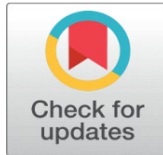
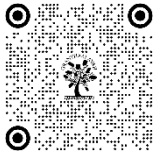


PYAAVS AND PAANPOIS - A STUDY OF THE CHANGING FACE OF PUBLIC WATER DISPENSING UNITS OF PUNE

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ABSTRACT

Water has always been an essential part of human civilization, shaping urban landscapes and influencing social life. The drinking water fountains built during colonial period are locally called as *pyaavs* while water dispensing units are generally called as *paanpois*. Two old drinking water fountains and some new water dispensing units are located within the Pune Cantonment region. Whereas the ancient Paanpois were located on the outskirts of Pune. The aim of this paper is to study the evolution of the historic *pyaavs* and the *paanpois* which are regional expressions of water dispensing units from Pune. This study explores the tangible and intangible legacy through a variety of photographic documentation and a review of existing research in the topic, showcasing the individuality of each water dispensing unit.

Keywords: Pyaav, Paanpoi, Water Dispensing Units, Water Pots, Water Fountains, Colonial, Pune Cantonment

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern water dispensing units are commonly referred to as paanpois, whereas antique drinking water fountains are locally known as pyaavs [Malekar \(2019\)](#). But there is also frequent interchangeability of this terminology.

Paanpoi is a combination of two words - 'pani' (meaning water) and 'poi' (meaning bread). This custom is common in areas where there are few water sources and pilgrims must travel great distances to reach sacred shrines or temples. Paanpoi is a great way to give these pilgrims support and comfort as they often walk for extended periods of time and are fatigued and dehydrated [Kale \(2001\)](#)

India has been the home of the age-old Paanpoi practice for many years. It is a widespread practice in various parts of India and is a part of the country's culture and traditions. Although the exact origins of Paanpoi are unknown, it is thought to have come from the teachings of revered Indian saints and sages who stressed the value of altruism and charitable giving [Thakur \(1946\)](#).

Even in the Middle Ages, when India was ruled by kings and emperors, paanpoi was a common practice. In the past, especially during times of famine or drought, many kings and rulers gave the impoverished and needy free food and drink. The people's goodwill and the blessings of the gods were perceived as benefits of the practice. Paanpoi is an easy and efficient way to give pilgrims free drinking water. They are frequently built close to highways or paths that pilgrims use to get to sacred sites like temples or shrines. Ahilyabai Holkar is said to have constructed several Paanpois during her reign [Thakur \(1946\)](#).

Paanpoi water is frequently obtained from neighbouring natural sources, such as wells. After that, the water is kept in big containers within the shelter. The pilgrims then have the option of drinking water straight from the pots or from little bowls. Food items like bread, fruits, and other snacks are sometimes given to the Paanpoi. This custom is particularly common during holidays or other special times when a lot of pilgrims visit sacred sites like temples or shrines [Thakur \(1946\)](#).

What is a Pyaav?

Public drinking fountains are iconic buildings from Bombay's colonial past. The idea of erection of fountains in the city of Bombay took root during the Governorship of Sir Bartle Frere (1862- 1867) [Shirgaonkar \(2007\)](#). These structures, locally referred to as 'pyavvs', were built between 1865 and 1943. Initially, there was significant community support and donations for their construction, but this declined as the twentieth century began. It's noteworthy that the term 'pyaav' used locally is a colloquial expression and not directly derived from the indigenous Marathi language. The morphology of these structures and their embellished adornments comprise two significant aspects of a pyaav's typology. The traditional design consists of water spouts to supply water to humans and spill-over troughs to quench the thirst of animals. Either external water storage tank arrangements were made, or municipal water connections were used to directly connect the water to the spouts. It's interesting to note that these monuments range in size from small 5 foot pedestals to unusual 20 foot canopies or clock towers [Shirgaonkar \(2011\)](#).

