagship species such as the Great Hornbill. This biological diversity of the Western Ghats is complemented by its cultural diversity. The Western Ghats is home to diverse communities including indigenous communities like Katakri, Thakar, Irulas, Soligas, pastoralists communities like Gawali Dhangars, farming communities and coastal fisher folk. Livelihoods of these communities are directly dependent on the biological diversity of the region. Not only is the biodiversity used and managed but religious rites, ceremonies and traditional knowledge are also linked to this biodiversity.

Issues

The Western Ghats are under severe threats of mining, dam building, urbanization, thermal power plants, drying of rivers, illegal logging, wildlife trade and industries that are highly polluting environment. These threats have increased manifold since last two decades with accelerated process of globalization. The model of development that has been adopted supports more exploitation of natural resources.

In the Western Ghats region Civil Society groups and NGO sector has been playing important role to create awareness, to support local communities for just environmental decision making for promoting sustainable development. At the same time lot of research is being done to understand the biodiversity and natural wealth of the region to develop the scientific understanding of the area. However the collective action and common thinking among all these institutions and individuals is lacking. Any one of the actions to protect the hotspot in isolation is not enough and there has to be a synergy while adopting the models of development in the wake of climate change and demands of globalization. Civil Society can play a major role in building such synergy.

Role of movements in saving the Western Ghats

In Western Ghats the process of thinking together though not continuous has begun long time before in 1987-88 and the thinking has resulted into a unique 100 day environmental campaign called Save the Western Ghats March 25 years ago, in 1987- 88, a group of Civil



Society representatives marched across the Western Ghats of India. Along with the marchers, various voluntary organizations, media groups, research institutions, and government representatives also participated and enhanced the understanding of ecological status and development need within these mighty mountains. This 100- day 'Save the Western Ghats March' (SWG M) has been marked as an important environmental movements of India.

Since its inception 25 years ago, SWG has witnessed a regular change in its leaders and other players. The magnitude of the environmental issues has also changed manifold and the need for civil society to come together to discuss, deliberate and to search for inclusive solutions to the quest of sustainable development is now more urgent than before.

A lot of awareness has created, environmental aspects have been brought into development perspective and many new groups started working with focus on conservation in Western Ghats. However this campaign had its own limitations and it could not take shape of any formal or informal institution or network then.

Rationale for revisiting the Western Ghats

In the recent plea to rejuvenate Save the Western Ghats movement to rejuvenate the spirit of civil society , a few annual meetings have been organized by various organizations within Western Ghats to recheck the possibilities of collective CSO action and creating grounds for the same. The recent Mahabaleshwar conclave in Dec. 2012 , organized by AERF to celebrate 25 years of SWGM was one such endeavor.

There was a consistent demand from participants of the conclave, marchers of the 1987-88 campaign and from the supporters, to look back, visit the villages again and see what has happened there. The drawback of the SWGM 1987-88 was the complete lack of documentation

except one book in Marathi by northern coordinator of 100 day campaign, though there are records in terms of detailed route of the March and villages visited from both sides. However it may not be possible now to have a spontaneous March covering entire Western Ghats as in the past, but there is a need to revisit the villages, communities and to see what has happened on the ground within last 25 years as in the interim the hold of globalization on the world has increased.

The issues in the Western Ghats have become more complex and intricate. There are new problems which have evolved while old problems still continue. The approach of the government and the civil society has also changed. The way in which they approach the communities has also undergone a huge change. The Practitioners' Conclave 2012 in Mahabaleshwar was an attempt to take stock of these changes and to engage other stakeholders in the process. Through the involvement of the civil society, researchers, government officials, corporate personnel, members of tribal groups and local communities, there were some riveting discussions on the changes that have happened and the collaborations that could take place in the future. During the Conclave there were many ideas thrown up which pointed towards the need to retrace the path of the SWGM followed in 1987/88. Only by travelling through the same route and interacting with the villagers, we can get a true longitudinal picture of the changes in the 25 years. This would be a truly representative study which would help us understand the exact changes which have happened in the interim. It would also allow us to not pass value judgments on the perception of development by the local communities. We could interact with them on a personal basis to understand the way they perceive the developmental efforts in their areas.

With this agenda in mind, we decided to commission a 6 month long project which would include covering 4 belts in the North Western Ghats. The project would be completed in a period of 6 months and would consist of 4 legs of the journey including a pilot run. Each leg would last for a minimum of 5 days and a maximum of 10 days.

The current key issues in the Western Ghats are

- Globalization is advancing much faster than before.
- Civil Society Organizations from WG region work in isolation. Such groups may not have all the skill sets to address the conservation issues.
- Synergy between research, implementation, advocacy and lobbying institutions is weak and incidental.
- Gap between government and local communities' perception is increasing.
- Landscape level understanding and mainstreaming of conservation issues of Western Ghats has just begun.

- Ground reality in the villages across western Ghats is also changing , villages by choice or otherwise are part of the process of globalization. They like to reap benefits of the globalization and development but still can't fulfill their basic needs like water and electricity.
- To become part of process, the resource in hands of the villagers i.e. land is being used and land conversions are at its peak in the entire Western Ghats.

As stated earlier it may not be possible to visit every village en route of SWGM, selected villages will be covered considering the parameters like development and conservation scenario, energy access , water supply , employment and overall understanding of communities towards development globalization and awareness about environment.

