

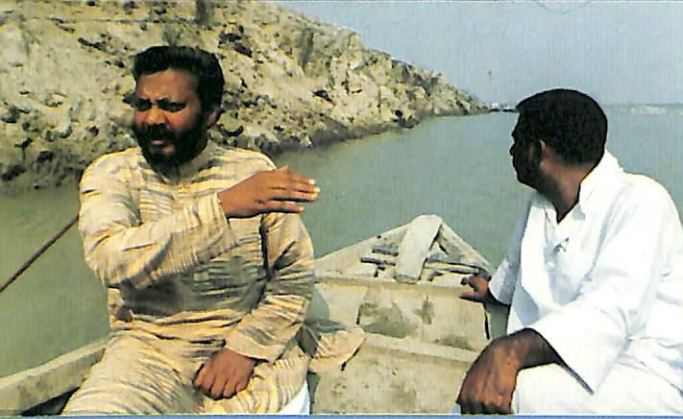
# The Waterman's Journey

## Rashtriya Jal Yatra

Rajendra Singh











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# **The Waterman's Journey Rashtriya Jal Yatra**

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## Foreword

**W**ater is an important issue across the globe. Water scarcity and its management have assumed such huge proportions due to the shortsightedness of governments, the societies and professionals expected to manage water resources. Though water is a natural resource, its use and management lie in the hands of mankind. Mankind has committed unpardonable mistakes in management of water resources, through the long chain of the human evolution. As a result, every region of the globe and every state of India is faced with various types of water problems. The governments have been unsuccessful in arriving at a solution to these problems, because they focus on the misuse of water. Successive Governments have focused on the centralization of management of water resources. As a result, society started depending on the government for provision of water and did not consider it as their own resource.



Rashtriya Jal Biradari, has tried to understand the nature of water problems through unique national level programs. Both before and after Independence India has seen many Yatras for both political and societal purposes. These include Yatras organized by Gandhiji, Chandrashekhar, Jai Prakash Narain and many saints. But never was water the issue for these Yatras. Tarun Bharat Singh organized a similar Yatra from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Rajasthan to Manipur. The main objective of this Yatra was to understand the national and state level water problems and to raise awareness amongst the people about water related issues. This is a historic Yatra with lacs of people from across the country participating.

In spite of differences in the nature of local water problems of every state, it emerged that there are certain water related issues which were common across the country. These include the falling water tables, pollution of water resources, ignorance of water related traditions, drying and slowing rivers, privatization of water and water markets.

This Yatra was successful in trying to increase awareness about these issues, coming out with solutions to some of the problems and getting the society to accept ownership of water as their resource. This fact is further supported by the formation of Jal Biradaris in various states, the increased level of activity on water related issues by both government and non government organizations.

We have made an attempt to capture the experiences of the Yatra in this report. We hope that the report will further encourage the people, and in the years to come various NGOs and members of the society, to take action to solve the problems of water.







## The beginnings of a revolution

"On the night of October 2, 1980, 24 years ago, when I boarded the bus from Jaipur to Bhikampura with four of my friends, we only had a single agenda - 'to fight injustice against the people'. And we only knew one way to do it, by spreading literacy in the villages. So we promptly started a literacy drive," recalls Rajendra Singh.

In those days people of Rajasthan suffered from a severe scarcity of water. The region that once sustained the eco-system of the Aravali hills had become barren. Young men were forced to flee the villages in search of employment, women trudged long distances to fetch a mere pot full of water, crops failed regularly, lack of vegetation led to soil degradation; monsoon run off washed away the top soil. "There was not a single blade of grass in the region and we often stumbled on cattle carcasses. Barely 3 percent of cultivable area was irrigated. Life was difficult and hardship endless," says Rajendra Singh



One day, Mangu Patel, the wise old man of Bhikampura told Rajendra Singh "we do not want your literacy, we want Water". But where was the Water? Rajendra Singh did not know anything about Water. It was then that Mangu explained the rich tradition of building "Johads", a prime example of the ingenuity of inexpensive, simple traditional technology that was quite remarkable in terms of recharging ground water.

"Johads" are simple

mud and rubble concave shaped barriers built across the slope to arrest rainwater with a high embankment on three sides while the fourth side is left open for the rain water to enter.

Even in 1985, this unique traditional water management system was alive in Bhikampura. On the advice of Mangu Patel, Rajendra Singh and his friends became a catalyst to building "Johads". They faced stiff resistance from the local authorities as they by-passed all bureaucratic channels and dealt with the people directly to fulfill their requirements in the manner they decided.





## Johad: The foundation

**T**he place where Rajendra began his work, the Thanagazi block of the Alwar district of Rajasthan, is a dry area. It was once covered with jungles, abounded in wildlife and supported a vibrant economy. After 1947 the government's Forest Department cut down the trees for firewood ably supported by the timber mafia. All that was left were barren hills, incapable of supporting much life.

Simplicity has marked the approach to rejuvenating the water systems of the region. There are no dams, those temples of modern India, but low earthen structures and piles of rocks across drains and rivulets. There are some concrete

dams but not the awe-inspiring type that you can look up to. Collectively thousands of these structures have made good decades of water loss in the region. From a 'black' area – where groundwater was not available till several hundred feet below the surface, it has become a white area.

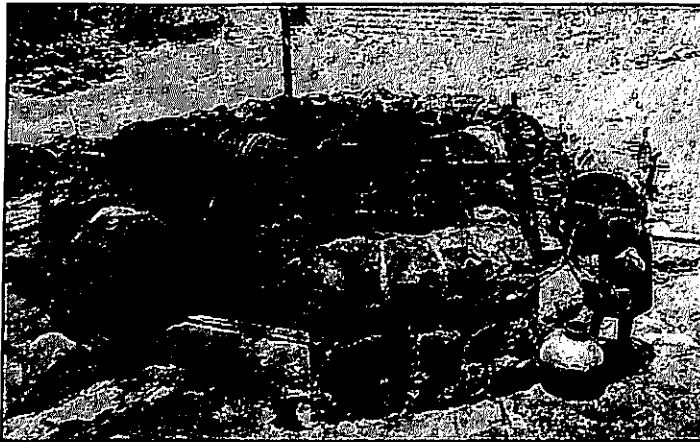
It is this simplicity that makes the work sustainable and has integrated it into the lives of the communities. This has engineered a social revolution as well.

The first johad took three years to build;

in the fourth year the group built 50 johads, in the fifth almost a 100 were built and in 2001 they built a 1000 water structures - in total they have built more than 5000 water harvesting structures in 1058 villages across Rajasthan.

No engineer was called for consultation; guidance was provided entirely by the traditional wisdom of people who have maintained the ecological balance for generations. These water structures were built with the involvement of the community - in construction, from identification of the site to the designing of the structure and by contribution in cost of its construction and later in its maintenance - which ensured that all the structures were need-based and looked after.

As a result, water became abundant; more water meant better crops, better conditions of soil, education, and rich community life. It helped forestation and development of wildlife in the area. Five rivers of the region started flowing





Perennially after decades of drought, a direct result of the increase in the water available through numerous "Johads".

Prosperity returned to the region, agriculture became more productive and due to availability of fodder, cattle-rearing started, resulting in increased production of milk. Higher water levels also meant less money on diesel for pumpsets. In 1985 only 20% of the agricultural land was cultivated, now it is 100%, and villages have started selling surplus grains in market for the first time in many years. Johads are extremely remunerative; studies have shown that an investment of Rs.100 per capita on a johad raises the economic production in the village by as much as Rs. 400 per annum.

As villages mobilized themselves to improve their quality of life by building johads, this participation of the people enable the community to become self-reliant by optimizing social cohesion and emotive bonding in the community. Since people realised that members were responsible not only for individual but also collective action, they became more aware of their rights and took on social evils. One was to stop the employment of children in the carpet industry and another was a legal battle that they took right up to the Supreme Court of India to stop indiscriminate mining on forest land in the Sariska Tiger Reserve.







## The community awakes

**T**hese enlightened and active communities also enforced self-discipline for the common good of the village. They strictly enforced their own rules to stop deforestation, hunting wildlife and consumption of liquor. The development of community participation, through the "Gram Sabha" or Village Assembly, gave everyone an opportunity to freely discuss and implement a common decision for general benefit. This process also made them reflect on the problems of others in the community and help each other in solving them. While the community became active in social and economic change, the crime rate dropped in the villages as economic conditions of the entire region improved.



This momentum in the community caused by the construction of johads has encouraged the villagers to go further looking for innovative methods of social change. The greatest challenge before them is to sustain those traditional values that started this movement in the face of the transformation of the community due to progress and prosperity.

Today the water crisis is looming large not only on India but almost the entire world. At the time of independence

India had only 392 villages with a problem of potable water; today the figure stands at 90,000.

Of course, this success did not come without its problems. Rajendra Singh has been fighting this war for over 24 years during which he has been booked under section 58 of the Irrigation Act, where even a junior engineer can jail you. He had 377 criminal cases against him at one stage; suddenly all these were withdrawn. All these things did not deter Rajendra Singh from continuing to pursue his mission of helping India fight its water crisis.

"Dodte Huye Paani Ko Chalna Sikha Do  
Chalte Huye Paani Ko Rengna Sikha Do  
Jahan Paani Rengta Hai Use Tehrna Sikha Do"

(Slow down the speed of running water/  
river and make it stay/  
and where it stays make it percolate)





## Taking the message out to the world

**A**fter their work had reached saturation in Alwar, people of Tarun Bharat Sangh decided to take their message to all the corners of the country. They had already got offers of support as well as calls of help from organisations in other parts of India. They began their outreach by setting up Jal Biradaris – water brotherhoods – across India. Each state now has a Jal Biradari headed by a coordinator and comprising people working for water conservation.

In 2002, they collectively decided to organise a Jal Chetna Yatra, which would go from state to state creating awareness about the water crisis in the country and mobilising people to fight injustice of the government.

Water is the very basis for the survival of all living organisms – both human and natural resources are dependent on water. It is the primary requirement for human beings as also for their socio economic development and the survival of a healthy ecosystem. In addition, access to water plays a vital role in food security and poverty alleviation. Yet, there were reports of a serious water crisis, arising out of demand-supply imbalances, especially in the developing world. The prevailing trend towards rising population, increasing urbanization and water dependent life-styles as well are expected to further enhance the water crisis unless timely action is taken. Management of water has thus emerged as one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. The entire country is suffering either from droughts or floods.



The problem is largely man-made by government policies that since Independence have aimed at controlling water rather than making it available to people. The government has consistently failed to provide water to the masses for drinking and irrigation. Of late, more dangerous trends have emerged with the privatization of water and the proposed inter-linking of rivers. The rapid spread of mineral or bottled water poses another threat to the availability of water for community use. All these point to the privatization of water resources.





National Water Awareness Campaign



The solution to the problem lies in communitising water resource management rather than privatizing it. Till such time as society considered water a pilgrimage, the basis of all life and water management their responsibility, the country had no water problems. Once communities gave up their control over water resources, their problems began.







## The Jal Yatra

From the desire to spread the message that communities must take control of their own natural resources, specifically water, the Jal Yatra was born.

This is a common platform for people throughout the country to generate awareness on the water crisis that is fast gripping India. The Yatra intended to find local solutions to the problem from amongst the people of various regions. That is why the focus was on water conservation using local and traditional means of recharging ground water resources.

The Yatra has highlighted the fact that society as a whole does not endorse privatization and commoditization of water. Water is a basic necessity for the survival of all life and therefore any attempt at privatization of this natural resource is against the natural law. That is exactly why the society or the state should have the right to manage their water resources and take decisions about it.

The Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra was committed to rejuvenating our culture and practices of water conservation. It brought to the fore millions of local traditions and initiatives to revive our rivers, recharge our aquifers and rejuvenate nature. It highlighted basic facts about water at forum after forum across the country. According to a recent estimate, of the total water available on earth, only 0.007% is potable water i.e., fit for human consumption. There is a huge disparity in the distribution of this water that has again been exacerbated by the government. For example, Uttaranchal has snow peaked mountains and rivers full of water, but the women of Uttaranchal suffer due to shortage of potable water. Orissa gets over 1,600 mm of rainfall but also has thousands of drought-prone villages such as Bilai Garh.

Water is the scarcest resource in the world and is fast getting depleted. Unless we take judicious decisions and concrete steps to conserve water, mankind is in for big trouble. All is not lost as there are many ways to check the fast-depleting water table. However,

**The "Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra" was an attempt to share the water related concerns and mitigate the pains of citizens of India, the farmers and the poor people.**





people are either oblivious of it or are not aware of the potential threats. If proper measures are not taken for water conservation soon. The Yatra set out to galvanize people.

**Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra stressed the fact that we should strive for linking people to rivers rather than interlinking rivers. Local communities across India have many traditional methods of enriching ground water resources.**

To achieve this objective, we do not need huge projects costing crores of rupees. What we need is to wake up to our traditional methods of conserving and recharging water resources and use these time tested methods to help ourselves.

The Jal Yatra tried to arm people against potential droughts and famines: "If the earth is recharged fully then the rivers will automatically start flowing again." (Jab dharti ke pet mein paani bhara jayega to nadiyan apne aap behene lagengee). By reviving the traditional methods of recharging water resources, we can arm ourselves against potential disasters.

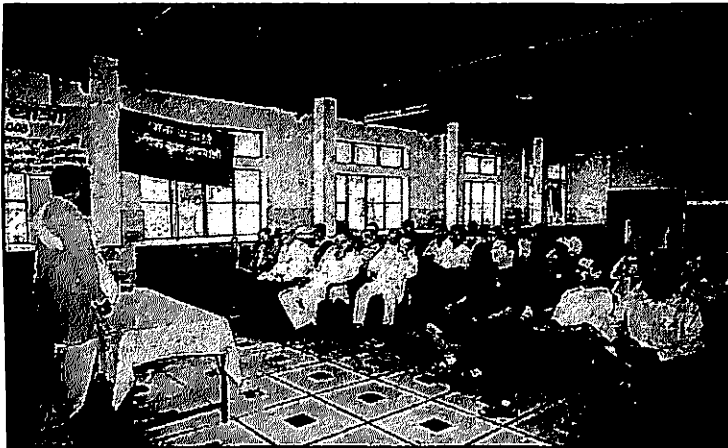
The Yatra pointed out that attempts at creating awareness regarding minimizing wastage, conserving water and augmenting its availability and other related issues have to be pursued as a mission at all levels – local, national and international.

During the Yatra, many water conservation projects developed by local people were highlighted. One of the heartening things was that drought prone areas where the local people have come together to undertake such projects, have now turned green and agricultural production has gone up. On the other hand, where

people are waiting for the government to undertake such projects, the situation is going from bad to worse. It is not the Government is not undertaking projects, but it is the responsibility of every citizen to conserve water.

Tarun Bharat Sangh, a non-profit organization through which Rajendra Singh has done most of his work played a central role in organizing this nation-wide campaign. Rajendra Singh, who is the Chairman of the Rashtriya Jal Biradari, traveled the entire country with the Yatris, and addressed

thousands of gatherings across the country. The Yatra traveled more than 200,000 km across 300 river basins in the country. People voiced their concerns





at the gatherings that were attended by grassroots workers, activists, politicians and even industrialists. Apart from the impressive statistics, the Yatra has begun a movement for the conservation of water and natural resource management in India. In this, it is unique. At some places, there were public hearings, at others a convention and at still others, a march to raise awareness about the need for water conservation and natural resource management.







## The Yatra – A Snapshot

**O**n March 5-6, 2002 witnessed the organization of the Rashtriya Jal Biradari Sammelan. This Sammelan was also attended by three cabinet ministers of the Government of India. Water warriors and water workers came from across the country. They all pledged to have water policy amended. They met the then Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee and apprised him of the pitfalls of this policy. He assured us but did not do anything about it.



We kept waiting for some kind of execution of the assurances the Prime Minister had given. After waiting for six months another memorandum was submitted to the Prime Minister. Thereafter, on November 16-17, 2001, the members of the Jal Biradari met at the banks of river Sabarmati in Gujarat where they decided to launch the nationwide Jal Yatra. As per the decisions, this Yatra commenced its journey on December 23, 2002, from the Samadhi of Gandhiji in **New Delhi**

From Delhi, this Yatra visited Haryana and thereafter Rajasthan, where the first National Conference of Women was organized. On the 30th of January, this Yatra reached the Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat. From here the Yatra proceeded to other areas of Gujarat, going on to Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal. On March 15, the Yatra reached Delhi again. The Yatra once again went to Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, where in Vardha the second sammelan was organized.

Further the Yatra visited Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The third sammelan of this phase of the Yatra was held on May 29, in Kanchipuram. The third phase of the Yatra began from June 1. It visited all of Kerala via Kanyakumari and Trivandrum, further moving to Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Haryana and culminated at the Punjab University in another sammelan.

In the fourth phase small programs were organized by the Jal Biradari. The fifth phase included the flood affected areas of U.P., Bihar, Bengal, Jharkhand, and Orissa. Similarly, the sixth phase focused on the drought impacted areas of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu.



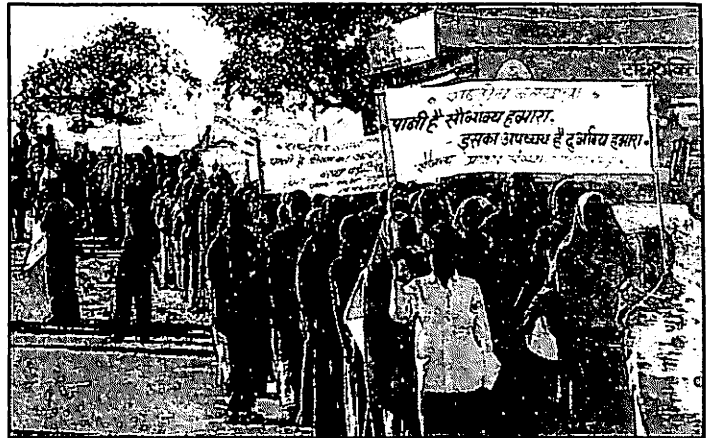


Starting from January 10, the Yatra journeyed continuously through Kerala, moving on to Maharashtra, Uttaranchal, U.P. Bihar, Bengal, North-East Uttaranchal, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Dibrugarh of Assam.

During the first phase of this Yatra, the yatriks witnessed an active water mafia across the country. In Chhattisgarh, which normally gets a good rainfall, there are thirsty villages such as Bilaigarh. Water was selling like hot cakes. On the other hand, they also saw the presence of those waiting to capture the Sheonath Kelo river of Chhattisgarh and the Mahanadi of Orissa.

In the same places they also witnessed the water conservation structures created by the villagers themselves. Some examples include Purnapani and Kundabahali of Simplipal Bagh Pariyojana area of Orissa, Ansudi of Karnataka, and many villages of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan.

Looking at various successful projects made for water conservation by the villagers, it is possible to believe that those who want to trade in water by controlling the water resources will never be successful in their attempts. Multinational companies such as Vivendi, Suez Leonnaisse, Bechtel, Coke and Pepsi are involved in trade of water.



The dams, considered as temples of India's progress and development, were seen in large numbers across the country. The numbers relating to power generation, irrigation and drought relief, mentioned in their project reports were very exciting. But these figures did not reflect any experience or awareness of reality. Just a little below the Hirakud Dam, was the drought affected village of Chandimar. At the same time there was a proposal to help the flood affected area of Katak Delta. One can see the dreadful sights of droughts, floods and famine across the states of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Jharkhand and Bihar. One could not see even one project being developed under the Watershed Program of the government even though the offices of the project were available every where.

In the Tehri Dam area of Uttaranchal, some women are forced to walk miles to fetch a pail of water. On the other hand, in the New Tihiri Town, there are people who lament there past and waste water by the liters.





The relationship of rivers to our civilization is age old. However, there are forces which are working towards breaking this beautiful relationship. The proposal to connect the rivers of India will lead to breaking this relationship. What will then be the sanctity of the larati performed at the banks of river Ganga in Haridwar? In order to regain plentiful water in the country we will all have to come together and work for this cause.

The Jal Yatra reached Sevagram, Vardha on March 31.