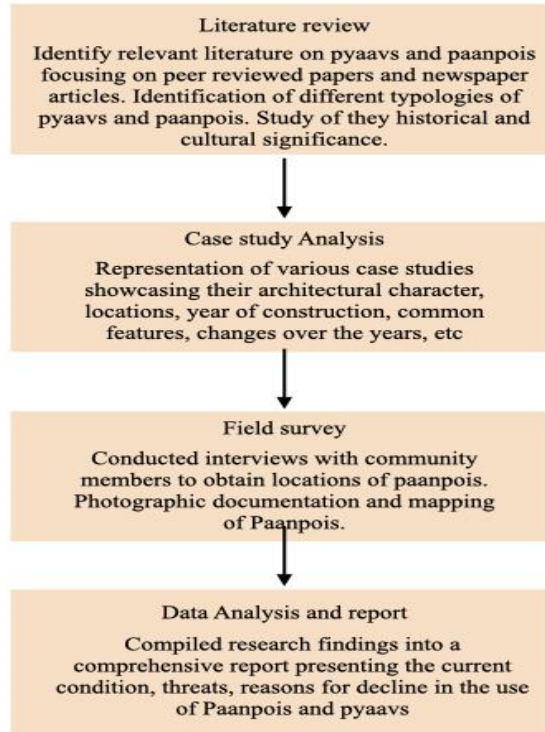
Plaques embedded in the structures clearly establish that the pyavvs are memorials in addition to water dispensers. Each Pyaav boasts a unique architectural style, and each Pyaav architectural piece tells a distinct tale. The wealthy started contributing funds to erect such water fountains and had their names embossed on plaques by the end of the 18th century [Satran \(2015\)](#). They appeared to be driven by the desire to leave their contributions for future generations, aside from philanthropy. The fountains were commissioned as memorials, not so much for the building itself as for the person, in order to memorialize and portray the person as monumental.

In modern times, the paanpoi consists of an arrangement of two black coloured earthen water pots covered with wet red cloth and a steel glass on top. This arrangement is under a semi open and temporary structure. People used to quench their thirst by drinking the naturally cooled water from muddy ranjans (large black earthen pots), mathas (small earthen pots), but with the changing times, paanpoi was replaced by cold water jars.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1) To study the origin and evolution of Pyaavs and Paanpois in Pune.
- 2) To explore, map and document the ancient Pyaavs and Paanpois in Pune.
- 3) To examine the changing face and forms of water dispensing units.
- 4) To analyze the reasons for the decline in the use of public water dispensing units.

3. METHODOLOGY



4. RESULTS

This study explores the tangible and intangible legacy through a variety of photographic documentation and a review of existing research in the topic, showcasing the individuality of each water dispensing unit.

The Pyaavs and Paanpois located and studied by the author are as follows:

1) Ancient Paanpois

Paanpoi at Shirwal, District Pune: A small Paanpoi (18.1206147N, 73.9839588E) is located on Naigaon junction on the Pune Bangalore highway. It is built in the Hemadpanthi style of architecture [Figure 1A](#). It is referred to as Seetechi Paanpoi by local people. It was built by the Peshwas [Konkar \(2016\)](#). Its construction took place in the year 1752 to 1753. There is a letter written by Nana Fadnavis to Nilakantha Mahadev [Palande-Datar \(2022\)](#). It says 'Natho Sadashiv has been sent to construct a poi (water dispensing unit) in the ghat of Khambatki' and there is a list of how many and what materials have been given [Marathe \(2023\)](#). This Paanpoi at Shirwal is unique in its form, architecture, and design. The chamber consists of two solid rock entry pillars that have been cut, with stone walls constructed behind

them. In addition, stones are stacked on top of one other to build the roof. Two water storage pots, called Raanjan in Marathi, are housed therein. It is constructed up of 300–600 mm-high basalt stone. This Panpoi is entirely supported by the interlocking stones and was built without the use of any binding materials, such as cement or lime. This historic Paanpoi was obstructing the construction of the six-lane Pune–Banglore highway. In light of this, the Archaeology Department notified the Highway Authority about Paanpoi's repair in order to preserve it [Pandit \(2018\)](#).

