



Jalasaya *Ra* Katha...

Stories of surface waterbodies
as told by youths of Odisha

MESSAGE



I am happy to know that the Youth4Water campaign is actively engaged in mobilizing youths of Odisha around actions and awareness on Water, Sanitation, Hygiene (WASH) & Climate change.

Our future lies in the hands of the youths of the nation. WASH and Climate Change challenges need both policy and on-ground solutions. The role of students, and youth in general, becomes very crucial in both. Young people have power to engage with policy makers as well as bring in behavioural changes in the society through grassroots level actions.

The youth should start right from their schools/colleges and their communities- educating their peers, holding awareness campaigns (especially in the rural areas), forming school action clubs, joining the local NGOs, pursuing studies in this unconventional field and taking green jobs. They should also engage with the local self-government representatives as well as other elected representatives in helping them implement several policy decisions and plans. They should also provide inputs from the grassroots for policy makers to understand their issues and take necessary steps. In fact, the Jala Ra Katha booklet is a great example of youths' engagement in both such actions.

I encourage all youths of Odisha to come forward & be a part of the Youth4Water campaign.

TUSHARKANTI BEHERA
*Minister of State (Independent Charge),
E & IT, Sports & Youth Services
Government of Odisha*



PREFACE



It makes me proud to present the 'Jala Ra Katha' booklet which compiles stories written by youth about waterbodies of Odisha.

I compliment the Youth4Water Campaign for having taken this innovative and heart-warming initiative. Each story is a creative tribute that the youth is giving to his lifegiving waterbody. I feel that these stories will re-ignite our people's love for their waterbodies and thereby, enthuse them preserve them.

I look forward to more such initiatives from the UNICEF-led Youth4Water campaign, it is good to know that the campaign aims to inspire and support 1,00,000 youth in the state of Odisha to become Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) and Climate Action Guardians. The fact that this campaign has brought together several prominent non-profits for the cause, makes it even more special.

I am happy to witness the active involvement of youths in consolidating this compendium of short stories around various water bodies of Odisha. I believe, this booklet will help in creating mass awareness among other youths and community members as well.

ANU GARG, IAS

*Additional Chief Secretary to Government
Department of Water Resources
Government of Odisha*



FOREWORD



On behalf of the Youth4Water campaign

I am happy to present the booklet of 'Jala Ra Katha' – an anthology that reflects the sentimental attachment that youth have for the waterbodies of Odisha. It is a fitting tribute to the theme of World Water Day 2022 – Making the Invisible Visible. It is also a reflection of the success of the Youth4Water Campaign in engaging youth for strengthening Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) & Climate Change actions of the State.

There are new and emerging challenges that require us to change the way we work. Youth, with their high levels of potential and motivation, are best suited to becoming the agents of change for a new, sustainable world. With this in mind, the Youth4Water campaign has increased engagement in “newer” areas such as adapting to climate change; mainstreaming gender; and engaging the youths in an optimistic manner.

This campaign provides platform for youth to become thought and action leaders. In many different ways they, along with their communities can adopt and help adopt suitable behaviours and celebrate national and international days focused on WASH and Climate Change with us. It is an outstanding opportunity to Youth to volunteer with us and bring a WASH revolution in Odisha.

I appreciate the sincere contribution of the entire team consisting of very motivated and dedicated members and our partner organizations working relentlessly in these testing times. I have always held on to the hope, the belief and the conviction that the coming years will show us a brighter future if we keep contributing with equal sincerity and dedication.

