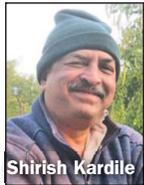


# From the Board

## One Man Can Protect Thousands



Shirish Kardile

A small town with a population of about 30,000 residents in Nasik district, Maharashtra, has a water supply scheme constructed 17 years ago by Maharashtra Jeevan Pradhikaran, then the statutory body of the government of Maharashtra. Built for a population of 15,000, the water treatment plant consists of a cascade aerator, a mixing weir/channel, a mechanical flocculation tank, a tube settling tank with hoppers, and two rapid sand gravity filters. Located on a hillock, where part of the treated water is conveyed to the town by gravity, the plant is operated and maintained by the local body.

The facility's raw water is pumped from a river 8 km away. High turbidity occurs from June through September, which was the case when I visited recently. A young operator enthusiastically showed me the plant and told me it was running satisfactorily. The filtered water was clear and even smelled of chlorine.

Over a cup of tea, he informed about some "minor" operational problems. The mechanical flocculator (slow agitator)

hadn't functioned for a long time. When operating two raw water pumps, it was difficult to "control" the plant during monsoon season. He informed me a new second pump was installed on a temporary source two years ago, as the town faced a water shortage. The pump's new pipeline conveyed the raw water directly to the plant. The operator didn't know the flow rate, but he told me the plant's filters needed to be backwashed every 12 hours.

I measured the water depth over the weir and calculated the flow. With the two pumps, the plant was receiving 60 percent more water than the design capacity of 2 mld! Coupled with high turbidity, no wonder the poor fellow had sleepless nights managing the plant for the last three months. He told local officials about these problems, but no one paid attention to him. It was only when the consumers became angry about water quality and short supply that officials took note and pressured him to perform miracles.

While we were chatting, the operator fetched another slab of alum and threw it into the mixing channel. He quickly went downstairs and opened one of the drain valves to release excess incom-

ing raw water to reduce the overload. Smiling, he told me the problem will soon be over, as it was nearly the end of September. Then there won't be a problem for another seven to eight months. I was speechless at his masterful performance. I lit my cigarette, and he opened his tobacco pouch. He had shown me he was equal to the task.

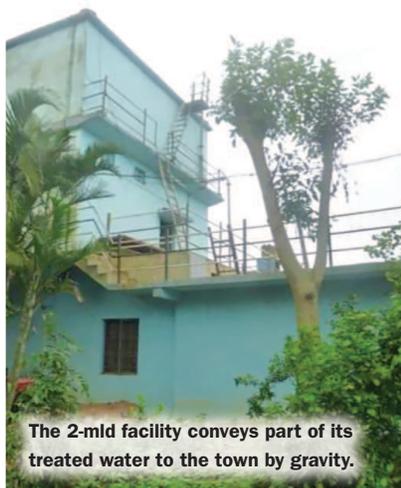
The young operator had studied up to 10th standard. He had a mobile phone and could speak a bit of English. He got his job because he was the most educated of the plant's valve men, earning Rs 8,000 (USD 135) per month. He was the town's guardian angel of public health!

While parting, he coyly asked me, "Sir, do you know where can I get a certificate as a plant operator?" I told him, "Yes, some good people as dedicated as you are listening and taking steps to develop such certification. I will be the first to call you personally."

I crossed myself, hoping I wasn't lying to myself and him. The incident reminded me that AWWAIndia's efforts to create operator training and certification opportunities are as important as ever.

—Shirish Kardile,

AWWAIndia Strategic Board Chair



The 2-mld facility conveys part of its treated water to the town by gravity.



A young operator is the town's guardian angel of public health.



A mixing weir/channel contains alum slabs.