Maharashtra is considered to be a developed state. However the farmers in this state have dried up all the water with sugarcane farming. This state is host to 40% of the large dams of India. On the one hand these dams, further helped economic development and on the other increased poverty. Even today, you can see greenery in some parts of Maharashtra and water shortage in the other parts.

While the farmers of **Maharashtra** cribbed about water shortage, they were worried about sugarcane and grapes farming, which is not a highly appreciated view. Today, some farmers are considering self sustaining farming. However, the government encourages only commercial farming because it is the rich traders who are taking advantage of the poor farmers' labor. It is these rich traders who finance those in power. And this is the reason why the powers that be are interested in encouraging commercial farming. There are many farmers who are struggling to break free from this cycle by becoming self sufficient.

In Sholapur, the Yatra witnessed many projects of self sustaining farming. This type of farming also maintains a give and take balance with the earth. This also frees the farmers of high costs of irrigation and farming and maintains the fertility of land. It is this farming which will enable our society to have plentiful water. Vidharbha, Marathvada, and rest of Maharashtra are suffering from severe water shortage. Equally, the villagers have got together and converted Hirve Bazar into a green village. The person who started this movement in the village, Popal Pawar, is greatly revered by the villagers.

From Maharashtra the Yatra reached Goa, where the Yatra stayed for two days and visited the ponds in Panaji and other towns of Goa. From the experience of Yatris it has been established that our country, from Delhi to Goa, has just the same ponds. Even in a developed state like Goa, many villages still use ponds for irrigation and household activities. The engineering of the ponds in Goa and Rajasthan is absolutely the same. It was surprising to see two famine struck villages in Goa, where the wells had gone completely dry due to the commercialization of water. The wells here had very sweet water, which was pulled out by tankers for purposes of watering golf courses and bottling. Even though the citizens filed a case against the company which undertook such activities







and won the case, the water market seems to continue to grow. The panchayat has also joined hands with the citizens to fight the company that has created famine conditions in their village. Further, some of the water resources have been destroyed due to garbage dumping and the army cantonment. The villagers are taking up the cudgels against such pollution of their resources.

From Goa, the Yatra reached Karnataka, where the Yatra began with the digging of the pond in Madhod Village of Dharwad. All political parties as well as many saints also participated in this leg of the Yatra. The followers of the Jagat Guru Shri Swami of Shringeri Pethi pledged on his birthday, to commence work on 600 ponds. The work is underway on some of these ponds and others have been completed. The chief of this state informed the Yatris that during the Yatra many new villages have joined the revolution and pledged to start work on reviving their ponds. Many villagers have got together and built beautiful ponds, with voluntary labor. The yatris were highly encouraged by the work done in Karnataka.

During the Karnataka leg, the Yatris held atleast 4 meetings in a day and each of them was attended by 500 - 25000 people. The pledge not to buy bottled water and to stop privatization of rivers under the boot agreement was strongly reiterated, in all these meetings. People also seemed eager to start work on cleaning the dirty ponds and starting construction of new ponds. Many large meetings were held during the Karnataka Yatra where the water warriors showed great eagerness to start work on water related issues.



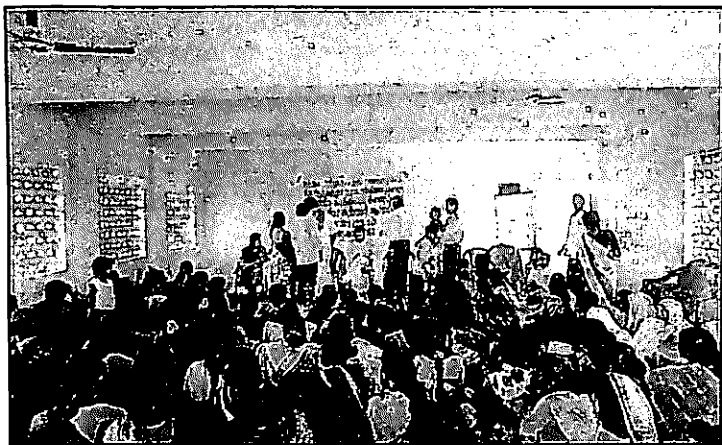
**T**he Yatra then reached Kuppam, which is the constituency of Chandrababu Naidu, the then Chief Minister of Andhra. Here the officers showed the Yatris the commercial and high tech farming being undertaken in Andhra. The yatris also visited the famine struck areas of Andhra. The workers of the Gandhi Peace Foundation arranged a large number of meetings in Trissur. The Yatris also visited Anantpur District, where many people had been driven to commit suicide by the famine, just a couple of days earlier. In this village which is considered high tech at least 345 persons had committed suicide in the preceding 3-4 months. The Yatris also witnessed the machine driven government programs for famine relief. This was the first instance of "Work for food" program of the government. Those enrolling for this program were hardly getting anything for their labor. The scene was however different in Varangal, where an honest district magistrate





and program manager had made sure that the machines being used did not belong to politicians. Hyderabad may be high-tech but they have not been able to save Moosi river, the death of which is proving to be a big burden. This river can at best be called a drain now. This leg of the Yatra concluded in Khambham, which is a famine infested area, but Coca Cola Company has installed a machine to pull out water from the earth and dried up the water level completely. It is quite amazing to learn that Coca Cola Company is able to survive in this area in spite of it being a famine infested naxalite area.

**T**he Yatra reached the Thakkar Bapa School in Tamil Nadu traveling through Nellore. The Sarvodaya workers and well known thinkers welcomed the Yatra here. All the arrangements had been made by N. Krishnaswamy under the guidance of Mr. Annamalai. The first day, the yatri,



under the leadership of Ilingo, met some panchayat leaders in Kuthabakkam. The collector of Trivallur met the Yatra. The Women's Organisation brought out their water related issues and problems. The rain water river of this area has completely dried. In Vindivanam District, a large rally of women had been organized. The Yatra then reached Manaparai via Tanjore, where there were three big meetings with women's groups and also saw some work done by the scientists of the Tamil Nadu Water Supply Board. All these were projects

undertaken by an old organization influenced by the Gandhian way of thinking.

The administrators of the Gandhi Gram organized meetings with the students and workers of their university and talked about the water related work done by them. The Dhaan Foundation and the Gandhi Gramudyog jointly arranged some programs in Madurai, where the Yatri stressed on the need for using traditional methods of water conservation especially in states such as Tamil Nadu. The of also felt that if Gandhiji were alive today, he would launched a Satyagrah to maintain the water rights of the citizens and would have given the message of constructing ponds in a creative manner. Every one agreed to the proposal of having at least one pond in every village and one pond in every colony. There was meeting of heads and workers of all religions in Villaitikullam. The Tamil Nadu Yatra was different as there was something new in every town and village visited. Most meetings were organized by those influenced by the Gandhian philosophy.





The Rashtriya Jal Sammelan held in Kanchipuram was attended by Sh. Shankracharya, Mr. T.N.Seshan and many government engineers and revolutionaries. They were all very successful in creating pressure on the Tamil Nadu government. A request was made to the Chief Minister to refill the water sources, who agreed to get this work started immediately by putting in place a law.

In Uttar Pradesh, the area called, Meerut, Hastinapur or Indraprastha would have been wealthy due to the presence of the Ganga Yamuna doaba. But today, the Hindon, Kaali and Ganga Yamuna are all rivers of poisonous water. The character of the river has undergone a complete change while flowing from the west to the east. By the time it reaches Kanpur, the Ganga is reduced to a dirty drain. It then assumes a large character when it reached Allahabad, where crores of religious Indians take a dip in the river. Even though thousands of crores of rupees have been spent on cleaning the Ganga its dirtiness continues to increase. The Ganges has transformed into a train which transports garbage. But the citizens of this area are still not worried about the purity of their rivers and the greenery of the mountains. If the society does not save its rivers it will break and fragment into nothing. The society of Uttar Pradesh desperately needs to connect with its rivers.



In Bihar, the Yatris met Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav as well as the Chief Minister. When the question of famine and floods was discussed with them they were absolutely quiet. The Yatra proposed to them the need to change the laws relating to the amount of compensation and rehabilitation for those affected by floods. These are at present pegged at Rs. 200 per person and Rs. 200 per animal. They were further congratulated on their opposition to the proposal of joining rivers.

The yatris also requested them to start the fight against privatization of rivers in Bihar. The meetings in Bihar also stressed on the use of traditional methods to save themselves from floods and famine. These suggestions were highly welcomed by those present.

Bihar is experiencing a huge exodus of people. This can only be stopped by making water available to people. The floods come into Bihar from Nepal side. The only way to get saved from this and to flourish is to follow the flood and famine crop cycles.





The highly developed state of Kerala which has 44 rivers is today witnessing famine and plastic. Where there was farming of rice we see huge cement plants. The shops are full of imported plastic goods. Deforestation of mountains and cutting of rivers is on the increase. One can see the dreadful problems of water pollution.

In Jammu Kashmir on one hand there are beautiful valleys on the other hand there are naked mountains. The youngsters of this state are eager to leave their guns and get involved with the water movement. Many organizations of this state also seem to be inclined to undertake this work. Many officers of the Army, wish to convert the state back into a green, prosperous and happy state. The Yatra appealed to such people to start the water and forest conservation work.



Punjab is considered a treasury of water but alas this treasury is slowly getting empty. There is a lot of wastage and pollution of water in this state. That is why a large part of the water reservoir of this state has emptied out and many areas have been declared dark zones. There are many water conservation projects of the government which are underway in Punjab but the people are not in any way involved with these projects. Even the Baoli in the Golden Temple has dried up and is polluted. The yatris suggested

the leaders of this state to consider the revival of this baoli.

The Yatris had to go without a bath due to water shortage in the Solan district of Himachal. However, it was nice to see that the workers in Solan have already commenced water conservation activities. While Himachal seems to be the State of water in some areas, it is a state of famine in others. The capital town is suffering from a water crisis. There is a movement against privatization of rivers but the governments consider commercialization of water a huge and profitable activity.

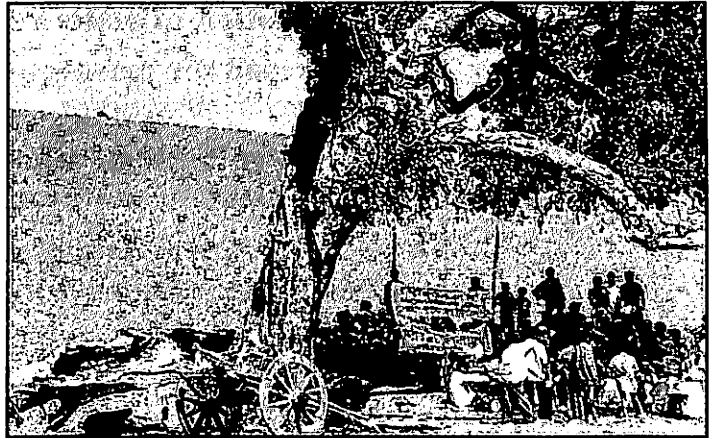
The North-East State of Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal and Uttar Pradesh can become states that meet 40% of their water requirements. They have snow water as well as the pure rain water, but they do not have the correct arrangements. This is the reason their water problems are on the rise.





The Brahmaputra and many other water filled rivers provide sufficient water to the North Eastern States even today. Even though these states have enough water they are not in favour of the river joining project. Floods give these states a lot of fish, wood, fertile soil and water, crops and life itself. Rivers make land here. Now China is trying to get the Brahmaputra to flow through its territory. Then most of the water will stay in the mountains and the Brahmaputra may also go dry. The political parties in these states are focusing on protesting against the river joining project. They were also very helpful during the Yatra.

It is the politicians who project that the North Eastern states want to separate from India. What the government projects on this topic is not correct. The society in these states is not in favor of creating a separate nation. The society is absolutely ignorant of how to conserve water and how to keep it pure. Today they have sufficient water. The yatriks were able to see the 400 years old Jaisagar, Shivsagar and Gaurisagar tanks. On seeing these tanks it became clear that where there is water, it is the society that looks after these water reservoirs and takes care of them. That is why the largest water reservoir of Asia is located in the Shivsagar district of heavy rainfall state of Assam. The people of this district have named the district based on the name of the tank. This state experiences heavy rainfall and has large tanks everywhere. These tanks are proof of the fact that earlier the entire country had similar methods of conserving water. Traditional methods



of water conservation in these states were strongly decentralized, but today this does not exist. This leg of the Yatra had started from the north east on the World Water Day on March 22, 2004 and ended on March 30 in Dibrugarh.

The last phase of the Rashtriya Jal Yatra ended on the May 18-19, 2004 in Chitrakut, Banda in Uttar Pradesh. The River linking project was to be launched with the linking of the Cane Betwa link here. The Rashtriya Jal Biradari started its protest against the project with a Satyagrah on the same day and ended the Yatra here.







## Objectives of the campaign

**T**he Yatra was aimed at improving the water situation by creating awareness amongst the people and also educating them about their water rights and encouraged people to make decisions about water management at a decentralized level. The Yatra increased awareness among people and encouraged them to undertake water conservation projects. Today, rainwater harvesting has become a household term. The Yatra prepared society to accept its responsibility towards water and undertake projects to conserve water.

To achieve these objectives, state-level water commissions have been set up with the following objectives:

- **Restoration of water resources**
- **To spread the message of conservation not only of water but also other natural resources**
- **To revive the local traditional practices of water conservation throughout India**
- **To generate awareness regarding the National Water Policy, declared on April 1, 2002 and its impact on our lives**
- **To garner nationwide support against the privatization of rivers and also against commoditization of water**
- **To generate awareness about the proposal of inter connecting of rivers, its impact, need and feasibility**
- **To promote the role of women in water conservation**
- **To promote national integration**
- **To arm poor people, farmers and the common man against the problems related to water as drought and famine**
- **To establish society's right to water**

The State Jal Biradaris were instrumental in the Jal Yatra's success. They coordinated meetings and marches. The book can be divided into a state-wise report of the Jal Yatra.





## Delhi

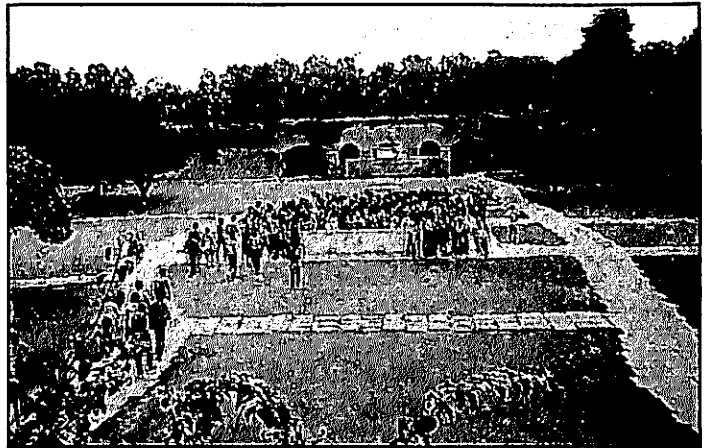
**M**ake the city of Delhi a city of plentiful water. Start the water conservation movement from the roof top of every house. Take the roof top water in to the homes of people which will take care of the water requirements of the families in these homes and also the water needs of mother earth. It is essential to rehabilitate the land. Earlier our society was based on nature and would return to the earth as much as it took from it. Today we are working against nature. That is why river Yamuna has turned into a dirty drain. The earth's water treasury is empty. The creation of the water scarcity on the banks of river Yamuna has happened due to the changes in the way we live and function. The Yamuna has gone from bad to worse over the last 40 years. In spite of Rs.11,000 crores having been spent on projects to clean the Yamuna it has only become dirtier than before.

Now the Yamuna will also carry the dirt from the Ganges. Ganga Water was considered amrit, but by using this water in our toilets and bathrooms, we are making sure that this water becomes as impure as possible.

We are trying to bring water from the Ganges in to Delhi. Delhi has no rights on the water of river Ganges. The residents of Delhi are taking away the rights of others. If Delhi were to take care of its own water resources it can survive without a problem. Since Delhi is the center of power it can snatch the rights of any one and every one. But now even Delhi will get left behind in this game since it is the multi-national companies that are trying to take possession of our natural resources.

Delhi is amongst the first cities of the country to start facing a water crisis. They decided that all the water resources of the country belonged to Delhi. The question in Delhi is not that of solving the water crisis but that of understanding the use of water. In Delhi, there are big bungalows which still receive water at 35 paise per liter and they use thousands of liters of water in a day. The government spends Rs.17.50 per liter.

It is Delhi that stands to gain the most from the commercialization of water. In Delhi water is as expensive as milk.





On June 21, 2002, the Delhi Government inaugurated the Water Treatment Plant at Sonia Vihar. This plant has been contracted to Suez Degremont, the largest water treatment company in the world. This company is not going to bear the cost of Rs. 200 crores to run the project. Moreover, the water from Bhagirathi river has been given free of cost to the company. The Yatra questioned this and sought to know whether the company would be able to provide clean drinking water to Delhi. Based on the experiences of other countries with this company it seems a tall order. The Yatra protested against this and many other such moves of privatization undertaken by the Government.

The Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra was kicked off on December 23, 2002 from Rajghat, New Delhi, where Gandhiji's ashes are buried. The ceremony included tributes to Gandhiji followed by a public meeting focused at discussing the water related issues of the country. This was a national-level meeting and people from across the country came for it.

- **Removal of encroachments on natural water bodies**
- **Renewal of these bodies**
- **Trucks carrying earth from neighboring states to be stopped**
- **Johad construction to be re-started**
- **Condemn the National Water Policy of the government**
- **Protest against the Suez Degremont management of Sonia Vihar water treatment plant**

The residents of Delhi, present at the meeting, demanded removal of encroachments on natural water sources such as ponds and talabs. They wanted these to be rehabilitated as soon as possible. This demand was expected to generate employment as well as improve the water situation for the residents of Delhi.

This collective also demanded from the government of Delhi that trucks carrying earth from neighboring states be banned since the construction mafia was using this earth to fill the traditional water resources of Delhi.

The Jal Yatris also wanted the culture of Johad construction to be restarted on the banks and catchments of the Yamuna. This would help in the revival of Yamuna, reducing the need for sourcing water from the Ganges and other distant sources.

A resolution condemning the National Water Policy, privatization of water and inter linking of rivers, was passed and a memorandum in this regard was presented to the Government of Delhi.





It is hoped that the residents of Delhi will start treating the Yamuna and the Ganga as their mother and that the citizens of Delhi will learn to respect water and learn to live within their means. If Delhites start living by their own water resources it will help to solve the water crisis in many parts of the country. And, most importantly, we will be able to maintain the purity of the Ganga and the Yamuna.





## Haryana & Rajasthan

**F**rom Delhi, the Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra left for Haryana, reaching Sohna via Gurgaon. Here, Rajendra Singh requested people to conserve maximum rainwater through Johads, anicuts, ponds and checkdams. He also requested the media to actively engage in an awareness campaign for management of natural resources, in order to reduce instances of famines and droughts in the years to come.

Haryana, by its very name means greenery. But unfortunately most of Haryana is dry and lifeless. South West Haryana is worse than Rajasthan. The only way to make things better is by harvesting rain water.



We will have to get down to saving water and reviving old water reservoirs. That is the only way of making Haryana into a state with plentiful water. The Sutlej- Yamuna discussion has become the answer to the argument of River Linking project. These discussions are not going to make water available to everyone. If we conserve the water provided to us by nature, and accept water as a pilgrimage in our daily life only then can we solve our water crisis.

To ensure that everyone gets adequate water and food it is essential to start conserving and harvesting water. Stop dreaming about linking rivers and start working on bringing people together on the issue of water conservation. The water crisis will get solved on its own. Wind up the Haryana-Punjab water issue. Share water with everyone. That is how the state can really be called Haryana.

The Yatra went through a large part of Haryana – Sonapat, Panipat, Karnal, Kurukshetra, Rewari, Mahendragarh and Bhiwani. Most of the ponds in these towns were full of plastic wastes. Haryana is the state of water crisis. In Sohna, Nuh, Ferozpur, Jhirka the Yatra found salt water, and a dry and arid land all over. The water crisis in Haryana has got compounded due to commercial farming and mining activities.