Paanpoi at Kumbharvalan village, Saswad, District Pune- This Paanpoi (18.3421396N, 74.0681571E) was located opposite Bhairavnath Temple in Kumbharvalan village [Figure 1B](#). There is a square shaped base on the plinth of the Paanpoi to keep the water pot. In due course of time, the big pot of water (Raanjan) has disappeared.

Paanpoi at Puhi ghat, Supa Village, District Pune- The Paanpoi (18.3650309N, 74.4187136E) is located between the trees on the left immediately after climbing the Puicha ghat in Kusegaon village on Pune-Solapur road. This is a north-facing Yadava period Paanpoi [Figure 1C](#). It has stone walls on three sides and an entrance on the north side. The construction of the Paanpoi is done by grinding stones to the right shape and stacking stone on stone without using lime or cement. There is a stone Raanjan (water pot) inside the structure.

Figure 1



Figure 1A Paanpoi at Shirwal, District Pune

Source author.



Figure 1B Paanpoi at Kumbharvalan, Saswad, Pune

Source Murlidhar Chandane.



Figure 1C Paanpoi at Supa Village

Source Pravin Shrisunder.

The water features on this walkway [Figure 2](#) suggest that it must be of utmost significance. This route departs from Pandeshwar and travels via Jejuri, Kumbharvalan, Saswad Village, Narayaneshwar Temple and Shirwal. Further this path joins the Khambataki Ghat. There is another route, which goes from Saswad to Kumbharvalan, Pandeshwar, Jejuri, Nira, Morgaon, Supe, and then from 'Puhi' Ghat to Solapur Road. The Paanpoi at Kumbharvalan village is between the Paanpoi at Shirwal and the Paanpoi in Puhi Ghat. Hence the Paanpoi at Kumbharvalan is of strategic importance. Since there are places of pilgrimage on both these routes, the pilgrims, the people from the Sardar family, wherever they came from, would have been visitors of this Paanpoi.

