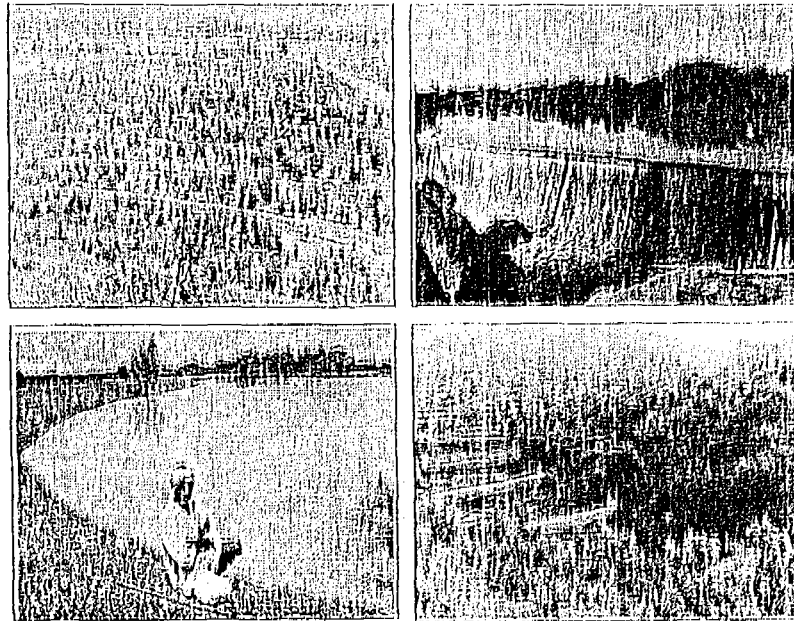




STRATEGY PAPER ON NEERU-MEERU



WATER CONSERVATION MISSION
DEPARTMENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT
GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
3rd FEBRUARY 2001

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STRATEGY PAPER

ON

NEERU-MEERU

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WATER CONSERVATION MISSION
DEPARTMENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT
GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH

INTRODUCTION

Water is a vital natural resource which forms the basis of all life. Further, water is a key resource in all economic activities ranging from agriculture to industry. With ever-increasing pressure of human population, there is severe stress on water resources. Due to lack of advance planning and improper utilization of available water, lands are getting either degraded or turning into wastelands. In India, out of 3290 lakh hectares of geographical area, nearly fifty percent (50%) of land is either waste or degraded.

NEED FOR WATER CONSERVATION

In India, the average annual rainfall is about 1170 mm which is received over an area of 3290 lakh hectares in about 100 rainy days. The receipt of about 4000 billion (4,00,00,000 lakh) cubic metres of rainfall in 100 high intensity rainfall hours renders one third of the geographical area prone to droughts and one eighth of the area subject to floods. The inter-relationship between rainfall, surface water and ground water indicates that out of total precipitation occurring, forty-one percent (41%) are lost as evapo-transpiration and forty percent (40%) lost as run-off, while ten percent (10%) is retained as soil moisture and another nine percent (9%) seeps in for recharging ground water. According to estimates, India will be requiring about 1,20,10,000 lakh cubic metres (cum) of water in the year 2050 AD to cater to the needs of about 150 crores population for food, drinking water, domestic, industrial, navigational, environmental and ecological requirements.

However, the continued neglect of traditional water bodies like tanks and ponds, indiscriminate exploitation of ground water, improper

maintenance of surface water systems and abnormal increase in population has accentuated the water problem which resulted in a sharp decline in per capita availability of water to half of 1947 levels in 2000. India has the largest concentration of rural poor who live in miserable conditions. One of the world wide accepted practices to effect economic development is treatment of lands in backward areas through water. Thus the enormity of the problem calls for laying strong emphasis on water conservation.

ANDHRA PRADESH - LAND AND WATER PROFILE

The total geographical area of Andhra Pradesh is 275 lakh hectares out of which the area falling under waste and degraded land category is 115 lakh hectares which constitutes forty-two percent (42%) of the total geographical area of the state. The state receives about 24,44,000 lakh cum volume of rainfall through an average annual rainfall of 896 mm falling over the entire area of 275 lakh hectares. Out of the total volume of 24,44,000 lakh cum rainfall received, 10,02,040 lakh cum (41%) is lost as evaporation and evapo-transpiration; 9,77,600 lakh cum (40%) is lost as surface run-off; while 2,44,400 lakh cum (10%) is retained as soil moisture and 2,19,960 lakh cum (9%) is recharged as ground water. As the percentage of total rainfall getting lost through evaporation and evapo-transpiration (41%) and run-off (40%) is substantial, the situation has resulted in nearly forty-two percent of total geographical area of the state turning into waste and degraded lands. In addition, due to indiscriminate drawal of surface water and under-utilisation of ground water in ayacut / command areas, the problems of water logging, salinity and alkalization of lands apart from floods are being manifested. Thus, while total water available from surface and

ground together is about 118.71 crore cubic metres with which an area covering 177 lakh hectares representing 88% of total culturable area can be brought under irrigation; the present irrigated area is only 55 lakh hectares which is about 33% of culturable area. Thus, there is need for initiating measures for ensuring effective water conservation and utilisation practices.

EFFORTS FOR WATER CONSERVATION

Over the years, in addition to traditional water harvesting structures like tanks and village ponds, a number of irrigation systems have come up at various places depending upon availability of water source. As the reach of such irrigation systems was limited and considering the vast size and population of the country, different practices have been tried for water conservation which are acceptable to the people. One such programme to combat recurrence of droughts and water stress was watershed programme in drought prone areas which was introduced in 1975. The experience of the programme revealed that the desired impact could not be achieved and sustained as the planning was mostly top down coupled with lack of co-ordination among departments and with hardly any people's participation. Consequently, the programmes of dry / degraded / waste land development have undergone a major change from 1995-96 with the introduction of revised watershed guidelines based on the recommendations of Dr. Hanumantha Rao Committee. The main principle adopted in the new guidelines is to lay emphasis on active mobilization and participation of stakeholders in the programme.

In the light of this backdrop, a massive ten-year watershed programme for development of all the degraded and wastelands was

launched during 1997 in Andhra Pradesh so as to treat 100 lakh hectares of waste and degraded lands. As a result of this effort, 27 lakh hectares of degraded and waste land is under treatment upto December, 2000 with participation of stake holders through 5472 Watershed Committees. Similarly, under Joint Forest Management (JFM), 16.6 lakh hectares of degraded forest land was treated with community participation through 6647 Vana Samrakshana Samithis (VSSs).

WATER, A NATIONAL PRIORITY AND NEED FOR WATER MISSION

With the experience of the last few years and based on recommendations of various experts, the government decided to launch a focussed onslaught on the man made phenomenon of drought and water shortage in the state. Thus, focus was laid on sustainable developmental effort with emphasis on holistic planning on river basin/sub-basin through convergence of various departments at the state, district and sub-district levels. In this direction, amalgamation of various wage employment programmes was devised at the district level with total emphasis on water conservation. With this background, the Government of Andhra Pradesh set up a Water Conservation Mission with experts and eminent persons at the state level with water conservation and its sustainable utilization as its main goal.

LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT FOR WATER CONSERVATION

In December 2000, the A.P. Water, Land and Trees ordinance was promulgated to provide necessary legislative support for water conservation activities. The ordinance seeks to regulate exploitation of ground and surface water, strengthen public participation in conservation activities and ensure equitable access to water in different basins, sub

basins and regions in the state. Some of the salient features in the ordinance are as follows:

- Constitution of Andhra Pradesh Water, Land and Tree Authority with powers to impose penalties including seizure of property.
- Registration of all wells by the users.
- Prohibition of water pumping in areas likely to cause damage/deterioration to ground water aquifer.
- Prior permission for sinking of wells for irrigation/drinking purposes within a distance of 200/250 metres from the existing public drinking source.
- Protection of over-exploited ground water areas by prohibiting extraction of water.
- Closure of wells sunk in contravention of provisions of the ordinance.
- Construction of rainwater harvesting structures in all residential, commercial and other premises and open spaces in an area not less than 100 square yards and incorporating water harvesting structures as being mandatory for securing approvals of building plans.
- Re-use of and recycling of waste water by industrial and domestic users.
- Measures for prohibition of ground water contamination by industrial and aquaculture waste disposal from being discharged into aquifers.
- Measures for ensuring efficient utilization of water in watershed areas through watershed committees and in irrigated command areas through water users associations by training and capacity building.
- Protection of lakes, ponds and tanks by notifying them as heritage bodies and conservation areas and by prevention of dumping of pollutants/wastes.
- Curbs on sand mining from water bodies in private and public lands.
- Compulsory plantation of trees and their maintenance all along highways, canals, water courses etc.

- All agriculturists to plant trees in five percent of their land holdings.
- Protection of trees from felling without permission, from sheep and goats by encouraging stall feeding, from felling in fringe areas of forests by promoting non conventional energy devices.

NEERU-MEERU

For ensuring convergence of the efforts of the concerned departments and to promote water conservation in an aggressive manner, the government brought all water conservation activities into a campaign mode and christened the same as Neeru-Meeru meaning Water and You.

The Government launched Neeru-Meeru on the 1st of May, 2000 coinciding with 12th round of Janmabhoomi. The concept of Neeru-Meeru envisages creation of awareness amongst the people to ensure their participation and to facilitate conservation efforts of various government departments.

The departments involved in Neeru-Meeru programme are:

- Rural Development
- Forest
- Minor Irrigation (I and CAD)
- Minor Irrigation (PR)
- Rural Water supply (PR)
- Municipal Administration and Urban Development
- Endowments

To achieve tangible results, an action plan was prepared by involving people during 12th round of Janmabhoomi and water conservation works suitable to the area were identified and necessary funds were made available from different on-going programmes.

VARIOUS ACTIVITIES UNDER NEERU-MEERU

Neeru-Meeru, in itself not a scheme or a programme, envisages to coordinate and guide the water conservation efforts of various departments. All the activities that are being taken up under Neeru-Meeru, by various departments, are aimed at creating more filling space for harvesting rainwater which contributes to more groundwater recharge. Various activities being carried out under Neeru-Meeru by different departments are –

I. Rural Development Department:

- Continuous contour trenching, continuous peripheral contour trenching and staggered trenching on hill slopes/ foot hills of all categories of lands.
- Gully control works in the recharge areas of hill slopes.
- Checkdams and percolation tanks in the discharge areas.
- Bunding in farmers' fields.
- Farm ponds, sunken ponds, dug-out ponds.
- Desilting of tanks.

II. Forest Department:

- Gully control works and contour trenching on hill slopes of reserved forest areas.
- Check dams and percolation tanks in the discharge areas.

III. Minor Irrigation (I&CAD) Department:

- Restoration of feeder channels to tanks.
- Strengthening of bunds.

- Revetment works of tank bunds.

IV. Minor Irrigation (PR) Department:

- Breach closures.
- Feeder channels and supply channels.
- Desilting.
- Bund strengthening.

V. Rural Water Supply (PR) Department:

- Conversion of low yielding bore wells into injection wells.
- Conversion of disuse dug wells into recharge wells.
- Check dams and mini percolation tanks.
- Recharge structures near bore wells.

VI. Municipal Administration & Urban Development Department:

- Rainwater harvesting structures in the premises of all residential buildings.
- Rainwater harvesting structures in open places, parks and play grounds.
- Rainwater harvesting structures in government/ quasi government offices and educational institutions.
- Run off breakers near bore wells.
- Desilting of tanks/ reservoirs.

VII. Endowments Department:

- Contour trenching.
- Gully control works.

- Check dams and percolation tanks.

The requirement of funds was met from ongoing schemes like Drought Prone Area Programme (D.P.A.P.), Desert Development Programme (D.D.P), Integrated Wasteland Development Programme (I.W.D.P.), Employment Assurance Scheme(E.A.S.), Jawahar Gram Samrudhi Yojana (J.G.S.Y.), National Watershed Development Programme for Rainfed Areas (N.W.D.P.R.A.), Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS), drought funds, etc.

NEERU-MEERU PROGRESS

The first phase of Neeru-Meeru was implemented upto to 31.10.2000 with participation of seven departments in all the districts of the state. During the Neeru-Meeru phase-I, 4,23,976 works with a financial outlay of Rs.190.17 crores have been executed creating an additional filling space of 801.42 lakh cubic metres.

Brief details of the works carried out during Neeru-Meeru phase – I are furnished below:

Sl. No.	Activity	Physical (ha./no.)	Volume (lakh. cum.)	Financial (Rs.in lakhs)
1.	CCT/CPCT/ST (Ha.)	181238	187.60	3932.63
2.	Bunding (Ha.)	20219	23.78	519.38
3.	Percolation tanks	3485	83.13	1485.30
4.	Desilting	7452	274.34	4496.20
5.	Feeder/Supply channels	163	4.18	55.76
6.	Check dams	4350	77.86	2562.94
7.	G.C. works	70565	45.88	1798.55
8.	Farm/Dugout/Sunken ponds	3073	12.47	513.61
9.	Other WHS	124895	66.05	3118.38
10.	Restoration	8536	26.13	535.18
	Total	423976	801.42	19017.93

Encouraged by the response and participation of the people and the impressive impact created by Neeru-Meeru, the government have decided to make Neeru-Meeru a continuing programme. The duration of Neeru-Meeru Phase-II will be from 1.11.2000 to 30.4.2001. The action plan for phase-II, prepared by the departments is as follows:

**Action Plan (Phase-II)
(1-11-2000 to 30-04-2001)**

Sl. No.	Department	Physical in Nos.	Volume in lakh cum.	Financial Rs. in lakhs	Source of funds
1.	RURAL DEVELOPMENT	87198	428.897	8428.20	DPAP, DDP, EAS, IWDP
2.	FOREST	135113	121.218	5676.70	RIDF (NABARD)
3.	IRRIGATION (I & CAD.)	1388	75.330	7410.61	APERP
4.	PANCHAYAT RAJ - MI	1773	72.130	1160.38	PLAN GRANT
5.	RURAL WATER SUPPLY (RWS)	1822	185.700	532.50	PMGY
6.	M.A. & U.D.	32745	6.351	441.93	MUNICIPAL FUNDS
7.	ENDOWMENTS	5803	4.182	255.47	ENDOWMENT FUNDS
	TOTAL	265842	893.808	23905.79	

IMPACT

The Ground Water department has conducted impact analysis studies of works taken up under Neeru-Meeru on groundwater levels and found that:

- Despite seven percent deficit rainfall, all districts registered rise in ground water levels varying between 0.19-6.34 metres during May to December, 2000, due to increase in ground water storage capacity.

