

MITHI BACHAO MUMBAI BACHAO : Dr Kirit Somaiya

Mumbaikars have seen and accepted various challenges in their life. From 1971 Pakistan war planes to horrible bomb blast. But the 26th July 2005 flood, waterlogging chaos have disturbed their 'Manasic Santulan'. Yes, we Mumbaikars are accustomed to heavy rain, coinciding with high tide. It is routine every year it rains once or twice for an hour or for a day. Traffic jam, roadblocks, disturbances in the railway service for few hours is a yearly routine. But after 26 July, they get scared by little rain. Feel like a bad dream.

I am a born Mumbaikar. We are accustomed to water logging in few areas –

- i) Matunga Railway Station
- ii) Sion Railway Station
- iii) Parel Railway Station
- iv) Hindmata Cinema Chowk, Parel
- v) Wadala
- vi) King's Circle Railway Bridge
- vii) Shanmukhananda Hall area
- viii) Elphinstone Road Railway Station
- ix) Matunga West Railway Station.

I am witnessing this for almost 30 years.

What is new development of last one decade is the numbers of areas are added.

In last five years, i.e. from 2001 monsoon, I have been shocked to witness heavy water logging from 2 ft. to 4 ft. for two hours to 7 days between Larsen & Toubro junction (Powai) to Bandra-Kurla Complex.

26th July although this area was worst affected, this has not happened for the first time. 'Alarm Bell ' was given by the 2001 monsoon. Air India Colony-Indian Airlines Colony got flooded for the first time. The Mithi Nadi dirty water came into the ground floor upto 2-4 ft. The Indian Airlines employees staying at ground floor were forced to shift to their neighbours on the upper floors for couple of days.

During monsoon of 2002, Air-India colony, Kalpana Talkies, Kurla, road was closed for few days. BEST bus routes were diverted.

The residents, small industries have suffered because of water flooding-logging – the only reason 'Mithi river'. Illegal encroachments, illegal commercial activities, illegal 'tel chori mixing' business, illegal scrap business activity taking its toll.

2001 monsoon – The water logging and the losses, damage at Saki Naka, Kranti Nagar, Safed Pool, Jari Mari, Kalpana Talkies (Kurla), CST Road area opened my eyes. I took up the issue as a Member of Parliament with

- i) Mumbai Municipality
- ii) MMRDA
- iii) Collector.

Not much success, no clarity.

The same thing happened during monsoon of 2002. We took up the issue seriously. Almost all the authorities cooperated. Conclusion – horrible shape and status of Mithi Nadi.

1. Mithi Nadi abused by all.
2. 458 illegal unauthorised oil mixing and scrap workshop have damaged heavily the flow of water.
3. 3000 residential unauthorized structures
4. Illegal industrial waste
5. BMC's local illegal sewage line
6. 248 small nullahs have been put in Mithi river.
7. The beginning, janmasthan of Mithi river in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, hills of National Park, Vihar overflow, Powai overflow is a beautiful sight of clean water.
8. The conversion of Mithi Nadi into Mithi nullah starts from Filter Pada – Aarey Colony area.
9. At Larsen & Toubro junction, Powai Lake overflow meets Mithi river.
10. Between L& T junction and Saki Naka, the industrial waste, BMC waste and sewage line.
11. From Saki Naka to Airport Authority boundary, oil mixing, scrap – bhangarwalas activities have damaged Mithi river.
12. Airport to Bandra-Kurla Complex – unauthorized residential, commercial,

- bhangarwalas – fulfilled encroachment activity.
13. Unnatural diversion of Mithi river at three places by Airport Authorities.
 14. Unnatural diversion of Mithi river at Bandra-Kurla Complex.
 15. The sangam, end of Mithi river near Mahim Creek/below Bandra bridge have been heavily encroached and brought down width from 120 ft. to 40-50 ft. at some places.
 16. **The slum mafia, political mafia, slum development business activities continued after 26th July 2005 also.**
 17. **In August 2005, also 24 new huts just come up at the bank of Mithi river at Mahim Creek.**

In the year 2002-03, as a Member of Parliament, I made serious, sustained efforts. A photo presentation was made to various officials of Government of India, State Government, MMRDA, BMC and Pollution Control Board. The observations of January 2003 :

- Half of the 'Mithinadi' has been encroached
- Many gutters, Nallahs of BMC are floating into 'Mithinadi'
- There are almost 3000 unauthorized encroachments like Commercial Galas, Small Workshops, Container Yards etc.
- The garbage and polluted water of these industries flows into this river
- Garbage, sewer water from nearby slums flows into this river
- The problem of encroachment, pollution have increased rapidly in last 10 yrs.
- There is no regulatory system, supervision, monitoring authority
- The water logging problem L & T Junction, Sakinaka, Kurla, Kamani Kalpana Talkies Junction, Bandra – Kurla
- Residential Building Complex became in last couple of years
- We must initiate corrective measures before the onset of monsoons for the betterment of 10 Lacs people
- Immediate Survey is required
- Identification of problem is necessary
- Diversion of all BMC, Sewer Line, Nallah is required
- Removal of encroachments
- Rehabilitation, relocation of nearby residential slums
- Strict action against the industrial pollution
- The master plan must be developed with the help of Environment Ministry-GOI, Environment Division-BMC, Environment Section-MMRDA.
- An action plan for next few years must be chalked out

The follow up by me –

27.1.2003 - I lodged a complaint with the Central Pollution Control Board that the Mithi river adjoining the Mumbai Airport flowing from east to west has become Gutter Nullah. All the nearby business establishments and industries are throwing their garbage in the Mithi Nadi. BMC has also failed to treat the sewage water which flows in the Mithi Nadi.

