



SAVE A DROP **OR** DROP DEAD!

An interaction with Aabid Surti

EDITORIAL NOTE

IPA has invited some of the most enlightened professionals for their participation at WPC 2013. As a prelude and with a view to share their thoughts with the readers of IPT, we have planned a series of interactions with them. Here is an interaction with Mr. Aabid Surti, one of the speakers at the conference.

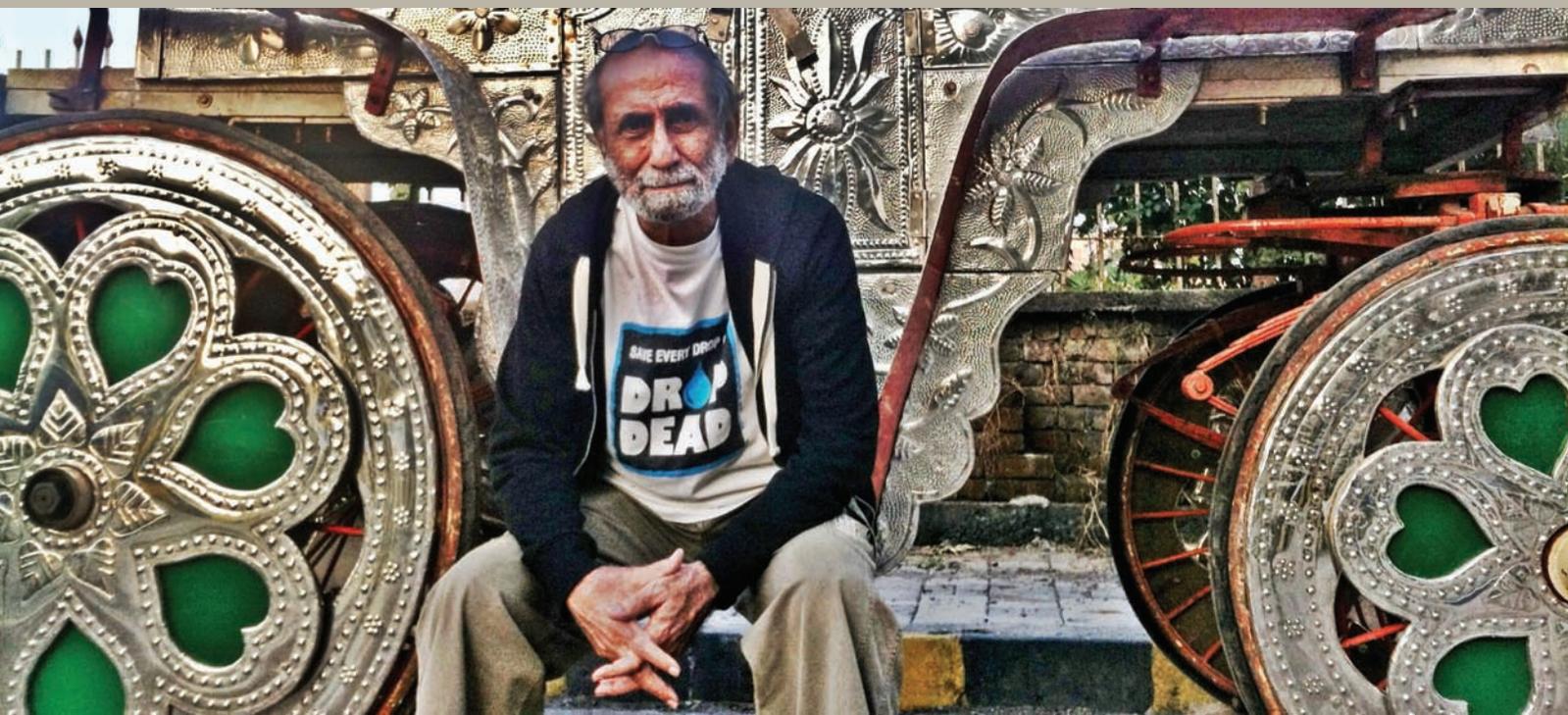
Aabid Surti is a National Award winning author, artist, cartoonist and playwright. But ask him what his proudest achievement is and he will tell you, he has saved more than 1.5 million liters water, from going down the drain, literally!