- The average rise in ground water level for the state as a whole is 3.35 metres while for regions, it is 2.67 metres for Coastal Andhra, 3.5 metres for Rayalaseema and 3.97 metres for Telangana.
- The comparison of water levels in December, 2000 with December, 1999 indicated a rise of 0.13 metres for the state as a whole.
- An incremental rise in water levels varying between 0.05-7.18 metres was recorded in influent zones of various rain water harvesting structures.

FUTURE PLAN

Though the Phase-I of Neeru-Meeru has been implemented successfully, the concept needs to be institutionalized even better. Hence, efforts are being made to build up proper functioning systems with emphasis on processes under the programme. For achieving this, there is greater need to involve all the stakeholders in the programme including the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs).

On the technical side, the services of experts on the subject have been enlisted for drafting technical guidelines, with emphasis on low cost water harvesting structures. The treatment areas have been prioritised for taking up works under Neeru-Meeru.

I. **Activities and priorities:**

To ensure that every village is motivated about the need for water conservation, it is proposed to take up at least one Neeru-Meeru work in uncovered gram panchayats. Uncovered gram panchayats will mean those gram panchayats where the regular departmental works are not taken up. To avoid contractors and to ensure participation of the people, it is planned that all such works will be taken up through SHGs only

(Watersheds/VSS/DWCRA/CMEY/WUA etc.). In such gram panchayats, while taking up the works priority will be given for

- Closing of tank breaches
- Supply / feeder channels
- Desilting of tanks
- Gabion structures
- Gully control works
- Small percolation tanks
- Drinking water ponds
- Recharge structures near drinking water sources etc.

Prioritization of Areas:

In all the water conservation works, public contribution in various manners will be encouraged. In the action plan for Neeru-Meeru under Phase-II, priority areas for treatment include:

- Dark and grey areas where ground water is exploited more than 85% and 60-85% respectively
- Areas where depth to water level has fallen below May 2000 level in December 2000 itself.
- Areas with depth to water level more than 20 metres and showing declining trend in pre and post monsoon water levels
- Problematic areas for drinking and other purposes

Strategies:

As remedial measures for water scarcity the following strategies have been suggested:

- Ridge to valley approach
- Conservation works

- Recharge structures
- Changes in cropping pattern
- Restricting the number of hours of pumping
- Staggering of pumping hours
- Sharing of water on a community basis
- Awareness among farming community by organising campaigns in Gram Sabhas during Clean and Green, Janmabhoomi and Neeru-
Meeru Programmes (through Rythu Mitra)

Abandoned wells are to be converted as recharge structures. Revenue department will take suitable action to remove encroachments on supply channels and tank beds.

Wherever workers are available, they will be engaged fully. In addition, excavators and tractors will be engaged and they will be utilised for difficult works like contour trenches in hard soil areas.

Judicious use of water:

Concerted efforts will be made for ensuring judicious use of water in important sectors like Agriculture, Industry, Drinking Water etc. In Agriculture, farmers will be educated to avoid water intensive crops like paddy and sugarcane under wells and bore wells and to go in for irrigated dry (ID) crops as the present practice of growing wet crops is leading to over exploitation of ground water resulting in artificial scarcity of water. The encouragement to irrigated dry crops will prevent such water scarcity and larger areas can be covered under crops. In the command areas, the farmers will be motivated to ensure optimum utilisation of available water.

The Industries will be asked to optimise the utilisation of water, to conserve extra water and to resort to recycling of water. They will also

be motivated to re-use water after treatment for various purposes including tree plantation. It will not only add to efficiency of water use but also lead to more green cover in and around industrial units.

There are large areas facing drinking water scarcity including the ones having brackish water and flouride in ground water. Through judicious construction of water harvesting structures such drinking water scarcity is sought to be solved. In the areas having brackish water and flouride contents, water conservation efforts will add to ground water and improve the quality of water through dilution.

II. Awareness building measures:

Water Conservation and Utilisation Committees at district, municipal, mandal and village levels will conduct awareness campaigns and to motivate the local communities to execute the activities.

Involvement of SHGs in Neeru-Meeru:

- All watershed committees to meet and decide the programme based on local priorities.
- Water Users Associations (WUAs) to finalise the works programme for improving the canals / tanks and for ensuring better distribution of water during the next crop season.
- Vana Samrakshana Samithis (VSSs) to also finalise the soil and water conservation activities in their areas of operation.
- School Education Committees (SECs) to identify suitable water harvesting works in the premises of the schools.

Other measures:

- Visits to be organised for watershed functionaries, VSS and other Self Help Group members to other villages for exposure to best practices.

- The visit of the people from uncovered gram panchayats to be organized to watersheds/other successful works taken up under Neeru-Meeru for their motivation.
- Conventions to be organized for different stakeholders of Neeru-Meeru at various levels (village / mandal/ division / district).
- Kalajathas to be conducted for spreading the message of Neeru-Meeru.
- Pamphlets, posters etc. to be distributed.
- In all the institutions - Educational, Research, Industries, Government Offices, Agricultural Farms (both government and private) water conservation activities to be implemented.
- In individual houses - water harvesting pits and plantations to be taken up on priority.
- Local bodies like municipalities, gram panchayats, mandal parishads to be involved in the entire programme for ensuring better results.
- Students to be sensitised on water conservation activities.

III Resource mobilisation:

Resource mobilization will play an important part in the successful implementation of Neeru-Meeru. The following are some of the proposals for mobilisation of funds:

- Funds available with Panchayat Raj, Rural Development, Irrigation, Forest, Endowments, Municipal Administration and Urban Development departments.
- To obtain sanctions under RIDF (NABARD) by formulating special projects.
- To obtain funds from the Government of India under SGSY – innovative programme component.
- To mobilize funds through bonds of A.P. Infrastructure Development Corporation.
- To examine possibility of earmarking certain percentage of funds of all the departments towards water conservation works for spending in the concerned department projects/lands.

- To canvass for public donations under adoption scheme for water conservation.
- To mobilize funds from MPLADS.