Figure 2

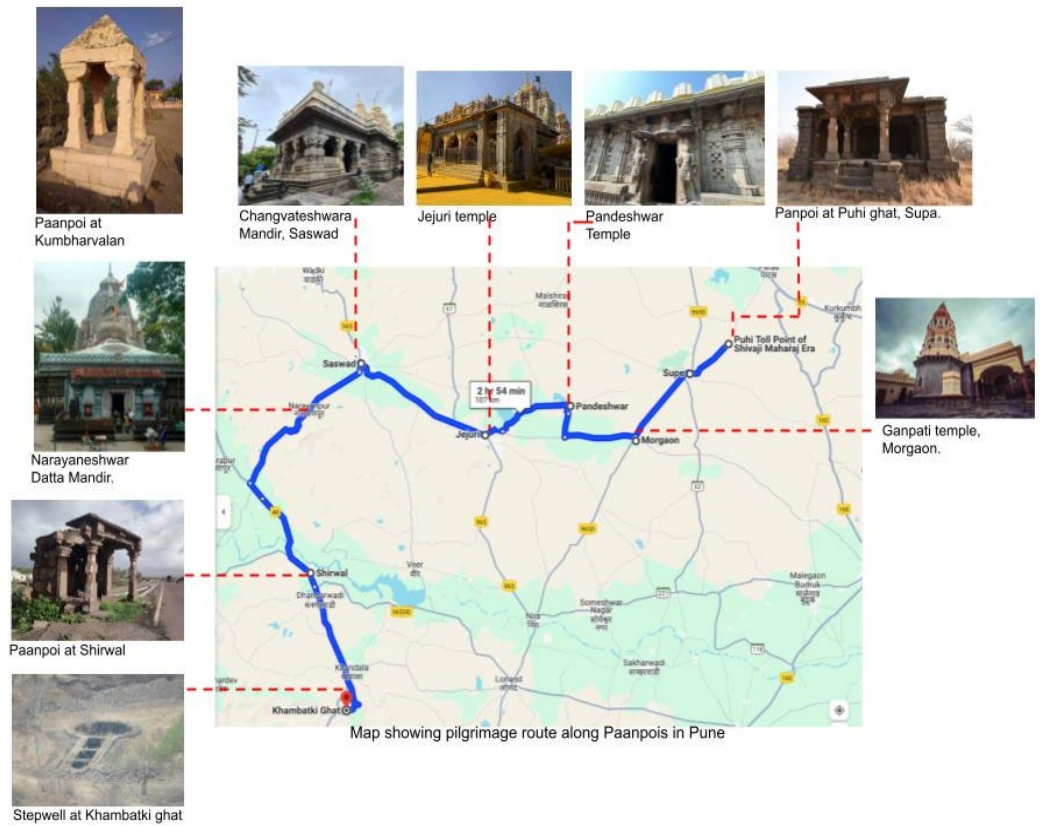


Figure 2 Map Showing Pilgrimage Route Along the Paanpois in Pune

Source Author

2) Drinking Water Fountain: Pyaav

In Pune, there are just two or three pyaavs from the colonial era that were dedicated in remembrance of the spirits of the dead. Pune cantonment is a small neighborhood consisting of a network of Solapur Road, East Street, MG Road, Bootee Street, etc. There are two historic drinking water fountains and six new water dispensing units in this area [Figure 3](#). Pyaavs are evidence of a charitable tradition that emerged in many Indian cities in the 18th century.

A famous pyaav (drinking water fountain) was constructed for the soldiers on the rifle range during the Queen's Jubilee year [Figure 4](#). However, it is not seen in the present cantonment settlement anymore. The artistic fountain, featuring gorgeous gable roofs, water basins on two sides, and gargoyles as waterspouts, is depicted in an old sketch. This was probably one of the most beautiful drinking water fountains in the city. According to an old newspaper clipping, J. Adams, the government's architectural executive engineer and surveyor, designed it and Command of the Duke of Connaught erected it to honour the Queen's Jubilee. This incomplete information suggests that the pyaav was constructed in the later half of the 18th century.

Figure 3

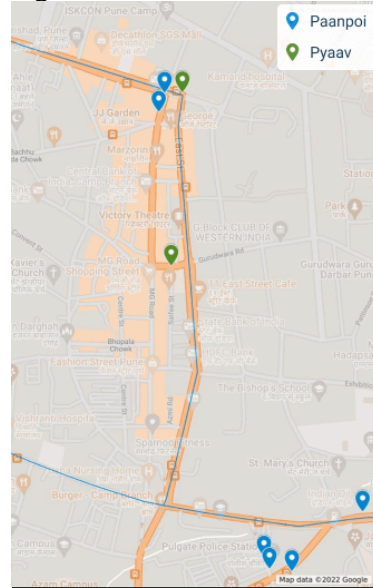


Figure 3 Map Showing Location of Ancients Pyaavs and New Paanpois in Camp Cantonment, Pune.

Source <https://punyachepaani.livingwatersmuseum.org/story/pyaavs-and-paanpois/>

Figure 4

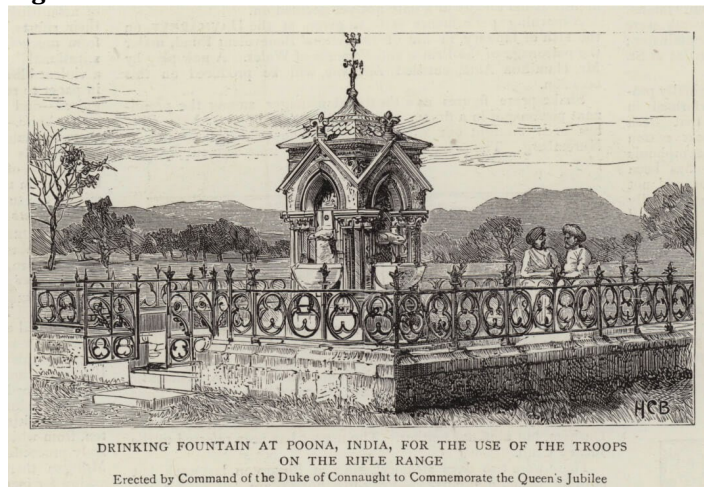


Figure 4 A Sketch of the Jubilee Fountain, Pune.