In Nuh, the Yatri discussed the 'Save Water, Save Aravali' project with the workers. The meeting was attended by many NGOs and such other establishments working on water conservation projects.



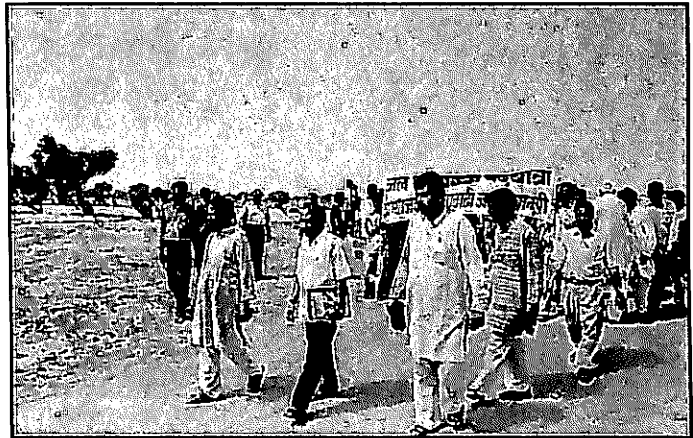




The Yatra also performed a community prayer and visited a large number of villages of Hayana before returning to the Natural Care office in Nuh. Wherever the Yatra went they had meetings with women's groups and the Gram Sabha. They discussed "Save Water and Save Aravali" in these meetings. While people of these villages were upset about the Supreme Court's orders restraining mining activities since they depended on these activities for their livelihoods, when they were apprised of the dangers of mining in the long term they agreed that this was the right thing to do. All the villages pledged to conserve and save water.

A very big meeting was held at Badkali Chowk. In village Khaledi a big rally was organized. They shouted slogans which included couplets such as "Kehti Geeta aur Kuran, ped lagao haj saman." (i.e. The holy scriptures of both the Hindus and the Muslims teach people to plant trees as if it were a pilgrimage).

In the Kali Badi Village some of the members threw light on the Islamic teachings on water conservation, for eg. How much water can be used in vazu (i.e. the act of washing up before offering the namaz). The people of this village pledged to save water.



In village Papda the residents assured the yatri that all the residents whether men or women whether big or small will use water and not misuse it and they will make every possible effort to save water.

The Yatra toured many other villages before it reached Shamsarbad, where they saw the Sewta Dam constructed by Deshaj Organisation. The head of the organization informed every one on the usefulness of this dam. The yatri found a tortoise on the way to Ferozpur Firka and went all the way to a water tank to leave it in that and save its life.

The Yatri Dal then proceeded to Rajasthan where it covered Tijara, Ramgarh, Alwar and Sariska.

In Tijara the journalists were concerned about the ill effects of mining. Some farmers were overheard discussing the low water consuming chemicals based farming. From Tijara to Charkhi Dadri the scenery was the same – there was no water anywhere. There are streams without any water in them. The teachers and students of the university here only talked about the water crisis but did not seem to be willing to make any serious administrative efforts to save water.





In this state, even the saints do not seem to want to do anything about the water crisis. Traditionally temples were constructed on the banks of a lake or a pond. Charkhi Dadri was born and has grown around a 500 year old pond, which is surrounded with temples. This pond is even today capable of watering at least half the town, but today it is the residence of plastic and other waste. Everything around this pond is quite because the pond has gone dry. In the olden days the traders use to stop by here to water their camels.

Traders and camels used to survive on the water from this pond. Slowly the traders constructed wells for consumption of water. They would then use the water from the wells and the camels would drink from the pond. They have put to waste all the wells and the pond and have now started drinking water from taps, borewells and tubewells. Even the taps have now started going dry.



In the future there will be pressure on the residents of Charakhi Badli to revive the pond for them to survive. Every reaction is linked to the action that is taken. As is well known, every action has an equal and opposite reaction. When the people of this village clean the pond and fill it with water, the pond will recharge the earth which will help the farmers and in turn help to feed the people of the village.

The Sutlej Yamuna issue has now become old in Haryana as there is very little hope for Haryana to get the water from these rivers. But if the residents of Haryana decide to they can make use of rain water to fulfil their needs of water as well as recharge the earth.

From Charkhi Dadri, the Yatra proceeded to Bhiwani where they stopped by at village Nand. Here they saw the beautiful pond at Sanyas Ashram. The pond is hundreds of years old but it is still full of water. It not only fulfils the water needs of Onkargiri Swami but also those of the entire village. Even in the month of May this pond is filled with water.

The answer to the misuse of water in Haryana is such ponds. It is the ponds and streams which can help life survive in Haryana. Haryana has many government water resources based on the Jhalar model, but even these are dry. These water houses are waiting to receive water from the streams. Whenever there is a little bit of water in the streams there is a fight between the farmers to grab some part of the water. Some farmers need water for the vegetables and crop in their fields and others for sugar cane. There is a battle





here for a share of the little bit of water available and many people have died in this battle for water.

Nandgaon is very much like Jaisalmer. The Yatris held good meetings with both men and women groups of this village. In this village there was enough evidence of the success of traditional water harvesting techniques and the failure of government projects for provision of water.

Lacs of rupees have been spent in trying to fill the pond in this village by connecting it to the streams with pipes. The point which has to feed the water into the pipe is low and the pipeline has been laid at a higher point. The water has therefore never reached the pond. The pond however, in any case is still full of water. There was no need to undertake such a project and waste lacs of rupees to pollute the water in the pond.

There is a temple at the banks of the pond at Nandgaon. A temple at the banks of a pond ensures the purity of water in the pond. It also helps in the maintenance and upkeep of the pond. Those living in the temple consider the pond as much of a place of worship as the temple itself. Ever since our places of pilgrimage have started become dirty so also have our ponds started becoming dirty. People have stopped respecting either as a place of worship. Garbage is always without water. Nandgaon has also now started treating



its water body as a dumping ground and have started dumping garbage in around the pond. During the rainy season this garbage flows in to the pond along with the rainwater. After the Yatra it is hoped that may be the villagers will awaken to the ill effects of what they are doing and may start cleaning up this area.

In Bhiwani, a large meeting was held in Halvasia School where the discussion revolved around the importance of saving water and using it sparingly in order to secure our own future. The children agreed but there were very few who stepped in to start work immediately. All of them however, pledged not buy drinking water. In Dhana Ladanpur village the villagers pledged to start working on water conservation projects immediately. In Dhamana village the meeting was held at the banks of a pond which was attended in large numbers by the villagers, government officials and farmers. This program was organized for the Jal Yatra by the Government of India. In this village the pond has water from the streams but the people of the village have become very lazy and therefore they do not want to do anything





themselves. The society has become shameless. If they were to become a little less shameless, the water is likely to increase. A shameless society can never have plentiful water. Work and water have a deep rooted relationship. Earlier Haryana had water even though they had no streams. Today they have streams but they do not have water! Why?

The Yatra then reached Narnaul, where the Jal Biradari had commenced work on two baolis the preceding year. The work was over and the two baolis were full of water. The fact that inspite of a drought and famine, these baolis had water in them is proof enough that if we conserve every drop of water there is, the scarcity of water can vanish from the face of this earth. The Yatris contributed to the reconstruction of the "Nagpurion Ki Baoli" by providing shramdaan. Many thirsty farmers of Narnaul and Nangal Chaudhary came and contributed to the

rehabilitation work by providing shramdaan. In Nangal Chaudhary there had been no crops for three years due to no rainfall at all. The farmers had water in their eyes and nothing in their stomachs. 39 wells in and around Nangal Chaudhary have gone dry. There is complete destruction in these villages. Earlier, in Rajasthan and Gujarat, when there was no fodder left for the cows at home, the owners would apply a mark on their animals and leave them free to go feed themselves. Today there are no cows left in Haryana. In fact, the farmers are forced to do to themselves



the same thing that they did to their cows – apply a tika and leave their homes in search of food. This is really heartrending.

Haryana is faced with a huge water crisis. The construction of the streams is such the water never reaches the other end. There is a problem of excess in some areas and a shortage in the others. It is the same with the people – in some places the farmers are misusing water, which is why in spite of having streams half of Haryana is suffering from a water crisis. The modern water arrangements encourage this kind of behavior. Traditional water management was decentralized; therefore water was available as per need. We will have to undertake water conservation activities every where. This will lead to decentralization of water management. Those who will use water must also capture the rainwater and conserve it. Then every one will get water. If every one wants water, they will all have to work towards conserving water. This is what will help to make Haryana a state of plentiful water.





In Karnal, Sonapat, Panipat, Kurukshetra and Ambala, there had been very good rainfall. People were happy. But the sad part was that all the water was going waste and had not been conserved by those focusing on chemicals based farming of sugar cane. The residential and industrial pollution of Panipat is increasingly dirtying the water resources here. In Haryana there is an environment problem due to the pollution of water, the polluted water of this state is leading to many health problems not just in Haryana but also in other states of India.

The proof of being a plentiful water state is in availability of potable, clean, soft water everywhere. Wherever there is water above the earth it must be potable as well as worth bathing with. There is no evidence of any such water resources in Haryana. The forward looking developed citizens believe that pond water is not potable. The benchmarks for developed and forward looking are very different today than what they used to be. Till a hundred years ago the larger the pond the larger was the village. Fathers looked for villages with large pure ponds of drinking water before marrying their daughters.

Today it is not the ponds but the presence of money and property which has become the focus in marrying the children. This main problem leading to creation of water and environment issues was well evident in Haryana.



Haryana is faced with a huge water and environment challenge. To face these problems and to deal with them Haryana will have to pay dearly. There is still time! Start conserving every drop of water and use it sparingly. Stop farming from turning into an industry. Work towards making our farming a nature loving one which aims at fulfilling the needs of human beings.

The Yatra began its tour of South West India from Narnaul in Haryana. This is the area where the Vidhan Sabha elections were boycotted by the residents of 25 villages to project their unhappiness with the water problems of their area.

There is a pressing need to educate the residents of Haryana on water related issues. Only when the farmers are aware about these issues will they change their crop cycles, use water sparingly, think of conserving water and help to make Haryana a state with plentiful water.







**T**his leg of the Jal Yatra culminated at the Lawa Ka Bas on December 31, 2002, with a Jal Sannelan, which was attended by a large number of women. The focus of the Sannelan was on conservation and utilization of rainwater. Other prominent people attended this Sannelan included environmental activist Vandana Shiva, Manohar Singh Rathore and Steven Phillip who also addressed the gathering. This meeting was followed by a large procession to various villages, during which there were meetings with the residents of the villages. The Sannelan finally reached Bhikampur, where the Rashtriya Mahila Dal Sannelan was held.

This summit was attended by over 1,700 women from 19 states and the discussion centered on the significance of water conservation in women's empowerment. Rajendra Singh believes and always stresses that women can play a major role in conservation of water as they manage the household activities and can thus control this aspect.

On January 23, 2003, the Yatra Dal left Bhikampur and proceeded to Hamirpur, Jamwa Ramgarh, Ramgarh and Nimi, organizing Jal Sabhas along the way. The Yatra addressed a public gathering in Amer on January 26, proceeding to the city that receives the least rainfall in world, Jaisalmer, on January 27.

We mention Nimi because it is a tiny village 30 km from Jaipur which used to be drought-prone like all other villages of Rajasthan. It is a success story; in 2003, Nimi's residents grew and sold vegetables worth Rs.3.5 crores. Every day they send 4-5 trucks to the Azadpur Mandi in Delhi and have 700 people from Jaipur working there.

In Marwad, Rajendra Singh motivated the people by reminding them that the business class of Jaisalmer is traditionally known for doing public welfare work especially in the area of water conservation. That is the reason they are known as the Mahajans i.e. the Great People. Rajendra Singh said, "Water is Prasad (food for the gods) for us. Its privatization is unethical. If a person does not receive from some one (read nature) what he takes from him/her that person is a thief."

Rajasthan today serves as a prime example of what people power can do. Today, the life of 1,058 villages over 6,500 sq km area has changed because the water conservation projects undertaken by the people. About 7,600 ponds have been reconstructed of which Tarun Bharat Sangh has contributed to 3,200 and the people themselves have done the rest.

Earlier the women in Alwar had to work for hours together to fetch water today it takes them 10 minutes. In places such as Ramdeda, saving water is equivalent to saving nature, which is completely dependent on water.





## Gujarat

**M**oving on from Rajasthan in the North, the Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra reached Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad, on January 29, 2003. The Yatra commenced from the Sabarmati Ashram on January 30, the death anniversary of Gandhiji.

The Gujarat leg of the Yatra started with addresses from Rajendra Singh. Mr. H.K.Patil, the then Water Resources Minister of Karnataka and various other prominent people participated in the Yatra, addressed meetings and shared their concerns about the scarcity of water.

Gujarat, particularly North Gujarat, faces an acute water shortage, with drought-like conditions. The Jal Yatra covered 8 districts between January 30 and February 6, 2003.

The villagers as well as the urban population raised water related issues not only of local but national importance. Meetings started with people in Ahmedabad, including people from all walks of life as well as organizations involved in the conservation of water. Yatris from other states visiting Gujarat shared their experiences on water shortage and management.

Rajendra Singh shared his experiences in water conservation and management through out the Yatra. The Yatra also exposed the fallacies of the National Water Policy to the people. Rajendra Singh hopes that every Indian will treat the water problem as a national issue and not just a local issue and therefore will act accordingly. Judicious use water in daily life is important. Water is a common property and every individual has a right to use it and that is exactly why every individual has the responsibility to conserve, save and protect this property.

- **While the ground water in some areas was reducing by the day, the farmers were not changing their agricultural practices and continued to grow crops requiring more water than available. The water level in some places was so low that the water in the wells was available 700 feet below ground level**
- **Natural resources such as forests, water and air have been grossly misused by people. This coupled with increased pollution has further worsened the situation**
- **Water in some areas has a high fluoride content which is detrimental to the health of people**
- **Excessive use of chemicals by farmers is a concern extensively discussed at the sammelans held in Gujarat**





During the Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra, the Yatris saw a number of water conservation initiatives taken up by villagers – e.g. work to recharge old wells and ponds in the village. The Yatris carried these experiences to other villages. The work of the villagers along with help from Tarun Bharat Sangh played a big role in motivating the villagers to start recharging ground water in their villages.

Community work was given importance during the Yatra and the villagers were made aware of their collective power and potential. It was reiterated that Alwar was a success story due to the involvement of the community. According to Rajendra Singh initially there are some problems and resistance in such projects but ultimately most people start contributing. It is the work done by the community which always lasts longer since they feel more responsible towards it and also have the authority to execute the related tasks.



The Yatris also saw some drought relief work being done in various villages under the government schemes. Since the community was not involved in the execution of such work, it would finally lead to wastage of funds. These projects provide temporary relief to the local community but also lead to government dependence. People then expect to receive help from the government whenever they are faced by a drought or famine.

The Jal Yatra also visited a number of educational institutions in Gujarat in order to involve students in the cause. If students can be made aware of the gravity of the problem and the possible solutions to the problem, the future can improve a great deal. Sensitizing the students to the issue can help our country have a better tomorrow.

An important achievement of this Yatra was the involvement of women. The role of women in water conservation was given due importance as they are the ones who control the use of household water. They shared their concerns and pledged support to solve this problem. The women of Gujarat felt that they must immediately start taking steps for water conservation because water is the basis of all life. If there is a water shortage they can not cook properly, their children can not study properly and their problems increase manifold.

People across Gujarat welcomed the Yatra and discussed the issue with the Yatris to find feasible solutions to the problem.



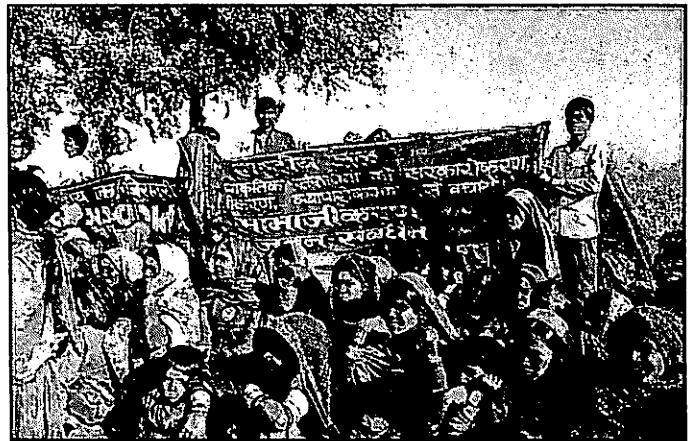


Some of those involved in animal husbandry raised the issue of water being more expensive than milk. They said that either the government should take some action on this issue or they will pressurize the government to make the price of milk ten times that of water. If water can sell at Rs.10 a liter then milk must sell at Rs.100 a liter. One cow drinks about 50 liters of water in a day and then produces five liters of milk. Moreover it takes water to maintain the cow and grow fodder for them.

It isn't that the Yatra went off smoothly everywhere. At Mehsana, the Yatra was attacked by some people involved with the Sardar Sarovar Project, since the Yatra is also demonstrating against the big Dam Projects of the Government.

During its 8 day tour of Gujarat the Yatra managed to get the people to accept that water is a scarce resource and that community based programs are the surest way to solve this problem. Many people accepted that they are responsible for the water shortage being faced today and therefore it is they that must help to get every one out of the mess.

Northern Gujarat in particular is faced with an acute water shortage. Therefore, initiatives such as the Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra are required to awaken the people to the problem and its solutions, which lie with in the community.



In Kherbrahma the farmers pledged to adopt less water-consuming crop and to start the work of reviving wells and ponds. Here not even 1/10th of the land is under farming. The farmers have realized that they had been wasting a lot of water and therefore they are faced with a water crisis.

In Gujarat most of the organizations are focused on using modern techniques for water conservation. They did not seem to be aware or inclined to revive traditional methods of water conservation.

There were instances of complete misuse of government funds. Government officials were bringing mud from the top of a mountain to create the banks of a pond. Those who protested against this were asked to leave the work and go.





## Madhya Pradesh

**O**n February 7, 2003, the Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra reached Madhya Pradesh. It began from the village of Kalatur, where the people were more aware of the issues than in other parts of the country. The local community had built a big pond which serves as the water resource for the entire village. It is at the banks of this pond that the Jal Yatris met the village community and began the Yatra with the traditional ceremony of breaking a coconut and performing a puja. This pond is the source of water supply for the entire village as well as for the animals.



In the meetings conducted in Madhya Pradesh, people from tribal areas shared their experiences in water conservation. They shared the success stories through use of the traditional methods especially in the light of drought conditions prevailing in these areas. People of the state were willing to promote a coalition between the community and the government.

In the tribal areas of Paati, Sendhwa and Roopkhera, local communities have already taken initiatives in this direction. The people here are not overtly

dependent on either the government or any other organization. In fact they are willing to share their experiences and learning with the government to enable better execution of large water projects at low costs or with limited budgets. The Bheel tribal youth were specially excited and willing to contribute to the water conservation work. The people of this area pledged to give the mountains a headgear of green trees and mother earth a green saree of agriculture and forest.

The Jal Yatra visited village Torani in Khandwa district, where the government had worked for water conservation. There is a vast difference between work done by the government and that done by the community. The government projects have also to be maintained by the government and therefore all the community people can do is to run around after government officials to get the water resource fixed in case of wear and tear. If the project is a community owned one then they have the right to manage it themselves as and when required.







The Bundelkhand area is dry and completely deserted. More than 1/3rd of the land is without water. Water resources are more than 2/3rd depleted and less than half the land has any kind of farming. The villages of this area are bereft of young men and you can see only old people and children in villages.

In Ranjgaon people have constructed small bandhs to retain water. They have also realised that it is the chemicals that they had been using for farming which have led to the water shortage. They have now started learning how to make compost khad and other inputs for organic farming. In other areas local people are focusing on reviving rivers such as Supar and Upali.

The local Member of Parliament Jyotiraditya Scindia showed special interest in water conservation work in Chambal area. His team had also visited Rajasthan to see the water conservation work done by TBS.

The noticeable thing about Madhya Pradesh was that the interest and inclination towards water conservation work was shown both by the rural and urban communities. The urban people were more inclined towards offering verbal contribution and the rural community offered physical labour as contribution for constructing water structures. A case in point is the construction of a talab in the Reeva area of Gobindgarh.