IV. Tasks ahead

Scientific and sustainable long term planning has to be initiated for development and management of groundwater resources in the state. In order to achieve this objective, the following issues are under consideration:

- Single window for groundwater development to be setup.
- Development of groundwater resources on basin approach.
- Groundwater management and training to be organized on scientific lines.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH

ABSTRACT

Water Conservation Mission – Constitution Of District, Mandal, Municipal, Gram Panchayat Level Water Conservation and Utilisation Committees -- Orders -- Issued.

Panchayat Raj and Rural Development (RD.III) Department

G. O. Ms. No.169

Dated: 20, May 2000.

Read the following: –

The Government of Andhra Pradesh have launched a Water Conservation Mission on 30 – 4 -- 2000 with the objective of conservation and sustainable utilisation of water. The Chief Minister is the Chairperson and eminent social workers and scientists in the field of water conservation are the members. It is now decided to set up Water Conservation and Utilisation Committees at the district, mandal, municipal and gram panchayat levels.

2. The Water Conservation and Utilisation Committees at the district, mandal, municipal and gram panchayat levels shall be advisory bodies with water conservation and its sustainable utilisation as their main goal. The specific objectives of the Water Conservation and Utilisation Committees are as follows:

- i. Develop a clear vision and strategy for water conservation and sustainable utilisation of water.
- ii. Ensure involvement of the local people in the movement for water conservation.
- iii. Ensure that a time bound action plan for water conservation and utilisation is prepared.
- iv. Monitor and oversee the implementation of the water conservation and utilisation plan within their jurisdiction.
- v. Ensure the convergence of programmes of various departments working in the field of water conservation.

3. District Level Water Conservation and Utilisation Committee

The composition of the District Level Committee shall be as follows:

1	Minister Designate as per Annexure 1	Chairperson
2	District Collector	Executive/ President
3	Members of Parliament	Ex-Officio Members
4	Chairperson of Zilla Parishad and Head quarters Municipality	Members
5	Mayor of Municipal Corporations	Members
6	1 Reputed Industrialist nominated by the Collector	Member
6	Representatives from 3 NGO's nominated by the Collector	Members
7	2 Experts in Water Conservation nominated by the Collector	Members
8	5 Presidents from the best watershed committees, Vana Samrakshana Samithis (VSS) and water users associations (WUA) nominated by the District Collector.	Members
9	Project Director, DPAP (DRDA in non-DPAP Districts)	Convenor

4. Mandal Level Water Conservation And Utilisation Committee

The composition of the Committee at the mandal level will be as follows:

1	President or Special Officer Mandal Parishad	Chairperson
2	Min. A/ MLAs having jurisdiction in the mandal	Ex-Officio Members
3	Nodal Officer	Member
4	2 Local NGOs/ Social Workers nominated by District Collector	Members
5	3 Presidents of the best Self Help Groups nominated by the District Collector.	Members
6	1 Reputed Industrialist if available nominated by the Collector	Member
7	Mandal Development Officer	Convenor

5. Municipal Level Water Conservation And Utilisation Committee

The composition of the Committee at the Municipal Corporation/ Municipality/ Nagar Panchayat level will be as follows:

1	Mayor/ Chairperson of the Municipal Corporation / Municipality / Nagar Panchayat	Chairperson
2	Nodal Officer	President
3	MLA/ MLAs having jurisdiction in the Municipal area	Ex-Officio Members
4	3 Local NGOs/ Social Workers nominated by District Collector	Members
5	3 Presidents of best Self Help Groups like DWCUA, Neighbourhood Committees etc. nominated by the District Collector.	Members
6	1 Reputed Industrialist nominated by the District Collector	Member
7	Municipal Commissioner	Convenor

6. Gram Panchayat Level Water Conservation and Utilisation Committee

The composition of the Gram Panchayat Level Committee shall be as follows:

1	Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat	Chairperson
2	President of one of the best self help groups e.g. watershed committee, WUAs, VSS, DWCUA group nominated by the District Collector. If none of the four groups are available, president of any other SHG may be nominated.	President
3	All SHG Leaders and Village Level Officials	Members
4	Village Development Officer/VAO/ VEO	Convenor

7. Frequency of Meeting

The Committees shall meet once in a fortnight during the peak-working season and once in a month or as required to review, monitor and evaluate the progress of implementation of water conservation plan. The Committees shall also meet on the eve of "Janma bhoomi" and "clean and green" programmes to ensure convergence on water conservation plan and its effective implementation.

8. The Term of the Committees

The term of the members of the Committees at district, mandal, municipal and village level shall be two years. However the term of the Committees may be extended by the Government in case of necessity.

9. Constitution of Committees

All the District Collectors shall constitute the Committees and ensure that they start functioning immediately.

10. Training for the Committee Members

Proper orientation and training shall be imparted to the members for the effective functioning of the Committees.

(BY ORDER AND IN THE NAME OF THE GOVERNOR OF ANDHRA PRADESH)

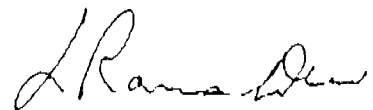
S. RAY,

PRINCIPAL SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT

To
All the District Collectors in the State.
The Commissioner, Panchayat Raj, A.P., Hyderabad.
The Commissioner, Rural Development, A.P., Hyderabad.
The Prl.Chief Conservator of Forests, AP, Hyderabad.

Copy to All Spl CS/Prl.Secy./Secretaries of all Depts. In Secretariat
Copy to all the P.S. to all the Ministers
Copy to all the Heads of Departments.

-//FORWARDED;; BY ORDER//-


SECTION OFFICER.

Annexure 1

List of the Ministers nominated by the Government as the Chairpersons of the District Level Water Conservation and Utilisation Committees

Sl No.	District	Minister nominated as Chairperson (Sarvaaree)
1	Srikakulam	T Seetharam, Sports & CMEY
2	Vizianagaram	P. Ashok Gajapathi Raju, Revenue
3	Visakhapatnam	Ch. Ayyannapatrudu, Forests
4	East Godavari	Y. Ramakrishnudu, Finance. <i>Shri Y. Ramakrishnudu</i>
5	West Godavari	K. Subbarayudu, Energy
6	Krishna	V. Sobhanadreeswara Rao, Agriculture
7	Guntur	S. Aruna, Medical & Health
8	Prakasam	J. Lakshmi Padmayathi, CT
9	Nellore	A. Prabhakara Reddy, Housing
10	Chittoor	N. Shiv Prasad, I&PR
11	Cuddapah	B. Veera Reddy, Marketing
12	Ananthapur	N. Kistappa, Animal Husbandry
13	Kurnool	B. V. Mohan Reddy, Transport
14	Mahaboobnagar	N. Janardhan Reddy, Civil Supplies
15	Ranga Reddy	T. Devender Goud, Home.
16	Hyderabad	K. Vijaya Rama Rao, R&B
17	Medak	K. Ramachandra Rao, Higher Education
18	Nizamabad	P. Srinivas Reddy, Mines
19	Adilabad	Padala Bhumanna, Handlooms and Textiles
20	Karimnagar	E. Peddi Reddy, Tourism
21	Warangal	K. Srihari, School Education
22	Khammam	T. Nageswara Rao, Prohibition & Excise
23	Nalgonda	K. Vidyadhara Rao, Industries

S.RAY
PRL. SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT

-/ True copy /-

S. R. Ray
SECTION OFFICER

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH

Water Conservation Mission - Constitution of State level Mission-Orders-Issued.