The Selected 12 villages from NWG were visited with the following objectives

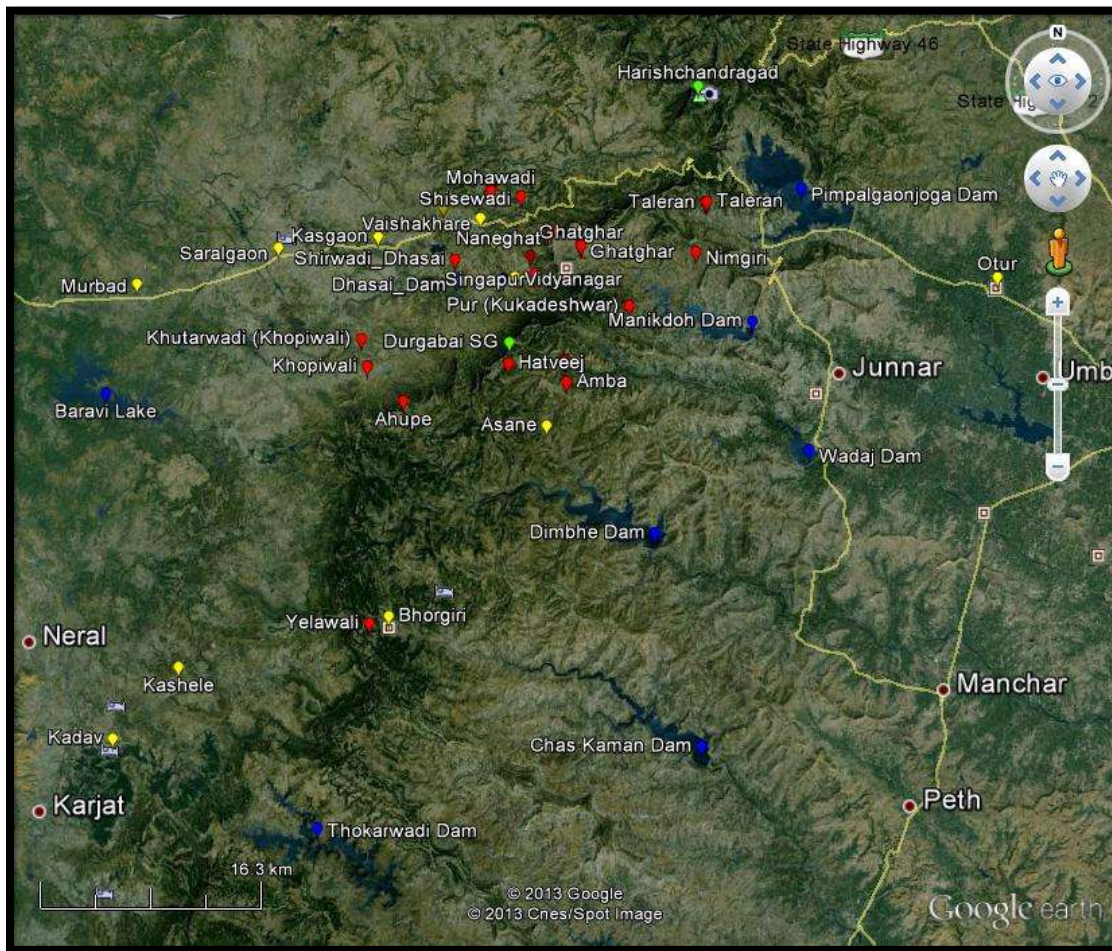
1. To meet local people and to understand the environmental scenario today.
2. Creating village energy profile to understand the issues related to energy access, energy sourcing and affordability of the people if energy is a major issue affecting the sustainable development.
3. Discuss the sustainable futuristic energy solutions like solar lighting and hydrams to improve the livelihoods.
4. To discuss the forest biodiversity conservation issues and possible long term inclusive solutions to achieve conservation on the ground.
5. To find out the availability of water and access to safe drinking water in the villages.
6. Reconnect with the local groups and contacts of 1987-88 and mobilize action for sustainable development at village, block , district as well as Western Ghats landscape level.

During this first leg , 12 villages (including hamlets) in Thane and Pune district , around Bhimashankar Wild Life Sancturay area were visited and detailed discussions /interviews with local people as well as organizations working for development/ conservation have been organized. The report of discussions and understanding through analysis is provided below.

Table I List of villages visited .

Sr.no.	Villages revisited	New Villages
1	Shisewadi (Zadgar)	Katyachiwadi (Singapur)
2	Mohawadi (Bangarwadi)	Bhiwade (Kh.)
3	Shirwadi (Dhasai)	Amba
4	Khutarwadi (Khopiwali)	Hatveej
5	Taleran	Yelawali
6	Ghatghar	
7	Ahupe	

Map I Villages visited in Thane & Pune District (marked in Red)



Water : Elixir of life

In almost all the villages visited with the exception of Kutarwadi, water was the most significant problem as identified by the villagers. There were detailed narrations about the long distances travelled by people to get water. In the village of Kathiyachiwadi, Singapur Gram Panchayat, women depend on 3 bore wells for most of the water supply to 60 households. Due to lack of sufficient water for other requirements women still need to cover long distances, anywhere between 3 to 5 km daily for water. In another village Sisewadi, women used walk 6-8 km for drinking water. Now thanks to the earthen dam and the distance has reduced to 3 km. Still enough water is not available for Bio gas plant and house energy issue has not resolved yet. Whereas in the Shirewadi village pipeline has been installed to resolve the issue of water supply but it is not functional. Same is the case of Ghatghar where pipeline was laid in 1994 and still some hamlets are devoid of water.

The villagers of Ambe and Hathwaj in Bhimashankar also have the same issues about water harvesting. Though the villages receive heavy rainfall, the slopes ensure that none of the water stays in the tanks. Women have to travel for 5-6 rounds to nearly a distance of 3 kms each day for water. Villagers in Hathwaj have to travel a distance of 4 kms to a huge well near the Devraai of the village. A farm pond was created through NREGA in Hathwaj and the Tata Motors Company helped in the formation of a tank. Though this has immensely helped solve the drinking water problems in the area, there is still a lot of complaint about water for household needs. The villagers of Ahupe had much less complaints about the water situation in their area. They still admitted that water for irrigation of crops is one of the biggest problems they face. An old member of the village said that there is a drastic reduction in the level of rainfall in the past decade. But procurement of water for household purposes and drinking has become relatively easy. There are now 4 small catchments, 16 wells and 8 small ponds in the area. This is spread over 6 hamlets /wadis and nearly 1200 households.