MONIKA O. NIELSEN
Chief of Field Office
Odisha

DAMODAR KATA

250 YEARS AND ON...

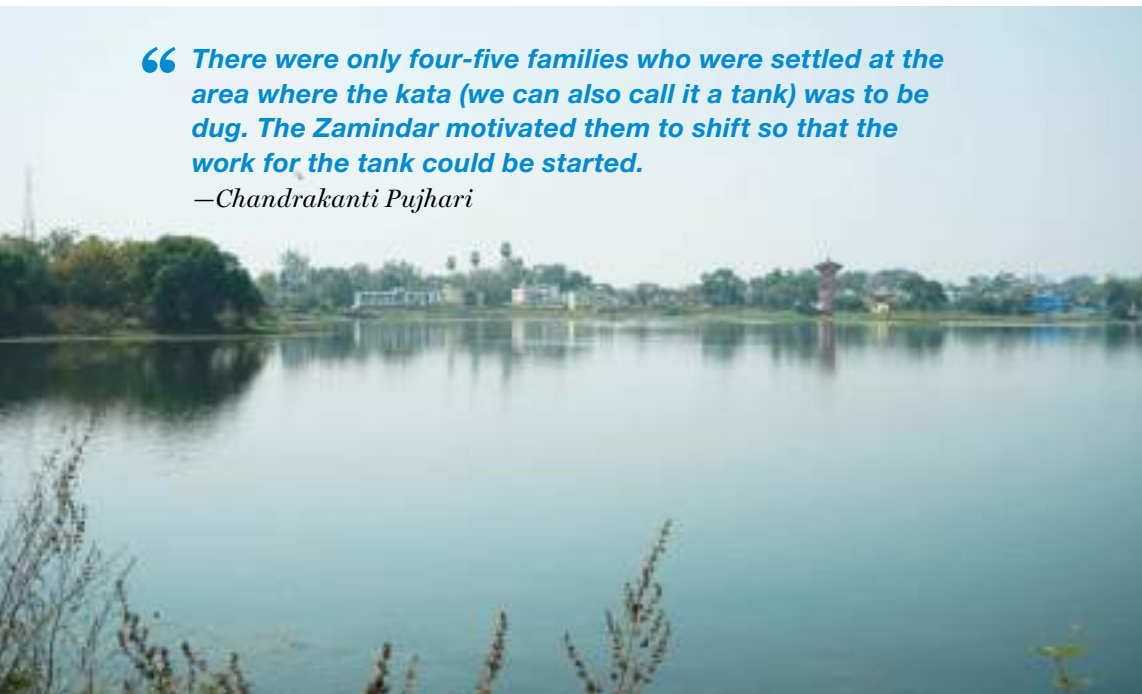
- **Type:** Kata (large surface water harvesting structure)
- **Area:** 250 acres
- **Location:** Bijepur, Bargarh district.

Settling a village

In early 1800s (some say 1818), the then local Zamindar (landlord) decided to dig up a huge Kata (large surface water harvesting body) of about 250 acres by inviting special pond diggers from other areas. The Zamindar, Damodar Gadtia, decided to end water woes of the villagers as there was no water storage facility in the village Jaring where all of them were staying. The Zamindar talked to all of them and sought their help in digging the kata so that they could settle alongside water and practice farming. “There were only four-five families who were settled at the area where the kata (we can also call it a tank) was to be dug. The Zamindar motivated them to shift

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—Chandrakanti Pujhari



so that the work for the tank could be started,” recalls Chandrakanti Pujhari who has already turned about 106 but has sharp memories of her times with the Kata. She heard all these from her father-in-law.

Bijepur's lifeline

This Kata has been the lifeline of Bijepur ever since it was dug. In fact, the entire village in a way gets its identity from this waterbody. Thousands of people belonging to Bijepur and nearby villages – at least five of them – bathe in this waterbody daily. The temple near the pond hosts a number of local festivals and the water of the Kata is considered as pure during such festivals.

Water security

According to the villagers, the Kata supports about 150 acres of farming during Rabi and somewhere between 500 acres and 1000 acres during Kharif by ensuring water supply through two canals. Besides, the Rapta, that is also known as Bijepurnullah, besides feeding this Kata with water, runs about 20 to 25 kilometres to the Raanjh river and on the way several villagers benefit out of it through water captured in check dams. At least 20 to 25 check dams have been constructed on the Bijepurnullah and more than thousand acres of land must be getting assured irrigation due to this in several villages downstream including Budapali, Bairagpali, Bhalubahal, etc.

Revival mode

The waterbody started to face challenges about 25 years ago. Some people started encroaching and the water was not cleaned daily. A group of women took up the task to themselves to raise these problems with the government. A people's movement led by women started in 2009 and continued upto 2016 when the government took up some projects to renovate the Kata and keep it protected. Locals say that the government sanctioned a budget of 3 crore for this purpose and the work is underway.

Author: Subodh Kumar Pradhan

A FAMILY TRADITION

- **Type:** Pond (traditional water harvesting structure)
- **Area:** 7 acres
- **Location:** Chindaguda, Nuapada.

