

Yavatmal district is known as the Suicide Capital of the state, but two villages - Bhambraja and Antargaon - are an aberration for the better. Not a single person from the two villages has committed suicide. So much so, several families have shut the door on private moneylenders and started side business. The turnaround has been brought about by Bt Cotton. Snehlata Shrivastav finds out. Pictures by Ranjit Deshmukh

# Reaping GOLD through Bt Cotton



The entire country knows Yavatmal for the farmers' suicides, especially cotton growers. But there are two villages in this suicide-prone district of Maharashtra where the picture appears to be just the opposite. There are no suicides and people here are prospering on agriculture. The switchover from the conventional cotton to Bollgard II or Bt cotton here has led to a social and economic transformation of the villages in just three-four years. Farmers from Antargaon and Bhambraja, the two villages where no suicides have been recorded, claim that their income from Bt cotton has not just helped them get rid

Villagers here attribute their prosperity, as visible from the modern day luxuries like dish television, refrigerator and a motor-bike in almost every household with even a few tractors in both villages, to the income generated from Bt cotton cultivation.

of the compounding loans from moneylenders, but has also fulfilled all their aspirations of sending their children to the nearest convent schools at Arni, a taluka place and get their daughters married as lavishly as people in cities do. Interestingly, majority of these farmers owned land anywhere between 10 and 40 acres and none of them was ever a marginal farmer. Farmers in both villages switched to Bollgard II, the single gene technology in around 2002, and then to Bollgard II, the double gene improved technology which contains two genes - the Cry1AC and Cry2Ab - which provide protection against the bollworms. Of

course, the yields in the two villages vary from farmer to farmer and soil to soil along with the management practices adopted. Although post Bt cultivation the lifestyle changes in the two villages appeared quite similar one factor clearly distinguished Antargaon from Bhambraja. The interaction with five farmers from Bhambraja revealed that apparently they were always better off than their counterparts from Antargaon, as none of them totally depended on agriculture and had some other small business too.

(The trip to Yavatmal was arranged by Mahyco Monsanto Biotech)

## SCRIPTING SUCCESS STORIES

### Raut family



When I was newly married I had many aspirations but had to seek money from my parents in Pusad, but now sometimes I send money to them," said a proud Jyoti, wife of Nandkishore Raut, showing her gold necklace and a Rs 2,500 sari bought for this Diwali. Jyoti is happy that her two sons Shivraj and Vashraj go to a convent school.

While Raut claims that he could construct a well in his field and a pucca house in the village, and buy a motorbike from his agricultural income his wife feels that education has made the difference. "My husband has B.Sc degree and I too have passed HSc. Earlier, we used to rely on the LIC agency. But because we are educated we could adopt technology better through company people, television and newspapers," she said.

## BHAMBRAJA: Village on the 'move'

Bhambraja village stands out in the Yavatmal district for the very fact more than nearly two-third houses in the village are pucca ones. In fact, in last two years alone the villagers have built 150 pucca houses. There are six tractors, 50 to 60 motorcycles and few matadors - all signs of a flourishing village. Bhambraja residents' children go to schools in Yavatmal city. The farmers do take loans from a cooperative bank and Allahabad Bank but are able to return with the first round of cotton picking. Nandkishore Raut, an LIC agent, first had six acres of land and purchased two acres more and built a pucca house. A BSc in Mathematics Raut's business flourished post Bt cultivation as all the farmers went for more LIC policies as their income increased. Now besides having about Rs 5 crore policies of villagers he has policies worth 8 lakh for



FARMERS AT BHAMBRAJA ARE HAPPY WITH THE RESULTS IN FIELDS WHEREVER Bt COTTON IS CULTIVATED

him and his wife. From cotton Raut's income increased from just six quintals per acre from conventional or non Bt cotton in 2001 to about 20 quintals per acre with Bollgard II. He now earns Rs 20,000 more per acre due to savings in pesticide. He has constructed a well and hopes

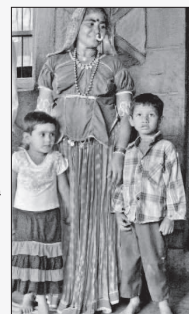
to take up winter crop like wheat from next year. "The yield with Bollgard II has almost doubled and hence I can pay even Rs 50-60 per day to a woman labour and Rs 100 to a man giving an income of Rs 160 per day in season to those who have little or no land in my village," he said.

Vijay Gomase, also from same village, has a better lifestyle now. He began with Mahyco-184 variety in 2005, switched to Bunny and now gets a yield of 12-15 quintals per acre. He has bought a three wheeler for his brother besides buying a motor pump, constructing house and well

for himself, and is supporting a family of six. He also takes soyabean in six acres. Suresh Patilkar has put a barbed wire fencing costing Rs 30,000, purchased additional five acre land, a LIC policy for his son, set up a grocery shop and bought a television in addition to expanding his grocery shop. "I wait for the right price to sell my cotton to the ginner, trader or federation. Last year we got around Rs 2,600 and this year expect to get Rs 3,000 per quintal after Diwali," he said. Gajanan Bhaskarwar, claims getting 11 quintals per acre higher yield with Bollgard II, has got his brother married and helped him in buying an offset printing machine. Kamalisan Rathod, who owns 12 acres, got his three daughters and one son married while another 18-year-old son is studying. He has built a well and has invested Rs 3 lakh in LIC.

