

A Month Before the Breaking Point

Thirty extra days can change the story of a summer.

In rural Maharashtra, the months between February and May are usually understood through water. Each month brings a different kind of pressure. February still feels manageable. March asks for caution. April often brings hard choices. By May, many families and farmers are forced to migrate to cities, often in search of work under conditions that test survival rather than provide security.

This year, in several villages, that familiar pattern shifted. Water lasted longer. Wells and storage structures held beyond their usual limits. For most agrarian households, this meant more than a better water table for the coming year. It simply meant more time in the here and now.



In February, the rabi season was still underway.

Farmers were using groundwater to support both crops and households. Across Maharashtra, this dependence is significant, with groundwater supplying close to 80 percent of domestic water and supporting a large share of irrigation. At this point in the season, wells were still holding, daily routines were steady, and summer was present mainly as something people knew was coming. However, few people anticipated the intensity of the heat that would follow.

By March, signs of pressure had begun to appear.

Water availability usually begins to decline seasonally across the northern Western Ghats, even in areas that receive 2,000 to 3,000 mm of annual rainfall. By the pre-monsoon months, shallow aquifers can sit anywhere between 0.05 and 30 metres below ground level, while some groundwater trends have shown declines of up to 1.49 metres a year. In tribal belts, this stress is often sharper because fractured basalt geology and limited storage make it difficult for rainfall to remain available through the summer.

By April, those trade-offs usually become part of daily life.

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But this year, the answer was different.

Water levels begin to fall with visible speed. Cropping plans narrow, and the possibility of migration spreads from the first family to the wider village. Time, in this period, compresses into a series of urgent calculations around when to cut one's losses. The difference was almost invisible at first. As cracks in the ground spread from one village to the next, fear moved with them.

Here, in our villages, the extra days of water changed the pace of the season. Farmers could continue irrigation for longer, which helped crops reach harvest instead of being cut short. Households faced less pressure around daily water collection, especially women, whose health is often most affected when scarcity deepens. Migration decisions were delayed, if not discarded, because local conditions remained workable for 30 more days.



Home remained home for 30 more days.

By May, the value of those additional days was clear.

An extra 20 to 30 days of water availability extended the agricultural window, supported the continuity, and reduced the strain of peak summer.

It also pointed to a deeper change in how the local water system was functioning. Better recharge, stronger village institutions, and more coordinated use have turned scarcity into a more liveable and humane experience for all living things.



The difference between water running low in April and water lasting into May is that communities have more room to make decisions before scarcity turns threatening.

It is also an invitation to introspect what makes those days possible.

It is 30 extra days of security.

It is 30 extra days that can change the course of a season.

