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He slips on a boat-shaped Gandhi cap, tightens his dhoti and hoists a hefty television set onto his greying head. His bare feet ready themselves for the long hard journey across the mountain. Soon he is striding purposefully with his load even as a group of city-dwellers pant empty-handed in his wake.

Shipahi Mama's hut in the hamlet of Mohri squats at an agonising height on a mountain peak in the Sahyadris, about 100 km from Pune. It takes three hours of uphill walking to get to it, but it's worth the climb just to hear its 160-odd residents narrate a tale so reminiscent of the inspiring plot of *Swades* that it makes you wonder whether art has imitated life or vice-versa.

Until a few months ago, most of the residents of Mohri hadn't even seen a bulb or experienced electricity. This, the sarpanch sarcastically jokes, is because even desperate politicians gathering votes have only managed to heave their bulk upto the nearby Velhe taluka. For the last 500 years, kerosene lamps have lit

SHINE A LIGHT

the village after sunset, burning sootily for a few precious hours. So cut off was this hamlet from the rest of the world that villagers look surprised if you ask them who Mahatma Gandhi is. Now, Mohri is a totem of the best kind of modernity—a non-polluting and grassroots one.

Eternal sunshine of the spotless kind

UMA KADAM

Mansi Choksi hikes to a mountain village where aartis are performed to light bulbs



