

**VANASHAKTI**

**ANNUAL**

**REPORT**

**2020-2021**



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# Introduction

Right from the start of the year 2020, amidst a global pandemic, we were witnesses to several environmental calamities - the Australian wildfires, the swarms of locusts that took our capital by surprise, the floods that occurred in Assam, and the Nisarga cyclone to name a few. The pandemic has been referred to several as our wake up call. We could no longer ignore the impact our actions and interactions have on borrowed spaces and resources. The effect of the continuous pressure experienced by these green spaces from our encroachments into them could no longer be contained and in 2020 we experienced the first major blowback. The corona virus pandemic took the world by storm, bringing almost everything to a halt. It dawned on us, that unless drastic measures to adopt truly sustainable models of growth and development, that are both culturally inclusive as well as socially just are made, occurrences, like the corona virus pandemic will become a more regular phenomenon, with far more fatal repercussions.

As an environmental organization, Vanashakti's multi-faceted approach, of education, citizen awareness, on ground research, litigation and legal intervention all strive to address unsustainable development and work toward engaging people of all ages in the environmental discourse. Our hope is that through these engagements, citizens will use their democratic power to dissent against the destruction of the environment.

While 2020 brought with it its set of challenges, through it all Vanashakti strived to stay committed to its goals of protecting the last remaining fragments of biodiversity in the Indian landscape by demonstrating the critical link between ecosystems and human welfare. Vanashakti's work in the year 2020 focused on identifying new spaces where impactful work can be done through research and awareness sessions for school students. On ground activities have played a significant role in Vanashakti's approach to conservation and social justice, thus, despite the pandemic and its resultant lockdowns, we have strived to do what was necessary and respond to the need of the hour.

# Projects and Activities

## Litigation

Despite the hurdle encountered, the year 2020-2021 saw some impactful litigations filed by Vanashakti's legal team to protect our environment from intrusive anthropogenic activities. The legal action initiated and undertaken by Vanashakti during this period is listed below.

2020

March:

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, 2020 Vanashakti appeared at the Coastal Zone Management Plan hearing to oppose the Coastal Zone Management Map, 2019 of Mumbai City, Mumbai suburban and Thane district. It drafted objections to the same stating a clear lack of adherence to the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification.

April:

Based on extensive research conducted on laws governing aquaculture in freshwater bodies in various states across India an application was submitted to the National Green Tribunal for the protection of Kamshet Lake against illegal fish farming activity. The research included studies of national and international research papers, reports, government guidelines, acts and laws in order to draft guidelines for safe inland aquaculture practices.

May:

Over the years non-biodegradable materials have increasingly become a part of festivities and celebrations, in light of this and in attempts to decrease the presence of non-degradable substances in the environment Vanashakti filed a Public Interest Litigation challenging the reversal of Guidelines passed by the Central Pollution Control Board regarding banning immersion of Plaster of Paris idols made of non-biodegradable material in natural waterbodies.

December:

Mangroves have been a focus area in Vanashakti's fight for the environment owing to the role they play in protecting the coast of Mumbai, supporting livelihoods, juvenile fish, and so on. In order to safeguard these ecological treasure troves Vanashakti filed a Public

Interest Litigation seeking the compliance of the Bombay High Court Order directing Collectors and Town planning authorities to transfer mangroves within their possession back to the Forest Department.

2021

January:

Given the diverse species that inhabit Mumbai, protecting wildlife and the spaces they inhabit is one of the foremost goals of Vanashakti. In this fight for wildlife, Vanashakti filed a Public Interest Litigation seeking a direction from the Court to the Forest Department to declare Panje-Dongri as a Sanctuary under the Wildlife Protection Act.