13.02.2003 – Mr. Dilip Biswas, the Chairman of CPCB by a letter assured me that the matter of Mithi River pollution would be investigated by the joint team comprising of the representatives of both the Central Pollution Control Board and the others.

05.03.2003 – The joint team comprising of the representative of the Central Pollution Control Board and the others investigated the matter of Mithi River pollution. They took several water sample for analysis and for making report.

26.03.2003 – Mr. T.R. Balu, the then Minister of Environment & Forests by a letter gave assurances to me to get the matter investigated by the joint committee of Central Pollution Control Board and others.

15.04.2003 – I addressed another letter to the then Minister of Environment & Forests pointed out the depreciate with the Mithi river due to the mushrooming illegal commercial encroachments along the banks of the Mithi river and also voiced his fear of impending mass disaster if concrete steps were not taken of its remedy forthwith.

21.04.2003 – The then Minister of Environment & Forests addressed a letter to me acknowledging receipt of the letter dated 15th April, 2003 and assuring me of having the matter looked into by another round on site inspection of the Mithi river.

25.04.2003 – I addressed a letter to the then Municipal Commissioner informing him of the impounding visit by the consultant to the Minister of Environment & Forests, Chairman of CPCB and other office for an on-site inspection of the Mithi river.

28.04.2003 – The Chairman of the Central Pollution Control Board addressed a letter to me enclosing therewith a copy of the report of the joint team comprising representatives of the Central Pollution Control Board and others which had investigated the matter of the Mithi river pollution on 4th and 5th March, 2003. The said report supported the complaint lodged by me made several shocking observations and findings and issued several recommendations.

28.04.2003 – The Government of India informed Shri Jayant Kawale, Secretary (Environment, Government of Maharashtra of the Itinerary of the second round of on-site inspection of the Mithi river.

01.05.2003 – Mr. Dilip Singh Judev, the then Minister of State, Environment & Forests addressed a letter to me officially informing me of the second on-site inspection of the Mithi river by a team of senior officers.

05.05.2003 – Myself as a Member of a Parliament (Lok Sabha) representing the people of North-East Constituency of Mumbai, which includes Kurla, Saki-Naka, Powai and parts of the city of Mumbai constantly affecting by the floods due to uneven flow of the water on account of the almost choked Mithi river raised this matter with the Ministry of Environment & Forest as unstarred question no. 5987 to be answered on 5th May, 2003 as several questions regarding this matter and received some revealing answers.

08.07.2003 – The then Minister of Environment & Forests addressed a letter to me accepting that the Mithi river is highly polluted and informed me that the Chairman of Central Pollution Control Board had asked others to preparing an action plan involving all.

11.07.2003 – I addressed a letter to the then Municipal Commissioner informing him of his discussions with the then the Hon'ble Minister of Environment and Forests as has also discussions during joint visit by the Government of India, Government of Maharashtra and others. I once again pointed out growing pollution of the Mithi river and over flow which had already been found to have taken place in and around the Mithi river.

17.07.2003 – Mr. Dilip Biswas, the Chairman of the Central Pollution Control Board, informed me that he had asked others to expedite the preparations of plan of action for the control of pollution of Mithi Nadi involving the others.

22.07.2003 – I addressed a letter to others and informed him of the discussions which had taken place between me and Mr. A.K. Mago, Metropolitan Commissioner and once again requested all the department to expedite the matter to do the needful.

30.08.2003 – Maharashtra Costal Management Authority addressed a letter to me informing me of the decision taken by the Principal Secretary, Urban Development, Government of Maharashtra to convene a meeting of all the concerned authorities and to find a solution to the problem of the pollution of the Mithi river.

Before the end of 2003, it was unanimously accepted, agreed by

- a) Environment Ministry, Government of India
- b) Central Pollution Control Board
- c) Chief Minister of Maharashtra
- d) Government of Maharashtra
- e) Chief Secretary, Maharashtra
- f) Maharashtra Pollution Control Board
- g) Urban Ministry, Environment Ministry, Maharashtra
- h) MMRDA
- i) Collector, Mumbai Suburban District
- j) Mumbai Municipal Commissioner

that a strong joint action to save Mumbai was necessary. Mumbai can be saved by action plan of 'Save Mithi River'.

