

Rajendra Singh

Rajendra Singh is a highly respected social activist working with water and river issues in India. Inspired by Gandhi, in 1985 he went to live in arid, rural Rajasthan, to introduce modern education and medicine there but soon the villagers made clear their primary need was for water. Harnessing the villagers' capacities and their traditional wisdom, Johads (small earthen dams to trap water) were quickly built and the first fruits of these labours were realised in the very next rains when the river began to flow again. Their area was dramatically transformed, progressively becoming more productive, and healthier.

Rajendra and Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS), the organisation he set up to further this work, began in each village by persuading the Village Council, a traditional body comprised of representatives from each household, where decisions are taken by consensus, to contribute labour and materials towards building and maintaining the johads.

Over 28 years of working in that region, **7 rivers**, dry for eighty years, were revived. He helped the villagers build more than 10,000 Johads at strategic points. Major impacts of this sustained work have made the area a 'water surplus zone' with:

- Recharged aquifers, much improved ground water levels and more surface water ;
- increased agricultural and milk production securing food supplies;
- thriving communities, especially for women and children;
- disciplined use of natural resources;
- ecological restoration .

His application of this unique strategy of community-driven, decentralised water management & conservation has regenerated healthy, prosperous communities; strengthened democracy and political transparency; changed government practices.

Working with actual communities, Rajendra Singh demonstrates that using the inherent capacities of a community *as well as* introducing appropriate modern knowledge, strengthens a community's capacity to adapt to existential threats such as climate change.

At a national level:

- He is a key contributor to the National Water Policy and the National River Policy.
- He launched the *Rashtriya Jal Biradari* (National Water Community) in 2001 to provide a platform for concerned citizens to discuss and debate water issues and now has over 5000 members.
- He started the *Jal Jan Jodo* (Linking Water and People) campaign in 2013 focusing on education of communities in river catchment areas about the causes and prevention of pollution and over-exploitation of the river waters.
- Based on his advice, the Indian Government has created the 'National Ganga River Basin Authority', of which he is a key member, to help clean up the River Ganges.
- His organization runs training programmes for school children and rural youth, NGOs and Government authorities on natural resource management. They also give vocational guidance on becoming entrepreneurs, river warriors and climate crusaders.
- His work has helped bring back the extinct tiger population of the 866 sq Kms Sariska National Park.

Rajendra Singh is commonly referred to as "Waterman of India" and at times as the "Water Gandhi".

He was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leaders in 2001.

492 words

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