The organizations working in these areas have also identified the problem of water as being crucial to the members of the local communities residing in the area. The Sashwat foundation, Manchar has helped in the construction of ponds in 35 villages. They have also helped spread awareness about protective irrigation and well digging through cooperative means. They have tried to divert water to a village from a stream which resulted in the cultivation of 99 quintals of wheat.

Most of the villages use water purifying chlorine drops

provided by the government for storing water. Villagers in Yelawali have been provided with Brass heaters for heating and storing water. The villagers in Ghatghar and Hathwij also had these provisions.

The grim story of water is same in almost all the villages visited. The government as well as Civil Society organizations tried to resolve the issue but due to lack of prior consultations with the community, top down approach and lack of awareness and responsibility among the local communities there are still many hindrances to reach any positive long term solutions. It was also observed that due to development like dams people got water but lost the livelihood i.e. productive agricultural lands .

In all, the pilot run reveled that water issues are the most significant issues being faced by the villages. Villagers have to travel long distances to collect water and often have multiple trips during the day. There are no proper water harvesting techniques known to them and in areas where they have been implemented, they have proved to be unsuccessful. Almost all of them agreed that the situation has improved over the past 25 years but they are nowhere near the solution of this problem. Rainfall has been decreasing, water for irrigation is insufficient and installed pipelines do not work. The steep inclination of the area does not help water harvesting techniques. A lot needs to be done in this respect.



Energy : Light to the life

Till late 1980s energy access to the remote villages in Western Ghats has been a serious concern. There was no enough electricity generated as well as there was no properly laid distribution system. However the issue of enough production has been resolved over the period of time due to hydropower generating dams and other measures taken at Government level for production of electricity.

There were two questions that remained important during our visits to villages from the remote north Western Ghats as a part of this endeavor. One is supply of electricity and the other household energy needs mainly for cooking. Most of the villages visited are electrified and supply is continuous but good enough to make best use of the same for empowerment in terms of education and reduced drudgery.

Load shedding was an accepted fact in all the villages and ranged from 6-12 hours on a daily basis. In the absence of electricity, villagers used kerosene lamps for light. In the Mahua rich belt of Murbad, the villages of Kathiyachiwadi, Sisewadi and Mohwadi also used Mahua oil lamps. The villagers of Kutarwadi were extremely satisfied with the power situation in their village and said that they have a maximum of 6 hours load shedding daily. Since, the load shedding takes place usually during the day, they are not inconvenienced in any major way. The villagers of Ghatghar got electricity in the year 1987 and still face 4-5 hours of load shedding daily. They do not have any access to solar lights and rely on kerosene lamps. The sarpanch identified electricity as one of their major concerns as power cuts during the night restricts their activities. This is a contrasting image to what was seen in Kutarwadi. The village of Ambe in the Junnar taluka got electricity 10 years back but faces nearly 8 hours of load shedding daily. Kerosene based lamps, Mahua oil lamps and solar lamps are quite often the way out in such situations.



Since the household energy need is directly linked with collection of fuel wood most of the discussions were revolved around the same. Determining the fuel usage patterns in the villages of the Western Ghats is one of the crucial ways of determining the pressure on the forests. Most of these villages use firewood collected from the forests as fuel for cooking purposes. The forests in the Murbad, Ghatghar belt are mostly under the control of the forest department while in the Bhimashankar region, there are still large tracts of private forests. In the village of

Kathiyachiwadi, Mahua oil collected from the abundant Mahua trees are used for fuel along with firewood.

The villagers own the Mahua trees and collect 15 to 20 litres of Mahua oil annually. They use it for such domestic purposes. The villagers in Sisewadi, Sirewadi and Kutarwadi also rely completely on firewood for their fuel purposes. They collect most of the firewood from the forests under the control of the forest department. They said that till date they have not faced any opposition from the forest department regarding the collection of firewood and dry leaves.

The village of Ghatghar has nearly 60% of its population now using LPG cylinders. The forest department helped provide the villagers with this amenity in subsidized rates under the 'Ghatghar Prakalp' so as to decrease the pressure on the forests. This scheme is worked out under the supervision of the joint forest management committee. In the village of Ambe, the same scheme has been worked out by the forest department just 4 months back. But till now only 10 households have received LPG cylinders. Others still have to travel 2-4 kms everyday to obtain firewood. The situation is almost the same in Hathwij. 13 households have received LPG cylinders from the forest department but the rest still have to travel 4kms on an average for firewood. Most of this firewood in Hathwij is obtained from private forests and the forests under the department control more or less remain untouched. Paperwork for the scheme is already underway in Yelawali and soon the beneficiary families will receive the LPG cylinders in a few months time. In Ahupe, an entire day is spent in procuring firewood from a distance of 2 kms and there is no provision of LPG cylinders yet. Some of the villages like Yelawali have obtained brass heating containers from the forest department. These containers heat water quickly and keep it warm for longer durations. This effectively reduces the firewood consumption.

