



GRA | Group for Rural Activities

Report

Subject: Nidhal Camp

24th -26thSept, 2022

October 15, 2022



By: Lukas

The present report attempts to cover the trip to the village of Nidhal near Satara (Maharashtra, India) on the weekend of 24th and 25th in late September 2022 organized by GRA (Group for Rural Activities) a voluntary student group at IIT Bombay.



Preliminary Preparation

GRA announced the trip which was open to all students of IIT Bombay regardless of their relation to GRA, in the week before the excursion was scheduled via [Student-notices] list and other (social) media. A fee of 1200 INR per participant was collected beforehand to pay for transport and food needs. To allow the participants and organizer to interact ahead the actual trip, GRA organized a preliminary meeting. During this meetup a basic introduction of every present participator as well as a brief outline of the upcoming event was conducted.

Packing List

As a suggestion (but with no claim to completeness) for future trips please consider the following items on your packing list:

- IIT Bombay ID Card
- dairy and pen
- water bottle
- cash
- mask
- blanket/bedsheets
- personal medicine and toiletries
- sunscreen
- mosquito repellent cream/spray
- changing clothes
- comfortable shoes
- umbrella
- cap (sun protection)
- Bluetooth speaker
- snacks

As usual for a weekend trip less is often more, so lightweight packing is preferable.

Saturday, 24th of September

Departure was scheduled at 4 AM from different pickup location around the campus. Surprisingly almost everybody made it to the bus in time. The total travel time to Nidhal including some traffic jam and also breaks for chai and breakfast accumulated up to approximately eight hours.

After a tasteful lunch prepared and served by the villagers in the back room of the marriage hall which was arranged as accommodation the group headed of to the villages high school to receive an introduction and briefing about Nidhals development.

At this time it became obvious that since years Mr. Chandrakant Dalvi was and still is the leading force in Nidhals evolution. He as a former Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer contributed his knowledge and skill set to raise funding from international and national programs and unified the villagers in their ambitions to develop Nidhal.

Some other personalities of the community were introduced, including the current major, the highschools principal and English teacher as well as the forest ministries officer.

Subsequently, the group was exposed to a series of short visits to relevant sites scattered all over the village. That also included a chain of cement bandhara's which are contributing since there final deployment in 2004 to the watershed management (Gaikwad 2014 and Telore and Unde 2012) of Nidhal. The so replenished groundwater allows irrigation of up to 500 acres of farmland in Nidhal (Gaikwad 2014). Micro irrigation systems were widely adopted by the local farmers as well as changes in their cropping patterns (more cash crops; Gaikwad 2014).

As a proud exhibit of their development the villagers presented the "Nilkantheshwar Multipurpose Garden". Which offers lawns, playgrounds and a gym accessibly to the public. In a central recently erected building local a meeting with local pupils was arranged.

After enjoying the dinner provided by villagers the IIT Bombay students gathered and discussed the experiences made by day. Unfortunately, no clear discussion etiquette was agreed upon beforehand so this session was slightly chaotic and longish. Most people headed to their mattresses by the time the meeting was over.

Sunday, 25th of September

The second day in Nidhal started with the luxurious option to take a bucket aided shower in an appendix of the wedding halls kitchen followed by a sweet breakfast.

The first station of the day was a poultry farm, which represented the efforts of local farmers to diversify their income. After a spontaneous sugar cane snack for everybody fresh from the fields next stop was local smallholder like diary production in a subsection of Nidhal.

As another approach of crop diversification one farmer introduced horticulture plantations to the village. He was making efforts to cultivate teak wood and various fruit bearing trees. The farmer also was planning for organic tourism once the premise has matured to a forest like area. On common land, which is used also as grazing land for cattle, the villagers planted seedling to introduce forestation to the gravelly mountainsides.

Next in line was the local cooperatives bank and head office. Furthermore, the villages woman care centre and local health care unit were visited prior to lunch. As the second last breakpoint the recently newly build primary school was exhibited before as a final stop chai was served at Mr. Chandrakant Dalvis residence and a model size oxcart a sign of gratitude was handed over to GRA by the representatives of Nidhal.

Also, while a traditional orange coloured maharashtrian style turban was wrapped around the authors head a coconut was gifted to him. Afterwards with a solid delay the group departed from Nidhal towards Powai and on their way enjoyed some roadside dinner in a dhaba.

The outstanding and enduring dancing and singing performance of some group members not only entertained their fellow travellers but also sparked the interest of traffic police, who in turn stopped the travel bus for vehicle inspection. But eventually the whole group reached IIT Bombay campus around 3 AM full of impressions of their mutual adventure.

On a Personal Note

Not being able to communicate in Marathi or even Hindi posed the biggest challenge for the whole trip. Also, the strong interest of villagers to take photographs with members of the group was an odd habit.

On the bright site especially the language barrier was broken by the efforts of fellow group members, who translated tireless whole conversations. Thank you GRA and every participant for the memorable weekend.

References

Gaikwad, Vijay (Sept. 2014). Impact of Indo-German Watershed Development Programme for Socio-Economic Changes: A Case Study of Nidhal Village.

Telore, Namdev and Maya Unde (Apr. 2012). Role of Watershed Development Programme in Sustainable De-velopment: Nidhal Experience from Satara District, Maharashtra.



Photo Credit: Lavanya Kosuri.

(Our Mid Semester Camp to Nidhal Village in Satara District of Maharashtra Concluded Recently (24th and 25th September 2022). We are bringing some experiences shared by the campers through this blog series. – Team GRA)