Source bridgemanimages.com

A unique pyaav, dating back to 1910, is located outside the formerly well-known Napier hotel and was created in loving memory of the late Dorabjee Dadabhoy Bootee [Figure 5a](#). Dadabhoy Bootee, who passed away in the early 1900s, was a well-known figure in Poona's social life and city administration. He was the proprietor of the Napier Hotel as well as the Vice President of the Municipality [Joshi & Kanim \(2017\)](#).

On one corner of the road, in a state of disrepair and filth, is the Bootee Pyaav. It is made of marble and black basalt stone, and it has a water spout and trough for people to drink water [Figure 5b](#). It must have formerly functioned as a water fountain for those strolling down East Street. The inscription on the bottom level of the building is decorated with etched letters [Figure 5c](#).

Figure 5



Figure 5a The Bootee Pyaav Opposite of Hotel Aurora Towers, Camp, Pune.

Source

<https://punyachepaani.livingwatersmuseum.org/story/pyaavs-and-paanpois/>



Figure 5b The Basin Used for Collecting Water Coming Out of the Spout.

Source

<https://punyachepaani.livingwatersmuseum.org/story/pyaavs-and-paanpois/>



Figure 5c The Plaque at the Bottom of the Pyaav.

Source

<https://punyachepaani.livingwatersmuseum.org/story/pyaavs-and-paanpois/>

An old pyaav similar to the one at Ambedkar Chowk is also seen outside Rani Laxmibai Udyan (garden).

This early 20th-century pyaav has deteriorated over time [Figure 6a](#). The plinth of the building has been occupied by the surrounding ground level, which has risen significantly [Figure 6b](#). The water-supplying pipe connection is no longer operational, rendering the Pyaav useless. The plaque designating the pyaav's patron is named "Indian Community," who reportedly gave the pyaav in honour of Lieutenant Colonel H. Minchin, the cantonment magistrate. However, there is currently no connection between the local community and this water dispenser [Joshi & Kanim \(2017\)](#).

Ironically, currently it is being used as a platform to keep empty water buckets and dustbins [Figure 6c](#). There are street food shacks, restaurants, tea, and coffee shops all around the pyaav. However, this historic building is still lost in the bustle of the city and neglected. This pyaav is no longer functional.

Figure 6



Figure 6a The Broken Basin of the Pyaav and the Information Plaque.

Source

<https://punyachepaani.livingwatersmuseum.org/story/pyaavs-and-paanpois/>



Figure 6b A Sketch of How the Pyaav Must Have Looked Originally.

Source

<https://punyachepaani.livingwatersmuseum.org/story/pyaavs-and-paanpois/>



Figure 6c The Pyaav Currently Serves as a Platform to Stack Dustbins and Empty Water Buckets.

Source

<https://punyachepaani.livingwatersmuseum.org/story/pyaavs-and-paanpois/>

The Somnath Ashram lies in Sindhipada which is an area where a large number of the Sindhi community migrated after partition. This beautiful Art Deco house belongs to the Bhatewara family. The 'haud' or the water tank in front of the house, often used by cattle, stands contrastingly, exhibiting an entirely traditional aesthetic with its trefoil and onion free-standing arch, flanked by two piers with an inverted lotus-like capital [Figure 7](#). Somnath Ashram and the water tank was constructed in 1941 by Dattusingh Pardeshi, who was also responsible for providing shelter to people who moved to Pune after the Partition.

Typically, paanpois on city streets seem to have been constructed primarily out of earthen pots. There are a few examples of stone buildings, though, such as the Solanki Pyaav, which was constructed off East Street in 2005 but is no longer in use [Figure 8](#). It was built as a result of the Solanki family's charitable endeavours.

Another noteworthy example is the paanpoi—a water cooler—that Shrimati Vasantibai Andraji Mutha donated to the Solapur bazaar police chowki, which is located at the roundabout of Solapur Road [Joshi & Kanim \(2017\)](#). This was constructed in 2005 as well and is still in operation [Figure 9](#). With a refreshed appearance, the custom of offering drinking water for free in remembrance of the departed is carried out.

Figure 7



Figure 7 Art Deco Style Water Tank in Somnath Ashram Bhavani Peth.