The dependence on firewood since the past 25 years had only increased since the past 25 years. Increasing family sizes and depleting forests meant that the process of procuring wood was becoming more arduous, time and energy consuming for the villagers. There were hardly any villagers who claimed to have had any altercations with the forest department regarding procurement of firewood from the forests. Many of the villages obtained the firewood from the forests under the control of the forest department and said that the forest officials were sensitive to their needs. The scheme of LPG cylinders being provided by the forest department is a novel scheme and can certainly help in decreasing the pressure on the forests. But, the scheme of subsidies is highly unclear and the onus of refilling the gas might still lie on the beneficiaries. Many of them are still not economically capable of affording and maintaining LPG cylinders. The department needs to take a closer look at the scheme and have further discussions with the villagers.

Solar Power: Empowering aspirations

The villagers of Yelawali and Hathwij had access to solar lamps which they used in case of power cuts. More than 100 families in Hathwij had been given a solar candle under the rural development scheme of the central government. This village faces around 12 hours of load shedding on a daily basis and these solar candles have helped the people in their daily activities. In Yelawali, there were solar panels installed by the government which hugely benefitted the locals. All the families in Yelawali had solar lamps which were given to them by the government under the eco-development initiative. The village of Palu, Taleran, Aambe and Ahupe also had street solar lamps installed. But, these villages unlike Yelawali and Hathwij have not been provided with lamps for personal use. Infact, in the course of our journey we found numerous street solar lamps, solar based pumps and solar panels on roofs installed in many of the villages. Most people knew about solar power and had access to them. But the same cannot be said about the people in the Murbad belt. In the 5 villages we surveyed in the area, 4 of them did not know about solar power and the way in which it could be used. They had some rudimentary knowledge of the technology but had not been approached by anyone with solar lamps. The villages of Sisewadi and Shirewadi got electrified nearly 15 years back but are tormented by long hours of load shedding. They were extremely interested when we showed them the solar lamps which our organization provides. But, they were extremely taken aback at the prices and asked us to reduce them. They expressed their willingness to use the technology and said that it was beyond their means.

Solar power is a technology that has benefitted the people in the places where it has been installed. It is a technology that the people easily warm up to and can use without supervision. The villages mentioned above have been vocal about the way in which solar power lamps have made their lives better. Constant load shedding is not a big problem if they have access to these lights; both for personal and community based use. The government has certainly gone a long way in installing these lights and providing people with personal solar candles. But the villages in the Murbad belt have absolutely no access to the technology. Except the villages of Hathwij and Yelawali, no other village we visited had personal solar candles. It would be a good initiative for both the government and the civil society organizations to step up their efforts in this regard. Solar power is certainly a strong means of village based empowerment.

But at the same time, we could see large tracts of forests being cleared for fire wood , development and infrastructure. The villagers themselves mentioned how the forest cover has been decreasing steadily over the years. While they did not clearly specify reasons for the same, it can be easily understood that feeling of trees for firewood can be a primary reason. Selling and purchase of firewood is an indispensable economic activity in the villages . While it is a necessary use that has to be derived from the forest and is a right of the forest dwelling communities, there is a need for a rethink. And the need emerges from the perspective of conservation of the forests. The scheme of providing alternatives for firewood needs to be explored and implemented at the earliest.



Forests .. Then and Now

The quality, quantity, management techniques and relationship of people with the forests has undergone many a changes in the past 25 years. All the villagers reported that there is significant loss in forest cover and loss of biodiversity in the area. There are villages which complained about their alienation from the forests because of its protected status while some talked of the power they have as members of the Joint Forest Management Committees. While the forests in the Murbad belt are mostly under the control of the forest department, the forests in Bhimashankar are privately owned, with the exception of the sanctuary forests. The villagers of Kathiyachiwadi noted that the bird population in the forests near them has significantly reduced over the past 10 years. They said that now it is difficult to even spot the common sparrows. But, the villagers noted that peacocks, parrots, Hyenas, Porcupines and Wild Pigs are still visible in the forests. Dhondo Hari Ugda, an elderly villager said that lack of water is forcing the bigger animals like leopards and tigers to leave the area. The villagers of Shirewadi also noted the depletion of the dense forests which surrounded them till a decade back. Kusum Wamanguda from the village said that Mahua wood can be sold for Rs. 400 a kg which is leading people to cut and sell them. She said that anyone can now break into the forest and cut trees and more often than not, it is an economic compulsion due to lack of livelihood. Mr. Vijay Sathe of the Shramik Mukti Sangathana also pointed to this fact. He said that people in villagers are fully aware of the flipside of cutting trees but their dire financial status directs their judgments. Therefore, the first thing which needs to be tackled is providing employment to people and securing their livelihood options. Otherwise the debate of conservation will fall on deaf ears. The villagers of Kutarwadi said that large tracts of forest land are being sold to contractors and builders from Mumbai. Infact we also noticed many fenced territories in the region which had quite obviously been sold to the land dealers. Joint Forest Management committees are operating successfully in many areas and villagers rarely have complaints about the forest department. Except few cases, people generally agreed to the fact that the forest department rarely caused any problems with regards to collection of minor forest produce, firewood and Hirda.

The villagers of Ahupe own more private forests than agricultural land. They have lost a lot of private land to the forest department and are still amazed about the necessity of it. Vitthal Bhiwa Loukare, an enterprising young farmer who was the sarpanch of the village talked about the alienation of the people from their own forests because of the declaration of the Bhimashankar sanctuary. He said that the locals never harmed the giant squirrel and using it as a pretext of protecting the forests seemed ridiculous. In the name of the sanctuary, there are thousands of rules and most of them are meant to keep the people from even entering the forests which they once revered. He also talked about the major human-animal conflicts

happening in the region which affect crop production. He said that Langurs, Monkeys, Wild Hogs and Porcupines not only affect crops but also destroy the plant diversity in the forest.

