



Università  
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# Sacred Waters: Purity and Pollution

## Stories from the Living Waters Museum Archives

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**BEYOND**  
**MUSEUMS** Tools for Promoting the Natural  
and Cultural Water Heritage

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# Water as a Marker of Change

Political

Economic

Ecological / Environmental

Social

Cultural

Fluid dynamics



Photo credits : Pranadh Mampilamthoda

## Water and Culture

All relations between people and their environment are embedded in culture (UNESCO, 2003).

Due to the elementary role of water for life, the ways to treat, handle and use water has forever been anchored in people's cultural values and traditional practices.





# Holy Water







## Divine / Sacred Waters

- Water is pure (dirt as 'matter out of place', Mary Douglas)
- Water as a source of salvation (fasting)
- Water as a way to reach God (crossing the oceans)
- Water absolves sin (a ritual dip in holy rivers)
- Water supports life (from conception to childbirth to rituals of death)
- Water as an offering; a prayer; a symbol of fertility, mystic powers
- Water and healing (hot springs, medicinal properties)

*And yet access to water is determined by social relations of power*



## Water and Social Organisation

- Traditional water sources – wells, ponds, springs, rivers, rain
- Step-wells in India / Central Asia
- Often funded by women as ‘good deeds’ / women’s agency in art
- Cool spaces for travelers, local community to meet, pray....
- Norms of collective action and community management ensured sustainability, equity
- But design of social space around water excluded many....



# MUNA

## Interactive Fiction

Paul Britto, Exhibition Design, NID

Digital interactive narrative on stepwells

Futuristic world through the eyes of a little girl, understanding water conflicts, rural-urban, surface/groundwater

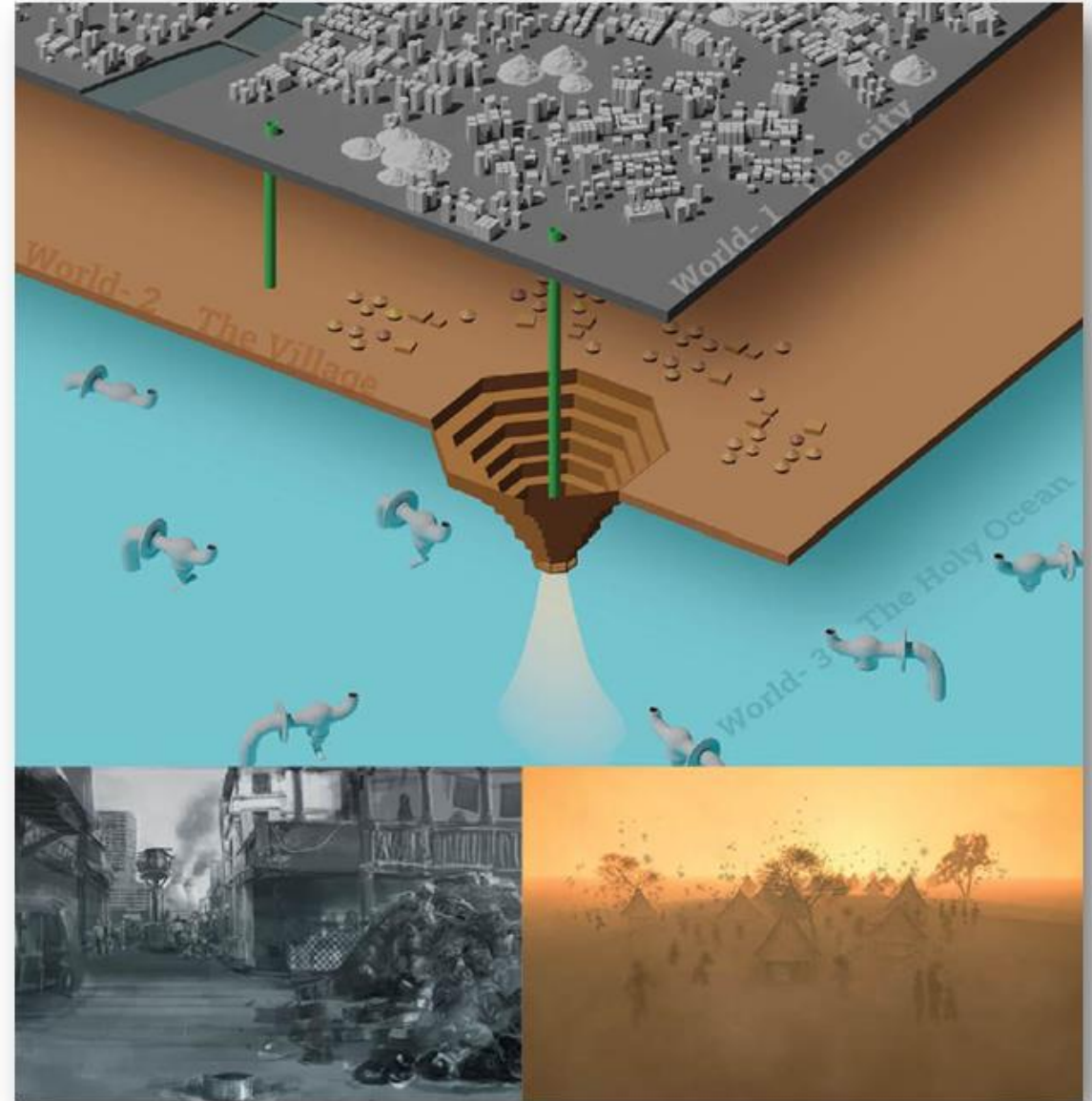
Collective action, negotiation, behavioral change



