

# New free accounting software GNUKKhata has ethical core

Mahafreed Irani | TNN

A group of computer-science students has developed a free accounting and inventory software. Their target audience includes women's groups, small-scale enterprises, micro-credit groups, craftsmen, NGOs and farmers. Called the GNUKKhata (GNU from the Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) movement and Khata for ledger), the project is spearheaded by visually impaired free-software hacker, Krishnakant Mane, and supported by the Comet Media Foundation.

The new innovation is being promoted as code that allows only ethical transactions.

"Users can't create sub-accounts using GNUKKhata. So you won't have another Satyam scam if everyone uses this software," Mane says. Fighting against the monopoly of proprietary software, the young economics graduate, asks, "Why should technology only be for the commercial sector who can pay?"

Since the software is compatible with a screen reader and Braille, the visually impaired can benefit. "Very few blind people get into accountancy because accounting software is not disabled-friendly," continues Mane. "In the case of GNUKKhata, even people who are not literate can use it with the help of on-screen

visual cues." Available in Marathi, Malayalam and Tamil, the Linux-based application also works on Windows.

In order to be truly democratic, GNUKKhata had to be made accessible even in far flung

## KHATA MEETHA

villages. "So we created a free web-based application. This feature impressed the National Internet Exchange of India and they decided to support us," says Chandita Mukherjee, director of Comet Media. Mukherjee collated a list of 6,000 places including Akluj, Linga, Kamptee and Parbhani for the software's drop-down list of places where transactions can be carried out. So a farmer can use a net-

book to update his bank deposits without having to travel to the bank. It took 15 months to create the software which cost Rs 5 lakh. Students from SNTD, Vidya Vardhane, VJTI and Thakur College volunteered their skills.

Internet expert Vijay Mukhi thinks the new software could challenge a proprietary accounting software like Tally. "We should encourage such alternatives that promote ethical transactions," he says.

Increasingly, many organisations are moving to FOSS. Cafe Coffee Day, LIC and Mahananda Dairy have already made the shift prompted by huge cost savings, freedom to customise software and a lower virus risk.