Source <https://www.instagram.com/p/Chthtneo6hU/?igsh=MW8wajljOTJ2NDhudg==>

Figure 8



Figure 8 The Solanki Pyaav, East Street, Pune.

Source <https://punyachepaani.livingwatersmuseum.org/story/pyavvs-and-paanpois/>

Figure 9



Figure 9 Details of the Inscription on the Paanpoi at Solapur Bazaar Police Chowki, Pune.

Source <https://punyachepaani.livingwatersmuseum.org/story/pyaavs-and-paanpois/>

3) Modern Paanpois

There are two paanpois close to the Pulgate bus stop on the Solapur road. One earthen pot paanpoi is located outside the Mutha bungalow, and the other is beside the Mutha water dispenser. The paanpoi in front of the Solapur Bazaar Police Chowki on Napier Road was donated by a resident of the Pune cantonment and is named after a certain Shri Vivek Yadav [Figure 10](#). Members of Pulgate Rickshaw Stand worked together to construct the paanpoi outside Mutha Villa [Figure 11](#). This group takes care of the earthen pots and fills it with water from the nearby tap. This enables them to fill their bottle with drinking water while they wait for passengers at this stand, according to an autorickshaw driver.

Figure 10



Figure 10 Paanpoi on Napier Road, Pune

Source <https://punyachepaani.livingwatersmuseum.org/story/pyaavs-and-paanpois/>

Figure 11



Figure 11 Paanpoi Outside Mutha Villa, Pune

Source <https://punyachepaani.livingwatersmuseum.org/story/pyaavs-and-paanpois/>

Figure 12



Figure 12 The Paanpoi at Market Yard, Pune

Source <https://pudhari.news/maharashtra/pune/517170/lack-of-potable-water/ar>

Figure 13



Figure 13 Travelling Water Tank in Auto Rickshaws on Pune.

Source <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/pune-autos-equipped-with-water-bags-to-help-passengers-passers-by-2773390/>

A modern public water dispensing unit has been constructed in Market Yard, Gultekdi, Pune. This modern Paanpoi consists of four taps with a granite basin in between three walls. It has a RCC roof [Figure 12](#). Market Yard is a wholesale market consisting of about 650 shops of vegetables, fruits, and grains. The taps of this unit have been stolen and hence it is not in use anymore [Chougule \(2023\)](#).

About fifty auto-rickshaw drivers from Pune have fitted their rickshaws with five to six-liter water bags and a glass so that they can offer drinking water to other drivers or bystanders [The Indian Express. \(2016, April 27\)](#). The autorickshaw union Rickshaw Panchayat launched this campaign in April 2016 under the direction of Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Sarang Awad. The union made the decision in light of Pune's water shortage condition and the intense summer heat. Each of these auto rickshaws has a label that reads 'Phirti Panpoi' (Travelling Water Tank) to make it easier for people to recognise those that have these kinds of bags [Figure 13](#).

5. NEW PUBLIC WATER DISPENSING UNITS FOR ANIMALS

The system of water dispensing units is not limited to humans but it is also meant for stray animals. In April 2018, K. Chandrabhaga Bhosle Pratishtan installed water tanks made from recycled barrels in order to satisfy the thirst of birds and animals in Old Sangvi [More \(2018\)](#), [Figure 14](#).

The Deccan Gymkhana Animal Welfare group has installed permanent cement pits of size 30cm x 30cm x 10cm on the slopes of the Hanuman Tekdi (hill) on S.B. Road, Pune They serve as water pots for stray animals on the hill [Figure 15](#). Since these are installed on the slopes rainwater naturally gets collected in them. These pits are fully functional. Permanent water pots of size 45cm x 30cm x 30cm have also been constructed on the London Bridge in Hingne, Sinhgad Road, Pune for stray animals [Figure 16](#). However, people are throwing garbage and washing their feet inside the pot. Hence it is not functional anymore. Concrete planters have been converted to water pots for strays. These have been installed in Sahakar Nagar, Pune [Figure 17](#). These are temporary, economical, and movable. They are easy to clean. It is a ritual to install such water pots every summer in all parts of Pune by animal activists.