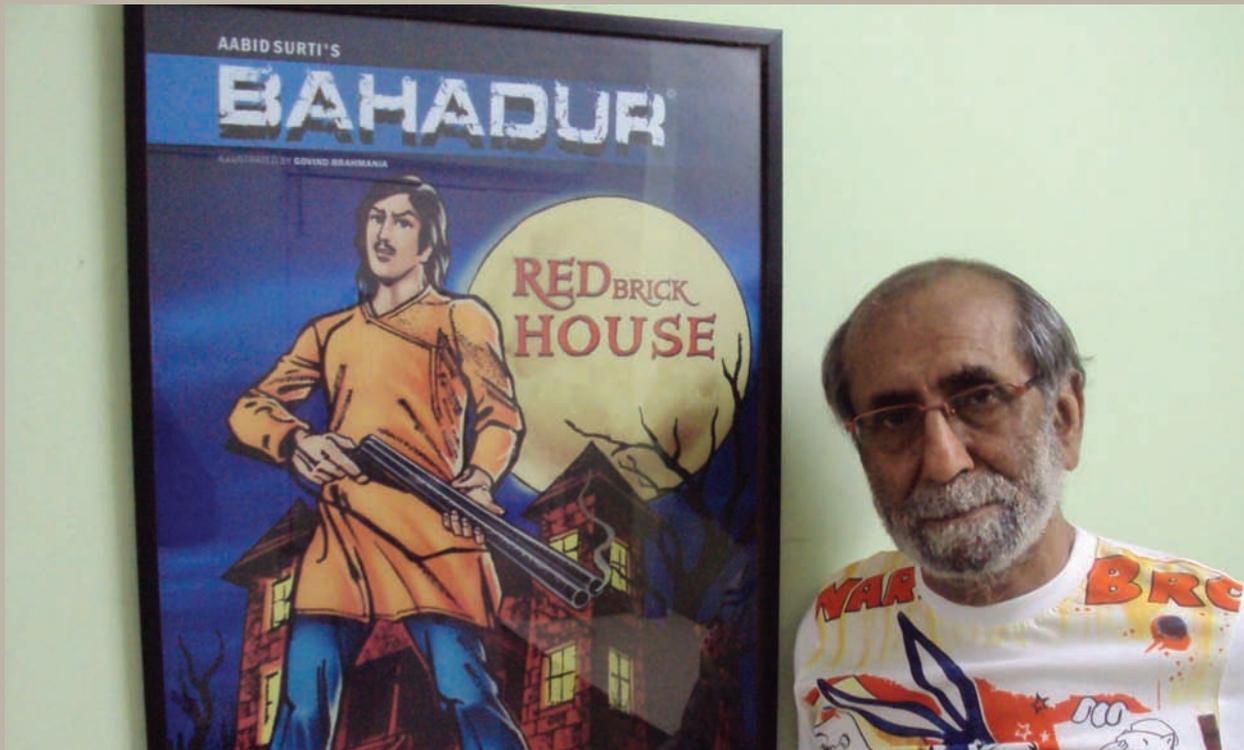
The 77-year-old celebrates Sunday like none else, picking up a building in Mumbai's far-flung Mira Road and, with his plumber and a volunteer in tow, searching for leaking taps to plug, free of charge! His reward? A lot of water saved! Surti's non-governmental organisation, Drop Dead Foundation, has just one employee - him! "I read an article that if one drop of water is wasted every second, 1,000 liters goes down the drain every month. An image of 1,000 bottles of 1 liter Bisleri bottles flashed before my eyes," Surti recalls. He couldn't ignore that image and quickly started his movement to save water!

Every Sunday, Surti spends about Rs. 600 on visit homes and fix taps. Surti visits an average of 1,600 homes and fixes around 400 leaky taps, saving more than 4, 00,000 liters of water, every year!

Noted film star Shah Rukh Khan wrote to this versatile 'water-warrior', when he came to know about this 'one man army' for water saving - "Sir, there are already too many gentlemen around...being neither gentle nor manly. I was reading your 'tap drive'. It sounds one of the little big things my dad would have done. God bless you and yes, I believe in angels after reading the paper today!"

Mr. Kamal Khokhani, Publisher - IPT met Mr. Surti recently at Ahmedabad when the latter was conferred with the prestigious 'Sparrow Award' and had a wide ranging talks with this multifaceted personality who is also an author and an artist of repute. Here are the excerpts...