Panchayat Raj & Rural Development (RD.III) Department

G.O.Ms. No.180

Dt:26.5.2000.

ORDER:

All over the world, there is a concern about the need for proper water conservation and water management measures because of ecological imbalance and various other factors which has led to the recurring problems of droughts and flash floods causing misery to the people. The per capita availability of water has come down to 50 percent in the last 50 years and at this pace there is going to be a major stress on water availability in the 21st Century.

2. In Andhra Pradesh, after analysing all the factors causing such problems, a massive watershed movement was launched in December 1997 as a result of which 27 lakhs Hectares of wastelands and dry lands are under development with people's participation under 5210 watersheds at present and it is proposed to treat 100 lakhs Hectares in 10 years. Similarly there is a proposal to treat 18 lakhs Hectares of forest lands (Joint Forest Management) out of which 5.5 lakhs Hectares is already taken up by the Vana Samrakshana Samithies with community participation.
3. With the experience of last few years and recommendation of various experts, the Government have decided to launch a focussed onslaught on the man made phenomena of drought and water shortage. Any sustainable developmental effort requires a holistic planning on the basis of river basins/sub-basins through convergence of various departments at the state, district and sub-district levels. Amalgamation of various wage employment programmes has to be made at the district level with a total emphasis on water conservation. Water harvesting and water conservation, efficient utilisation as well as management of the fresh water are the lifeline for poor and all alike.
4. It has been decided to constitute a Water Conservation Mission in the state with experts, and eminent persons who are involved in this field. The Mission is visualised as an advisory body at the state level with water conservation and its sustainable utilization as its main goal. The objectives of the Water Conservation Mission are as follows:
 - (a) Develop a clear vision for water conservation and its sustainable utilisation at the state level
 - (b) Develop a strategy for water conservation at the state level
 - (c) Ensure that a time bound action plan for water conservation and utilisation is prepared for the state
 - (d) Take measure to ensure convergence of the plans and programmes of the various departments working directly or indirectly for water conservation and utilisation.
 - (e) Ensure promotion of suitable cost effective and sustainable measures for water conservation and utilisation in the state
 - (f) Ensure that proper steps are taken for involving the local people in the movement for water conservation

- (g) Regularly monitor and oversee the implementation of the water conservation and utilization plan in the state
- (h) Initiate public debate on important policy issues related to water conservation and its sustainable use and build consensus for policy reforms related to water and its sustainable utilisation.

5. Accordingly Government here by order constituting a Water Conservation Mission with the following composition, with the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh as the Chairperson.

WATER CONSERVATION MISSION - ANDHRA PRADESH

No.	Designation	Name and Details
1	Chair Person	Sri N.Chandrababu Naidu, Hon'ble Chief Minister, Andhra Pradesh
2	Vice Chair Person	Sri S.Ray, IAS Principal Secretary (RD & RE) Govt. of A.P.
3	Chief Executive Officer	Sri S.P.Tucker, IAS Commissioner, Rural Development, Govt. of A.P.
4	Member	Sri Anna Saheb Hajare, Ralegaon Siddhi, Maharashtra.
5	Member	Sri B.N. Yugandhar, (IAS Retd.) Wassan, Hyderabad.
6	Member	Sri Anil Shah, Development Support Centre ,Ahmeuabad, Gujarat.
7	Member	Sri Vilas Rao Salunke, Paani Panchayat, Pune, Maharashtra
8	Member	Sri Vasi Malai, DHAN Foundation, Madurai , Tamil Nadu
9	Member	Sri Rajendra Singh, Tarun Bharat Sangh, Alwar, Rajasthan.
10	Member	Sri James Mascarenhas, OUTREACH, Bangalore, Karnataka
11	Member	Sri D.G. Dokrekar, Pune, Maharashtra
12	Member	Sri Ch. Hanumanth Rao, Ex-member, Planning Commission, Hyderabad, A.P.
13	Member	Sri T. Hanumanth Rao ,Retired Chief Engineer, Irrigation. Dept., Hyderabad (A.P.)
14	Member	Sri Y.V. Malla Reddy, Rural Development Trust (NGO) Ananthapur. (A.P)
15	Member	Sri Crispino Lobo, WOTR , Ahmednagar. Maharashtra.
16	Member	Dr D.P. Rao, Director, NRSA, Hyderabad, A.P.
17	Member	Dr Nagendra Swamy, Villagers In Partnership, Mahbubnagar, A.P.

List of Special Invitees		
1	Sri Mohan Kanda	Additional Secretary, (Department of Land Resources) Ministry of Rural Development, GOI.
2	Dr. A. Vaidyanathan	Madras Institute of Developmental Studies, Chennai, Tamil Nadu
3	Mr. Anil Agarwal	Centre for Science & Environment, New Delhi
4	Chandi Prasad Bhatt	Chipko Andolan, Almora, Uttar Pradesh.
5	Ravi Chopra	People's Science Institute, Dehradun (U.P)
6	Dr. R.N.Athawale	Professor Emiretus, CSIR(NGRI), Hyderabad, A.P.
7	Director General or Representative	ICRISAT, Hyderabad, A.P.
8	Director,	CRIDA, Hyderabad, A.P.
9	Director	Central Ground Water Deptt., Hyderabad, A.P.
10	Director	CAZRI, Jodhpur, Rajasthan
11	Director General,	MANAGE, Hyderabad, A.P.
12	Director General,	NIRD, Hyderabad, A.P
13	Commissioner,	APARD, Hyderabad, A.P
14	Any other as per invitation	

6. Departmental Representation

The following departments shall form part of the Water Conservation Mission so that convergence, coordination and mutual learning becomes a reality:

1	Panchayat Raj & Rural Development Department	8	Environment, Forest, Science & Technology Department
2	Agriculture Department	9	Irrigation Department
3	Municipal Administration & Urban Development	10	Rural Water Supply P.R., Department
4	Ground Water Department	11	APSRAC
5	Endowments Department	12	Marketing Department
6	Relief & Rehabilitation	13	Health and Family Welfare Department
7	Education Department	14	Any other Department as required.

7. Frequency of Meeting

This Mission shall meet once in three months or as often as required to review, monitor and evaluate the progress of implementation of water conservation plan of the state.

8. Term of the Mission

The term of members is for a period of 2 years. However the term may be extended by the Government in case of necessity.

9. Status of the Members

The non-official members of the Mission shall be treated as state guests whenever they are on the work of the Mission and their airfare/A.C. First Class train fare would be reimbursed. Further a sitting fee of Rs. 1,000/- (Rupees one thousand only) for each meeting shall be paid to the non-official members and special invitees.