Royal touch

Shibnarayan Singh Deo, brother of Vir Bikram Deo, the erstwhile ruler of Khariar Zamindari had dug the tank in late 1940s. The objective was to create a water source for people of the area. This was the only source of drinking water for the people of about five villages – Chindaguda, Khairpadar, Damapala, Gadramunda, madosil and Bijepur. The name “Lakshmi Bandh” was given by Baidehi Kumari Devi, w/o Shibnarayan Singh Deo, brother of Vir Bikram Deo, the king of Khadial (Khariar was an estate in Central Province of India) ruled by a King. Local people call it Raja Bandh as it was dug by a man of Royal family. The tank was constructed in an area of 7 acres. A water body locally called as Adkata was formed in 13 acres of land covering three sides of the tank.

Traditional technique used

The pond has been dug using traditional knowledges and techniques of water harvesting. The embankment on the downside of the tank is double the length of the embankment of upper side. It has been extended on both sides of the tank which acts as the embankment of the Adkata.



A small tank of 100 ft by 100 dimension has been made in the centre of the tank. The depth of this tank is about ten feet. There is one inlet on the south embankment of the tank made on the downside. The tank has a good catchment collecting run off of about ten to fifteen square km area. The run-off is collected in the Adkata and enters the tank from the south. The tank gets recharged through percolation from the Adkata and also gets flow during rains (especially rainy season) through the inlet. There is no outlet in the tank. The Adkata has two outlets on two sides (north and south). The inlet allows inflow into the tank from the Adkata from south side. When the water level in tank reaches the optimum, the surplus water from the Adkata drains to farm lands through the *Nalla*. The Adkata saves the tank from siltation.

In memory of a wife

This pond has been used by villagers of several nearby villages for bathing and other purposes. One Siva temple was constructed on the bank of the tank by Shivnarayan Deo. The name of the temple is Baidehinath (Baidehi Devi is second wife of Shivnarayan Deo) It is presumed that he would have constructed the temple in memory of Baidehi Devi. Shivaratri festival is being observed every year in this temple by the people of Chindaguda and nearby villages.

Crop fields and mango orchard

The tank irrigated about 100 acres of farm land during Kharif. Paddy was the only Kharif crop at that time. Chana was being cultivated during Rabi. Gradually the cropping pattern during Rabi season changed. Chana is no more cultivated, paddy and sugarcane in some patches have replaced Chana. There water requirements for the Rabi crops is fulfilled through percolated water.

Shivnarayan Deo also developed a mango orchard adjacent to the Adkata. Hundreds of mango trees of different local as well as grafted varieties are still there. These trees got irrigated by water from the tank in the initial time.

Restoration efforts

The first renovation of the tank was done by Dr. Fanindam Deo, grandson of Shivnarayan Deo, in 2021. Silt of three to four feet depth was removed from the tank on four sides (100 ft. wide from edge embankments). Renovation could not be done beyond 100 ft as the water could not be drained.

Author: Ipsita Ruchi, Khariar

THE PIOUS POND

- **Type:** Pond (traditional water harvesting structure)
- **Area:** 5 acres
- **Location:** Nisha village, Angul district.

A pond for 4500 people

In the early 90s the village of Nisha faced acute shortage of drinking water. They also faced water shortage for bathing purposes. The residents decided to end this problem and dug a pond in the year 1926. The 4500 odd population of the village benefit from this pond even today. The pond not only conserved water for the villagers for the summer months, but also provided irrigation water during the *kharif* season.

No litter

A Shiva temple was built near the pond and that's the reason the pond became more important for the villagers over time. The deity is worshipped on festivals such as *Shiva Ratri* and *Laxmi Puja* each year. The pond's water is the first water to be used during *Laxmi Puja*. There are so many ponds in our village but people of our village think this is the most pious pond. That's also the reason people don't throw any garbage in this pond. Even the livestock are not let inside this pond for their daily clean up. During the festive times, people from nearby villagers also visit this pond as it is considered sacred.

Irrigating farms round the year

This pond's water is being used for irrigation as well as fishery purposes. It is one of the major irrigation sources for the villagers as it irrigates about 50 acres of crop fields round the year. The entire village is involved in the pisciculture activity in this pond and the funds earned from this goes to annual maintenance of the pond. Above all, the waterbody helps in maintaining the groundwater level. People of the village say that it is due to the water of the



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pond, the nearby wells and hand pumps maintain good water level throughout the year.

Community ownership

The water body is free from bacteria and any kind of solid waste which makes it usable by the villagers for day-to-day activities. Annual cleaning up activities are carried out by the youth in collaboration with the gram panchayat. These activities are mostly done in the month of March before the onset of the festive season, particularly the *Shiva Ratri* and *Dola Purnima* (Holi festival). The youths and gram panchayat of the village are highly motivated and taken the task of maintaining the pond to themselves without any external assistance. It is for their continuous efforts that the water is potable. The villagers now expect this pond to be adopted under the “Adarsha Pokhari” scheme of the government so that they can develop it further.