What was the 'germ' that came to your mind when you started this noble initiative of Drop Dead Foundation for the nation's good, nature's good and for a noble cause?

I came across a statistic that, if one drop is wasted from a leaky tap every second, then in a month, a thousand litres of water go down the drain. I thought to myself, "If I can't save the Ganga, I can at least save a few drops".

What was the initial reaction of people, when you started this initiative, six years ago? What is the response now, six years later?

The response has been the same - 'pure love'. Wherever I go with a plumber, people give us respect. Sometimes, they even offer us snacks, lunch, sweets, soft drinks etc.

As a 'One Man's Army', it's a marathon task that you've taken up. How do you plan to take this thought forward?

I don't have to take it anywhere. It's moving smoothly on its own, like a leaf floating with the flow of the river.

You reside in one of India's Metro's which

happens to be so vast and fast-paced. Within this myriad Mumbai population, how do you plan to speed-up your plans in terms of 'active' solutions?

Not only Mumbai, it has taken roots in many other cities in India without any effort on my side. This proves that if the thought is pure, then nature takes care of the rest.

We Indians, know the danger, that scarcity of water can bring about in our lives if we do not get conscious about it and yet, we keep cool and take 'water' for granted. With your practical implementation of 'Saving Water', how do you think people's mindsets can be changed?

The easiest way out is to use religion in a positive way. For example, the Jain community is responding to our cause very strongly, because in their religion, the importance of water is emphasized. Luckily, they have remembered it. But other communities have forgotten. For example, Prophet Mohammad and the Holy Quran too have underlined the importance of trees and water. Unfortunately, I haven't heard any Mullah referring to it in his congregation. So, wherever I get an opportunity, I emphasize on what holy books say about conserving water.

“Boond boond hai anmol – each drop of water counts”! What measures do you suggest for the validity and severity of this statement?

I tell people about Rajasthani women going miles on foot all day to collect a potful of water. Women in some African countries go out to the fields, early morning, to collect dew drops from leaves. In future, I intend to show videos from my laptop. I am looking forward to some financial support to create interesting videos to highlight this.

How can your creative background be used to achieve the ‘success mantra’ in this social venture? Can the two be juxtaposed to gain a fine balance and a far-reaching outcome as well?

Of course creativity helps! The basic concept of ‘saving a drop’ is the result of a ‘fertile mind’. Now, I am also working on short films to create awareness for water conservation. I intend to upload these films on net, especially on YouTube and Drop Dead Foundation’s pages on Facebook.

“An artist with an authentic approach”. What is the satisfaction you derive out of this noble cause?

As I have said earlier, the unadulterated love, the selfless affection of people that I receive, is unexplainable. I also believe that society has done so much for us, now it’s our duty to return the favour.

How do you perceive the plumbing scenario in our country?