Forests and Medicinal Plants

Pandu Goma Choudhury is 57 years of age and is a member of the Thakur community. He belongs to a scheduled tribe community and is the manager of the Sahyadri Ayurvedic Bahavidhi Aushadhalay. This is a small medicinal plants farm in Mohawadi which sees hundreds of people every day. He uses his traditional knowledge of medicinal plants and frequents the Harischandrachi Dongra in Bhimashankar. He does not face any harassment from the forest department because he distributes the medicines to the local people through the Aushadhalay. If he had intended to sell the medicines commercially on a larger scale then he would not have been granted permission. He said that the forest has the solution for all ailments and if one carries the traditional knowledge, they can find solutions in the forest. He said that the traditional knowledge is dwindling as the young members of the community are not much interested in carrying the knowledge forward.

Maintaining sacred forests in the name of deity or ancestors has been an age old traditional practices that has contributed to forests and biodiversity conservation in past. The practice is still prevalent in the remote areas especially among indigenous communities of this area. Therefore sacred groves and their status today has been a concern for AERF team while surveying and discussing forests. There are not many sacred groves in the Murbad region but we came across a few Devrais in Bhimashankar. The villages of Taleran, Ambe, Hathwij and Ahupe have sacred groves which have been maintained by the local people. The village of Taleran has a scared grove dedicated to Kalsubai which is very popular religious shrine. The village of Ghatghar has a Devrai (Sacred grove) dedicated to Malganga Devi. This sacred grove has many tall Hirda and Mango trees. But, they are being regularly cut by the people. The village of Ambe has a 100 year old sacred grove dedicated to Garudinath. The villagers do not cut trees here but use the wood which can be retrieved from trees which have fallen due to natural causes. Rohidas Sahuji Damse from the village pointed out that there are 4 other sacred groves near Aambe. This grove of Garudinath did not have dense foliage or very tall trees. But, the villagers were extremely serious about the cultural prescriptions associated with the place.

The villagers of Aambe and Hathwaj own private forests and the villagers use their forests to collect firewood, Hirda and other minor produce. The forests belonging to the forest department remain untouched. The village of Hathwaj has a beautiful sacred grove dedicated to Durga Devi. This grove has dense forests and tall trees surrounding it and sees major footfall by religious tourists on every Tuesday. The Joint Forest Management Committee of the village has undertaken the work of the renovation of the temple and has also used its funds to procure



utensils for the pilgrims. The idea is to engage the villagers of Hathwaj in providing food and water to the religious tourists thus augmenting their income.

The villagers can also take charge of keeping the sacred grove clean and well maintained.



Livelihoods : New ways of living and earning

One of the biggest issues pointed out by people was the lack of livelihood opportunities for the youth. Agriculture is the primary occupation in many of the areas. In the villages of Katiyachiwadi, Sisewadi, Sirewadi, Mohwadi and Kutarwadi the villagers get some money from Mahua oil and by selling baskets made of Bamboo. These Bamboo baskets and Mahua oil has to be sold in Tokawade which is quite some distance from these villages. Kutarwadi, where most of the agricultural land has been lost to the dam, livelihood is a major problem. There is no more land to work on and



the Mahua trees in the vicinity are also getting rapidly destroyed. Forced by dire circumstances people are selling off wood or even worse their own land to businessmen from Mumbai. The loss of Mahua trees means less production of Mahua oil which is affecting their income opportunities. Many in the village are working as tenant farmers and laborers in the adjoining villages. In Ghatghar, Ahupe and Yelawali, Hirda becomes the other source of income. In the village of Ghatghar, Hirda is sold at the rate of Rs. 50 to Rs. 60 per kg. The rate varies in the village of Aambe, where it is sold at a rate of Rs. 20 to Rs. 30 per kg. The villagers from Hathwij and nearby villages sell their Hirda at the Adivasi Mahamandal in Junnar. In Yelawali, some village youth work as guides to show people around the historical point of Nanneghat and the nearby areas. Some in the village earn a livelihood by providing food to the tourists. In the village of Mohwadi some youth are paid by the government for practicing their folk art and music. This entails performing their music at festivals and ceremonies. While this provides a good form of livelihood generation, it also has its flipside. The youth members are not focused on education and sacrifice it hoping to benefit through their music. But, this kind of employment is not just sporadic but also extremely irregular. In this fashion, many people lose out on other chances at a livelihood.

Poultry farming and cattle rearing is not an active occupation any more. The number of cattle owned in villages is gradually decreasing. The grazing land for the cattle were decreasing, large number of cattle died as they fell off steep mountain cliffs and sometimes death results from eating poisonous plants. Some people in Kutarwadi even alleged that land sharks were purposely poisoning the grazing land of the cattle which should lead to their death. The village of Ghatghar did not have proper cattle sheds till a few years back. Most of the cattle could not cope with the incessant rains that lash the region and perished. The village of Aambe is possibly the only village which we visited in our survey where every household owned cattle and poultry. The ex-sarpanch of Ahupe said that earlier each household in the village used to own cattle and poultry. But, now the figure has come down to only 10%.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) is one of the flagship ventures of employment generation by the Indian government. But, sadly the results are not commensurate to the hype that surrounds it. People do not trust the NREGS and have many bad experiences to share about it. In the village of Hathwaj, some people were provided employment in the form of digging trenches. But, they were paid a meager amount of Rs. 40 per day which is much less than the minimum wages. Though the payment was regular, it was not enough for the hard work that the people were putting in. Hence, many decided to leave. In the village of Aambe, there has been no work provided within the village or at a manageable distance from it. Once, there was a 15 day work given to the people which involved travelling very far. Since, the farmers could not leave their fields unattended for so long, they refused to join in for this work. In the village of Sisewadi, NREGS has been used for building small bunds but the people have complaints of late payment of dues. The villagers of Ghatghar also shared a similar story where the payments were nearly 3 months late. In most of the remaining villages, the work provided under NREGS is either absent or extremely rare. But, in the village of Kutarwadi the NREGS scheme is active and many people seem to have been benefitted from it.