A digital interactive narrative on water in the context of stepwells



Story of Muna, a little girl's adventure to find water, which gradually turns into a chase for water and finally saving it.



## 'Free' Water: changing forms

*Parabs* (earthen pots),  
found along dusty roads;  
any passerby can take  
water from them  
irrespective of socio-  
economic background





Photo credits : Joel Fernando



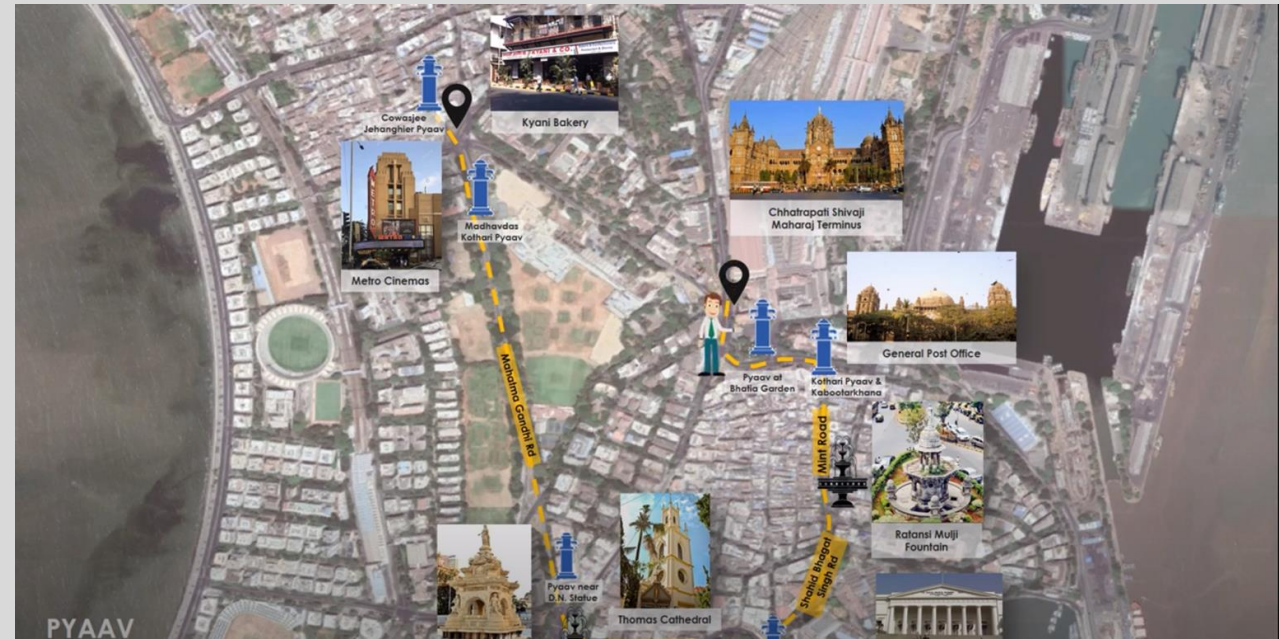
Photo credits : Aslam Saiyad

# Once upon a *Pyaaav*

Documentary-animation film, made by  
VastuVidhaan Consultants

Mumbai's public water  
fountains have disintegrated  
and been forgotten over the  
years. This virtual walk  
locates the last few  
remaining *pyaavs* in Mumbai  
and tells their stories.