Many have prepared models to undertake water conservation.

However there are no organised groups undertaking the activity. Many farmers have constructed talabs or kunds on their farmland. However, the common talabs in the villages, due to neglect over a period of time, have got filled with mud. Over the last 20-25 years, farmers in Madhya Pradesh have moved to soyabean farming which has largely contributed to aggravating the water problems of the state.

The focus of the Yatra in Madhya Pradesh was community development and participation of villagers. People in MP were aware of and against the issue of privatization and commoditization of water. During the tour of Malwa, Nimad and Bundelkhand and Mahakaushal, it was seen that around one third of the area is waterless. People told the Jal Yatra that due to the water conservation work done in these areas, a large number of people have started farming and have given up illegal activities such as looting etc.

- **Soyabean cultivation responsible for water crisis**
- **Common ponds fallen into disuse over time**
- **Need for community development and participation of villagers**
- **High-level commitment to water conservation**





## National Water Awareness Campaign

Tarun Bharat Sangh and the people of Morena have done some good work together, which has been replicated in other villages. The highlight of the work in this area is that some young political leaders have joined hands with the community for the water conservation work. They visited Rajasthan and tried to learn from the work done in the villages there. In Satna and Reeva, the intellectual class and journalists also participated in the construction of water structures.

In Madhya Pradesh the media was very supportive of the Jal Yatra and helped in giving the desired impetus to the Yatra. In every village press conferences were held which facilitated in bringing to the fore the specific problems of the villages and the kind of work that can be done in the village. The community driven approach as advocated by Rajendra Singh, popularly known as "Waterman", is crucial to conservation of natural resources.



The underlying principal to the approach is that the local expertise and knowledge need to be tapped if sustainable development has to take place. The local people must feel completely involved in the project. The sense of ownership will make them less dependent and more self reliant. The *Jal Yatra* helped in motivating people to replicate the success of other similar projects done in various villages.



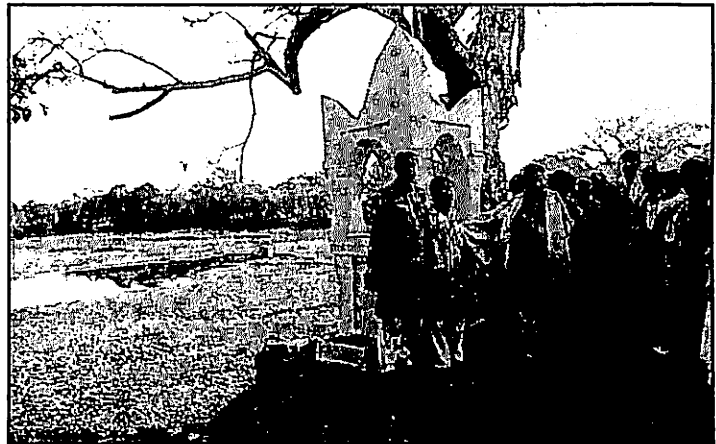


## Chhattisgarh

If the existing forest cover of Chhattisgarh is protected, it will be enough to avert a water crisis in this state. Even today, organizations in this state are working on water conservation projects. The Jal Biradari is keen to revive the traditional methods of water conservation in this State. This is what will help to maintain the ecological balance. This is the state where Satyabhama laid down her life fighting for the cause of water and fighting those who are trying to capture the natural water resources.

Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra arrived at the Banks of River Bagh, Churia in Chhattisgarh on February 23, 2003. The water in the river flowing through the jungle of Keshu was a beautiful sight. This is an animal conservation area and the greenery in this area is breathtaking.

The prominent participants of Yatra included Rajendra Singh, Arjun Baba, Shrimati Bhagirath, Syed M. Hasnat (Tarun Bharat Sangh), Gautam Bandopadhyay, D.C.Jain (President, Sheonath Bank Regional Development Society), Hemlata Sahu and T.K.Verma. Representatives of 8 organizations met here and discussed various issues related to water conservation.



Arjun Baba encouraged the people to take action. He said that words alone do not achieve anything and action is a must to get results. Gautam Bandhpadyay reminded the people that Chhattisgarh is a revolutionary land. Bal Gangadhar Tilak started his revolution from this land. It was heartening to see the people coming together to conserve water and fight the privatization of a natural resource.

It was discussed and agreed that society should be given responsibility for water conservation and allowed to develop a water policy. The government should not try to link rivers, rather it should link societies through the rivers. The objective should be to enrich societies with water by working together towards its conservation.

The Yatra then visited Dongargaon where the focus of the discussion was restoration of old ponds, tanks and lakes. The water level in this village is 200 ft below ground and the ponds have not been repaired for many years. The people here





protested against privatization and commoditization of water and demanded that either the Panchayat or another village level body should manage the village water resources. One of the observations en route to Dongargaon was that though Chhattisgarh was a water-plenty state earlier, misuse of water resources has led to a water scarcity. People have demanded that water resources in this state be made more plentiful.

Rajendra Singh encouraged the people not buy water which is selling at the price of milk and might tomorrow start selling at the price of ghee.

At Rajnandgaon, the next destination of the Yatra, there was a big gathering

of government officials, teachers, students and farmers. The core discussion here was the privatization of Sheonath River. Privatization of natural resources is leading to profits for some industrialists and rich people leaving the actual user to pay for a common natural resource. People here joined hands in the movement against privatization of water and pledged to boycott bottled water. The anicut built by Radius, which is harming the livelihood of the local people also, formed a part of the visit. The negative impact of this anicut is so high that even an eight-year-old in the village believes that it is because of the anicut that they have a water problem. Women sarpanches from various villages such as Peepar Kheri and Nemi

- **Plentiful water, therefore people not used to water conservation**
- **Privatisation of Sheonath river successfully opposed**
- **Water level has fallen because of cultivation of water-intensive crops**
- **People not organized at the community level**
- **Grasim Industries a major player in community upliftment**
- **Youth involved in the Yatra**

said that the only solution to the problem is to get together as one community and fight privatization of water. Vakshi encouraged the people to start a movement similar to the Satyagrah started by Gandhiji.

Rajendra Singh referred to the 1973 declaration, which had granted societal rights to the Panchayat on all natural resources and facilities. He said that with privatization of water this right has been taken away from the people. He said in Rajasthan local people's efforts had turned a dry river into a perennial one and in Chhattisgarh, the efforts of one person are leading to the death of a perennial river.

The All India Youth Federation, a students' union, organized the visit of the Yatra in Durg. The youth were mobilized to demonstrate against the privatization of





River Sheonath. An association of people living on the banks of this river was formed to fight against such exploitation. Yatris asked the youth to organise a Parliament to take up the issues of privatisation. The idea is to recharge the land with water not to turn an employed person into an unemployed person, and a laborer into a cripple.

On February 26 the Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra reached Raipur, where Grasim hosted the Jal Yatra. This industrial group is involved in many community development projects in the city. The Yatra held meetings with the employees of Grasim as well as with the people of the neighboring villages. It was painful to learn that even in Chhattisgarh, there are a large number of villages suffering from water shortage. The main crop here is rice, soybean and sugarcane. Perhaps this is the reason for the reduction of water level.

The meetings stressed the fact that we continue to extract natural resources from "Mother Earth" but never think of returning to it what we have taken from her. Such a relationship is one sided and can not be sustained in the long run. Therefore, unless we give back to the earth water in the form of recharge projects, we should not expect it to remain a sustainable resource.



On discussions with the residents of Chuchagpur it was discovered that the main reason for the water problem were the bore wells that some people have installed. In the past this area used to have heavy rainfall and good crop. Today they do not have enough water to drink.

Rajendra Singh said since this is a state with good rainfall the people of this state do not understand the importance of water and are misusing the water resources available to them.

Arjun Baba encouraged people to consider water as their personal resource and look after it in that manner. He said that unless we consider it as a personal property we would never feel the pain of its misuse.

At Bicarapur the two Yatri teams met to exchange notes. The Yatris were upbeat about the success of the tours undertaken till now and mentioned that they had been successful in creating awareness amongst the people, who are now ready to implement water conservation and harvesting projects.





The Yatra reached Raigarh on March 1st via Akaltara and Dobra. The Akaltara meeting was attended by a large number of women, an encouraging phenomenon. The success stories of Tarun Bharat Sangh were retold to the people of Akaltara to demonstrate that it is not impossible to achieve this task. The Mahanadi was one of the main attractions on the way to Akaltara. From Akaltara the Yatra reached Chapa where the Yattris were greeted with the traditional garlands made of vegetables. The women of this village grow vegetables, which require the least amount of water. For irrigation purposes the women use an instrument, Tera, which they make themselves.



In village Kirara of Chapa, the Yattris saw a talab, which made them feel that this village has always been happy and prosperous. The fruit bearing trees alongside the talab create an atmosphere of well-being and happiness. The small temple in the compound further enhances the feeling. There is a tradition of bathing in the talab and then performing a puja here. Therefore the talab and its surrounding are kept clean by the villagers. There are several similar examples of considering the talab as a religious spot and having a temple in the area. This was a way of maintaining the village water resource. It is disheartening to see that people have forgotten these traditions and have started misusing water resources and privatised them.

Another example of exploitation natural resources by industrialists is River Kello. This river, the lifeline of Raigarh and nearby villages, was nearly destroyed by Jindal Strips Limited. The local people had rallied against this, with the woman activist, Satya Bhama dying for the cause. The Yattris visited the tombstone of Satya Bhama as also the site at the banks of the river where she had died. This perennial river now has water only in patches. There is a crying need to

fight against such exploitation and destruction. At Sarang Garh the Yattris were distressed to find that the old talabs were not being maintained properly.

Before the Yatra reached its final destination in Chhattisgarh, it was clear that privatization of water can only benefit a handful and the people at large will remain under privileged. The solution to the water crisis is not large multi purpose big budget projects but micro projects which can be initiated and maintained by the local communities.

Chhattisgarh is a live example of how the privatization of rivers and commoditization of water has brought misery to the lives of the local and native people. The Sheonath River is the biggest tributary of the Mahanadi and supplies water to





40% of the Mahanadi Basin. The people of Rajnandgaon, Durg and Bilaspur are not only totally dependent on Sheonath water but it has also become a part of their life and culture. Sheonath River has been privatized and given to Radius Industries Limited on a Build Own Operate Transfer basis (BOOT). This was basically done to supply water to the Borai Industrial Growth Center. The villagers living on the banks of the river could only use water for six months from July to December. Thus, during the crucial months from January to June they were left waterless. Radius has built structures that have upset the ecology.

The Rashtriya Jal Biradari conducted a Sampark Yatra and mobilized local villagers against the exploitation. They took out a rally on the banks of River Sheonath and denounced the government's decision to privatize the river. The representatives also had a meeting with the officials of Radius asking them to withdraw from the project. Radius did not agree to this proposal, following which a formal complaint was lodged with the government to cancel this contract. The villagers have been demonstrating against Radius and have destroyed the structures built by Radius. The agitation was successful as after two months the government cancelled the contract and handed over the river to the local community. This was a major achievement for the local community as well as the Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra and Rashtriya Jal Biradari. It has set precedence for other states to follow.



Chhattisgarh is a good example of the fact that even with good rainfall the place can have water problems. Thus both water conservation and proper usage of water are equally important. The objectives of the Jal Yatra have been well understood by the people of Chhattisgarh but its success depends on the continuity of such programs and the community response to such programs.



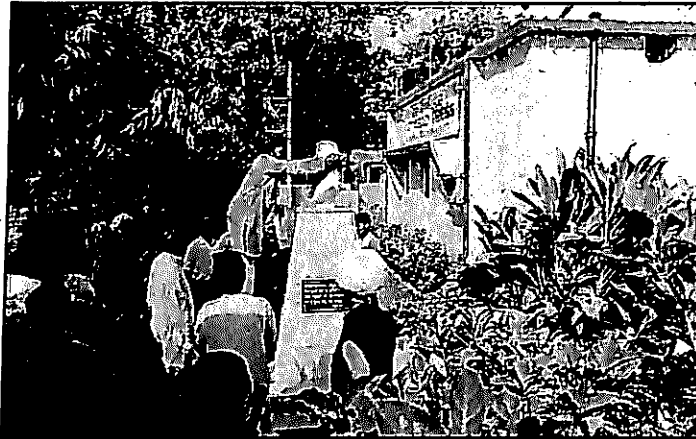




## Orissa

**R**ashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra reached Orissa on March 3, 2003 and left on March 12, 2003. Bilaigarh, where the Yatra began, has faced drought for years with no perennial sources of water. Women have to walk long distances to fetch water and this tells on their condition. Rajendra Singh made an alternative plan for the villagers to conserve water, which they pledged to implement. The villagers also staged a special cultural program to welcome the Yatra in Orissa.

In Orissa the Yatra visited Borgarh, Sambalpur, Deogarh, Kendakm Barkat, Bonai, Keonjhar, Jal eswar, Balasore and Bhubaneshwar. In most of these places meetings were arranged in schools and colleges and were arranged by the Youth Federations of the representative places, demonstrating the fact that the youth are aware and concerned about the gravity of the situation. They however, find themselves helpless and do not know where to begin. Rajendra Singh's perseverance proved to be the crowd puller at these meetings.



At most places discussions were on similar lines, with people being concerned over their rights to local water resources. While people know and believe that they are the rightful owners of these resources the government is denying them this right. This is mainly because of the lack of willpower on the part of the government which is succumbing to the pressures of multi national companies who are being supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the World Bank. By transferring the rights of ownership of rivers to multi nationals the government is playing with the future of the nation.

Since most multi-nationals are eyeing

- **Privatisation of water resources and rivers a major concern**
- **Drought and floods in adjoining districts**
- **Youth involved in the Yatra**
- **Community organization and mobilization levels are low**





the rivers of Orissa, the state is in a very difficult situation. The state government is providing favorable ground to such companies and recently granted rights over the Baitarni River to a French company Vivendi. The villagers however fought for the cancellation of these rights and the government had to finally give in. The government however continues to plan to sell rights to 11 other rivers in the state to private companies. Orissa is therefore expected to turn into the next battlefield between social activists and the MNCs.

Discussions were also focused on the National Water Policy announced on April 1, 2002. People shared their concerns that under this policy rights to rivers and other water resources will first be sold to local industrialists/ companies and later transferred to MNCs such as Coke and Pepsi, leading to MNCs having rights to our natural resources. Their worry is that such a scenario will mean water selling at rates higher than ghee.

People pledged to fight against the National Water Policy and prepare a draft for a new policy that will lay emphasis on community ownership of water resources. People also took an oath not to purchase bottled drinking water. This is a small step in the direction of discouraging MNCs from entering this area.

Another important issue was the construction of huge dams. In Orissa people believe that the water shortage has become more acute after the construction of the Hirakud Dam, one of the biggest dams in Asia. Drought was a rare phenomenon in Orissa before the construction of this dam. Even though the area 40 kms from the dam is a high rainfall area it suffers from a severe drought.

This is the situation all across India not just Orissa. According to statistics the number of villages without their own water sources was 232 at the time of independence. This number has grown to a threatening 90,000 and that too after the construction of so many dams which promised the heaven and earth to the farmers of the area. The reason for this situation remains a big question in the minds of the villagers and the farmers.

In spite of the failure of these dams the government is planning another big budget project of linking all major rivers. This requires a mammoth investment of Rs. 5,60,000 crores. Not much thought seems to have gone into the technical and socio economic feasibility of the project.

People are aware of the situation and want to fight for their rights. This was the objective of the Jal Yatra, which has been achieved to a large extent. In most places that the Yatra visited people wanted to learn from the Rajasthan experience.





## Jharkhand

**O**ne team of the Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra under the leadership of Syed Hasnat left for Jharkhand from Orissa on March 6. This team was accompanied by Bagrathi Devi, Rakesh Singh, Arjun Gujar, Kajodie Meena, and Namrata Bavsar.

On way to Ranchi, the Yatra crossed many tribal areas and interacted with the tribals and village people, trying to create awareness amongst them about the risks of water privatization, commoditization of water and the proposal to interlink rivers.



Most people in Jharkhand seemed to be aware of the potential threats posed by water privatization. The Yatra was welcomed in the villages and people understood the need for water conservation as the water table in rural area was fast depleting due to over exploitation of ground water by industries. The villagers also complained that they had been assured by the administration that after the establishment of these industries the local people will have good job

opportunities generating employment and income for the rural people. However, no such thing happened since most of these industries are mechanized and need very little manpower. The manpower required is mostly "technically skilled" and therefore they do not employ any local manpower. To add to the problems the companies have bored the earth and pumped out the water from the depth of the earth. As a result, the wells have dried out affecting the farmers' livelihood.



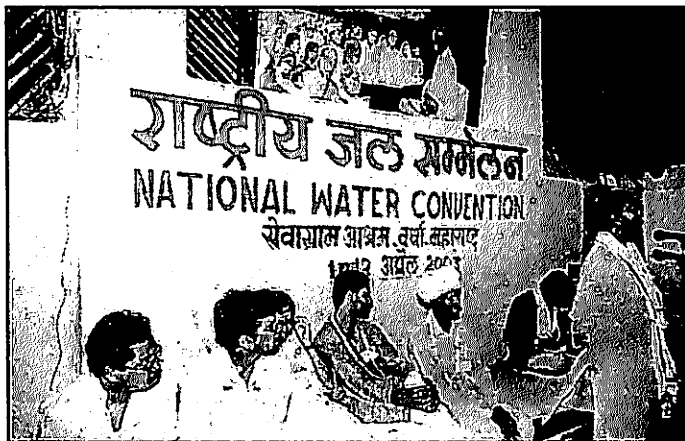


## Maharashtra

**T**he Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra was launched in Maharashtra with a two day seminar held at Sewagram, Vardha, on April 1 & 2, 2003. People from across the country, including distinguished personalities from the voluntary sector participated in discussions focused on privatization of water and its impact.

The ceremonies of lighting the lamp, garlanding with desai cotton threads were performed to symbolize self sufficiency and independence. Rajendra Singh said, "If Gandhiji were alive today he would have started a Satyagrah for the right of water". People with a vision similar to Gandhiji's have already started working towards the swarjya of water and water warriors such as Aditya Patnayak in Orissa, Ganandra Bai in Maharashtra, Nilesh Desai in Jabhua (M.P.) Vinod Bhat in Uttaranchal, Amla Rui in Sikar, Rajasthan are all working to achieve this dream.

Kannak Bai commented on the overwhelming presence of women and said it is very encouraging to see women participate in issues of such importance. The sale of River in Chhattisgarh was discussed in detail by Rajendra Singh.



He explained that the National Water Policy, declared by the Prime Minister in April 2002, is a go ahead for the sale and purchase of rivers i.e. privatization of rivers. This declaration basically means leading India to slavery.

The water giants are quietly but surely establishing themselves in our country. However, there is still time and we must create awareness about the risks of such a policy through out the length and breadth of the country.

It is amazing to note that while more that five thousand crore rupees are spent annually on water resource management the number of water scarce villages is on the increase. This is because of the wrong policies being adopted by the government, which are applied uniformly to the entire country, which is diverse in climate, geography and water availability. For example we have eight agro climatic zones so a uniform treatment can not be given to all the diverse areas.





Rajendra Singh said that there are strong objections to the ownership of water being given to private companies. The Jal Yatra is focused on awakening the communities and societies to the rights and responsibilities over water.

The Rashtriya Jal Biradari is a national union with regional Jal Biradari as at the state levels. These have led to formation of various water commissions, responsible for investigating how much water is flowing from region to another and accordingly decide how much water is needed by each state. The People's Water Commissions have pledged to prepare a white paper on water and related issues.

Rajendra Singh said, "Except Brahmaputra, there is no river with surplus water which can be diverted to other river basins. Instead of linking rivers with each other, the government should link the society with water"



The Yamuna Satluj link is a fine example – this is a 50 year old proposal with Rs.300 crores having been spent on it. Even to date the last remaining patch of 50 kms remains unlinked since Punjab had strong reservations about the project and finally walked out of the agreement.

