

Bharatiya Jain Sanghatana Builds 5,100 Crore Litres Water Storage Capacity in 1,500 Drought-Hit Villages of 75 Talukas in Maharashtra, With 8.52 Lakh JCB Machine Hours in 2 Months

Bharatiya Jain Sanghatana drives extraordinary battle against drought

Every year, thousands of villages in Maharashtra reel under the harsh consequences of drought. Inadequate rainfall and the inability to battle drought fester an agonising social cycle --low crop production, poor income, poverty, and thirst. The Bharatiya Jain Sanghatana (BJS) has been working throughout the country for natural disaster response for the last 25 years. Mr. Shantilal Muttha, Founder, BJS has undertaken drought-free operations in Maharashtra for the past five years. In the wake of the severe drought affecting Maharashtra annually, BJS perceived an urgent need to implement these drought-management initiatives at a vaster scale. In April-May 2018, BJS steered a massive movement for water abundance in 1,500 villages of Maharashtra, deploying 1,624 earth-moving machines (940 Poclain and 684 JCB) across 75 talukas. In a record-breaking achievement, the machines ran for 8.52 lakh hours, building 5,100 crore litres of water storage capacity. Mr. Aamir Khan, Ms. Kiran Rao and Mr. Satyajit Bhatkal from Paani Foundation lent constant support all through the project.

In 2016, the Paani Foundation launched the Satyamev Jayate Water Cup Competition to fight drought in Maharashtra. The competition brings villagers together to get trained in watershed management and perform voluntary manual labour or *shramdaan* to build watershed structures. This year, 4,000 villages from 75 talukas in Maharashtra took part in the competition.

The intense human endeavour, with many villagers working all night, prompted BJS to not let geographical terrain or limited competition time become roadblocks for the people. To facilitate the watershed work, BJS resolved to provide JCB (backhoe loader) and Poclain (excavator) machines to the villages once they met their target *shramdaan*, thus accelerating the momentum of work manifold. In fact, one machine-hour of JCB equals the creation of 60 cubic metres of water storage capacity! BJS laboured to provide machines to every village completing *shramdaan*, procuring them from across Gujarat, Telangana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh.

The machine-procurement and deployment was one of the chief project challenges, demanding strategic planning, coordination, and gruelling field-work. BJS appointed 100 taluka coordinators (TCs) to oversee the work in the 75 talukas. Along with over 1,000 BJS volunteers, the TCs untiringly worked for two months, meeting Sarpanches, villagers and machine owners; keeping records of machine deployment and payment, and monitoring ongoing work. In the blazing summer, with temperatures soaring above 45 degrees, the taluka coordinators travelled more than 10,000 km on two-wheelers to prevent ground-level difficulties from stalling the movement. From the Pune Head Office, 16 project supervisors and two managers regularly coordinated with all the TCs.

After the deployment of the machines, another monumental task lurked in the vicinity: the cost of diesel. The Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Mr. Devendra Fadnavis, who strongly supported the movement and also performed *shramdaan*, generously granted Rs. 1.5 lakh per village toward the diesel costs. In the true spirit of an unprecedented people's movement, the villagers worked together to raise the remaining amount. This stirring of responsibility and cooperation among the masses is possibly the most powerful effect of the movement.

BJS also received donations for the cause from pan-India. An online payment gateway was opened to facilitate this. Nothing was more heartwarming than beholding contributions as small -- and yet as momentous -- as Rs. 100, sent in by students, the elderly, and people with little dispensable income but

hearts of gold. Many conglomerates also came forward to help, joining forces with BJS for their CSR initiatives. This included Tata Trusts, Reliance Foundation, HT Parekh Foundation, Vallabhji Bhanshali (Enam Group), Smiti Holding and Trading Com, Pradeepji Rathod (Cello), Philanthropic Foundation, Jain University Bangalore and Motilal Oswal Securities Limited, among others.

BJS has a long history of pioneering drought relief initiatives in Maharashtra, working for the last five years, starting with the Beed district. The Satyamev Jayate Water Cup Competition, started by the Paani Foundation three years ago, and the wholehearted participation from all the stakeholders, snowballed the project into a mammoth-scale people's movement. The project benefitted immensely from the Jalyukt Shivar Abhiyan started by the government of Maharashtra. Hundreds of NGOs, farmers, villagers and government officials from Maharashtra contributed in multifarious ways. Various print and online media generated widespread publicity for the cause. The district collectors, *tehsildars*, block development officers, and taluka- and district-level agricultural officers worked in tandem, proving that government machinery is not an impediment in the way of important societal work.

Leaders from multiple political parties also set aside their differences for the project. Mr. Sharad Pawar, President, NCP, set a brilliant example by participating in *shramdaan* in the Satara district. He also contributed Rs. 1 crore through his personal trust towards diesel costs. His proactive support lifted machine-utilisation in Satara to the very top -- 547 JCB machines running for 1,18,000 hours. Approximately 70,80,000 cubic meters of water storage capacity has been built in Satara alone.

A total of 1,624 machines were used during the competition which ended on May 22 at midnight. By then, around 300 villages had been unable to receive machines even after completing *shramdaan*. BJS decided that these villages should not stay behind and provided machines to 304 villages for five days, even after the competition ended. Upon the request of the government of Maharashtra, BJS is continuing to provide more than 100 machines to even more villages in eight districts until June 5: Ahmednagar, Nanded, Akola, Amravati, Nandurbar, Wardha, Nashik and Yavatmal.

In India, where a major chunk of the population works in the agrarian sector, rainfall closely affects human life and happiness. The drought-management initiatives taken by BJS are empowering villages and helping them fight the vagaries of nature. However, to make Maharashtra a drought-free state, consistent efforts will need to be taken and sustained over time.

BJS Starts Innovative Experiment to Make an Entire District Drought-Free

"It is my dream to see a drought-free Maharashtra. The work that BJS has achieved in the last two months is encouraging, but we'll need continued efforts of even greater magnitudes. Three months ago, BJS started the Sujalam Suphalam Buldhana project -- an innovative experiment to make the entire Buldhana district of Maharashtra drought-free. For this, BJS has purchased 134 JCB and Poclain machines to be used exclusively to complete the work in Buldhana. In only three months, we've built 45 lakh cubic meters of water storage capacity and made over 9,000 acres of land fertile by silting."

--Mr. Shantilal Muttha, Founder, BJS

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Attachment 1: Taluka- and district-wise chart of the water-storage capacity created in individual districts through BJS's machine-support (The details of the capacity built through *shramdaan* are not included in this attachment and will be shared separately by the Paani Foundation.)

Attachment 2: BJS volunteers list

About BJS

Established in the year 1985, Bharatiya Jain Sanghatana (BJS) is a non-political, non-profit, professionally managed Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) with a nationwide footprint working towards the benefit of all. BJS has long been in the forefront of addressing national concerns in the areas of drought relief, disaster response, social development and educational Initiatives. BJS has its head office in Pune. For more information, visit <http://bjsindia.org/>.

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