(BY ORDER AND IN THE NAME OF THE GOVERNOR OF ANDHRA PRADESH)

S.RAY
PRINCIPAL SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT

To

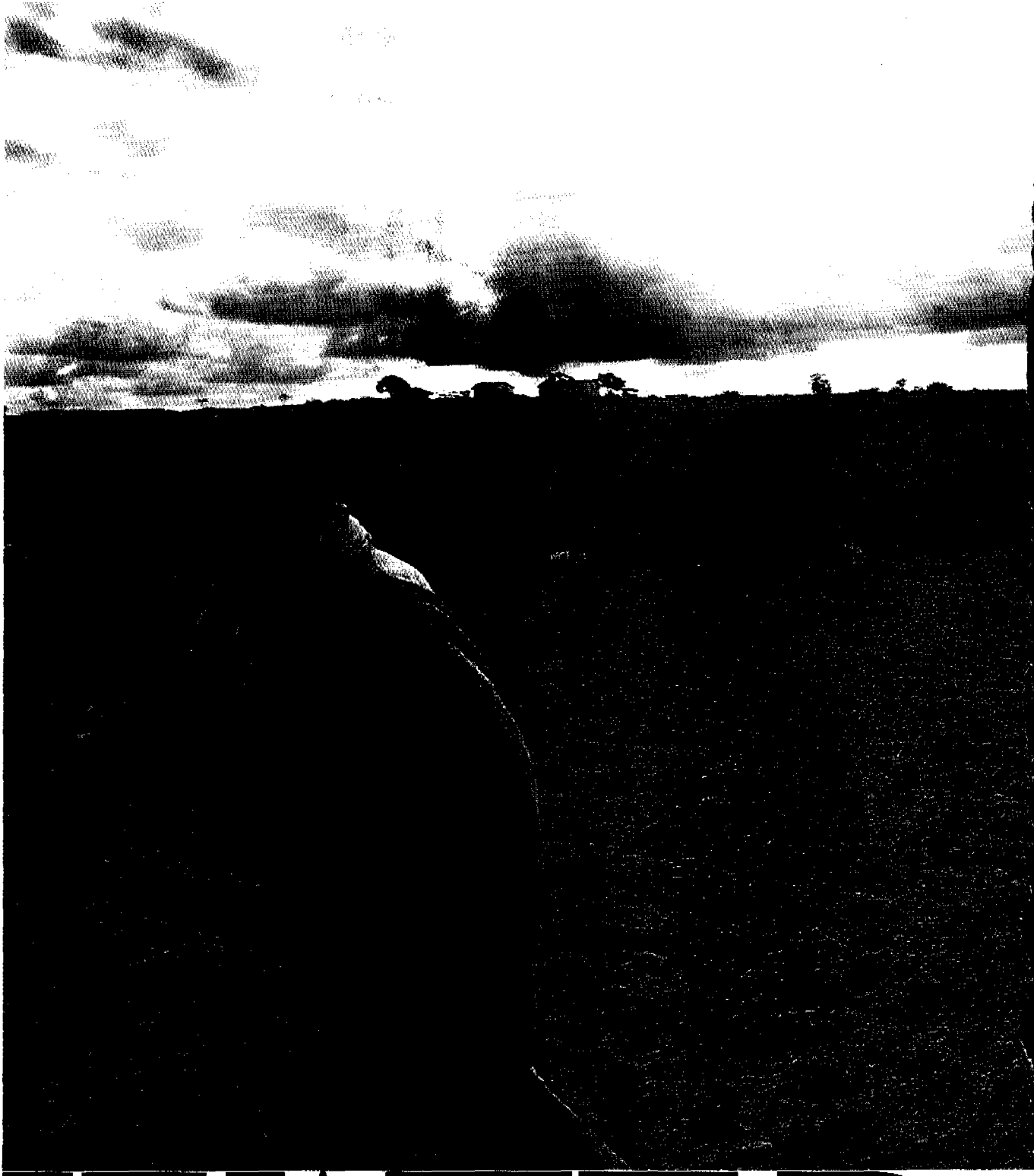
All Members of the Water Conservation Mission
All Spl. Invitees
Departmental Representatives of concerned
Depts. Of Secretariat concerned
Commissioner, (RD), A.P., Hyderabad
Commissioner (PR&RT), A.P., Hyderabad

Copy to:
All Spl.C.Ss./Prl.Secys /Secys. of all Depts.of Sectt.
All P.S. to all Ministers
All the Heads of Depts.
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SECTION OFFICER.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY SANJAY CHATTERJEE

WATER

An unknown messiah to rural Rajasthan who, over the last 17 years, has brought the region to an unimaginable path to prosperity. He and his Tarun Bharat Sangh are building dams, filling lakes, opening schools, saving trees and changing lives completely. "Everybody changes history but when someone changes the geography of a place, what can you say?" The winner of the Magasaysay Award, **FIRST CITY** meets Rajendra Singh



Water is not an ordinary issue. The next world war is not going to be because of your bin Laden, you'll be able to handle him, but the water issue is going to take catastrophic proportions in the next 10 to 20 years. Even the politicians won't be able to escape from the flow of this water. Kha jayega pani unko. Till now, they've been saved by their lies and everything but not anymore."

This is the story of a group of villages in Rajasthan, spread over a 100 kilometres beyond Alwar, 250 kilometers from Delhi, villages that were nearing extinction about 17 years ago. It's the story of a man who came to Kishori, one of the villages, around that time, representing an NGO called the Tarun Bharat Sangh and was ostracised by the village people for quite some time. A man who, today, stands on the podium of the Tarun Bharat Sangh Ashram trying not to get moved by the intense love and devotion in the eyes of over a 100 village people collected under the open sky which has the false promise of rain, celebrating miracle after miracle.

"This is the fourth year of drought and you can still see greenery all around," the man points out of the car window as we navigate the rocky road to the legendary dam at Lava ka Baas, where tree after tree stand in solid defiance, much like the man sitting next to me. A couple of hours ago, Rajendra Singh was lost in the crowd of the festival until I mentioned his name... "Rajendra bhai? You see that man sitting on the floor on the left of the dais? The bearded one? Go, go to him," someone points out. I saw the bearded one, who had the strangest look of youth, despite his lush peppered beard. Then followed his every movement, when he stood up and talked, every inch of him addressing every soul collected, when he invited the village people and government

M

You can only bring about superficial changes if you work from the city. Foundational changes can only happen if you start from the bottom

officials to honour each other for working together for water, forest and soil conservation, which they did by tying bright tie-and-dye turbans for the men and dupattas for the women. When he shared success stories - "You heard the story of Nimi this morning? They spent a total of five lakhs and now have an income of three-and-a-half-crores. The best vegetables in Delhi come from Nimi. They're famous. Around 30 to 35 trucks go from the village and the entire activity of growing vegetables started just three years ago. In fact, the people there still don't know how to grow vegetables. People from Uttar Pradesh come and teach them. They didn't have water so they didn't know how to grow vegetables. Did you see the *raunak* on their faces today?"