Rajendra Singh also shared his experiences from the three International water seminars he has attended. In the international Earth Summit held in Johannesburg, the

developing countries strongly objected to the privatization of water.

Arjun Gujar shared the experience of his village where the involvement of Tarun Bharat Sangh and the participation of the community in the revival of water conservation traditions led to solving the water problem. Not only have the villagers built water structures they have also framed rules for forest conservation, efficient utilization of water, regarding the crops to be grown and against the crops that can not be grown because they consume too much water.

Water is not the private property of any one being and every one has an equal right over it. Not just human beings but also animals and plants have an equal right over water.

Syed Hasnat said "we need to stop delivering lectures and start taking action to conserve water and focus on its effective utilization by self practice and





restraint. Examples are available in all religions for practicing this – It is believed that if a Muslim wastes too much water for wazoo his prayers are not accepted by Allah as by wasting water he is harming nature and life since water means life.”

In Vardha a symbolic burning of the National Water Policy document was carried as protest against the water policy. The thrusting of a unilateral National Policy on all the climatically and geographically different zones of our country has lead to the initiation of a debate in all the eighty agro ecological climatic zones. The results of the debate indicate that no government has the moral right to thrust a unilateral water policy on different agro ecological climatic zones.

Rajendra Singh said that the Government of India still has time to frame a National Water Policy which takes care of the regional aspirations and local needs of the people of India. The Jal Yatra was started from Rajghat on the same day the Gandhiji started his Dandee March against the imposition of tax on salt by the British. This campaign has been launched to protest against the declaration of water to be a property and its privatization.



He named the alternate water policy as the Peoples Water Policy and said “if the National Water Policy is not repealed then we will start a village level campaign to protest against such a policy.”

The Seminar ended with a pledge from the participants to fight the privatization of water where ever possible and in whichever way. There was a cultural program organized by the organizers at Vardha.

The Jal Yatra then reached district Yavatmal, where Vinodji Bhang said “As we need warmth and light of sun we also need water for existence. We must therefore understand and respect water and all related things.” He is constructing a building for the poor where there is a well.

Rajendra Singh mentioned that just like wars are being fought today and countries occupied to control and own natural resources such as petrol, in the near future wars will be fought to own and control the most important natural-water.





Phase two of the meeting in Yavatmal was organized by the Nagar Parishad, Rotary Club Yavatmal and Jal Yatra Jan Jagran Abhiyan.

The president of the Rotary Club Yavatmal said that the Jal Yatra is program of the people. We must try to work towards the conservation of rain water, and must restrict ourselves from excessive use of water.

According to Devi Das Pawar from the District Development Authority they had made it compulsory to incorporate the building of rainwater harvesting structures in all the proposed constructions whether they are commercial buildings or private houses.

After independence we have done many good jobs and accomplished many challenging tasks but many of these have lead to the draining of natural resources and disturbing the balance and healthy relationship with our eco system. While a large number of water harvesting and conservation projects have been undertaken the country continues to face a water crisis. For example Maharashtra has the largest number of dams but still continues to suffer from a water crisis. The civil society fails to recognize that dams as their own because they do not own them. Here too like in all other states the Yatris appealed to the people not to buy and drink bottled water, who

- **Rainwater harvesting made compulsory**
- **Agitation against bottled water**
- **MNCs buying rights to water and trying to colonise India**
- **Inter-linking of rivers will be disastrous**
- **National Water Policy should be people-centric and not oriented toward privatisation**

readily took the pledge not to do so.

In Umarched, the Jal Yatra was welcomed by Gyanendra Bai, who believes that the MNCs by planning and buying rights over water in India are planning a conspiracy to colonize India once again. Today 70% of water resources are being exploited for non essential work. During the visit to 11 states, the Yatris observed that over 1.5 lakh villages are suffering from water scarcity and 70% of the area has been declared as dark zone.

The Yatra appealed to the civil society of Umarched to undertake small scale water harvesting projects in order to help improve the situation. The next destination of the water warriors was Jalna. Here too Rajendra Singh addressed the congregation and reiterated the need to give back to the earth what we have been drawing from it.







It is possible for us to conserve water and use it judiciously when required. This has been demonstrated by Tara Chand Jain of Chooru in Sujangarh. Right from his childhood, he bathes with just one liter of water. He uses two bowls, one lota and one towel to bathe using just one liter of water. He pours some water in a bowl and wets his towel; he then washes his face, head and arms with this towel by rubbing it on his face, head and arms. He then extracts the dirty water into another bowl and wets the towel with the fresh water and then washes up to his belly. He repeats the process a third and fourth time to wash his legs and feet.



The Jal Yatra then reached Latur, where the district collector Raji Jalota was also present. The sammelan was also attended by Aparna Gowande and Amool Gowande. According to them the water crisis in Maharashtra is on the rise. Latur was a water surplus state till ten years ago today it is the biggest water market of India. The Gowandes have helped fight water scarcity by helping people adopt roof-water harvesting techniques. There is a need to work on large scale along with initiatives such as the Jal Biradari in order to fight the water crisis. There is also a need to learn from our rich culture and traditions of water conservation and efficient utilization of water.





**T**he Jal Yatra began its tour of Goa on April 11, and traveled through out the state holding rallies, gatherings, public meetings in Curca, Mercedes, Mapusa, Ponda, Bicholim, Saligoa, Madgaon and Panjim.

In Goa meetings were also held with Zila and Village Panchayat representatives at the Institute of Menzes, Barganga and with NGOs, V.O.s and individuals regarding the present water situation in Goa and the challenges that are posing a threat to the common man.



While Goa has a rich tradition of water conservation through tanks, lakes and springs there is still a depletion of water resources due to poor water management and growing commercialization of water. Though Goa is blessed with enough rainfall it is worrying to learn that certain parts of Goa are regularly plagued by drought like conditions and acute water shortage.

Goa should revive its traditional water harvesting systems that have been neglected for decades. There should be

capacity building in Panchayats and municipalities. NGOs and college students should also engage in saving the traditional water bodies and in water harvesting. This will encourage the civil society to join in the endeavor.

The Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra urged the people of Goa to protect their natural water resources to ensure that water does not become a scarce commodity in the state. The citizens must take up the responsibility to do this rather than allowing the local water bodies to get contaminated. The civil society must take action whether against the garbage dumps at Sonsoddo or the mining rejects in the rivers of Khandepar or Zuari, the pollution of wells by seepage from septic tanks and public toilets or the increased salinity of wells due to bunds in Khazan lands.

It is a sorry state that the growth in demand for water is met through water tankers and piped water and the age old wells, ponds, lakes and springs are ignored. Today bottled water is considered a status symbol by the upper middle class. This has further helped in the commercialization of water.





During his interaction with the municipality officials of Bicholin and citizens of Saligoa, Rajendra Singh discovered that there is rampant pumping of ground water in the village leading to the drying up of wells. These two parties have been doing investigative work and Rajendra Singh urged them to present the findings before the court to stop the plundering of natural resources. "Do not allow them to make the water of the earth the water of the Bazaar," says Rajendra Singh.

It is heartening to see the involvement of the local people of Saligoa to save their natural resources. They have started a movement against commercialization of water. Just like the people living on the banks of River Sheonath in Chhattisgarh, where a company had privatized a long stretch of the river and banned the use of water by the local people. Upon the advice of Rajendra Singh the farmers came together and launched an agitation. Finally the State Government gave in and cancelled the license issued to the company.

At the Friday Balco organized by Goa Dese Resource Centre, Mapusa, the negative impact of Golf Courses on the ecology was highlighted. The water used for golf courses evaporates easily and the golf course grass does not provide much oxygen. Rajendra Singh believes that India is not really a water scarce country; the water shortage is really manmade.



In the entire discussions there was a plea to conserve and develop natural fresh water springs of Goa. The people of Goa believe that the water conservation initiatives have to begin from the grass roots level. They raised concerns about the commercialization of water resources and the possible impact of the Goa Ground Water Regulatory Act, 2002. They also believe that it is essential to involve students and organizations such as NCC in the mission to protect the environment and other natural resources such as water.

Environmentalist Roland Martins, St. Xavier's College Principal Newman Fernandes and social activist Sorter D'Souza were some local personalities who participated in the discussions.

"Save Mercedes Spring" campaign was initiated by Rajendra Singh before concluding the Jal Yatra in Goa.





## Karnataka

**A**fter traveling 12 states, the Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra initiated its week long campaign in Karnataka. The Yatra visited Dharwad, Haveri, Gadag, Bagalkot, Lingsugur, Maski, Potnal, Hospet, Hagribommanahalli, Jagalur, Sirigere, Hassan, Arasakire, Tiptur, Tumkur, D.B.Pura, C.B.Pura Bagepalli, Chintamani and Bangalore. Various meetings and seminars with farmers and intellectuals of Karnataka were held.

In all these districts wells, bore wells, streams and rivers such as Varda and Tungabhadra have dried resulting in acute water shortage. The Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra tried to raise the awareness about water conservation and rights of communities amongst the people.



According to Rajendra Singh drought is not a new phenomenon, nor is suffering under such circumstances a new phenomenon. However, earlier people used to dig bore wells during drought. Today this is not an option as ground water level has depleted due to over-exploitation. Open wells, bore wells, streams and rivers have all become dry. People have to understand

the situation and own up responsibility for rejuvenating the natural water resources.

Rajasthan was faced with a similar situation. But 20 years back rain water harvesting began in Gopalpura, later spreading to 6,500 sq. km area. Because of this 1-59 villages have been able to sustain four years of continuous drought. This area, declared a dark zone in 1980, has been converted into a white zone with streams flowing perennially.

This has been achieved through the community approach of rain water harvesting and cropping pattern. In order to spread the message, social and people's organizations have collectively undertaken Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra.

In Hassan District there were four main ponds of which three have vanished. Rajendra Singh warned the people of Karnataka to start taking steps towards water conservation else face the consequences.





In Sunalane, the government had provided one hand pump which has been under repair for the last 10 years. The residents here purchase water at Rs.2-3 per pot. CMC provided a water connection which provides water fit only for washing and bathing.

In Samadhnagar the situation is no better. Here too the residents purchase water at Rs.2/- per pot. The residents of both Sunalane and Samdhanagar have to walk 2 kms to source water for their daily needs.

Nethaji Slum has a population of 4000. 10 years ago the Bangalore Municipality provided them with a public tap which has been constructed on the footpath of Nethaji Road outside the slum. This tap meets all the water requirements of the slum dwellers – washing, bathing, cooking and drinking.

Water is released only by 11 am or in the middle of the night. This makes it further difficult for the residents to collect water. It is difficult for the people to bathe in the middle of the night and they generally bathe once in four days.

All of Karnataka is faced with similar water problems: A slum with a population of 3000 has 9 taps but only 1 hour of daily water supply, another has a tap in every lane but gets water supply once in 10-12 days. Yet another slum with a population of 6,000 has no public taps and bore wells. The slum dwellers here have resorted to loosening the joints of a pipe line that runs across the slum.



Rajeshwarinagar and Rajgopalnagar slums have four bore wells but none of them are any use to the residents. One gives pale green water, another gives hard water, the third one is the worst giving water with worms. The fourth may as well not exist because it has been under repairs for many months.

In Karnataka, Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra was intellectuals, heads of Maths, students, teachers, leaders of society, representatives of political affiliations participated in the debate and discussions about water conservation, privatization and community rights over water.

The Jal Yatra recommended that the communities that conserve water be rewarded and penalize those that exploit and pollute rivers and ground water. People in





almost all districts of Karnataka have realized the importance of rain water harvesting, conservation and cropping pattern.

In Karnataka the local MLA has done some commendable work in the area of water conservation. He has constructed the checkdam, a tank and a rainwater harvesting structure.

The Yatra also visited the Seregere Muth, where Mr. Singh said that it is people like the Swamiji of the Math who come to the rescue when there is a problem. A pond is under construction here. The Swamiji wants this pond to be constructed in a way that the children can also use it as a swimming pool.

In Harithi Village a pond has been constructed by the shramdaan of the people. This pond will help in recharging 14 wells in the upstream. The Yatris performed a religious ceremony at the pond.



The Iccha Nallah which had been dry till last year has been revived by the efforts of the local people. Rajendra Singh provided inputs on how this can be improved.

Rajendra Singh also told the people of Karnataka that water management is not rocket science and any body who wishes to learn this can do so. To exemplify this narrated an incident where the President K.R.Narayanan invited him to consult on water

harvesting in the Rashtrapati Bhawan. His colleague Gopal chose a site, which had been rejected by the Chief Engineer of the Rashtrapati Bhawan on the grounds that the slope was only 5 ft. Gopal, insisted that the slope was enough at 7.5 ft. To resolve the difference of opinion a road was used. This proved that Gopal was 100% correct.

In Belgaum the Government and the public have come together and formed a federation. This federation has 160 societies. One society is formed for 500 hectares of land. These societies select 16 directors of whom one is a Chairman and one Vice Chairman. There are five government nominees, which include two superintending engineers, one Administrator from Command Area Development Authority, one agriculture officer and one retired officer.

The Government of Karnataka paid Rs.15 Lac and each society has to pay Rs.500 to become a member. Total command area is about 3,31,000 hectares. The





federation is able to provide water to about 1,72,000 hectares. Government provides water to the main canal the distributory canal belongs to the farmers.

Some farmers believe that the farmers themselves and the free electricity being provided to them are to blame for the water shortage in Karnataka. Farmers draw excess water and waste almost 3/4th of it. Farmers are sowing only cash crops so there is a shortage of fodder.

Narayan Reddy, a farmer suggested various ways of saving water which include avoiding a daily shave and bathing near a tree.

The Karnataka phase of the Yatra was a success with the complete participation of farmers, common people, as well as politicians. Every one seems to be aware of the present water crisis and the need to conserve and use water effectively. On April 19, 2003 the Karnataka phase ended in a declaration drafted by the farmers, villagers and water users of Chickballapur, Ragepalli, Chintamani Taluka Centers for Kolar District. These people participated in the Karnataka Jal Chetna Yatra organized by Tarun Bharat Sangh under the leadership of the Magsaysay award winner Rajendra Singh.

### **"Water Liberation Declaration"**

**Water is life. It is a gift of nature. The access to water is a natural and fundamental right. It is not to be treated as a commodity and traded for profit people shall have adequate safe water for all their living needs.**

**Experiences all over the world reveal quite convincingly that water, which is life, is being privatized and brought under corporate control. This will deprive the people of water lifeline for survival. All the water resources be owned, controlled, managed and utilized by local communities in the natural settings.**

**We the people from all over the world will not allow our waters to be made a commodity for profit. We will work together to liberate water from corporate/private agencies control and return it to the people for common good.**

**We demand the government all over the world should take immediate action to declare that they accept water in their territories as public good and exact strong regulatory structure to protect them.**

**"Water sovereignty is our fundamental right"**

**"Water is nobody's thing but a public good."**

**"Water is an essential public resource"**

**"Water is a human right"**

**Signature of organization in Karnataka**

**On behalf of the gathering**

**Date :**



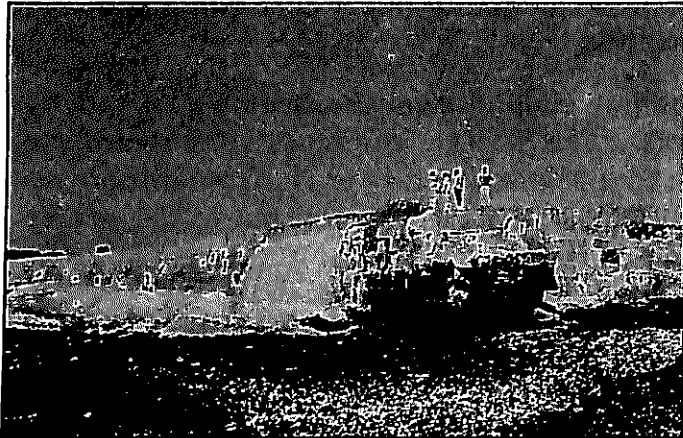




## Andhra Pradesh

**T**he Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra entered Andhra Pradesh on April 22, 2003 from Karnataka. Here the farmers were urged to face the situation bravely taking encouragement from Rajasthan, where inspite of droughts over the past years farmers have not been pushed to the wall.

AP strongly condemned the privatization of water and rejected the rivers linking project on ecological grounds. This project will halt the natural flow rivers, and also lead to increase pollution. The cost factor of course is very high – Rs. 5.60 lakh crores. Since India is a poor country we will end up borrowing this money by mortgaging our rivers and other natural resources.



The Center has been criticized for privatizing and commoditizing water. If privatization of a natural resource such as water is complete, people will be forced to wage a war against it. There is need for NGOs and the local communities to join hands to fight for this cause.

Linking the major rivers of India, a poll promise of the BJP government, is a farce and the communities must work

to save their rivers which alone can supply water to them. The once famous and now infamous Musi River cannot be called a river at all. It is today a cocktail of industrial pollution and sewage.

The Yatra recommended that the factories on the banks of River Musi must respect the order of the Supreme Court and treat effluent in the premises instead of poisoning the city. Pollution of the River Musi is a man made problem and the only solution is that the industries completely segregate and treat their wastes in their own premises.

The 18 km pipeline being laid by the Government from Patanchra to Amberpet may transfer affluent from Makhagavu to Musi River. This will not reduce the pollution but will make the officials less accountable. This pipeline will carry more than 80 tons of deadly toxic mixture per day. This will include metals, pesticides and organic pollutants. A small leak in the pipeline can lead to the worst ever disaster for Hyderabad.



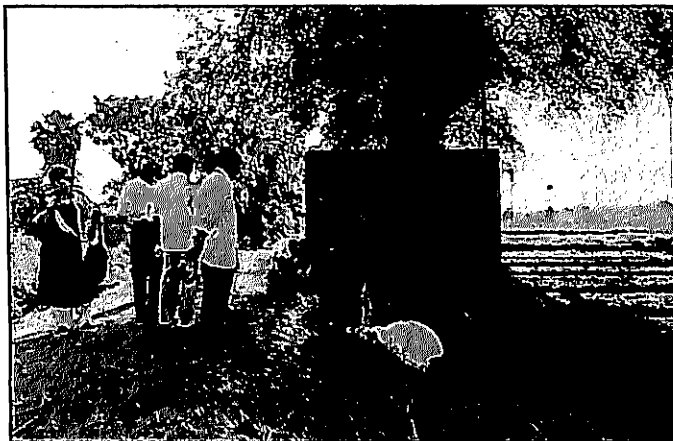


The alarming shortage of water in Hyderabad is because of the wrong policies adopted by the government. The Yatra called for a decentralized community management to ensure distribution of safe water to urban and rural people.

AP has the largest water market in the country apart from Latur. At least 10 shops at the Zila level sell water.

If water conservation can be carried out in Rajasthan than Andhra Pradesh can certainly initiate and sustain such a movement for restoration of traditional water harvesting systems. If water conservation is carried out in a planned manner there will be no water shortage. This has to be further coupled with efficient use of water including water conservation.

Government projects such as Neeru Meeru have been a failure. The entire focus of watershed and Neeru Meeru in Andhra Pradesh was on raising water tables. This ensures water security to the smaller proportion of the landed class excluding the small land owners and the landless. This is the reason why in spite of crores of investment in Anantpur, there is no evidence of water security even after six years.



The state government in AP has been criticized for implementation of programs in the state since the rice meant for the unemployed agricultural labor was diverted to owners of machines while the labour continued to starve.

According to Prof. H.M.Desarda, an economist and a water management expert, there has been no significant change in the amount of rainfall in the country over the last 100 years. It is the anti-people policies of the government which translate into difficulties for people at the grass root levels. There is also growing concern over the large scale felling of trees.

After visiting Chittoor, Anantpur, Kurnool and Manboobnagar, the Jal Yatra concluded that drought is a socially created situation and not an inevitable one. There are places in the country where rainfall is significantly less than in AP, yet the situation was not that of a perennial drought. It is alleged that the limited water resources are being monopolized by the politically powerful elite community leading to an artificial shortage of water for the people who are excluded from any right of manage and control water.





Rajendra Singh along with H.M.Dasarda from Maharashtra, B.V.Subba Rao of Center for resource education and Kishan Rao of Patanucheru believe that the State of AP has failed to deliver on the water front.