Eco Lodge : Alternate livelihood or burden of dwindling resources??

The village of Yelawali has a smooth functioning Joint Forest Management programme in collaboration with the CSO . Rs. 11 lakhs has been spent on an eco-tourism lodge constructed here. The management of the lodge lies with the villagers. The proceeds from the tourists go into the village funds. This has been acting as an income generating enterprise for the villagers. It is certainly a departure from what would be the norm 25 years back. The forest department also offers them some minor, temporary employment with regards to cleaning the forests and constructing small bunds.

The eco-lodge is certainly an enterprising avenue for furthering Joint forest management techniques and providing people with gainful employment. But Yelawali is a village which has an acute water shortage and is not connected by road. Hence, the amount spent was a staggering 11 lakhs and the water shortage also increased during the period of construction. Availability of water often restricts number of tourists visiting.

The villagers from now on will rethink any such developmental work in the village. Villagers mentioned that will try their local resources in the best capacity instead of wasting money and resources on procuring other material. Consultations with villagers, before designing and building the eco lodge, would have saved the investment and had made the ecotourism successful.

Conclusion & Way forward

Western Ghats are one of the 34 biodiversity hotspots and there has been a continuous struggle between development, people's needs and natural resources. Government of India through the two committees appointed specially to look at ecologically sensitive areas within region has agreed that Western Ghats are extremely important for the well being of communities and the future of peninsular India. There is question of how to establish balance between development and environment. Civil society since last few decades is trying very hard to organize people, work towards doable solutions and question the governments to improve the policies and implement the existing inclusive policies for the benefit of people and ecology. However Western Ghats are diverse with many indigenous and local communities, vast number of forest types and biodiversity as well as varied ways of life of people. Therefore knowing policies at National and State level are important but many a times ground situation at village level is important to understand the matter. Such understanding then could form the basis for using policies at the advantage of local communities and to find long term solutions to address dwindling resource enhancement and conservation.

The recent interventions and deliberations with people in 12 villages from Northern Western Ghats provided such opportunity. Based on our visit and understanding developed following facts have been revealed and common throughout area covered.

- ✚ The population has increased manifold within the last 25 years and therefore pressure on resources increased. At the same time migrations in search of livelihood have also increased. Due to migrations the agriculture as a livelihood is also on decrease.
- ✚ Water availability has been resolved to some extent but largely remained an issue of concern and benefits of development like dams have not been fully accrued to the communities. There are issues of repairs and maintenance of water Harvesting system.
- ✚ Globalization has impacted the remote corners as communication facilities like mobile phones have reached in every corner. It had developed a support system to the communities and in many cases it is affordable. The drudgery for day today life like walking for daily needs, medical facilities has been reduced to a large extent.
- ✚ Pressure on forest resources has increased manifold as urbanization is spreading in remote areas. Unorganized unplanned tourism also puts pressure on the resources of the villages in the remote areas.
- ✚ Access to energy has been resolved but continuous supply and long hours of load shedding remained unresolved. Solar electrification has been provided at community sources like street lights, but awareness of using solar lights for household purposes and its affordability is lacking.
- ✚ Household energy needs have not been resolved and therefore fuel wood still remains the main source of household energy.
- ✚ Creation of alternative livelihood through development at the local level is still a major concern and resultant migrations are common. Skill development and capacity building

at local level is lacking and did not get priority over infrastructure and market driven development.

- ✚ Within last 25 years the dependency of local people , on government and outside agencies like CSOs has increased and the people's contribution in development as well as conservation interventions remained on paper. In the process the local communities are losing their traditional knowledge like water harvesting, home remedies and forest conservation .

Based on this broader understanding we believe that there is a lot of scope to work closely with communities and Government to improve the situation. We recommend following

- ✚ Concentrate on awareness generation among the local communities about the ongoing development process, their role and need of conservation of resources like water and forests and local level.
- ✚ Work with the civil society organizations within the Western Ghats to exchange the information, ideas, success stories and learning's. Create possibilities of cross learning and exposure visits.
- ✚ Engage with communities in planning and implementation and develop a process to have their contribution and long term ownership of development interventions.
- ✚ Take up the programme like popularizing solar lights for households to reduce the dependence on electricity supplied by government.
- ✚ Take up the village development planning with local youth and seek support and expert advice as and when required.
- ✚ Work collectively towards enhancing forest as well as water resources using incentive based mechanisms.
- ✚ Develop opportunities of capacity building to implement various activities' suggested above.
- ✚ Develop appropriate monitoring tools to understand the process of development and its impacts on conservation and local people.

In the absence of baseline data it is difficult to compare the processes over the period of time. Therefore to develop a monitoring mechanism at least in the few selected villages will be useful to work in future. There is a scope for civil society to work together and facilitate the exchange for betterment of communities and region.

These conclusions are based on visit to 10-12 villages from the remote corner of Northern Western Ghats. We are sure that repeating the similar exercise in other three sections of North Western Ghats as well as Southern Western Ghats, would Earn more advantage in understanding the situation on the ground today and will create possibilities to plan development of the future and to address the new issues and old problems in a more inclusive manner.