Author: Amarendra Prusty

THE SIN CLEANSER

- **Type:** Pond (traditional water harvesting structure)
- **Area:** 4.5 acres
- **Location:** Khalari, Angul district.

A pond for all needs

In order to meet the requirement of water for agriculture and bathing purposes, the panchayat along with the residents of the Khalari village in Angul block of the same district had built this surface water harvesting structure in the 19th century. The Rengali canal which was built later on passes nearby the pond and recharges the waterbody throughout the year.

Lord of the village

A *Shani* Temple has been constructed at the bank of the pond in the year 2014. Earlier the women of the village used to visit a nearby village to worship Lord *Shani* and observe *Shani Mela*. However, after construction of the temple, the villagers worship Lord *Shani* here and it is being believed that worshipping Lord *Shani* by using the water from pond will help them get rid of all sins and is also one of the remedies for curing *Shani Mahadasha*. In addition to it, residents gather near the pond to celebrate various religious festivals such as *Shiv Ratri*, *Kartika Purnima*. Among them is the famous religious festival *Maa Hingula Yatra* which is observed in the month of April. The villagers carry, in a procession, 108 of earthen jars (*Matka*) filled with water from the pond to the place of worship of *Maa Hingula* in order to bathe the idol of the goddess. The Self Help Groups (SHGs) and the village youth committee organize the religious festivals in the village.

Multiple benefits

The villagers predominately depend on this waterbody for irrigation. The nearby Rengali dam's canal runs dry during non-monsoon periods. In addition to it irrigating fields, the waterbody is also used for fish farming. The village youth committee takes up this fishery activity. The



“Regular cleaning activities such as hyacinth and debris/ waste removal is majorly done by the youths of the village at our own cost. But now the pond has been full of silt which requires heavy earthmoving machineries and related cost to it (which we are unable to bear) for cleaning it and restoring to its original condition. We therefore request the local administration to revive the pond and give it a new life.”

—Harihar Sahoo, A member of Rameswar Youth Committee

income earned from fishery is used in cleaning the pond as well as in organising various religious festivals. The banks of the waterbody are nicely maintained by the village youth committee which is majorly used by the residents of the village for recreational purposes.

Youth take the lead

With regular and frequent efforts of the local youth committee in collaboration with the villagers, the water body is in its natural form i.e., free from hyacinth and waste. A soothing atmosphere around the pond makes it a part of some of the most picturesque places in the locality. Self-motivated members of the youth committee have not only undertaken annual rejuvenation activities but also have taken the ownership to build a model village in the entire district with respect to water, sanitation and hygiene. Nearby *Malati Ashram* which was founded by former Chief Minister of Odisha Late Nabakrishna Choudhary and his wife Malati Choudhary is a place of heritage and historic significance. The inhabitants of the Ashram have a great contribution towards keeping the waterbody clean and healthy.

Author: Sushant Kumar Das

AN INCLUSIVE STRUCTURE

- **Type:** Pond
- **Area:** 1 acres
- **Location:** Mallikadeipur village, Bhadrak district.

A pond for the God

In 1945, local Zamindar Bhaskar Chandra Mohanty dug this pond for the Nilakantheswar Temple. Besides being used for the God, the water of this pond is used by all irrespective of their class and caste.

Holy waters

Water of this pond is used by the villagers for different purposes like bathing, fishing, irrigation, etc. The Nilakantheswar temple was built by a village trust in 1945. This is Lord Shiva's temple who is worshipped during each religious festival celebrated in the village. Especially the Mahasivaratri sees a big celebration here and people from other villages



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also participate in the same. The villagers have this belief that the pond's water is holy because the God uses it.

State of use and maintenance

The pond water is primarily used for irrigating crop fields. The temple trust leases out the pond to one person each five-year for fishery. The said person is responsible for regular cleaning and upkeep of the pond.

According to Pitambar Barik, a member of the Nilakantheswar Club, the water body is completely clean and bacteria free, which makes it usable by the villagers for day-to-day activities. To clean the pond people use calcium oxide and calcium hydroxide before fishing.

Author: Aparajita Barik



DAKAI POKHARI

ABODE OF MOTHER DEITY NEEDS ATTENTION

- **Type:** Pond
- **Area:** 1.98 acres
- **Location:** Kohi village, Mayurbhanj district.