It is widely believed that in spite of heavy annual investment in water for irrigation (surface and ground), drinking and domestic water the delivery of a reliable water system seems to be a distant dream for the rural and urban poor. This also raises the question of accountability of the financial and administrative efforts made by the powers that be. The crisis has continued to worsen.

The reasons for the crisis are always attributed to natural factors such as low rainfall for a couple of successive years. The plight of the residents of Chitoor, Anantpur, Kurnool, Mahbubnagar and Hyderabad is terrible and has been created due to manmade shortage of water resulting from poor water management policies.

The focus of the Yatra in Andhra Pradesh was to increase awareness of those who make decisions and allocate resources for ineffectiveness of water resource development. The Yatra encouraged the policy makers to listen to the voice of the local people. It is proposed to generate a debate amongst the people on the persistent water problem such that they may suggest concrete policy and practical measures for water conservation. They must also campaign for the effective implementation of the suggested measures.





## Tamil Nadu

The Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra reached Kathampakkam village in Distt, Trivellur, Tamil Nadu on April 30, 2003. The Jal Yatra visited Trivellur, Tirukkuvali, Nagapatnam, Agrahara, Vaivanthi, Nammakai, Trichy, Madurai and Chennai. More than 33% of Tamil Nadu has been declared as a dark zone by the Government.

In some places the villagers along with voluntary organizations have tried to revive traditional water harvesting structures e.g., Kuthampakkam village of Trivellur. Here all water structures have been rejuvenated thus improving the water level to just 6 feet below the surface level. This district is trying to build a role model for other villages and the Panchayat is working on developing a package for sustainable development. The youth must get trained to undertake rainwater harvesting and pond conservation projects.

The story of Dev Rajan relates the success of co-operation between the government and the local people. They got together to fight the water crisis. Mr.Dev Rajan uses a simple sensor to find the water level, which collects data through the satellite helping in the site selection for the percolation pond. This



has led to at least 82% of the stored water reaching the ground leading to an improved water table. The water level in both drinking water wells and irrigation well has increased between 3 to 18 meters in the effected areas. The area influenced by the percolation of water extends upto 184 acres.

Modern techniques such as use of sensors in selection of site for construction of percolation ponds, to find the direction of water flow on the ground, must be used. If the site selected is good, up to 82.5% of stored water reaches the ground, otherwise only 10-12% of it reaches the ground. There is a need to make several such ponds across the state.

On the other end of the spectrum is the age-old relationship between water and spirituality. A pillar with an inscription from the Chalukya period located on the banks of a pond reads "We bow our heads on the feet of a person who helps in maintaining, preserving and conserving this pond."

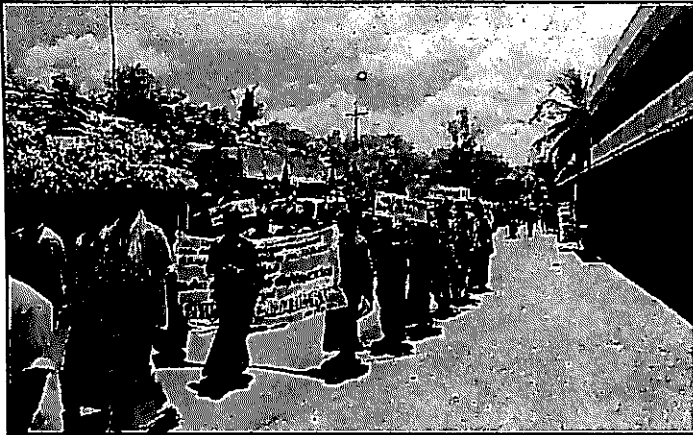




There is a Tamilian saying which says "If you want to go to heaven after death, you need not visit religious places. You simply dig ponds, tanks and conserve water, you will go to heaven."

In Thumbapakkam, 7-8 big companies are extracting and withdrawing under ground water. Even though the Madras High Court has passed orders against these companies, this continues.

A few years back a consumer organization filed a case against the Madurai Municipal Corporation for imposing a charge for providing water. The Municipal Corporation is supposed to provide free water as per the Act. Even the Corporation pleaded that they had taken a loan of Rs.40 crores from the World Bank and the interest on this loan is accumulating, they lost the case. It is the same story with privatization. MNCs can take over our water resources in a period of 10 years and we will be left watching helplessly.



The people of Tamil Nadu have forgotten their traditional methods of water harvesting which included construction of Ahars, Erries and Talabs, thus worsening the water situation. The yatri visited some ancient ponds built thousands of years ago. These are today filled with silt and are also encroached upon by the construction mafia. In Tamil Nadu Eri development has become synonymous

with building construction. In Chennai many multi story buildings have replaced eries. In Madurai encroachment on ponds is common.

The Government's schemes are not balanced. They have both Rainwater Harvesting Schemes and Rainwater Drainage Schemes running parallel to each other. Does this mean that the Government's money being spent on harvesting is going down the drain!

There is an urgent need for the revival of water harvesting structures and tradition of conservation of water, as well frame rules for efficient and equal use of water by the community. In the April and May of 1943, the Yai Gai river was full of water. In the 40s children were not left unattended on the banks of this river lest they get washed away. Today it is full of pollution and sand.

Though efforts are being made towards water harvesting and conservation, no community mobilization and participation is taking place. The main stakeholders





in this cause are least involved with such initiatives becoming the individual efforts of civil engineers and the government. Such projects are not sustainable as the local communities do not have a sense of ownership to the project therefore they do not bother about its maintenance.

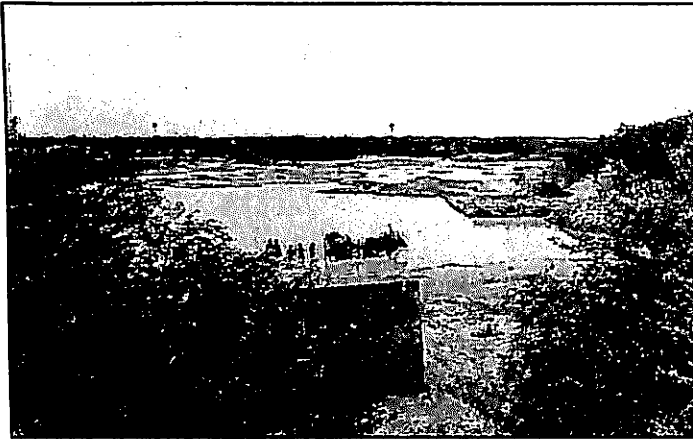
The government normally proposes big and impossible solutions to problems that can be easily solved by involving local communities and help from traditional knowledge and solutions.





## Pondicherry

**T**he yatris saw some traditional ponds during this Yatra. Pondicherry seems to be a beautiful place with plentiful water. It was surprising to hear about the shortage of water for both farming as well industrial use. Pondicherry government has contracted a multinational company to manage and supply water. This organisation has constructed one pond spending Rs.80 lacs. They used big machines which measure the recharge, using up most of the money for these kind of things. Their priority does not seem to be to capture the maximum amount of rainwater.



This state located at the seaside, has atleast ten times more water available than Rajasthan. But it has gone dry due to a neglect of their old ponds and water resources. One can understand the concerns of the farmers and the industrialists regarding polluted water but what is difficult to understand is the shortage of water. This obviously is a result of mismangement of water resources. The residents of this state have enough rainwater.

The Yatris saw many traditional ponds during this Yatra. Development in the name of water can be seen in equal measures in both Rajasthan and Pondicherry. One thing is absolutely clear from these projects: those from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank who are giving out loans for water related projects are busy getting policies through which will help them to take control of our water resources. Funds for water are for namesake. No funds have been invested in either conserving or harvesting water in Jaipur or Pondicherry. They have dug existing ponds a little deeper and that's it! Most of the funds meant for water related projects have been spent on either constructing roads or putting up fountains around these ponds in order to beautify the place and make it more accessible.

Both Jaipur and Pondicherry are just the same as far as the water landscape is concerned. In both the places, the farmers want to conserve water, but commercial farming does not let them do so. The village water is selling cheap in the markets in the form of vegetable, fruit, and grains.







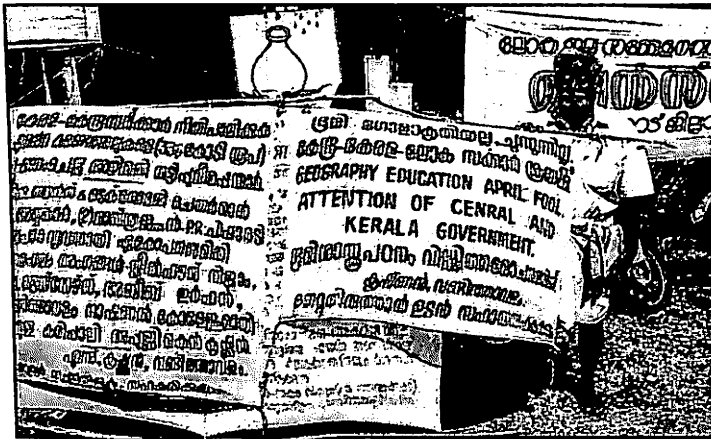
There were lovely vegetables and fruit in the Pondicherry markets. There is large spiritual influence in this place but one could not see such influence in the use of water. Many of the youngsters consider it modern to buy bottled water to drink. It seems to be the measure of living standards for them.

There was an environment of protest against Pepsi and Coke in some of the schools and colleges. Students from three colleges pledged not to buy bottled water for drinking purposes. One lady called Arvind Nayak, pledged to start the water revolution in Pondicherry. Most of the villages in Pondicherry are like small towns but they still follow their traditions. One could see some instances of traditions related to water too. It is important to save these water related traditions. This is what will make Pondicherry a state with plentiful water.





**S**ome of the big farmers of Kerala have undertaken water management themselves. The Yatra saw many such arrangements in at least four places. These projects give a ray of hope. The biggest hindrances to these projects are the local politicians. These people do not believe in doing anything themselves. They keep spinning stories so people will follow them. Those willing to undertake water management projects also look upto the government for help. They do not realize that just by expecting the government to help they will get nowhere. In order to become self sufficient these people will have to take action.



The Yatra spent maximum time in Kerala. The yatris broke into smaller groups and visited various parts of Kerala. From a distance Kerala seems to be a beautiful green state. The greenery on the mountains comes from 44 rivers and gives immense pleasure to the eye. Some forests, crocodiles, tigers, goats etc. add to the beauty of the state. The people of Kerala want to and also do share this beauty and happiness with others. But there are lots of arguments in the day to day conversation which sound bitter. When

you look deeper you realize that these are actually educated discussions and not really arguments.

The people of Kerala have been talking a lot and working equally hard. Unfortunately they have been working in a direction opposite to the required direction. There is heavy water pollution and unending menace in the state. Maximum population of Kerala is literate and hard working. This is the reason why this state is considered as a 100% literate state. The only problem is that they are desirous of a high society life style.

Greed and desire are very visible in Kerala. Self-respect is important to these people. Perhaps this is the biggest virtue of materialism. Those who are able to control their desires are respected by materialism. The people of Kerala also consider themselves as larger than life.





People would attend the Jal Yatra meetings in large numbers. The Panchayat head is well respected in Kerala. Even the councilors treat them with respect. This is not a practice anywhere in the North. Just like the terms Panchayatpati, Block Panchayat and Zila Panchayat are not familiar terms for the Keralites. This is not like the Amarbel creeper. The women of Kerala are very hard working. Since the Pardha is not prevalent in Kerala the women of this state have had many opportunities for growth. Even though the women are forward looking, Kerala is still a male dominated society.

The administration and discipline in the schools of Kerala and the services of the teachers in this state are much better than in many others. In the North, the teachers don't visit the school for years together, and still get their salaries. This is not prevalent in Kerala. The Yatris visited more than 100 schools during the Yatra and obtained information about their functioning. The people of Kerala are conscientious and wish to work. The women are very hard working but their work is not as back breaking as that of Rajasthani women. Though there is a lot of disparity in Rajasthan and there is a section of the society where women do not lift a finger. The women of Kerala did not depict a similar love for water as do the women of Rajasthan.

Even Kerala has a fort, Kaasarkud Fort, within which is located the Ganesh Temple at the sea side. It is here that lacs of people begin their pilgrimage to Sabrimalai. Though this fort is in shambles, the people of Kerala are very attached to it. The men visiting Sabrimalai observe celibacy for 40 days before beginning their pilgrimage. They do not consume non veg and alcohol during these 40 days. Such occasions help people to remember their lineage, religion, karma and traditions.

The Panchayats of Kerala have a deep understanding of their jungles and their land and water resources. That is why they have heightened their campaign against Coca Cola and Pepsi. They have started a campaign to have the Coca Cola plant in Panchimani shut down. The campaign against Pepsi in the Pundaseri district has been successful. These two campaigns are good examples of how the locals are working to stop the loot of water. The panchayats in these places went to court. They won the case and have created an environment against these companies. The other Panchayats of our country can learn a lesson from these experiences. The right to water granted under provision 73-74 of the constitution is a very important right. To further this right the panchayats across the country can approach the Supreme Court against the Water Policy 2002. They can stop the privatization of water by exercising their constitutional right to water. They can stop the sale or allotment of water resources of their land to multinational companies.

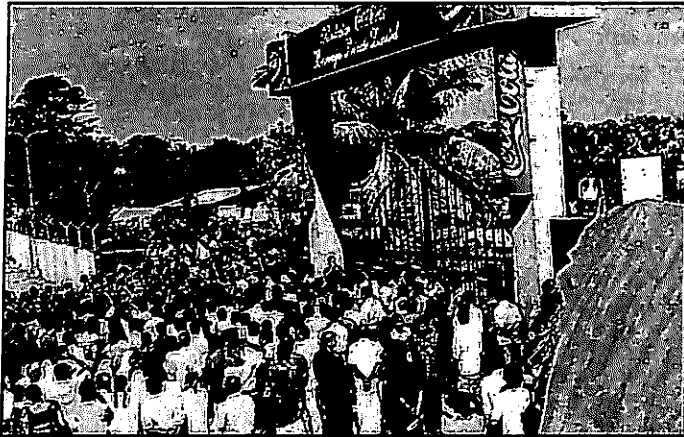




The Government of Kerala including the Chief Minister, is in favour of granting the rights of water to the people of Kerala. The other politicians of Kerala such as the Water Supplies Minister, Mr. Thomas, Parliamentarian, Mr. Ramesh Chitnatan and others speak with an understanding of the subject. The Janata Dal leader, Mr. Birendra Kumar, who was also the editor of Matrubhumi, has been fighting against Coca Cola in Panchimani.

All the politicians from all the political parties seems to be a part of the campaign against Coca-Cola in Panchimani, since all of them spoke against Coca Cola in their speeches delivered during the January 22, meeting. But how many of them have actually stopped consuming Coca Cola, Pepsi or bottled water? No one has an answer to this question! But many of the youth, students and teachers of this state have pledged not to drink aerated soft drinks and

bottled d water. Many of them have even written letters saying that after the Jal Yatra they have stopped purchasing either the aerated soft drinks or bottled water.



The paddy fields are fast disappearing from the beautiful valleys of Kerala. Concrete jungles have replaced the paddy fields. The farmers say that around 70 years back a dam costing Rs. 5 crores had been constructed on the Periyar river. The administration had promised that this dam would have the capability to irrigate atleast

80,000 acres of land. But due to shortage of water it has never irrigated more than 50,000 acres of land. Over the last ten years this figure has further reduced to about 25,000 acres.

The farmers complained that shortage of water has led to bad crops year after year. That is why they are forced to sell the land to keep their lives going. The traders from the urban areas are busy constructing multi storied buildings on the land. This continued construction of buildings has led to replacing the lively greenery with concrete jungles. Mr.Rajendra Singh advised the Chief Minister, the Revenue Minister, Industrial and Water Supplies Minister of Kerala to come up with a law which restricts such misuse of land. The Revenue Minister was quick to point out that such a restriction will deter the industrialists to set up the badly required industrial units in Kerala. Such a comment made in the presence of the Chief Minister indicates that there is no clarity in the development policy of the state on matters pertaining to maintenance of natural resources.





It is true that industrialists and the state have earned a lot of money from industrialization but the government still needs to give a thought to the protection of the natural resources of the state.

Even though farming cannot earn as much as industry, but the state needs both farming and water. It is very important to make proper arrangement for these, for which the people of Kerala must put a foot forward and hold a discussion with the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister of Kerala is a very straight forward, simple and honest man but he says that he is compelled to give a hearing to every one and also to act on what many of them say.

People such as the science journalist, Shrikumar Padre are in favour of decentralization of water management. He showed many examples of traditional water management in Kerala to the Yatris.

Every temple in Kerala has at least one big pond located in its campus, which fulfill the drinking water and irrigation requirements of the people. There is a big pond near Kaasarkud which used to irrigate about 1000 hectares of land. But this pond has been destroyed and cannot be used for irrigation. Most of the ponds of Kerala have faced a similar fate. The ponds situated in towns have been converted into parks. Many of the big farmers of the state have undertaken the water management themselves. At least four such farmers came up and showed what they were doing for management of water. This has created a ray of hope.



Kerala, like Karnataka, also has the tradition of saints. There are many saints here who respect all religions and consider sarvadharmas as supreme. But they do not seem to be bent towards creating and maintaining a relationship with nature, water and spirit.

In all the meetings the stress was on the purity of rivers and the greenery on land and mountains. In many places people pledged not to use plastic.

The modern education programs of Kerala have taken the people of Kerala away from nature. There is a gap developing between nature and human beings. This is actually happening across the country not just in Kerala. The fertilizers, chemicals and pesticides being used in the tea gardens are destroying the water resources





National Water Awareness Campaign

of Kerala. Similarly, the modern commercial farming is also destroying these resources. While Kerala is a clean beautiful, literate state, where the modern virtuous conduct is visible, what is also visible is the fact that the people of Kerala are far removed from the natural beauty of their land, are prone to increasing their pains for momentary pleasures and there is a lot of infighting among them. They can make a mountain out of mole hill in no time. These are not just verbal arguments but those that create a rift among people. If people have an argument but do not keep any thing in their hearts it is fine but this is not so in Kerala. Small fights in Kerala are leading to huge issues.





## Punjab

**T**he water related stories of Punjab are well told. But today they do not seem to have any impact on the people of Punjab. The picture of water in Punjab has done a one eighty degree turn. Those people who never bothered about their own thirst and provided water to donkeys are today not only are not ready to share their water with each other they are also trying to snatch the water resources belonging to other states. The Sutlej Yamuna link is the biggest proof of this fact.

Punjab is a state of five rivers. There are many small rivers in this state. But they are facing a water shortage. The underground water resources are emptying out. The river at the banks of which Guru Nanak ji meditated is also going dry. But the farmers have not reduced paddy and sugar cane farming. People still consider those spending more water as belonging to the upper class. That is why when they are irrigating their farms they do not run the water, they flood their fields with water. Punjab is not a victim of water shortage but a victim of their own creation – excess use of water. It seems that Punjab is the favorite residence of all the mosquitoes and flies of this world.



The underground water in Punjab is drying up. Fields are going dry, but still vehicles get stuck in the slush on the roads. Not just vehicles but even bullock carts and tractors get stuck here. This is evidence enough that the farmers do not use water with any restraint.

Whichever political party comes to power in Punjab, the first thing they do is to announce that they will not share the rivers of the state with any other state. The water from the rivers of this state does flow into other states and countries. This state does not care for the water that it has or receives. Punjab receives more rainfall than is required to fulfill their water needs. People of Punjab will have to start managing rainwater. If not, they will have to bear the consequences. The Punjab University has at some places started reviving their water resources, jungles and the land, but the local people do not seem to be attached to





these projects. If the local people and the society are not involved in such projects they can never be long lasting and sustainable.

The Jal Yatra in Punjab was organized by leaders of political parties, NGOs and social organizations; therefore it was easy to become a part of various programs in the state.

The people of Punjab do not seem to be concerned or eager about wanting to conserve their rain water. Therefore getting the people of this state to start water harvesting and be more careful with their water resources is a tall order.