Annex I Schedule & Activities

Date	Travel	Village	Visits /locations / activities
05/04/13	Pune to Murbad via Karjat	Dhasai, Palu, Katyachiwadi (Singapur)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dhasai Earthen Dam • Palu village water tank • Discussion at Katyachiwadi (Singapur)
06/04/13	Stationed at Murbad	Shisewadi (Zadgar), Mohawadi, Shirwadi (Dhasai), Khutarwadi (Khopiwali)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion with the participants of Save the Western Ghats March from the all visited locations. • Visit to “Sahyadri Ayurvedic Bahuvindh Aushadhalaya”, Mohawadi. • Discussion with Mr. Vijay Sathe, Shramik Mukti Sanghatana, Murbad
07/04/13	Murbad to Taleran, Halt at Bhivade (Khurd)	Taleran, Nimgiri, Ghatghar,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions at Taleran and Ghatghar. • Visit to “Naneghat” • Visit to Kukadeshwar Temple
08/04/13	Bhiwade (Khurd) to Bhimashankar, Halt at Nigadale	Bhiwade (Kh.), Amba, Hatveej, Ahupe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions at all the visited locations. Village “Sarpanch” of all the villages were participated in their respective village discussions. • Visit to Durgabai Sacred Grove, Ghatghar
09/04/13	Bhimashankar to Manchar via Bhorgiri, Halt at Nigadale	Yelowali, Manchar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit to Yelowali village. Discussions with the village representatives and visit to Eco-tourism Centre. • Discussion with Mr. Anand Kapoor, “Shashwat” Organisation, Manchar
10/04/13	Bhimashankar to Pune via Dimbhe	Dimbhe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit to Bhimashankar Tribal Development Project, Dimbhe of Maharashtra Arogya Mandal, Hadapsar, Pune. • Discussions with Mr. Suresh Kale, Station In charge & Mr. Balasaheb Bhendare, oldest representative, MAM.

Annex II : Village Profiles

Village Ambe

Parameters	Current Situation
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 150 households, with a approximately total population of 1000
Electricity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available from 2010 • Load shading of 8 to 9 hours
Energy Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kerosene lamps used for light during night hours. • Firewood for cooking • Firewood collected within a periphery of 5 km. from the surrounding forest. • 10 households have LPG stove • 5 dead bio-gas plants • Solar street lights are available
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current situation better than past • One storage water tank • Common drinking water supply system
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Transport Bus service as well as private local jeep services are available
Medical Aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary health centre at Inglun. • Medical officer visits once a week.
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 10th standard
Livestock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every household has the livestock • Livestock decreased from average 25 15 years ago to hardly 3per households today.
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seasonal rain fed agriculture • Main crop paddy, and with finger millet as supplementary
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seasonal migrations to Narayangaon for labour work during off season • No work from MNREGS, in the village. • Every farmer has some <i>T. chebula</i> trees, villagers use to collect T.chebula fruits from the forest premises as well as from the privately owned forests.
Sacred Grove	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ancient “Garudi Dev”, sacred grove , Many trees more than 100 yeas old deteriorating and falling. Absence of regeneration.
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tar road, Public transportation, drinking water facilities, communication, education, medical services improved
Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water for irrigation of agricultural fields, Employment

Shirwadi (Dhasai)

Parameters	Current Status and past history
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Households: 27, Population: 100 to 125, “Thakar” Community
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since last 2 years Thakars are practicing agriculture but still to receive the FRA benefits or land to till. Main crop is seasonal paddy , but grow traditional crops like finger millet and foxtail millet.
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of them have improved houses with the aid of “Indira Avas Yojana”
Electricity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electrified since last 15 years.
Water for utilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drinking water supply system is out of order, they are collecting water from the river which is around 2 km away from the settlement
Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Firewood for household consumption. Kerosene used for light sources, Absence of Solar as well as Bio gas energy sources.
Mahua Oil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mahua as well as other edible oils available from the market are used for cooking.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of education improved and some reached the stage of graduation.
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agricultural Labor, as labor in Bricks kilns Bamboo craft is a common household practice Very poor family income MNREGS did some work during 2012 but the beneficiaries were not paid.
SHG’s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women’s self help groups are not working but male’s SHG’s are in working condition and use to work out small scale brick production as well as renting a tent in nearby hamlets for various small functions.
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Village is connected by tar road
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement in education, electricity, road
Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water for drinking and utilization , unemployment

Khutarwadi (Khopiwali)

Parameters	Current Status and past history
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased from 50 to 150 households within last 25 years, Koli community
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 households have agricultural as well as private forest lands, approximately 80% of paddy lands were submerged in Khopiwali Dam. Land was acquired at the rate of hardly Rs 47,000/acre. Main crop is paddy.
livestock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Livestock decreased considerably from average 60 to hardly 10 per farmer. Lack of fodder is the main reason.
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land acquisition by Government facilitated the availability of large lump sum amount in hand, as a result farmers built homes
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bamboo crafting is a common household practice, sell their bamboo products at Mhasa and Tokawade bazaar.
NTFP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use to collect Mahua flowers and seeds, seeds are generally used for oil extraction to manage household requirements of edible oil. Flowers are brewed

	to liquer for household consumption.
Electricity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since last years there is electricity supply. 12 to 18 hours load shading is very common,
Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire wood for house hold consumption, Kerosene for emergency lights, kerosene is available at the rate of 2 liter /family/month. • No solar or bio gas
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of water, light and education
Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of employment, very low family income,

Ghatghar

Parameters	Current Status and past history
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within last 25 years there is an increase in households from 90 households now to 175, in 3 hamlets,
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main crop paddy, subsistence agriculture main source of liveihood
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45, houses were constructed with the aid of Indira Avas Yojana as well as Yashwant Gharkul Yojana. Improved from Huts to brick houses.
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very old bandhara (checkdam) was constructed during 1932 is full of ilt and reduced storage capacity.
Electricity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available since 1985, with 4 to 5 hours daily load shading
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradually improved from 1995, presently 250 students are studying in class 8
Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firewood for household consumption, Kerosene for emergency lights, Solar street lights. • During 2006-07, LPG gas connections were made available at 60 % subsidized rate from Ghodegaon Adivasi Prakalp
NTFP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection of T. chebula fruits generates income of Rs. 3000 to 4000/ family/Year.
Sacred Grove	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 acres of Malaganga Sacred Grove
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education up to 10th standard, Electricity, Tar road
Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of drinking water, and irrigation for agriculture, unemployment