Figure 14



Figure 14 Water Barrels Installed in Old Sanghvi, Pune

Source <https://www.esakal.com/pune/water-tank-bird-animal-109067>

Figure 15



Figure 15 Permanent Installation of Cement Water Pots on the Slopes of Hanuman Tekdi, S.B. Road, Pune.

Source Author

Figure 16



Figure 16 Permanent Installation of Stone Water Pot on London Bridge, Hingne, Pune

Source Author

Figure 17



Figure 17 Temporary Installation of Water Pots in Sahakar Nagar, Pune

Source Author

6. DISCUSSION

The historic fountains are defunct and not acknowledged. Additionally, some modern paanpois are also left unattended. This noble tradition is on the verge of extinction in current times. It is extremely important to acknowledge the existence of pyaavs and paanpois. Efforts must be made to bring back the system of public water distribution. This water feature makes places for commuters to stop and relax by connecting to the city streets. Today, unfortunately, it is seen that no such activity is being maintained in the spirit of social service. However, it is seen that the number of panpoi has decreased rapidly due to the lack of service in the society [Ishi \(2023\)](#).

Many reasons are given for the disappearance of public water dispensing units. Previously, such activities did not require approval from the Food Safety & Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). However, now it has become mandatory. For this social activity, permission was also given by the municipality to use the public space. However, due to the increase in the number of encroachments there after summer, the municipality has also tightened the rules in this regard [Bhor \(2014\)](#).

Filter water is said to be another major reason for the decline of aquaculture. Bottled water is available everywhere. Also, water sachets are available for just two rupees. These pouches are also available on betel leaves. Hence, pouches are said to have overpowered the aquatics [Bhor \(2014\)](#).

7. CONCLUSION

The system of Paanpois was prevalent in the 17th and 18th century during the reign of Ahilyabai Holkar and the Peshwas [Parasnis \(2021\)](#). The system of Pyaavs was started by the British and the rich Parsi families in the 18th century in Bombay. Due to the close proximity of both the cities, this tradition hailed to Pune Cantonment from Bombay. The act of giving and the provision of drinkable water are the common links that bind these two types of water dispensers. Another essential component of all water units, both ancient and new ones, is the preservation of the departed soul's memory and its dissemination to society.

The ancient Hemadpanthi style Paanpois and the colonial Pyaavs are in a dilapidated state. They are not functioning any more. Due to the overall appearance of the ancient Paanpois, they are considered to be temples or samadhis (memorial) by local people. Ancient toll booths/ toll plazas had a Raanjan (stone pot) to store the collected revenue. Hence the presence of identical stone pots in the Paanpois also makes one rethink whether it is an ancient toll booth over a trade route. The mapped Paanpois are neither listed as graded heritage structures nor are they protected by the Archaeological Survey of India. The modern Paanpois are also in an unattended state. The permanent water pots for strays are functional. Whereas the temporary ones being portable and movable are broken, moved, robbed and hence not completely functional.

Initially the Paanpois were constructed with basalt rock in the Hemadpanthi style. The Pyaavs were constructed in stone in the colonial style of architecture. In the 19th and 20th century, a new style of construction of Paanpoi was seen which consisted of earthen water pots covered with wet red cloth and a glass installed in a temporary shelter. Another typology of a modern Paanpoi is a permanent concrete structure with taps and basins in it. It is devoid of the pots. All paanpois are accomodative, encourage water sharing, and unintentionally foster relationships through water. The charitable system of providing drinking water is also practiced

for the stray animals. Drinking water is provided to them in the form of movable concrete pots, concrete pits installed in ground and water tanks on ground level.

There is substantial decline in the use of public water dispensing units and fountains due to lack of maintenance, theft of taps, unavailability of water, lack of cleanliness, etc. Mineral water bottles are easily available at every crossroad at economical rates. Water sachets are also available for just two rupees at local Paan shops. The Pune Municipal Corporation has made stringent rules to address the prevailing issue of encroachments on footpaths. It is also mandatory to acquire approvals from the Food Safety & Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) for installation of such public water dispensing units.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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