## Bihar

The first President of India, Sh. Rajendra Prasad, during his tenure, launched many projects for flood relief in the state of Bihar. These projects continued for many years later. The most popular of these were the embankment projects. Today, these embankments have become the means of holding back floods. Before these embankments were built the rivers would flood the towns for two to three days and then flow back. Now the water level in the rivers has gone above the height of these embankments. The water from these embankments gets collected in the fields instead of flowing back into the rivers. The solution has today become the cause of the problem – embankments now lead to further aggravating the floods rather than controlling them.

The Yatra Dal reached Ranchi on evening of March 6. They organized a press conference on March 7 and then proceeded to Bihar. The welcome given to the Yatra in Bihar was exceptionally good. Though Bihar has a lot of water but there is acute shortage of potable water. The water here is stagnant and polluted.



Bihar is considered as the center of floods. But the Yatra witnessed evidence of both floods and drought at the same time. Bihar is faced with a peculiar water problem – the farms get flooded with water in one season and face drought in another season. Some village elders told the Yatris that during the British Raj Bihar was amongst the most prosperous states and it was suffering in the modern times because people had forgotten their traditions and customs of water, soil and forest conservation.

While Bihar faces destruction due to floods in rivers such as Sharda, Gandak, Koshi and the Ganges they also get the benefits of these floods, as the rivers flow down taking away the dirt and bringing in fresh fertile soil with it. It is the prosperity brought in by these rivers that led to Buddhism and Jainism taking root and becoming popular in Bihar. Today this state is infested with anti social elements.

During the Yatra there were many protests against the embankments. Both Laloo Prasad Yadav and Smt. Rabri Devi are of the opinion that these





embankments are the main cause for the floods in Bihar. Since these embankments are not doing any good, the government is in favor of breaking them but some sections of the society are not allowing this to happen. This has also been an issue oft discussed in the State Assembly. There are some sections of the society who are in favour of breaking these embankments and yet others who want to construct new embankments. In such a situation, the government is left with no alternative but to provide financial assistance to those who are affected by the floods. This assistance however is limited to Rs.200/= if an animal of the family dies and some food grains for the family. How far will such support take any one? Rajendra Singh sought the help of both Rabri Devi and Laloo Prasad in the campaign against privatization of rivers and the river linking project. Laloo Prasad Yadav told the yatris that his government is strictly against both these things.



The yatris as a tribute to Sh. Mahesh and Smt. Sarita, who laid down their lives fighting for the cause of water, further strengthened their pledge to stop the privatization of rivers.

The roads in Bihar are terrible and it takes almost six hours to drive a distance of 150 kilometers. The Yatra reached Khagaria after passing through the flood prone town in the Kashi river bed. There were many senior and old social workers present in the meeting here. Rajendra Singh told the people

here that Bihar has a lot of water, but it is visible only as floods. The question is can we revive the traditions and capability to save the water and make it the symbol of our progress. The people present in the meeting were very supportive of this idea. Bihar has been the state of revolution. Today, democracy is facing grave danger. The society of Bihar has to start taking steps by saving themselves from this danger. The first step should be to stop the privatization of water and the linking of rivers. This will be the biggest tribute to Loknayak. Even today people who have been relocated due to floods live on the embankments of river Koshi.

Musahron is a big village in Bihar which has been rebuilt by the government. But the labour which worked on the houses has not been paid till now. The Sarpanch, Patwari and the Secretary of the Panchayat said that actually the villagers were supposed to contribute to the construction of these houses by providing shram daan. However, if they were told so before the construction they may not have agreed. So for their own benefits, the Panchayat lied to





them and got them to work on the construction. The amount equaling their shramdaan is what has not been paid to these people.

In some of the other villages the women folk stopped the yatris and requested them organize for construction of houses in their village too. When asked what was it that these people did fifty years ago and what were the circumstances then, two old women replied they were much better off fifty years ago. They could eat any thing and any where. Today, they cannot step out of their house with out being accosted by the village landlord. Even after so many years of independence, Bihar's situation is grave. It is important to understand the State and people of Bihar.

On the way back while crossing the river Koshi, two types of farming were visible – one extremely modern and the other traditional, alive type of farming. The modern farms had Corn Terminator Hybrid kind of crops. Till about two years back, this seed was very fertile and gave good crop. Last year however, this seed gave a very green crop with no seeds or grain. The sellers of the seeds told the farmers that it was due to bad weather conditions that there was no grain in the crop, but this year there will certainly be grains as well as seed. The farmers have spent a lot of money to buy the seeds again and plant them. However, the traditional farmers experienced a good crop both the years that the modern farmers did not get! Such huge difference in crop and a feeling of agitation was highly visible in Bihar. It is possible to see both modern and the traditional in Bihar.



The yatris made a listing of the benefits and losses from floods and then analyzed them and arrived at the conclusion that we must accept floods as a part of nature. The projects undertaken for flood relief have led to increasing both the frequency as well as the length of the floods. It is important to be rid of this cycle.

In Patna the Yatra was busy with the Dharna and meetings organized to ensure that the administration takes action to arrest the killers of Smt. Sarita and Sh. Maheshkant, who were fighting for the cause of water in Bihar. In the evening the yatris met the Chief Minister and made a request to him for the same. The Chief Minister issued orders to take action on this matter immediately. It is suspected that their murders were politically motivated as while undertaking





their water conservation activities, they must have rubbed the administration the wrong way.

In many villages, the protestors got their heads tonsured and started an agitation across the country to protest against these murders. They also organised a Sarita Mahesh Karyan Jali Yatra, which visited Banda, Dudhi, Chhapra and Khagaria. The biggest tribute to these people will of course be the completion of the work they started.

The floods in Bihar come from Nepal, which leads to the farm lands of Darbhanga, Saharasa, Muzzafarpur and Khagaria getting submerged in water. The new highdam is the latest project launched to save the people from these floods. However, this Highdam will bring just the same fate to Bihar as did the embankments. It is therefore believed that the people of Bihar should themselves work towards finding solutions to their problem of floods and drought.

The only way to solve this problem is by starting a decentralized water management program which begins in Nepal and continues down to Bihar. This is the only way that the flooded areas will get less water and those facing drought will get more water.





## Uttaranchal

**T**he Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra reached Uttaranchal via Haridwar on March 10. The first stop in Uttaranchal was Nav Danya farm. People like Rajendra Singh, Vandana Shiva, Sunder Lal Bahuguna, Arjun Baba, Kajodie Maa, Vimla Bahuguna, and S.M. Hasnat accompanied the Yatra. The focus of the Yatra in Uttaranchal was the privatization of River Ganga.

On March 11, the Yatra left for Chamba. Public meetings were organized at Mandarpur and Ganeshpur villages. Dr. Vandana Shiva who joined the Yatra at Chamba, delivered a motivating speech on the need to conserve and use indigenous seed bank of our country rather than using hybrid seeds. Hybrid seeds initially appear to be more profitable for the farmer but are susceptible to diseases. The farmer generally ends up losing because the farmers have to procure these seeds from the market as they are patented.

They cannot save the seeds from the earlier year's produce. While the seeds are expected to give a higher yield they cost the farmer a lot of money. The country also faces the danger of the farmers forgetting how to use indigenous seeds, which too the MNCs will patent. She gave the much talked about examples of Haldi and Basmati

Rice which some companies in the US tried to patent. It took Vandana Shiva a long legal battle to get the licence of the Basmati patent cancelled.

Vandana Shiva also highlighted the fact that the scientific and environmental consequences of hybrid seeds are harmful since they require more chemical fertilizers and water for irrigation compared to indigenous seeds. She emphasized that we need to save our seeds to save our water resources and should allow MNCs to take control of our natural resources.

On March 12, the Yatra visited Tehri, a disturbing site to see. The town looked war torn and depicted the harsh and difficult situations faced by the common man in India. The town is today half deserted however there are still those who seem determined to continue living in the ruined town of Tehri.





The Yatra held a meeting with Sundar Lal Bahuguna, Vimla Bahuguna and the residents of Tehri. Bahuguna congratulated the Yatri who came from different states to fight the evils of privatization and sale of rivers. According to Mr. Bahuguna, the people of Uttaranchal were fooled by the promises that Tehri Dam was being built for their welfare.

River Ganga is not just a source of water but is also worshipped by the Hindus. The women offer prayers to the Ganga before beginning to cook food. According to Bahuguna, the people living by the banks of the Ganga have been deprived to their right to worship, the children of the families were turned against their parents and made to shift to other locations. Government offices were moved over night. Promises were made that no one will be forced to move from the banks of the river. But these were all tall promises no one was there to stand by them.

- **Save earth and mud**
- **Methods of water conservation, health, education and women empowerment**
- **Oppose the Tehri dam**
- **Stories of small talabs being built in the area and how they have mitigated the drudgery of women , were narrated**

The Rasthriya Jal Chetna Yatra took out a rally at Tehri Bayradi along with the village women and women workers of Mahila Samakhya. Slogans condemning the sale of rivers, privatization and commoditization of water were raised. Later a public meeting was organized.

In Chamba the Yatra addressed students of Rajkiya Balika Vidhyalaya Inter College. After the meeting the students pledged not to use bottled water and to

participate in the Ganga Bachao Andolan.

On March 13, the Yatra reached Dehradun, where a press conference was organized. The conference was addressed by Vandana Shiva, Oscar Olivera from Bolivia and Rajendra Singh, the leader of the Jal Yatra. The Yatra then visited DAV PG College Dehradun where a Sabha was organized, from where it proceeded to Har Ki Pauri at Haridwar. On March 14, the Yatra left for Roorkee from where they went to Meerut.

Rajendra Singh was the main speaker at both these places and he focused on National Water Policy, interlinking major rivers of India, recharging of ground water and nationalization and privatization of water bodies.

Oscar Olivera from Bolivia, to demonstrate the ills of privatization, presented the case of privatization of water in his country. The management of water and all rights of ownership of water transferred to a company called Vivendi. As a result





the prices of water increased manifold and people who attempted to conserve water from natural resources such as rain were barred from doing so. When it became unbearable, the people of Bolivia, under the leadership of Oscar Olivera, started a movement against privatization of water and managed to throw the company out after a prolonged legal battle. The next problem was who would manage the water supply. The people of Bolivia formed a company which regulates and manages the water supply. Oscar said that there is a lot to be learnt from the Bolivia experience.

The Yatra left for Delhi on March 14, where a two day seminar was conducted. Representatives of seven states participated in the seminar. Experiences gained during the Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra were shared. It was decided that action would be taken for

- Providing a revolutionary shape to the Yatra, based on ideas of some revolutionaries
- Drafting a new water policy

The second session of the seminar, held on March 16, was focused on the issue of joining the major rivers of India. The impact, feasibility and need for such a project were discussed. At the end of the seminar a declaration condemning privatization and commoditization of water, and proposing communization of water was passed.

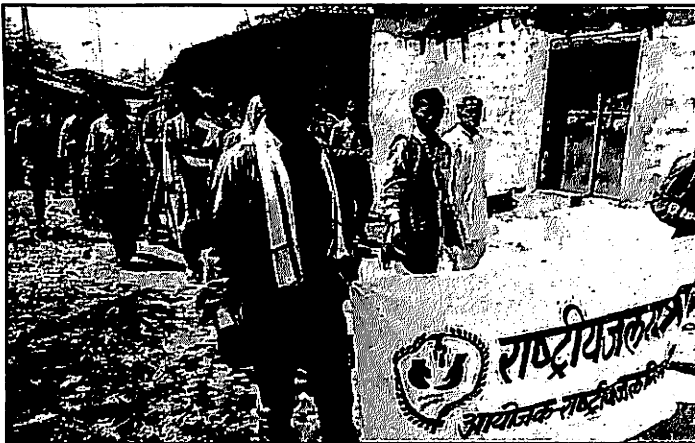




## Uttar Pradesh

**T**he Jal Yatra left for U.P. on March 8, which is also celebrated as Women's Day globally. In Jonpur, the Yatra Dal along with the local women took out a big rally to support women and water conservation. The rally concluded at the Jonpur Tehsil office with a big meeting.

The Yatra was given a warm welcome by the people of Jonpur, especially the women, who were impressed by the mission taken up by the Jal Yatri to raise awareness on issues related to water, its efficient use and conservation. They were also impressed by the participation of women from different states.



Kajodie Maa from Mandalvas, Rajor shared the experience of their village and the hardships before water harvesting was undertaken by the local community with the facilitation of Tarun Bharat Sangh. During drought the young men used to migrate to the cities and the women had to travel miles in search of water and fodder. It was life full of drudgery.

But the people of Rajor changed their fate with the help and guidance of Tarun Bharat Sangh. TBS taught them

how to survive with the least resources and how to conserve every drop of water. Rajendra Singh helped to revive the ancestral art of constructing water harvesting structures such as Johads. Slowly this area earlier declared a dark zone, converted into a white zone and the farmers were able to raise two crops a year, bringing back both the young men and the prosperity of the villages.

This of course posed new challenges. The area became known as a prosperous one; people from other areas started coming and establishing liquor shops, leading to the men getting addicted to drinking. They started returning home late at night and fighting with their women. The village women got together and ousted the liquor shops, thus getting back the happiness.

The present discussion on privatization of water angers the people of Rajor and many other villages of Rajasthan, because they have sweated it out to conserve and recharge their water resources. These the government is now staking a







claim and wants to hand over to multi-national companies. This is the reason people from various parts of Rajasthan have come together for the Jal Yatra going from city to city and village to village protesting against the National Water Policy and raising awareness amongst the citizens of the country about the huge looming water crisis.

On the way to Banaras from Jonpur the Yatra stopped at various villages holding meetings and spreading the message of water conservation. In Banaras, the Yatra visited the famous Ganga Ghats, which they found completely polluted and badly managed. The Yatra appealed to the people of Banaras to maintain their traditional water resources and take active and effective measures to protect them privatization and pollution.

The Rasthriya Jal Chetna Yatra on reaching Lucknow, organized a press conference to spread the message of water conservation amongst the masses of the city.





## North East

**A**ssam had lovely bananas, rice and vegetables. It was very satisfying to eat rice and curd, gur on the bark of banana trees. The food of the North East is unique and that is why it is very important to save the Brahmaputra. The traditions and religion of this part of India are all a gift of the Brahmaputra. To maintain the give and take balance with the river, the society of Assam, will have to understand their religion as well as follow it. Brahmaputra is the religion of Assam, which can be assumed and accepted by every one. Only if the people of Assam work to saving the Brahmaputra will they be able to become a state with plentiful water.



It is common to hear discussions about floods in the North East because of the Brahmaputra but one never gets to hear stories about how the government and the people conserved water. It was surprising to see Gauri Sagar, Shiv Sagar and the Jai Sagar ponds. Jaisagar is the largest covered pond of Asia. The king had got this pond made in the name of his Jaisamita. In order to pay tribute to his mother, the King got this pond made to provide water to the subjects of his kingdom. The Shivsagar and

Gaurisagar ponds have been made by the efforts and sacrifice of the people of Assam.

It has been oft repeated in Rajasthan that the people of Rajasthan work towards conserving water because they are faced with a shortage of water. People of the states where there is plentiful water are never involved in water conservation and harvesting projects. This has been proven absolutely wrong by the experiences of the Jal Yatra which realised that from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Goa to Guwahati; people are involved in such work every where. While there has been a fight for the rights to water, water has always been a giver of good and has always been considered as pure and a pilgrimage. That is why the society has been attached to water and the basis of life has been attached to management of water. Water did not turn into a tradable commodity any where. The people learnt to live with the problems of floods and droughts. They did not consider these as a problem but as some thing that had to happen as a part of nature.





People lived well because they understood these aspects of nature.

Today the government presents floods as a problem which can only bring sadness to the people. Therefore the people want to save themselves from such vagaries of nature. The government in the name of saving people from floods and droughts is making plans to link the rivers. That is why they are talking about managing floods. The smart ones in the society understand this and are therefore protesting against such plans.

The Brahmaputra river begins its journey from Brahmakund, travels through Tibet and China and then reaches Assam. This miles wide river which has created thousands of islands such as the Masauli, is not a small river but a giant river. Since the water flows with much force in this river it makes and destroys islands very often.

The rivers linking project plans to change the course of this river to the Indian borders between Bangladesh and Bhutan to a narrow path, converting this giant river into a small stream and then linking it to the Mahanadi in Orissa. During the Jal Sammelan at Delhi, the people of North East had pledged to save the river Brahmaputra. This is why it was considered important to take care of the river and save it from the dangers that the river is faced with. Guwahati observed International Water Day on March 22, 2004. Dr. G.D. Aggarwal, Sh. Hem Bhai of Assam, workers from the Shanti Sadhna Ashram, teachers from the university, and youth from Assam Gana Parishad were present on the occasion. They got together and planned the Save Brahmaputra Agitation.



From Guwahati they reached Gaurisagar, where they took out a rally and distributed pamphlets. Many teachers and other professionals attended the meeting here, and protested against the project of linking the Brahmaputra to the Mahanadi. They were also concerned about how they can save the town from floods.

In Diko Arsam village the meeting was attended by children, young and the old alike. The youth of this village were very aggressive and protested against the river linking project. Some intelligent old people said that floods also give a lot to the society. These people believe that the Brahmaputra is akin to their





parents and therefore they will not allow outsiders to buy the river because it leads to a little bit of problem for them. The Brahmaputra is the basis of life for these people and they will not let go of it at any cost. The Yatri's were very surprised to hear this kind of a response from the elderly.

It was possible to start a fresh debate on the Brahmaputra issue and created a desire amongst the people to save their river. Looking at the excitement amongst the people it was proposed that a Jal Biradari be set up here. The pledge to save the Brahmaputra was to give a message out to people to start working immediately. This program lasted from 20th to 29th March and ended at the Shanti Sadhan Ashram in Vijaysagar District where they took a decision – protest against the river linking project during the elections. After the elections when the work on the river linking project begins step up the protests and mobilise people against this project.



Assam Sarvodaya Mandal, Kasturba Gandhi Trust, ASU etc. unanimously agreed to protest against the river linking project. Sh. Hem Bhai has also started organising other such groups of people. It was planned that even before the elections are over, these organisations must be ready to launch their protests against the river linking project. It seems that Assam is a green, prosperous state – but this prosperity comes from the river Brahmaputra. If you change the nature of this river, even the society's nature will have to change.

This is some thing that a large section of the people of Assam has understood. Brahmaputra Bachao program will further enhance this feeling.

The North East has been saved of the problems of water shortage because there is plentiful water in the Brahmaputra. But one must not forget that where ever there are treasures the thieves always focus on those places while hatching their plans of theft. The Brahmaputra has plentiful water and the water thieves are focused on this treasure. Therefore the people of Assam will have to stand up for their right and save their treasure from the thieves.





## Bengal

**B**engal could well have been called a state of Ponds and Pokhrans. People of Bengal open their eyes and start their daily routine with the use of water from the ponds – starting from bathing, washing utensils, cooking the rice for which they use water from the ponds, fish that they love and of course not to forget the beetle leaves all come from these ponds.

The state with beautiful ponds has been traditionally focused on decentralised water management practices and is a model to follow.

The Jal Yatra reached Bengal in its fourth phase. Purulia is a region which is vastly affected by droughts. The droughts maintain their clutches in this area inspite of a good spell of rainfall. This aspect has become further enhanced because the ponds which saved the people from the droughts have started breaking down under the pressure of mud and garbage. All the rain water flows into the sea instead of recharging these ponds.



Gandhiji's swarajya charkhas are still used in this state. Currently every household in the village uses the dhekli for pulling up water from the wells and ponds.

The Panchayats and the village level organisations are well aware. Nintod village of Midnapur is a reminder of the independence struggle launched from there. There is still a lot of anger against multi national companies, here.

In the Modi village of Howra, every third house has a pond. The pond right across the Gandhi Peace Foundation here is rather dirty as it is used by the people for their daily chores. 40 kilometers from Modi village is another small village called Kamani. Here Mr. Chandan Pal of the Bengal Jal Biradari motivated the people to start using non potable water for farming and also helped them to construct some new ponds. This helped the people to start sowing rice, beetle, fish etc. in the village. The result – the youth who had been uprooted from their village now started getting livelihood with in their own village. A small water project changed the lives of many people in this village. While Bengal is the successful model for novel projects, it can also become the centre for war against privatisation of





water. The then government of Bengal was quite adept at protesting against privatisation of water.