<https://confluence.mumbaiwaterarratives.in/water-build-heritage/exhibit02.php>

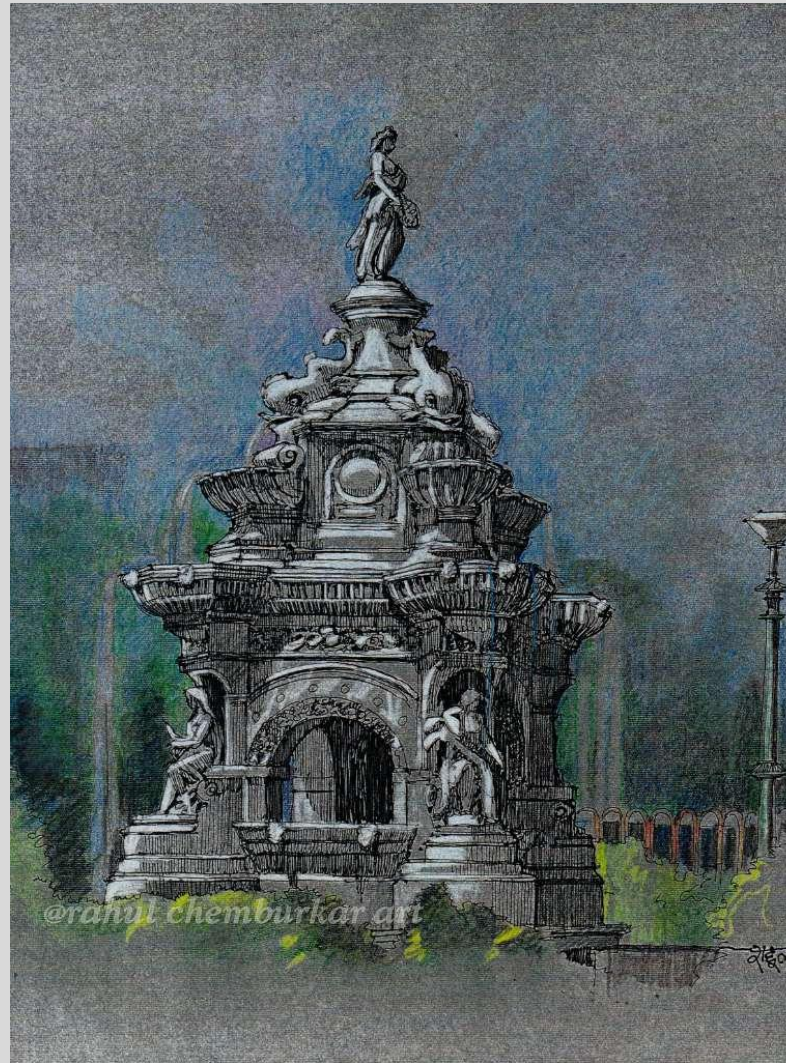


# Once upon a Pyaav

Postcards by Ar. Rahul Chemburkar

Sketches portraying the present and imagined conditions of *pyaavs* in Mumbai are reproduced in the form of postcards.

<https://confluence.mumbaiwater narratives.in/print/index.php>



# Mahad Satyagraha

Illustrations by Siddhesh Gautam

History of caste and water in Mumbai explained via graphics. Retelling of history to draw attention to the politics of caste in the current scenario