## Legal Milestones



### Creek Pollution (O.A. No. 197 of 2017)

In a matter concerning pollution by sewage in creeks and coast of Mumbai filed by Vanashakti, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) took serious cognisance of the sewage pollution and directed the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) a fine of Rs. 30 Crore in addition to 4.5 Crore per month till bio-remediation measures are taken by the authorities. It further directed an environmental compensation of 15 lakhs per month to be paid to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) till all required Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) are made fully functional. It further directed that trash needs to be kept from entering the creek and the sea of Mumbai by setting up trash booms and installation of nets at each outflow along with the setting up of toilets to avoid open defecation. The review filed by BMC on the matter came to be dismissed and the earlier judgment has been upheld.

### Aronda Port (OA 45 of 2015)

Challenging the setting up of a Port in Aronda, Sindhudurg district, which would have resulted in reclamation work, affecting the access of fisher folk to the sea, the NGT has held that no work can commence until all requisite clearances under Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) & Water Act are obtained and on that note, it

**BEFORE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL  
(WESTERN ZONE BENCH)  
PUNE  
(Video Conferencing)  
\*\*\*\*\*  
Original Application No. 45 of 2015 (WZ)**

**IN THE MATTER OF:**

**Vanashakti & Anr**  
A public trust having  
Its office at  
19/21 Unique Industrial Estate  
Twin Towers Lane, Prabhadevi,  
Mumbai : 400 025

.....Applicant

**Versus**

**State of Maharashtra & Ors.**

.....Respondent(s)

directed that no construction or reclamation can be undertaken at this stage. This judgment is partly in favour and is under review since it is also our claim that certain reclamation work was carried out earlier without any clearances and therefore, appropriate environmental damages ought to be paid by the Project Proponent.

#### Coastal Road (Supreme Court)

In an attempt to seek a direction to stop the work of reclamation for Coastal Road in Mumbai as the same would cause irreparable harm and damage to the entire western coast of South Mumbai until the Appeal before Supreme Court is finally heard (especially when the High Court had struck down clearances granted to Coastal Road), the Supreme Court refused to halt the reclamation work and allowed the work to continue during the pendency of the Appeal.

#### Transfer of Mangroves to Forest Department (High Court)

In a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by Vanashakti before the Bombay High Court seeking the transfer of all mangrove lands (from all revenue authorities and agencies such as CIDCO, JNPT, MHADA, MMRDA, etc.) to the Forest Department, the High Court was pleased to issue a notice in the matter and sought replies of all authorities.

#### Brick Kilns (NGT - OA No. 1A/2018)

In a matter concerning the issue of pollution caused on account of Brick Kilns in rural areas of Palghar and Thane, the NGT passed an order dated 01.07.2020 directing CPCB to audit all brick kilns situated in the entire state of Maharashtra so as to stop the menace of Brick Kilns pollution and directed CPCB to file a status report seeking strict details of the number of Brick Kilns that can be operated in Maharashtra and the technology that has to be undertaken.

<b>BEFORE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI (Through Video Conferencing)</b>	
Original Application No. 1A/2018 (WZ)	
Vanashakti & Ors.	Applicant(s)
Versus	
MPCB & Ors.	Respondent(s)

Ulhas River Pollution (07.09.2020)

On the plea of Vanashakti seeking a joint inspection by the CPCB and NEERI of the entire Ulhas river on account of the continuing pollution menace of the Ulhas River, the Supreme Court was pleased to allow our plea and directed the CPCB and NEERI to file a detailed report with suggestions on long term and short term measures and directed Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) and the Environment Department to immediately commence remedial steps. Upon receiving the combined report of the CPCB and NEERI which agreed with every contention of Vanashakti regarding the extent of pollution in the Ulhas River, the Supreme Court was pleased to pass an order directing the Chief Secretary of the State and Secretary of the Environment Department to implement the recommendations of the CPCB Report, and inform the Court about the status of action plan with a dedicated timeline.