Today, it is clear from Kamani village that inspite of it being a heavy rainfall state, there is a water shortage here. This, inspite of the fact that the village is located in the Howrah river bed. Some new ponds have been constructed in this village and some people have started farming colourful fish. They pull out the underground water to charge these ponds with water and earn money through such fish farming. The dry farms and fields on one side and the shameless farming of colourful fish on the other are proof of commercialisation of water.

Bengal has a good mix of traditional and modern thinking. But today this mix is being misused by some. While the government is supportive of the traditional ponds and water management projects, there are people who are just running after making money.

If this state wants to become self sufficient, they will have to encourage traditional decentralised self sufficient life style. The water needs of this state can be met with the rain water alone. The underground water resources of this state are getting increasingly polluted. The pure and sweet water from the land is flowing into the sea and turning salty. Where the traditional methods of rain water harvesting are still alive there is sufficient water and other means of taking care of the needs of the people.





# Learnings from the Rashtriya Jal Yatra

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## i. Genesis of the Yatra

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The National Water Policy was declared on April 1, 2002. It was widely felt all over the country that the provisions of the Policy would drive India towards a centralised control of water and an atmosphere in which the private sector would have more say in planning and managing water resources in the country. The colossal scheme for linking 37 rivers all over India to enable inter-basin transfers has also been proposed by the Government as a panacea for tackling problems of drought, flood and agricultural and industrial development in the country.

The National Water Policy has defined water as a property and a tradable commodity thus promoting privatization of water. Privatization of water, which is fast becoming a reality, is unethical. We as responsible collective citizens of the country must fight such a move. **Water is a natural resource, a gift to mankind.** No one has the right to privatize this resource and therefore any such attempts must be condemned.

A drive to privatize and commoditize water will destroy community rights and erode community responsibility in water conservation and sustainable use. More than privatization, the authorities should focus energies on water conservation techniques and on building awareness amongst people on the judicious use of this scarce but very important natural resource.

In the above environment, activists and groups working on community-based water harvesting fear that in the long run, resources developed by the efforts of countless communities in various parts of the country could come under the ambit of privatisation. It is also widely recognised that lack of right to develop, manage and control their own water resources is the major reason for alienation of local communities from their water (and hence land and forest) resources. The current policy developments would further alienate communities and result in pushing the country into an ecologically and economically disastrous downward spiral, affecting most the poorest sections of Indian society.

This urgency of the Yatra was further accentuated by cases in Chhatisgarh, Orissa, Kerala and other states where water resources had been (or were proposed to be) put under BOOT schemes. The corporate sector has been given unfettered priority rights by these States over water resources completely ignoring the rights of local populations.





The Rashtriya Jal Biradari, a national group of activists, NGOs, scientists and other concerned citizens working in various parts of India on water issues was formed in this background with the objectives of involving various sections of Indian civil society in dialogue and constructive action on water issues.

## **ii. Objectives of the Rashtriya Jal Yatra**

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The Rashtriya Jal Biradari felt an urgent need to organise civil society against the disastrous implications of the NWP and river-linking scheme. In order to sensitise people at large about the major issues involved and to seek a diversity of opinions from various parts of the country on the same, the Rashtriya Jal Yatra was planned with the following objectives:

- To increase awareness about the need for judicious use and regeneration of water resources for enhancing water quality and quantity in all parts of India.
- To increase awareness about water as a basic right of each citizen of India and the consequences of Government policies regarding privatization of water and interlinking of rivers of India.
- To meet persons/ institutions doing exemplary work in water conservation and management in India.
- To bring together activists who are working on water issues in isolated pockets of India to form a national forum against privatization of water.
- To form a pressure group for making state and national water policies more people-oriented and responsive.

In 14 months, the Yatra touched 320 districts in 30 states of India (of which 17 states are severely drought affected) and met concerned persons in 90 cities and 3 metropolises.

## **iii. Issues that emerged during the Yatra**

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### **a. Degradation of surface and groundwater resources**

Acute degradation of land, water and forest resources in all parts of the country is leading to an acute scarcity of water with all its consequent impacts. Nature is fast losing its capacity to regenerate its capacity to provide water for human and ecological use. The cycles of floods and droughts are becoming more recurrent and severe.







Overexploitation and unsustainable use of surface and groundwater is leading to a rapid fall in groundwater table. The number of districts in the dark zone is increasing sharply.

### **b. Drinking water**

The availability of clean and potable drinking water is falling very fast, leading to a rapid rise in exploitative drinking water markets. In 1952, according to planning commission study 232 villages in India were without any water source in 2002 this number has increased to 90,000 villages. In 2003, this figure has reached 1 lakh.

Where potable water is not available, water borne diseases and drudgery of fetching drinking water for human and animal population are on the increase.

Water quality is also being severely affected by human interventions such as excessive ground and surface water exploitation (leading to increase in fluorides and salinity) and industrial and household pollution of water.

### **c. Failed promises of large dams**

Modern methods of water management such as large and medium dams have failed to deliver on promises of flood and drought control. These are in many cases now the causes of droughts and floods. The social impacts of such large dams have still not been addressed. However, such structures (as in Tehri and Narmada) continue to be built and supported by the State.

### **d. Conflicts on water**

At a local level, increasing inequity in access to water is being manifested in the form of conflicts over water use between:

- Urban and rural areas
- Various sectors such as agriculture, industry, energy





- Advantaged classes and marginalised sections.
- "Lower" and "upper" castes.
- Upstream and downstream water users.
- Various states.

#### **e. Water for irrigation**

There is a drastic decrease in water availability for irrigation, severely affecting food security.

Non-judicious use of water is also visible in the promotion of water-intensive crops. As an example, of 3700 dams built in India 1,600 are in Maharashtra. Thus Maharashtra has consumed 40% of the total expenditure on water resources in India. In spite of this, out of 45,000 villages in the state, 6,000 are facing acute drinking water scarcity and water is being supplied to these by tankers. In Mann tehsil of Satara district, 69 villages out of 80 villages are supplied water by tankers. There is the bizarre phenomenon of coexistence of a thriving water market on the one hand along with large areas in the state being under water intensive crops such as sugarcane. In fact, the Yatra found that in more "developed" states such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, etc., the incidence of farmers' suicides due to the above problems is very high.

The pricing policies of electricity and subsidies in water pricing in canal irrigation are promoting a non-judicious use of water in some pockets. Canal irrigation is itself causing increased salinity through water logging in large pockets in the country.

The increased cost of water in almost all parts of the country is fast making milk cheaper than water and is hence making dairying unviable. Thus the cost of production of agricultural and associated products is on the increase.

#### **f. Impact of pressures of globalisation**

Although the National Water policy underlines that priority in water allocation should be given for drinking water and irrigation, in reality, water allocation for industry and urban water use is getting a priority.

The entry of private water companies is being portrayed as a cure for the mismanagement of water resources by State and Municipal authorities in urban and semi-urban areas to meet drinking water and industrial water needs. However, this has grave consequences for the poor sections that do not have the purchasing power to compete in the market. Thus in Chhatisgarh, Radius Company was





given a contract for providing 30 MLPD from Shivenath river to Borai Industrial area and Durg city.

The State's policy of handing over control of water resources to private sector under various BOOT schemes as a result of global pressures and due to the nexus between industry, politicians and bureaucrats. These policies are leading to exclusion of poor tribals and local residents from using water for their basic subsistence in various areas such as Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, while at the same time promoting profit mongering for the private sector.

### **g. River linking**

The river linking scheme is bound to fail because surplus water is not available in any river basin except Brahmaputra. Also, the 3 river links (Sutlej-Yamuna, Cauvery-Godavari, Godavari-Mahanadi) which were started many years back with large expenditure have failed because no state is willing to accept that it has surplus water. The scheme is thus a gross wastage of public money without concomitant benefits.

### **h. Negligence of traditional water harvesting systems**

India has a rich bounty of traditional systems of water harvesting in various parts of the country that evolved from the agro-ecological-climatic diversity of the country. All religious and cultural systems in India have viewed water resources with reverence and there still exists a strong water philosophy in the country based on prudent and judicious use of water.

However, there has been a gross negligence in regeneration and maintenance of traditional water structures in almost all parts of the country. There is also now a dependence on the government for maintaining the same.

### **i. Learning from positive efforts**

On the positive side, there are innumerable examples in different parts of India where communities have been mobilized for water conservation and regeneration. In such areas, the ill effects of drought have been minimized. Water availability for drinking and irrigation has increased, migration has decreased and an increase in income from sale of agriculture and associated produce has been the result. Such examples are visible in Neemi and many other villages in Alwar in Rajasthan, Hirwe Bazar, Ralegan Siddhi in Maharashtra and other states.

This underlines the need for promoting decentralized methods and techniques of water conservation and management to respond to cultural and agro-ecological-climatic diversity in various parts of India.





#### **iv. Perspective of Jal Biradari on above issues**

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Jal Biradari feels that the above issues must be seen in the following perspective:

- Water is a basic human right and is the very basis of human existence. It is not a property of the State or any individual. Water is an endowment of nature to mankind and human society can manage water for both human and environmental benefit.
- Water is never a private asset and ever a universal resource. The state is the trustee (not an owner) of all natural resources, which are by nature meant for public use and enjoyment. The state is thus under a legal duty to protect the natural resources. These resources meant for public use cannot be converted into private ownership. Privatisation of water resources is thus a crime against mankind and should not be encouraged.
- The current crisis of water is one of management and not that of supply. The solution is to regenerate water resources to such an extent that supply far exceeds demand. This is the only long-term way of fighting current globalisation and privatisation of water.
- If Gandhiji were alive, he would have launched a massive campaign against privatization. The talab and dhekli would replace the charkha as his weapon for regeneration of the downtrodden today. He would fight for right for conservation of water resources as a fundamental nontradable right.
- Rather than linking rivers, it is more important to link people with rivers today. For this, communities should have the right to plan, conserve, manage and control their water resources at local, river basin, state levels.
- Traditional values of reverence and prudence in use of water need to be revived on an urgent basis. Our national water policy must be based on the philosophical and cultural values of Indian society.
- In urban areas, there is a strong need for a differential water pricing to ensure that five-star hotels, industries, affluent colonies are not subsidised and that poorer sections and people living in slums pay according to their capacity.

#### **v. Future directions**

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- State level public water commissions (Jan- Jal -Aayog) are to be formed in various states which would prepare a white paper on the situation of water





in their states, the gaps in their state water policies and how state and national water policies could be made responsive to people's needs.

- The Jan- Jal-Aayogs should contain at least the following :
  - A justice of the High Court from the respective state.
  - An eminent water scientist.
  - An experienced water engineer or a gajdhar.
  - A women social activist.
  - A journalist and environmentalist.





## National Water Awareness Campaign

- For long-term sustainability at village level, a village water fund is required which could be raised from the following :
  - Labour contribution by one person from each household per month.
  - Contribution of one day's salary per month by each household engaged in job or service.
  - Setting up grain bank in each village.
  - Under the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, Panchayats and local municipal bodies have been given rights to plan, conserve and manage their water resources. These must be supported to carry out the same.
  - Formation and supporting river parliaments for planning, conserving managing resources and resolving conflicts at a basin level is an urgent priority.





# Program of the Yatra

Phase	Duration	States covered
<b>Phase I</b>	23 Dec 2002 to 10 Mar 2003	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Delhi</li><li>2. Haryana</li><li>3. Rajasthan</li><li>4. Gujarat</li><li>5. Madhya Pradesh</li><li>6. Chhatisgarh</li><li>7. Orissa</li></ol>
<b>Phase II</b>	10 Mar to 30 May 2003	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>8. Uttaranchal</li><li>9. Delhi</li><li>10. Madhya Pradesh</li><li>11. Maharastra</li><li>12. Goa</li><li>13. Karnataka</li><li>14. Andhra Pradesh</li><li>15. Tamil Nadu</li><li>16. Pondicherry</li></ol>
<b>Phase III</b>	Jun 20 to Jul 15 2003	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>17. Kerala</li><li>18. Karnataka</li><li>19. Maharastra</li><li>20. Madhya Pradesh</li><li>21. Uttar Pradesh</li><li>22. Delhi</li><li>23. Haryana</li><li>24. Punjab</li><li>25. J &amp; K</li></ol>
<b>Phase IV</b>	Jul & August 2003	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>26. Himachal Pradesh</li><li>27. Punjab</li><li>28. Haryana</li><li>29. Uttar Pradesh</li><li>30. Rajasthan</li></ol>





<b>Phase</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>States covered</b>
<b>Phase V</b>	Sep to Dec 2003	Follow-up on above and following states of North East : 31. West Bengal 32. Bihar 33. Jharkhand
<b>Phase VI</b>	Dec 2003 and Jan 2004	Follow up visits 34. Maharashtra 35. Kerala 36. Uttaranchal 37. Uttar Pradesh
<b>Phase VII</b>	March -May 2004	Follow-up visits in : 38. Arunachal 39. Assam 40. Manipur 41. Meghalaya 42. Mizoram 43. Nagaland 44. Sikkim







## The Arvari Sansad (Parliament)

Since 1986 Tarun Bharat Sangh has built 5000 Johads, check dams, and anicuts for rain water harvesting. These small scale low cost structures do not look like very much, but together they have changed Rajasthan. In 1996 Arvari was flowing even at the peak of summer. Since then four more Rivers have become perennial. Earlier these rivers had water only during the monsoons.

This led to the natural growth of fish, which continued to multiply. The government wanted to get hold of fish and brought in a contractor. Local people realized that the government, through the contractor was intruding into community's domain, its right over the use of water. Water as a resource was developed by them and they wanted to have full control over it. They thus revolted and the government had to cancel the contract. If they had allowed that intrusion to succeed, the leadership would have failed the community to protect its right over water.

Not only did the local people fear intrusion from the Government, there were also differences within the community over sharing of Arvari waters.

***This led to the formation of Arvari Sansad (Parliament) representing 72 villages which has framed 11 rules for use of Arvari water. The Parliament meets 4 times a year.***

This example demonstrates community leadership in action in protecting a resource:

- **First** people work on their priority i.e. water, and develop this resource through rainwater harvesting.
- **Second** when resource is fully developed there is an intrusion to demolish the concept of people's right over water.
- **Third community puts up a strong resistance and removes intrusion.**
- **Fourth community consolidates and takes responsibility. It gets a mandate from 72 Villages.**
- **Finally a lesson- the community initiated work unites people and builds bonds of cooperation between different constituent groups.**

Workers of TBS function as facilitators with leaders of Gram Sabhas. But all this is possible when every member of Village Community has a feeling of Ownership.





**This** feeling of ownership is very important and is a product of one's contribution, participation, and sharing.

### **Contribution**

The most critical ingredient in building leadership and management of resources is the contribution the leader and each member of his community makes. When the Johads are being made contributions of each section of the community have to be decided. As a matter of policy, TBS does not associate itself with any structure building till the contribution aspect is sorted out.

Contributions come both as Shramdaan (free labour) or cash. This contribution determines participation and the ownership of the resource. Where communities are very poor, it is difficult to convince people to make a contribution. Initially they had to bear 25% of total cost, it now varies between 35 and 75% depending upon benefits that will accrue to the people. There are cases where people have provided 100% contribution seeking only technical advice from TBS. Contribution involves the concept of ownership of asset created and if one owns an asset, he will ensure its long-term safety and maintenance.

### **Technical Training**

TBS has 45 workers responsible for projects in different areas of Rajasthan. TBS gets requests from other States of India for advice and they depute these workers. These workers are picked up from villages where TBS has worked. TBS's credo is "Do not expect others to do what you cannot do yourself," a learning by doing technique at the geographical site. The workers have to examine:

- Detailed features of the landscape
- Catchments
- Reservoir for storing water
- Suitable site if a new one
- Soil type
- The possible benefits

Some years ago TBS launched training courses for its workers to impart technical knowledge. Duration of this training varied from 6 to 9 months. Today these workers are as good as any, if not better, as far as building of Water Harvesting Structures is concerned.





## Gram Sabha and Bhaonta Village

Promotion of village institutions to look after projects during implementation and maintenance is also responsibility of TBS workers. And the primary institution in this respect is the Gram Sabha (village representative body). Earlier there was a problem with women joining and participating in Gram Sabha activities but gradually the male resistance to their participation softened.

In Bhaonta Village, the Gram Sabha is very active and women have formed a Mahila Mandal (Women's Committee) for themselves. This Mandal works as an associate to Gram Sabha and discusses problems specific to women as well as to voice general concerns.

The Gram Sabha of this village is very progressive and received an award of Rs.1,00,000 from the President of India for being most environment friendly. This Gram Sabha is known for high degree of awareness on water, land and environment issues, and has a development fund of its own for maintenance of structures etc.

Gram Sabhas generally have following functions to perform:

- Meet once a month on Amavasya (new moon night)
- Make rules on felling of trees, protection of pastures, forestlands, use of water, crop patterns, alcoholism etc.
- Punishment for breaking rules
- Building a fund for future development or maintenance needs.

TBS may help but does not run Gram Sabhas. TBS has also a Friend of Trees Award (Paryavaran Premi Puraskar), which is given annually to eco-friendly active Gram Sabhas.

## padYatra (Footmarch)

There are times when you can find workers of TBS and men and women leaders from different villages going round for weeks from village to village carrying banners and shouting slogans about conserving water, saving forests and planting trees. In the evenings where they halt they talk of ways to make gram sabhas effective with local people. These footmarches have become popular and more and more people want to join them. Where the literacy is low and people poor, this tool is very effective in establishing communication.





## **Johads and Drought**

Rajasthan is a drought prone state and there are years when rains are half of average rainfall. And one of the main features of Johad building activity is that villages which have built water harvesting structures are able to withstand the rigors of drought much better. When TBS started working, this area was classified as "Dark Zone" by the Government i.e. the region has severe water shortage and underground water table has receded to difficult depths. The same area after 10 years of TBS work on Johads was classified as "White Zone" which means it does not need attention of Government during drought and its underground water levels are satisfactory.

## **The Jal Biradari – a culmination of years of efforts**

TBS's efforts of organizing the villages and local communities across the country have resulted in the formulation of the Jal Biradari. It is a people's organization of individuals and organizations that are concerned about conservation of Jal -Jungle- Jameen especially to promote water conservation work and to re-establish the community rights over water. From 1998 onwards Jal Biradari is working to make people oriented National and State Water Policy.

Jal Biradari was formally initiated in the National Water convention held in April 2001 in Tarun Bharat Sangh at Nimmi village (near Jaipur). More than 7,000 water warriors from all over the country participated in the convention. Then started the water movement regarding **water rights** and to establish communities right over water. The responsibility of leading the movement was given to the Convenor of Tarun Bharat Sangh, Rajendra Singh.

Jal Biradari is a platform of various individuals, farmers groups, social groups, voluntary organizations, Non Government Organisations, Research Institutions, social scientist, water experts basically all those who are concerned and have deep interest with the issue as important as water which forms the basis and support system of life and to make the water conservation work a mass movement as well as to give full support and efforts to have people oriented water policy both at the National and State level.

The **Rashtriya Jal Biradari** has been concerned with water issues, especially in the light of the recently declared National Water Policy. The Jal Biradari has been fighting for the cause of water for the past few years. Even after the declaration of the National Water Policy on April 1, 2002 not many people have reacted. Therefore the Jal Biradari has taken up this responsibility to fight for this cause and to create mass movement regarding water conservation all over the country.

This it is doing through the **Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra**.





## Get Results

To quote an American management guru:

“Good intentions, good policies, good decisions must turn into effective action ..... Work is not being done by having a lovely plan. Work is not being done by a magnificent statement of policy. Work’s done when it’s done. Done by people. By the people with dead lines ..... **By people who hold themselves responsible for results”**

What Mangu Lal Patel told me in 1985 was no different. He simply said, **“Do not talk too much. Dig tanks and build Johads. You will get results.”**





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---

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Tarun Bharat Sangh

# Tarun Jal Vidyapeeth

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