- i) Immediate action on Mithi Nadi
- ii) Action necessary before the monsoon of 2004
- iii) Joint action plan to be evolved
- iv) MMRDA to act as a nodal agency
- v) MMRDA to immediately appoint a consultant to prepare action plan, time bound programme to save Mithi Nadi
- vi) Rs16 lakhs consultation fee to be paid by MMRDA.
- vii) The State Government is responsible for follow up.
- viii) Urban Ministry, Maharashtra to act as nodal ministry.
- ix) State Pollution Control Board has to supervise, monitor the clean Mithi River activity.
- x) State Pollution Control Board to prepare regularly pollution, encroachment status of Mithi river and submit to CPCB and others.
- xi) Rehabilitation of those qualified for rehabilitation of the 3000 residential premises, slums/chawls.
- xii) In the first phase, immediate removal of the horrible illegal commercial activities.

By the end of the year 2003, it seemed that Mithi Nadi would be saved. But the destiny was waiting.

The year 2004 became election year. The vote bank politics forced the State ruling party to shelve the "Save Mithi River" programme. Initially, it was Lok Sabha elections and subsequently Vidhan Sabha elections. The whole of year 2004 was wasted.

Lakhs of Mumbaikars have paid the price for the vote bank politics. 400 people lost their lives, 10 lacs suffered heavily, due to this self-centered, selfish behaviour.

In Gujarati, there is a saying – *Jagya Tyarathi Sarkar*.

Let us understand the nature, use nature but not so cruelly. We can do it what is needed is will power – *Ichha shakti*. Public pressure to support good politician and positive attitude. Let people of Mumbai get united, let us fight with land mafia, builder mafia, industrial mafia. Yes, there is difficulty in system but the same system has been used positively many times.

We have saved Powai Lake in the year 1999. Powai lake was in similar situation –

- i) 21 illegal small nullahs were coming in
- ii) 5 major storm water drains were used as sewage line
- iii) Unauthorised encroachment from all the sides
- iv) Encroachment by Government organization, builders, developments, slums, commercial – everybody.

We came out with "Save Powai Lake" programme. Government of India sanctioned Rs.5.5 crores. Everybody cooperated and nullahs/gutters, encroachment were thrown out. Today Powai Lake is a clean lake. If Powai would not have been there on 26th July 2005, disaster would have been five times more.

Think about Central Railways of 1997 to 2000. In Harbour line, one could touch slum roof while travelling. Everybody came together –

- a) The then Railway Minister and MMRDA extended financial support.
- b) 10,000 slums were identified as close to the security zone.
- c) They have been rehabilitated to Vashi Naka, Mankhurd area.
- d) Both the sides heavy strong wall constructed.
- e) All harbour and Central Railway efficiency improved, went upto 96% by the end of year 2003.

I would like to appeal we can do this. We have converted Mithi river into Mithi nullah. We can once again make the water of Mithi Nadi *mitha paani*. What is needed is strong will power, time bound action plan. Positive action from all and continuous public pressure. The action plan to make Mithi nullah once again to Mithi river –

1. Immediate criminal action against oil mixing activities at the bank of Mithi river.

2. Immediate action against all those industrial units throwing industrial waste into Mithi river.
3. BMC agreed in 2003 for Rs.21 crores sewage line parallel to Mithi river. The work should start immediately.
4. Stop unnatural diversion of Mithi river by Airport Authorities.
5. Disilting the whole of the river
6. At the Airport, the Mithi river may be excavated and made more deep. Proper bridges may be constructed on the Mithi river on the runways.
7. Three unnatural diversion by Airport Authorities to be reviewed.
8. Immediate removal of all encroachments from the Mithi bank.
9. The slum mafias' erection of zopdas near Mahim Creek where Mithi river ends should be stopped. All such huts should be removed immediately. Strong action, criminal action against this slum mafia should be taken.
10. Atleast at 7 places, width of Mithi river has been brought down below 25 ft. Removal of encroachment should be taken up immediately on war footing. Atleast 50 ft. wider flow, natural flow be made available.
11. All the building construction activity near Mithi river should be stopped immediately. Permission should be reviewed. If necessary, guidelines and laws be amended. CRZ guidelines be observed strictly.
12. All unnatural diversion should be removed.
13. The Government of Maharashtra has got more than 5000 tenements of PAP with MMRDA.
14. The priority for rehabilitation of 3000 qualified slum dwellers be given. The MUIP Project priorities be given after Mithi Nadi.
15. BMC should be asked to provide alternative gutter lines, sewage lines for all waste, garbage coming in the Mithi river.
16. Ban on throwing dirt, garbage, kachda, plastic should be ordered. If required, Act be amended.
17. Special security force of about 100 security persons along with motor boats, two wheelers should be provided from Filter Pada till Mahim Creek to watch, supervise and take care of Mithi Nadi.
18. Public awareness campaign be taken up.

Yes, 26th July 2005 incidents have shown

'MUMBAIKAR HELP MUMBAIKAR'

Mumbaikar has accepted the challenge and started their lives with 8.18 local, 9.19 bada fast, 6.30 return, once again the same life has started.

Arre bhai, yeh apna Mumbai hai. Hum use Achhi Mumbai banayenge.

MITHI BACHAO MUMBAI BACHAO

APLI MUMBAI SUNDAR MUMBAI.

Dr. KIRIT SOMAIYA