The *raunak* was hard to miss when an entire open kitchen worked steadily at serving generous proportions of *halwa* and *roti* to everyone who came to celebrate Gandhi Jayanti along with them. When the terrace, staircase, rooms, halls, corridors were filled with the sound of little feet running to and fro, bored by all the speeches and then... stopping dead on their tracks when Rajendra *bhai* would cross their paths...and then smile shyly, before screaming a loud *Namaste*. And he, in turn, greeting everyone with the same affection and distance. "You've snatched me away from so many people. So many people wanted to talk to me, meet me...*kharab lag raha hai mujhe*," he complains in the car, and then turns to point at the babool trees, all new, all flourishing because entire villages worked together to save them. Over the last 17 years.

“When I came here for the first time, the bus from Jaipur dropped me at this place where the cycles are,” he says pointing to a bustling general store. “When we got off the bus 17 years ago, this greenery we see now wasn't there and the village was desolate. All these shops, the liveliness, there was nothing. People came and surrounded us, thinking we were terrorists from Punjab and asked us to show our belongings. Then, the elders of the village stood up and said that if they were terrorists what would they take from here? What do we have here in our village? All the young men are leaving and going to the city, looking for livelihood...what will they loot and what will they gain by killing us? So, the people put us up in the Hanuman Mandir in Kishori *gaon*. We started living in this Mandir,” and as if on cue, we cross his first home, a small temple under the aegis of a large tree, “for seven to eight days, and I feel that those were the defining days of my life, when we faced a whole spectrum of questions. So many of the questions we didn't have answers for. (Can you see that

small room? That's where we stayed. We were five of us and the room only had space for two. The rest slept outside). They asked us why we'd come here, why we'd chosen this village, what will we do here and they didn't believe anything we said. When they asked us who we were, we used to tell them honestly, but no one believed anything. They used to laugh, reject us and leave. So we stayed there for seven to eight days, in this phase of rejection till a teacher came along and got us place in Bhikampur village.” He pauses again and points to a large peepal on the side of the road (“that was the only tree there”) and looks over his shoulder to see if his train of people is following us to the dam. “So, we started living in a money-lender's home who threw us out in five to six months because a lot of poor people started coming over and he felt his money lending social position threatened,” he says with a grin. “The day he threw us out, another man gave us his house.”

But the story also has another beginning, outside these villages, when Rajendra *bhai* was Rajendra Singh, a government official supervising the Department of Adult Education in the Ministry of Education in Dosa, District Ramgarh, Baroda. “I grew up in Meerut though my childhood was in the village Dhola (what I'll call the *kishor avastha*) and my youth was spent in Baroda. I graduated in Ayurveda and did a post-graduate in Hindi literature. After that, I came to Rajasthan as a part of my work which involved the opening of adult education centres and then running them and especially involving the youth in this sort of educational work, so that there's a new awareness in the community.” This path led to another, when a non-governmental organisation called the Tarun Bharat Sangh came his way. A beginning that made Rajendra Singh, Rajendra *bhai*. “TBS was started in 1975, when the Jaipur university caught fire for the relief and rehabilitation of the burnt houses. Then, during the emergency, this Relief and Rehabilitation organisation emerged as a think tank to release the country

The farmer eats the minimum and gives the maximum back to the earth

from the emergency. I joined them in 1980, when the Sangh was working with the elite class of the university to involve them in social work. But, during that time, people would join the organisation for fashion, for a year or so, for novelty's sake. There was no stability. And there's no novelty in social work. You have to see things through till they are ripe, and then help them evolve, come to their own. In 1984 I raised questions, said that the Sangh couldn't work like this and we have to change its character. So, they asked me who could do it, who could run it? I said that I could. But then, it would run according to my principles. I said I wanted to go to the villages and work, because you can only bring about superficial changes if you work from the city. Fundamental changes can only happen if you start from the bottom.



They gave me the go-ahead and in 1984, I became the Mahamantri of this Sangh. In the beginning, I started work on the problems of nomads. Earlier, people in the villages would call them and invite them to stay. But the iron implements they make are now made in factories, so no one asks for them. There was no shelter, no support, no food for animals. Slowly, we tried to understand their problems, how we could give them shelter while keeping in mind that they find their markets only by roaming around. More problems emerged. Then, we thought that we could start a programme for the mobile education and health of the children and we submitted the proposal to the government. But then, we thought that working with them is the address of a very small problem. We had to do something bigger, something that would take the country to a new direction."

Back in the *ashram*, Rajendra *bhai* had put us in the hands of an elderly man who showed us the way around slowly and surely, escorting us to a room, showing us where to wash up. Involved with the Sangh for so many years, he recently gave up his life's savings to build a lake for the animals in the forest ('I don't have any family, and I've grown up with these animals...it's quite natural') and is just one of the many, many strong, grinning souls who are celebrating the region's prosperity. There was one man in particular, an old man sitting on his haunches whom Rajendra almost carried in his arms, garlanding him, then locking him in a tight embrace. He was called Mangu Patel. Riding in the car a couple of hours later with a restless Rajendra Singh next to me, we again go back in time. "We started work with child education and medicine because the youth were all out and

The most important work is to get rid of the insult that the rural people have been subjected to right from the times of the British. The minute they respect themselves, they'll do things on their own

the villages were all abandoned. The old and the children needed help so that's what we did. But one day Mangu Patel, whom I consider my guru, abused me, screamed at me. He said that all you educated people just eat off your words, do

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If the same large dams are built by the villagers themselves then they'll choose places where no one would be displaced and make the dams as large as only they need to be

no actual work with your hands. And it's these people, who make a living out of their speeches that have brought about the ruin of our nation. *Sab pada likha log aise hi hain, lootoch hai, khavench hai, bhagse*, he said. I asked him why he was so angry, since he'd always spoken to me with such love. Then he said that nor do you do any work and nor do



you let me do any work...all you do is talk, that this should happen, that should happen. We don't want all this, nor do we want schools, nor do we want hospitals, nor roads, nor gardens. We want water."

He points to a check dam constructed over one of the *naalas* coming down from the hills, water held in which, and 4500 other lakes, have raised the underground water level to the extent of making the wells of the region full and the hand pumps dripping. "I told Mangu *kaka* that I don't know how to bring about water. I'm no engineer. He said that you don't need an engineer, I'll teach you how to bring water. But you just decide that you have to. So I asked him how. He said I'll tell you tomorrow. Get a spade."

He breaks and urges the photographer to click the trees before returning to his tale. "Two of my colleagues said that they couldn't do all this manual work and told me that if I wanted to carry on with this *pani ka kaam*, then I would be on my own.

They said that Mangu is poor because he doesn't know anything, if he did, he wouldn't remain poor. I told them that the farmer eats the least and gives the most back to the earth. My two mates left and Mangu showed me a place in Gopalpur where, without any rationale, without calculation, without any thought of *career et cetera*, I worked the spade for six-and-a-half months. A small hole was made. *Usmein kya hota?* But a bigger thing was achieved. That was belief. The people who used to think that I'm some young vagabond who'd leave the way he came... thought again. They thought that a man who could work the spade for six months was not completely useless."