<b>ITEM NO.18</b>	<b>Court 3 (Video Conferencing)</b>	<b>SECTION XVII</b>
<b>S U P R E M E C O U R T O F I N D I A</b> <b>RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS</b>		
<b><u>Civil Appeal No.10582/2017</u></b>		
<b>ULHASNAGAR MUNICIPAL CORPORATION</b>	<b>VERSUS</b>	<b>Appellant(s)</b>
<b>VANASHAKTI PUBLIC TRUST &amp; ORS.</b>		<b>Respondent(s)</b>

Mithi River (26.02.2021)

In a plea concerning pollution and cleaning of the Mithi River, the Supreme Court has directed the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority and the Environment Department of Maharashtra to file its response to the IIT Bombay report that provides a complete solution/recommendation of the menace of pollution in Mithi.



## Drives and Events

Given the restrictions in place during the entirety of 2020, on ground work was limited. However, we managed, in whatever small way possible to conduct food distribution drives, clean up drives, trails, while ensuring that all safety precautions were maintained and followed.

2020

The worst affected by the COVID-19 pandemic have been the poor, the daily wage labourers and the migrant population of the country. Vanashakti realised that the need of the hour was to reach out to them and offer as much help possible. In order to provide the much needed help in the form of ration kits and manpower Vanashakti's major activities in the months of March and May were centred on providing help and provisions to the poor and migrant population.

March:

Dharavi: On the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, ration kits were distributed to daily wage workers at Dharavi by the Vanashakti team.

May:

Thane: In Thane, along the Kharegao Toll Nakka and Majiwada Highway, Vanashakti distributed biscuits and water to over 200 migrants leaving the city and walking with their family back to their far off villages outside the state. We followed the safety measures and distributed the rations to those who were completely stranded without money and rations.



*Food Donation Drive*

In addition to this, lunch and drinking water was also provided to 200 people in need in Thane.

Ration kits were distributed to the parents of disabled children who lost employment on account of pandemic.

Mahim: Vanashakti received a call from Mahim police station regarding 10 families residing in the slum area near the police station who were in deep distress. We prepared 10 ration kits which consisted of food grains and basic vegetables. With the help of a policeman, we distributed the kits while maintaining all social distancing norms.

Lucknow: Vanashakti's North division in Lucknow also made sure to ensure that those in need got access to food and rations by conducting food distribution drives to provide relief to migrant workers.



*Food Donation Drive*

June:

The month of June brought with it the opportunity to get back on the field and Vanashakti took the opportunity to plant over 200 terrestrial plants along the Bhilawali-Wada region. This was Vanashakti's effort to counter the massive deforestation taking place globally while following all the necessary COVID-19 protocols.



*Plantation Drive*

July:

Lucknow: Vanashakti kicked off its Urban Greening Program in Lucknow. Due to Pandemic restrictions and to ensure that all COVID protocols are followed the event was kept on a low scale. 300 Kadamb saplings were planted in Lucknow city. The event saw the presence of dignitaries, with the Hon'ble Chief Justice of Lucknow High Court also planting a sapling.



*Plantation Drive*

October:

In October 2020, Vanashakti undertook its first mangrove clean-up drive since the easing of lockdown rules. A mangrove clean-up was conducted with the Forest department and the locals at the Bhandup Pumping Station of the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary.



*Mangrove Clean-Up*

December:

Vanashakti conducted a mangrove clean up along with external volunteers and locals at the Bhandup Pumping Station of the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary. At this drive close to 500 kg of non-degradable waste was removed. The aim of these drives are to rid Mangroves of trash to support the aquatic and avifaunal life they house.



*Mangrove Clean-Up*

2021

January:

On the occasion of World Wetland Day, Vanashakti organised a mangrove clean up drive along with N.S.S unit of R.J College. In addition to clearing and ridding a large section of the mangroves at Bhandup Pumping Station of non-degradable material, this was a learning moment for the students who for the first time saw the impact and extent of damage that these green covers undergo.