Most important pond

There are many ponds in and around Kohi village but the Dakai pond is special. It's the Thakurini Peetha: abode of the Mother Deity of the village, Maa Dakai. In fact the pond got its name from the deity. Mythology says that anyone who pleases Maa Dakai with their worship at this pond would get all wishes fulfilled. No one exactly recalls when the pond was dug. However, elders believe it was done during the times of the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj- Sriram Chandra Bhanj Deo (1882– 1912).



“The youths of the village should come forward to restore the pond to its earlier glory so that the local ecology can also be conserved. For this mass awareness drives should be taken up and the district administration should help in this.”

—Abhinash Behera, a teacher at Kujidihi High School

Heavily polluted

The pond water irrigates about 20 to 25 hectares of paddy fields. The villagers also fish in the pond. Water of this pond is very cold and the depth is approximately between 12 and 15 feet. Earlier the depth was more. Further, the pond is heavily polluted with mud puddle, litter and debris, different algae and some other plants.

Urgent restoration needed

With changing lifestyle and household tap connections reaching rural households, people's relationship with the pond is reducing. There is no cleaning effort by the villagers despite this being an important pond since ancient times.

“The youths of the village should come forward to restore the pond to its earlier glory so that the local ecology can also be conserved. For this mass awareness drives should be taken up and the district administration should help in this”, said Abhinash Behera, a teacher at Kujidihi High School.

Author: Jnyana Ranjan Behera

SPRING FED

- **Type:** Pond
- **Area:** 4 acres
- **Location:** Nirakarpur village, Khurdha district.

A king's effort

In early 19th century, Narendra Pratap Singh, the village head dug this waterbody to meet water needs of the Nirakarpur and nearby villages. The pond is still used by the 3000 odd population of the village. It is believed that Singh discovered springs (Paani Jhara) that are fed by channels running out of the Chitrakut Hills. He used dug this pond to harvest those perennial water sources. People know this pond as Hata Pokhari (Market Pond) because the banks of this waterbody houses a bi-weekly vegetable market to which vendors from about 25 villages come to sell their produces.

Hub of religious activities

The temple was dug near an ancient Lord Shiva temple named Nilakantheswar Temple as Singh believed that the natural water sources was a gift of this God. Since then, the day-to-day rituals of the temple are performed by using water from this pond. The locals celebrate Shivaratri and Kumar Purnima here. Old Hindu widows bathe here daily during the Holy Kartika month and perform some rituals. During the Danda Jatra, that's the most important dance festival organised since the Kalinga kingdom times, the devotees take bath here before performing the rituals.

Supports livelihood

The pond is used for bathing purposes. The vegetable vendors also wash their produces in this pond. It also irrigates the banana farms and mushroom cultivation thus supporting livelihood of many people. For paddy fields, the water of this pond supplements that of the Rameswar River's water. Fish farming in the pond is done by the local village club.



“ We expect assistance in terms of recognition and incentives from the government to keep our motivation high to keep our water bodies and locality clean and hygienic (Swachha and Sustha) in the upcoming days”.

—Members of the Village Youth Club

Clean and healthy

The water body is free from all kinds of weeds, hyacinth and waste/pollutants. The youth of the villages take up regular cleaning activities. The youth volunteers of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) have recently conducted clean up actions with help of local youths under the “Clean India” campaign done during Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations.

“Many people in this village are completely dependent on this pond for their daily requirement of water. Youths and villagers have put in their efforts significantly to keep the pond clean and usable throughout the year. We expect assistance in terms of recognition and incentives from the government to keep our motivation high to keep our water bodies and locality clean and hygienic (Swachha and Sustha) in the upcoming days”, said members of the village youth club.

Author: Sri Satyanarayan

GADHUA POKHARI

AN IDEAL POND

- **Type:** Pond
- **Area:** 7 acres
- **Location:** Jiral village, Dhenkanal district.

Holy waters

Water scarcity in the early 1920s led the villagers of Jiral to dig a pond to meet all their water needs. The pond was named *Gadhua Pokhari* (Bathing Pond) and still caters to the need of the 8000-odd population. It has been built at a low-lying area of the village so as to hold water throughout the year.

The residents of the village believe that the pond holds holy waters. During important religious festivals such as *Ram Navami* and *Dussehra*, they carry pots of water from this pond in a procession called *Kalas Yatra* to bathe the idols before worshipping them. Since water from this pond is used for such rituals, people believe this can also cure skin diseases.