Taleran

Parameters	Current Status and past history
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main village has 175 households, village has 12 hamlets (Dandachiwadi, Kokatwadi, Ghuduchiwadi, Dawkharwadi, Ambyachiwadi, Shivechuwadi, Borichiwadi, Baraki Was Wadi, Mothi Was Wadi, Nanechuwadi, Pachakewasti, Wadachiwadi) • Population of Kokatewadi, Waswadi and Borichiwadi is approximately 550. • Community: Mahadev Koli
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% farmers, main crop is paddy ,limited wheat • Around 50% waste land.
Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Started before 1972
Electricity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since 30 years electrified , 3 hours load shading of single phase alternatively during day and night as well as 10 to 12 hours of load shading

	for three phase connections .
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since last 30 years there was a percolation tank, a water supply scheme started since 2008 , but currently it is out of order. Other regular sources are 2 wells , 1-hand pump, Peak water scarcity is during 15th of May to 15th of June.
Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firewood, cow dung cakes. For collection of firewood, villagers has to walk up to a distance of 10 to 12 Km. • Previously firewood was available within a periphery of 5 km. • During last 25 years the surrounding forest cover was drastically decreased to 25% . • 20 years ago, people use to sell the bundles of firewood at Junnar. • Since last 10 years government is trying to introduce bio gas. There are only thre households with bio gas as a source of cooking energy. • Kerosene was used for emergency lights. • 6, Street Solar lights were made available by Taluka Panchayat during the year 2012-13.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilities are available since 1972, up to 4th standard but now there is school up to 7th standard. • Around 25 to 30 graduates in the village.
NTFP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2% households use to collect Karanj seeds from privately owned lands as well as from the reserve forest areas. • Around every year 20 quintals of T. chebula fruits are collected by the villagers, but there is reduced fruiting since last 5 years.
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main occupation is farming, • Other is labor work as well as some small scale trade. • Opportunistic cost of labour is Rs. 150/day. • Some 150 to 200 villagers were/are in Government services.
Sacred Grove	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not collect firewood, timber from the grove.
Wildlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grove is a home for Giant squirrel, barking deer, wild pigs, Sambar, hyena, jackal as well as blue buls I also visit the village and grovesince last 5 years.. • Cattle and Goat depredation by leopard. • 15Yrs back vultures were very common, recently observed in the village surroundings.
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tar road, Electricity, Education, employment
Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of drinking water, water for irrigation, energy source (Scarcity of firewood), unemployment

Bhiwade (Khurd)

Parameters	Current Status and past history
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gram Panchayat, 5 Hamlets (Ramajewadi, Madhaliwadi, Namajewadi, Payarichiwadi, Gawthan) Population-635
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All farmers Irrigated as well as non irrigated, 20 years back it was traditional with seasonal cropping of Paddy, Finger millet and “Warai”, but later on gradually changed. Use improved as well as hybrid seeds. Now they cultivate crops like Wheat, Horse Gram, Pearl Millet, Maize, Onion, Potato etc. Mango orchards (5%), floriculture, vegetable farming Agriculture Department provided land development activities during last 15 to 20 years as well as horticultural inputs since 2004.
Electricity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electrified since 1070 Load shading of 5 hours/day round the year Road lights, home lights, flour mills, drinking water supply, agricultural irrigation pumps are common in the village.
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since last 6 years tar road is available; previously it was a dirt track.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 4th standard, 5th to 10th standard at Ingulun, technical education as well as graduation facilities at Junnar Village produced Two successive Panchayat Sabhapati during 1990 to 1995. Higher education till graduation and there are people completed BA, BSc Agri, MA, MBA, BE Computer etc.
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percolation tank was constructed during the year 1986-87. 50 acres of agricultural land was submerged under water. Increase in the crop yield, improvement in agricultural practices, increase in family income. Previously the drinking water was fetched from a well but now most of the villagers use bore well water for household purposes. Interestingly one of the bore well has a continuous flow of water without pumping.
Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some 20 years back sale of firewood, extraction of timber was practiced on large scale. (Mango, Kombal, Ashind, Waras, Karambu etc.) Now most of the families are dependant only on firewood for household consumption. Availability of firewood was drastically lowered, 25 years ago it was available within 2 km of radius but today villagers travel far away to collect firewood. Around 50% households have LPG gas connections. Cow dung cakes for food preparation is very common. Last year, Adivasi Mahamandal, Ghodegaon, provided 13 Solar street lights as well as 10 solar home lights.
NTFP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wild Honey is collected for household consumption.
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Village was able to achieve 100% sanitation.
SHG's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since last 10 years, 6 women SHG's were active, comprising 10 to 12

	<p>members in each.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women with the help of SHG use to manage PDS Shop, food services to school and money transactions at the rate of 2% interest rate. • Govt. provided a loan of Rs. 1Lakh to an SHG. • Presently they are succeeded to maintain a amount of Rs. 1 Lakh in yearly rotation. • Only one male group SHG is working in saving activities.
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main occupation is agriculture. • More than 50 persons from the village are in various Government services, such as in education department, Revenue Department, Police Department, Ammunition Factory at Khadaki etc.
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education, Agricultural improvement , road, electricity,
Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drinking water supply and household Energy solutions (Scarcity of firewood)

Annex III

Team AERF

Dr. Archana Godbole

Mr. Jayant Sarnaik

Ms. Pratyasha Rath

Mr. Umesh Hiremath

Mr. Kailash Gawand

Mr. Kondhawale

Mr. Bharat Dalvi