

## Hand pump promises brides for unmarried villagers

Dry summers have for long been the cruellest months for bachelors in a Bihar village - non-availability of drinking water had meant no brides. But a simple hand pump has changed all that.

The increasing number of young and middle-aged unmarried men of Badwan, a hilly village in Kaimur district about 250 km from here, are finally hopeful of tying the knot this year. All thanks to a hand pump installed ahead of 'lagan', the traditional marriage season in summer across rural Bihar.

The middle-aged unmarried men as well as their parents in Badwan village are cheerfully looking forward to marriage negotiations from families of prospective brides as the marriage season begins in the second week of April.

On several occasions in the last few years, marriage negotiations had failed to mature due to shortage of drinking water that discouraged girls' families from marrying off their daughters to men of this village.

Like dozens of unmarried men in Badwan village, Birendra Yadav and his friend Shyam Chandra Yadav, both in their late 30s, are happy as never before. 'We are sure that now girls' families will turn up at our village in search of grooms. We hope not to die unmarried thanks to the hand pump,' said Birendra.

'No girl's father was ready to give his daughter to a boy from this village due to the water problem,' agreed Madan Mishra, a village priest. Mishra's own family reflects this social reality. Three of his five brothers are unmarried.

The local administration installed a hand pump in the village some time back under the rural development programme scheme to provide safe drinking water. Earlier, the villagers, mostly women, had to trek four-five km every day to fetch potable water.

According to former village body head Ram Dayal Kharwar, around 35 to 40 men in the village over the age of 30-35 were unmarried because of the water problem.

Dozens of old men here are unmarried too because of this reason. 'Water scarcity is to be blamed for their unmarried status,' affirmed other villagers.

'Finally, the government has installed a hand pump in our village. It has ended the century-old drinking water problem for us,' said a smiling Mahesh Kharwar, an old villager.

Hundreds of villages in central Bihar spread over a dozen districts - known as Maoist-affected areas - have been facing acute scarcity of drinking water during summer for years.

A senior government official from the department of rural development admitted that water scarcity is a hard reality not only in rural but in urban areas here.

*Imran Khan* ( © IANS / India eNews)