*Mangrove Clean-Up*

February:

Every year, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February is celebrated as World Wetlands Day commemorating the Ramsar Convention. On this day, Vanashakti works towards raising awareness about mangroves through awareness sessions, clean-up drives and nature trails. In 2021, Vanashakti had the opportunity to ensure that young minds from the Rajashri Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj School had the opportunity to partake in a nature trail to broaden their understanding about the diversity mangroves support in addition to competitions as well as awareness sessions.



*World Wetland Day, Tansa*



*World Wetland Day, Mumbai*

## WORLD WETLANDS DAY: MUMBAI

World Wetlands Day 2021 was truly a memorable one for Vanashakti as we had the opportunity of celebrating it with the students of Rajashri Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj Vidayale.

This event saw the release of Vanashakti's book, 'A-Z Birds' an alphabetical compilation of avian biodiversity of the Thane Creek that aims at raising awareness on the avian biodiversity of this region. A photography competition was held for the public with the theme, 'Wetlands and Water' and the students of Rajashri Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj Vidayale took part in a poster making competition on the same theme.

## WORLD WETLAND DAY: TANSA VALLEY

Based on "Wetlands and Water" the theme designated for 2021's World Wetlands Day commemorating by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Vanashakti team at Tansa celebrated the day by organising informative talks on the various wetlands spread across the Valley, primarily the hot springs, cold springs and reservoirs, for the students of a local school of this predominantly tribal valley. The children also cleaned up the wetlands that they visited and the results left them astonished and with learnings that we believe with last a lifetime

## March:

To create a supportive environment for the diverse species of butterflies at the Aarey Forest, Vanashakti planted a butterfly garden plantation at the VIP guest house Aarey. The garden consists of diverse species of plants such as bryophyllum, neem trees, and Murraya (curry) tree among so many more.



*Holi Workshop on natural colours*

## Awareness Sessions

Our awareness sessions, primarily with student aims to provide them with ample information and resources to understand their environment, it's ecological, economic, socio-cultural, and historic benefits better so as to make them more sensitive to the needs of the environment and to inculcate in them from a young age a sense of responsibility for our environment.



*Awareness Sessions with Rajashri Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj School*

2020

March:

69 students from the Rajashri Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj School attended an awareness session organized by Vanashakti on 'Different Species of Lions' to provide them with an understanding of the diversity among these critical species that are facing endangerment.

June:

In order to incorporate audio-visual elements into our awareness sessions and make them more interactive Vanashakti organised a documentary screening on 'Butterflies' with the students of Rajashri Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj School.

2021

January:

On the occasion of World Wetlands Day 2021 Vanashakti organised an interactive session on 'The Importance of Wetlands' with over 80 students of Rajashri Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj School, Navi Mumbai.

February:

After the lockdown, slowly but steadily with all due precautions Vanashakti has once again started its journey towards a "sustainable environment for all" by conducting interactive session on 'Mumbai and its Biodiversity' for the students of Rajashri Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj School.

Vanashakti organised an awareness session on the 'Importance of E-waste Management and its Adverse Effect' on the environment as well as human beings. This session was conducted with 80 students from student of Rajashri Shahu Maharaj School.



*Session on E-Waste Management*

The aim of the session was to create effective awareness among various levels of society so as to incentivize them to reduce their e-waste consumption to reduce the adverse impact on environment and health arising out of the polluting technologies used in recycling e-waste.

March:

Awareness sessions in the month of March involve a number of sessions where children were taught how to adopt more green practices as alternatives to current practices. These sessions included - how to grow microgreens at home, how to make eco brick, and how to make eco-friendly colour at home.

The 'How to make eco-friendly colour at home' session was part of Vanashakti's Eco-friendly Holi celebrations where 89 students from class 5 to 9 attended a session on how Holi can be celebrated in an Eco-friendly manner. In order to make this a holistic experience for the students, a poster-making program was conducted on the theme 'Eco-friendly Holi Celebrations'. There were also presentations conducted by the students for their fellow classmates with the guidance of scripts provided to the students by Vanashakti.

In addition to these sessions, awareness sessions were conducted to educate the students on the difference between turtle & tortoise, Butterfly & its life cycle, and the environment and its components.