The villagers also organize an annual boat festival, each April, in this pond. Famous as Chapa Khela, this is another holy ritual organized to worship the village deities.

Groundwater recharged

Water from the pond is primarily being used for irrigating crop fields and in pisciculture. In fact, this pond is the primary irrigation source for about 500 acres of land for growing paddy and other crops. Pisciculture is taken up by the village club. The club members contribute funds to farm the fishes and utilize the profit in annual maintenance and rejuvenation of the waterbody. People thank this pond for good groundwater level in the village. They think that the nearby



wells and hand pumps hold water throughout the year due to this rainwater harvesting structure.

Due to the regular upkeep by the villagers, the waterbody is free from hyacinth and any kind of solid waste which makes it usable by the villagers for day-to-day activities. Annual desilting and cleaning up activities are carried out by the youth in collaboration with local club of the village. These activities are mostly done in the month of March before the onset of the festive session particularly the Holy '*Chapa Khela*' (the boat festival) and *Dola Purnima* (Holi festival).

Active youths make a difference

This being a bathing pond as well, four changing rooms, to each for males and females, have been constructed on the banks. The youths of the village have been enthusiastically involved in upkeep of the waterbody. They now expect assistance from the government so that they can make it an *Adarsha Pokhari* (ideal pond).

"Youths of this village are engaged in various livelihood activities but their motivation and will power has given life to this pond. They not only clean the pond but also spread awareness around health and sanitation which resulted in an Open Defecation Free (ODF) area. They wish to become small-time entrepreneurs by engaging themselves in various allied agriculture activities by using water from this pond," said Padma Charan Sahoo, A member of Kalyani Cultural Club.

Author: Sri Satyanarayan



IMPORTANT YET NEGLECTED

- **Type:** Pond
- **Area:** Half an acre
- **Location:** Khairmal village, Subarnapur district.

A pond follows a temple

The villagers say that about 70 years ago a Shiva Linga appeared at a place in the village. Considering this as a will of the God to have a temple here, the villagers decided to build one by collecting donations from all the residents. Once the temple was built it was realised that people will gather in large numbers during festivals and they will need water for the rituals as well as other needs. They then decided to dig a pond over here. The pond is a busy place always. Especially, during the Makar Sankranti festival, it attracts a lot of devotees.



“ There were only four-five families who were settled at the area where the kata (we can also call it a tank) was to be dug. The Zamindar motivated them to shift so that the work for the tank could be started.

—Chandrakanti Pujhari

Provides drinking water

This pond is also a source of drinking water for many. Groundwater level in the village is very low and hence this surface waterbody helps in both providing drinking water as well as recharging the groundwater. There are many shops near the temple and people visiting these shops also find a succour in this water when they need to quench their thirst and do other chores.

Urgent revival needed

Unfortunately, such an important pond is in a state of utter neglect. It has turned into a dump yard for garbage and other pollutants. Two years ago, an initiative was taken to revive the waterbody but this was stopped halfway for reasons unknown. The locals as well as administration should take immediate steps to clean it up and restore its ecological conditions.

Author: Banti Pradhan

ONE MAN'S EFFORT PAYS OFF

- **Type:** Pond
- **Area:** 1 acre
- **Location:** G. Udayagiri town, Kandhamal district.

Benefits across generations

One Mr. Dalabehera dug this pond in and around the year 1938 with an objective to quench the thirst of the local population which was fighting water scarcity then. The water of this pond is still being used by many people of the G. Udayagiri town, which is currently a Notified Area Council (NAC).

Fish farming

The pond water is used for both irrigation and fishery activities. The NAC has leased out the pond for fishery to one person who pays an amount of 5000 rupees per year and is responsible for cleaning the ponds regularly.

Keeping it clean

Even though the pond is surrounded by houses, as it is a populous location, the locals keep it clean with the help of the NAC. In fact, it's a famous pond of the town and many people flock to this place in the mornings to have a bath and offer respect to the Sun God with Surya Namaskar. Many people also believe that the water of this pond is holy. Many devotees who visit local temples also take water from this pond to offer to God on a daily basis as well as during various religious festivals.

"The pond is completely clean and hygienic. To clean the pond the people of town normally fish out string algae, treat the water with hydrogen peroxide or barley straw, maintain the pond with aeration, and remove plant debris with a pond vacuum or by pumping out the water," says Pabitra Mohan Pradhan, the current lease holder.

Author: Rahul Nayak



YOUTH4WATER
www.youth4water.org

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