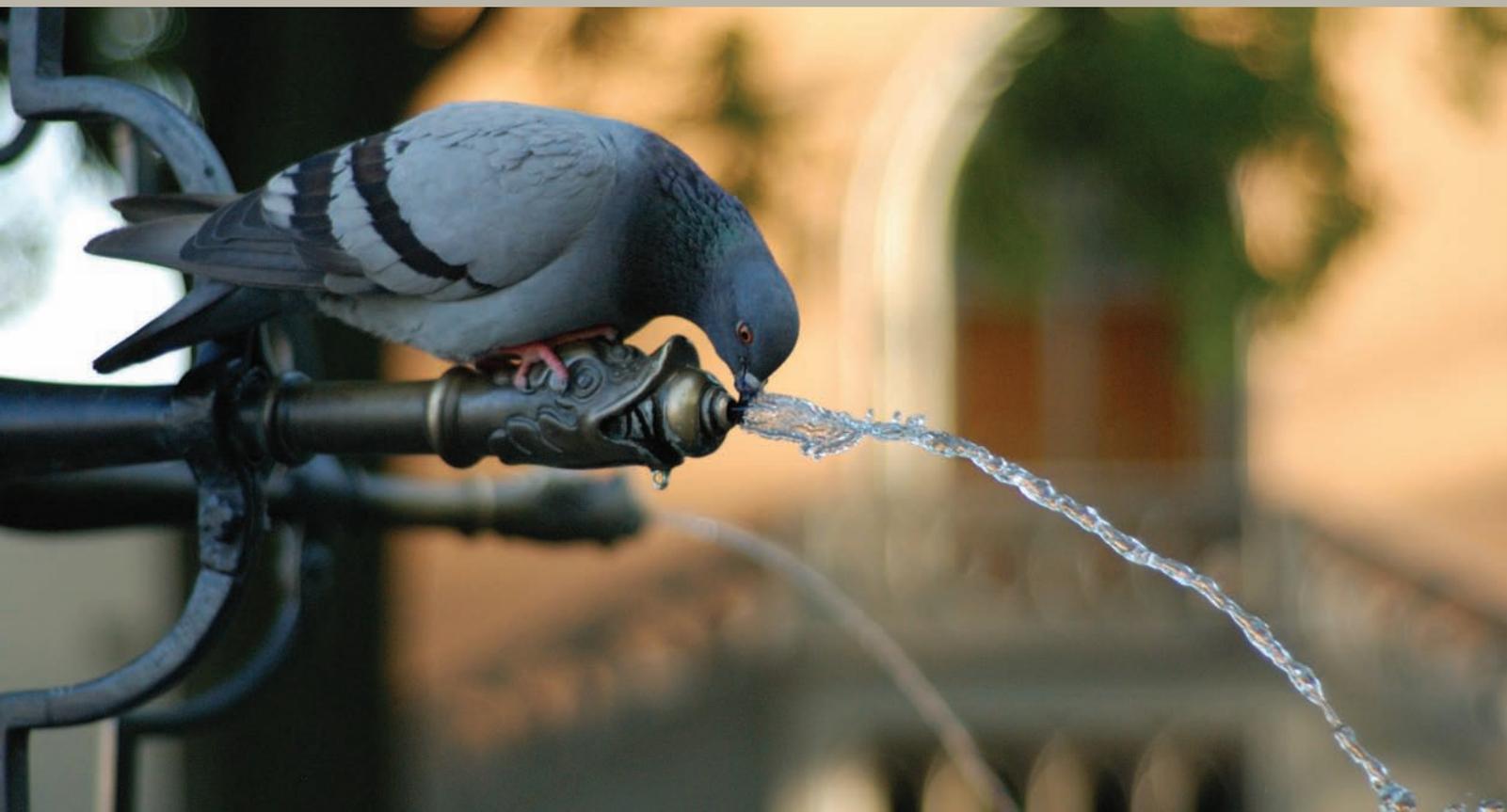
As far as the affluent localities and five star buildings are concerned, the plumbing scenario is as good as any western country. It’s like we have solved the clean water problem of rich people by introducing bottled water. What have we done for the poor masses? In middle-class localities, the plumbing scenario is pathetic.

“Green” is the ruling colour of today and tomorrow. Please share with our readers, your perception on “Green Plumbing” and what steps should be taken to meet this end?

The first step to move towards green plumbing is to have correct plumbing. In many localities and ghettos, the plumbing material is so poor that the pipes start cracking and taps start leaking within a few months of its installation. I strongly believe, some sort of quality control is a quintessential in the material used for new buildings.

Health, Hygiene, Sanitation are rock solid challenges, facing India, today. How, according to you, can we overcome these challenges?

If bands of dedicated social workers, supported by Corporates, are given a blueprint to tackle health, hygiene and sanitation, I believe these problems can be considerably solved. I had encountered a





team of five Indian American Collegians doing padyatra in Gujarat, going from village to village, cleaning the garbage, whitewashing the faded walls and building simple latrines using bamboos and mud.

What message would you like to give through this platform of IPT?

It's simple: Just do it. The time is running out. 

As one of the speakers at ensuing World Plumbing Conference, what would be the main emphasis of your presentation before a global audience?

Naturally my focus will be on conserving water, the blue gold, and other natural resources since they are all interconnected. For example, if trees are there, water is there. The scarcity of water will force millions to migrate and then it will be too late.

How do you rate Indian Plumbing Today as a platform for dissemination of information amongst the plumbing professionals?

These professionals are the key figures in an industry that can make miracles in environment. Hence, this platform is most ideal for sharing new ideas.