## Research and Site Visits

2020

March:

To inspect the growth of mangroves, diseases among them and susceptibility to infections and diseases a site visit was conducted at the Airoli Mangrove Forest, Vasai bridge Mangrove Forest, and Near Mulund Toll Naka Mangrove Forest.

Another site visit was conducted at Wada to identify spaces for mangrove plantations.

April:

Research was conducted on the laws governing aquaculture in freshwater bodies in various states across India. This resulted in an Application in the National Green Tribunal to protect the Kamshet Lake against illegal fish farming activity. The studies looked into national and international research papers, reports, government guidelines, acts and laws to draft guidelines for safe inland aquaculture practices.

July:

The Annual Report for 2019-2020, of our projects in the Tansa Valley titled 'Integrated Preservation and Management of the Tansa Valley Ecology and Ecosystems' was drafted and submitted to the funder, The Mariwala Trust.

August and September:

The history and the subsequent impact of coastal development and industrialization in the North Sea region, Mediterranean Coast, Black sea and some Baltic island coasts was studied in detail. A focus was laid on its impact on fisheries, the laws and pacts in place to mitigate the environmental damage caused and so on. The intention behind studying these was to get an idea about the nature of challenges the coasts face in a different geography and the mitigation measures adopted so as to gain an understanding of how we can emulate the same in our region.

October:

Research was conducted to better understand the changing patterns of Maharashtra's fisheries and landings, the causes behind the same, and to identify what must be done to address the issues of unsustainable fishing practices along the coast of Maharashtra most efficiently from a policy perspective as well as a market and consumer perspective. The focus of this research was to identify the unsustainable fishing methods and the extent of the damage done by them. Most importantly, the aim is to identify the factors enabling this unsustainability from a policy perspective.



Research was also done on pelagic fisheries, forage fish stock and sea birds ecology and behaviour.

December:

Research was done on the issue titled, 'Negotiating Ocean Conflicts Among Rivals for Sustainable and Equitable Solutions' whose aim is to uncover the complex casualties and feedbacks that underpin conflicts associated with making trade off decisions about uses of the ocean environment, the allocation of ocean resources and the management of ocean ecosystem services. The geographic areas in question were the North Sea and the Baltic.

2021

January:

The avifauna supported by the mangroves of Maharashtra was studied and based on the information obtained a book, 'A-Z Birds' was drafted. The book aims at emphasizing the importance of the mangroves to avifauna so as to prevent their destruction. In addition to this, to help people venturing out into these green spaces identify the various species of birds.

February:

Research was conducted on the state of pollution of the Bhīma River in Maharashtra in order to identify the extent of pollution, need for intervention, nature of intervention, past efforts and so on. A similar report was drafted for the Gomti River as well.

March:

Research was conducted on the 'Sustainable Development of Little Andaman' Project proposed by the NITI Aayog to identify the extent of harm such a project would impose on not only the endemic flora and fauna of the region but also the severe risk it imposes on the life, health and well-being of the several tribes that have lived on these islands for centuries together. The lack of information made available by the government further drives the need to make public as much information as possible about the very real consequences such a poorly researched project could have on the lives of so many.



*Holi Celebrations*



*Session on Mumbai's biodiversity*



*World Wetland Day, Tansa*



*Mangrove Clean-Up Drive*



*Mangroves Before and After Clean-Up*



*COVID Relief: Food Donation Drive*

# Conclusion

The year 2020-2021 was a challenging one for all and through the uncertainty of it all Vanashakti managed to ensure that we remained committed to fight for the environment. This was an eye opener, and as we slowly build our nation back we hope to take the lessons from the past year to ensure that we move away from mere gestures of promoting green habits, and actively work towards impactful steps directed not only at protecting existing green spaces but also working towards restoring forests and water bodies. Vanashakti's fight has been and will remain for this goal, and the work undertaken in the past year is testament to our commitment to this.