<https://confluence.mumbaiwaterannarratives.in/water-equity/exhibit02.php>

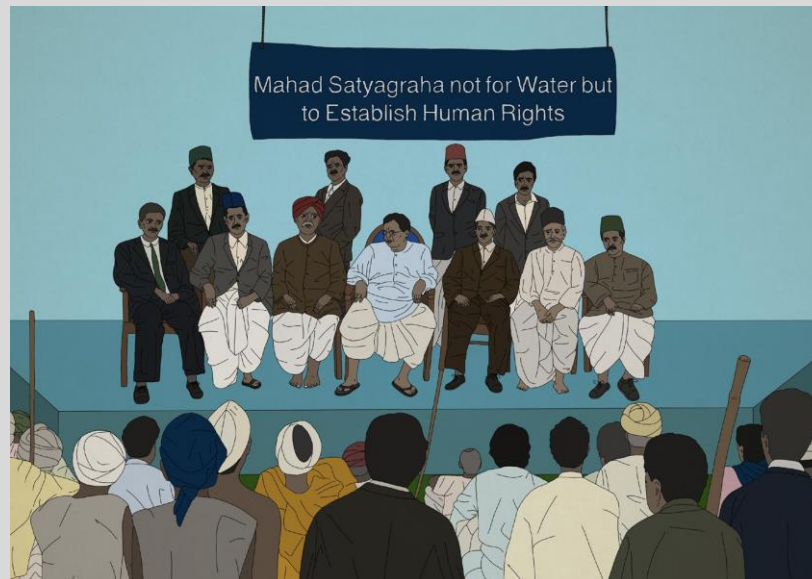
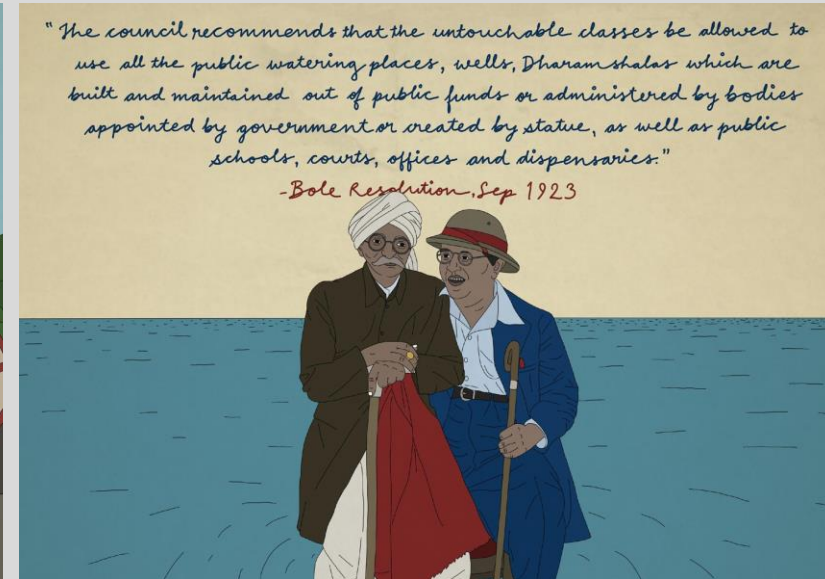


Illustration credits : Siddhesh Gautam





# Pani Haq Samiti Calendar

Photostories and print calendar

by Pani Haq Samiti

Exhibits the milestones of voluntary water activist organisation Pani Haq Samiti in the form of a calendar, along with milestone days in the history of Mumbai's access to water.

MARCH



March 14<sup>th</sup>  
International Day of Action for Rivers

1927 - March 20<sup>th</sup>  
Mahad Satyagraha takes place

March 22<sup>nd</sup>  
World Water Day

2019 - March 30<sup>th</sup>  
No Objection Certificate received from Mumbai Port Trust. This NoC allowed the residents of informal settlements on Mumbai Port Trust land to get water connections for the first time since independence

APRIL



2020 - April 14<sup>th</sup>  
Insan Vanha Pani Abhiyan was initiated

2019 - April 30<sup>th</sup>  
A No Objection Certificate was obtained from the Aarey Forest administration for providing water connections



Photo Credits : Suraj Katra



## Gender and Water

“Do you know who brings water home for hundreds of rural families across India? Made of bronze, my long neck and wide collar help Jigna to hold me gracefully in the curve of her hip, as she walks back from the village well, careful not to spill water she has spent several hours collecting. On her head, she confidently balances another broad-based, brass pot, while sharing local news and singing along with her friends. I know its hard work for Jigna, particularly in the dry summer months, but she doesn’t complain even when she has to miss going to school on some days.”

- Ghada, a pot for fetching water

## Women's water work is never done!

- Gender division of labour – roots in patriarchy, capitalism, ideology
- Reproductive or domestic work – unpaid, care economy
- Time and energy spent in walking daily to fetch water across barren landscapes, wash clothes, utensils
- Head-loading heavy pots – health impacts, also poor water quality
- Girls: loss of childhood, learning
- Men do fetch water: drought, conflicts, transport – cycles, barrows



# Women Water Work

Global digital exhibition to visualize women's everyday roles in the domestic, productive and community spaces around water

Built through an open call for poems, images, videos, photographs

[www.womenwaterwork.org](http://www.womenwaterwork.org)



Source: Isaac KB Aggrey: inversed gender roles



Source: Utthan, lobster fattening in coastal Gujarat