### Chavan families (of Banjara community)

My father-in-law began from scratch. We had no land and he worked as a labourer in other people's field in this very village. But, he bought three acres of land for Rs 3,000 and now my husband and his five brothers own 40 acres and a plot in Arni. With this money we bought some jewellery too," said wife of Mangoo Chavan, Kamlabai, dressed in traditional attire.



The couple has two sons and two daughters. After their HSc both the sons have taken up agriculture. "Mere bete padhne ke bad hi kheti kar rahein aur kar so kahi nah jayega. Ek ladki ki shadi master (teacher) se kar di hein," she said. Vasant Chavan, another farmer from Banjara community has five brothers. Vasant admits to have gone through bad times. "My brother once decided to sell our land but we refused. He later became an 'adalye' in mandi. It was he who brought the Bt seeds first and are all are flourishing now, with a new house huge enough to accommodate members of all five families," he said. Now one of his brothers is in Zilla Parishad service and his elder brother's two sons have become doctor and engineer.

## ANTARGAON: United in crisis

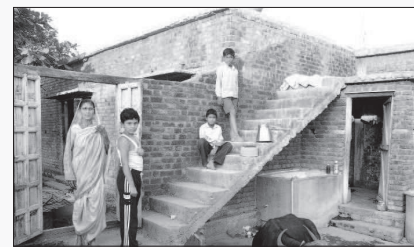
The distance between Bhambraja and Antargaon is hardly three kms but there is a marked difference between the approaches of the villagers. While Bhambraja residents do go for 'side business', Antargaon totally depends on agriculture. However, the villagers of Antargaon have remarkable unity among themselves and help each other in times of crisis. The village has 50 motorcycles, five tractors, 10-12 autos and 15 dish antennae. A graduate, Dyananeshwar Bhoiband has 14 acres of land and is happy to send his son to an English medium school. He has built a pucca house worth Rs 5.5 lakh and drives his son to school on a motorcycle. He claims to earn Rs 21,000 per acre more than conventional cotton. Babul Bhoiband, Dyananeshwar's uncle got his Gangrene leg operated for over Rs 1 lakh and is happy to walk to his field instead of accompanying his son on a bike. Gangadhar Maske, although takes Bt cotton on only five acres but still has managed to send his children to convent school by taking another five acres on lease.

Marriages in halls with buffet lunch is a dream for any Banjara community member. But Vasant Chavan proudly shows his daughter's wedding album, a lavish affair. Mangoo Chavan, another farmer from Banjara community earns less (Rs 5,560 per acre) but is proud to have cleared his bank loan and invest in irrigation. "We have thrown away the moneylender. No one needs him anymore," he said. Besides the farmers and their families Raj Ketkar, deputy managing director, Mahyco Monsanto Biotech (MMB), the company which apparently motivated farmers to take up Bt cotton in these villages says, "In Yavatmal district, the ability of farmers to purchase on cash instead of credit; increased ability to invest back in agriculture in implements like drip irrigation, tubewells, and in life insurance policies for their family speaks for the success of Bt. In Vidarbha the area under Bt cotton in past three years (2006-2009) has increased from 32.8 lakh acres in 2008 to 24.3 lakh acres in 2007 and 15.8 lakh acres in 2006. This has increased the income of cotton growers as reflected in earnings of Yavatmal farmers."



FOR FARMERS LIKE DYANANESHWAR BHOYBAND (CENTRE), IN ANTARGAON, Bt COTTON HAS PROVED TO BE A PROVERBIAL GOLD MINE. HE HAS BUILT A PUCCA HOUSE WORTH RS 5.5 LAKH AND DRIVES HIS SON TO SCHOOL ON A MOTORCYCLE. HE CLAIMS TO EARN RS 21,000 PER ACRE MORE THAN CONVENTIONAL COTTON

### Bhoiband family



The Bhoiband family, consisting of three brothers, Bhaurao, Himmat and Sheshrao each with two sons and their families own 60 acres of land. The three daughters-in-law, Uma, Sheetal and Umika, all high school pass, are happy that their fathers-in-law have not just made a huge new house adjacent to the old one but also has made provision for expansion for making a second storey in case need arises. Dyananeshwar has a brother whose son is doing BEd and was only person who admitted that he had no interest in agriculture.

This is a re-print of a story from The Times of India, Nagpur edition, October 31, 2008.

A facsimile of The Times of India's August 28, 2011 page with the 'marketing feature' on Bt Cotton.