The clouds have made the ride so much easier and as I look at them longingly, Rajendra Singh gives them a cursory glance ('If it rains, it's good'), shrugs and looks away. "You know that during monsoons, there's a new *raunak* in Rajasthan, a new rhythm.

When it rains here, all those who'd left the villages, return and stay for the monsoon. So all the young men who'd returned for that monsoon were called for a meeting by the village elders, like Mangu Patel. He said that 'this Rajendra...he's been working the spade for the last six months. Now you also work it. ('The mountains there?' he again interrupts himself, 'They have at least 10 to 15 lakes in their lap, all made by us'). Then they said that they needed to feed themselves, that I didn't need to work like that for my everyday *roti*, but they do. That meeting failed. Mangu came to me at night and said Rajendra *bhai*, you keep doing whatever you want alone and you'll spend your life here and nothing will happen. So what should we do, I asked him. He told me to give the youth employment. *Paise ka intezaam kar, roti ka intezaam kar, anaj pani ka intezaam kar* (Arrange for money, food and water). Then, for the first time, I wrote to my friends, some government servants, some not and some organisations explaining the work I wanted to do. Some organisations came to meet, some friends but the friends didn't have much money to give. Then one organisation gave 400 sacks of grain after which we started the '*Kaam ke Badle Anaj*' (Food for Work) scheme according to which, if you worked through the day and dug a hole of 10 by 10, then you'd get eight kilograms of grain. Even after this, people didn't come. It took three years to make the first lake. But after it was made and the water filled, all the village people collected and said that we'll call all our relatives. In our village no boy or girl is ever married off in the same village - *usse bahut baat kharab hoti hai*. So, wherever the village had relationships through marriage, which was in about 45 of them, all were invited to a *davat* on the banks of the lake. So, what was the feast? Our village had no money at the time. So, we served porridge cooked in water and served it on leaves...." he smiles. "At the feast, Mangu asked the people that if they

The bigger the dam the bigger the distribution problems, the larger the displacement, higher the corruption

wanted to do what we did, Rajendra *bhai* would help them. People of 45 villages said that they would do it? But how could I start work in 45 villages all by myself. With further discussion, we decided that all the village elders who've worked with their hands would start a *padhyatra* and go to all 45 villages, stop for a day and get work started in those villages. Work didn't start immediately, it took months to explain to people. But it helped that so many were related, because no one turns down relatives!"

The hearty laughter is interrupted. "Look. Here...the



government has broken our lake and made an air strip...there was quite a huge dam here, they just broke it," he says with a shrug and a dismissive shake of the head. "*Is sarkar ki kahani mein kya baat bataon*. For the last 16 years, they want to get rid of me, cut of my neck. This is the Jaisinghpura village, what plane will ever come here, we don't know..." The gleaming strip of concrete, odd and abandoned, travels with us on our right, evoking an uncomfortable silence in the car. Rajendra breaks it first. "The first lake was made in three years, then 35, 90, 210, 500, 800 and now, how many are there? 4500 water bodies. And now, each year a 100 villages have work going on simultaneously. But I'm not doing the work, nor is TBS. It's the community. The community has to be woken up. An organisation is not capable of doing such work. It's like a *baisakhi* to the community and when they can walk on their own, it will get rid of the support. At this time, the most important work is to get rid of the insult that the rural people have been subjected to right from the times of the British. To give them respect and increase their self-esteem. The minute they respect themselves, they'll do things on their own. Today, anyone who's doing manual labour, anyone who's working the spade, is automatically called illiterate and backward. His community's traditional knowledge, it's understanding and it's poverty, we've insulted them all. So much so, that they started thinking that these city folk, they just cut the jungles and live in their big palaces in Delhi or Bombay or wherever, *aur hum yahan junglon mein pade hain*, we might as well cut them too. When the same city folk are dying of cancer and asthma because of the

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bitter city air, they come running back to the villages and beg them not to cut forests. The poor understand this, but he's weak, helpless and insulted. No one wants to sit with him and talk, forget giving him respect. What we are trying to do, is to raise the illiterate society's self-respect. Sometimes pat them on the back or sometimes tie a turban to honour them. So that he feels like a valuable member of society. To increase his belief in himself. See, he's brought about all this greenery on his own, this was a naked mountain. And it was also cut by him. He thought that if all the city folk could cut trees and make their money, why couldn't we? Why should we remain poor?"

“**A**nd now how do they conserve the forests?” he asks, sitting strangely still, conscious of the respect he commands. “They stop any cattle grazing in the particular area for three years, goat grazing for five years and camel grazing for seven because after that, the animals can't harm the trees. These methods are some of the basic methods and traditions through which they practice forest, water and land conservation. They've developed these methods themselves, according to their needs. This has managed to change the topography of the place,” he says and all of a sudden, traces a map on the palm of his hand. “See, in the lower area it's still alright but the higher reaches...like right now, we are travelling in one of the most difficult areas. The rain water just cuts through the soil and rocks and flows down. So, there's nothing here, though there's a little agriculture in the lower areas. So, we made small, small water bodies here, in the higher ground, which is very dry. We dug the mud wherever there was a natural depression, made a concave water harvesting structure and collected the rain water so that the crop and animals have water to drink through the year. The design is our rural society's but adapted to the needs of today. All this knowledge was there in their minds but was covered over by years of dust. But if you wipe an old mirror clean

you'll see your face clearly. And that's what we did. We talked to them, removed the years of abuse, cleaned out the dust. When the dust cleared, they themselves could see clearly.”

I wonder if they took any professional help and he cuts me mid-way. “During this time, a lot of engineers and scientists came to meet us. We talked to a lot of them, we need the engineering faculty as a faculty, for advice *et cetera* but we don't let them take decisions for our structure. The decision is taken by the village because the engineer's vision is very different from the farmer's vision. You can learn science and technology from an engineer, but that technology has to be suitable to the farmer's requirements and hence, it's his decision. He knows the nature and design of his field and also has so much love for it that he'll never let the soil get ruined. The way that the farmer can choose a place for a lake, dam or anything else, an engineer can't. The latter will say that this is the place for a lake, whether it be agricultural land or residential and then ask for the houses to be removed if they are there. The way it's done where those large dams are made. But if the same large dams are built by the villagers themselves, then they'll choose places where no one would be displaced and make the dams as large as only they need to be. Small dams should be made where everyone gets water. The bigger the dam, the bigger the distribution problems, the larger the displacement, higher the corruption. The big contractors make big money so the big dams are for big people. Medha also gives the same option. Build smaller dams and promote agriculture.”

We look out dreamily, as we cross another lake, Rajendra

The youth have stopped going to the cities and the ones there have started returning



still as objective as ever. These lakes are like a bank. We put the water in a fixed deposit, in small lakes through which it seeps into the earth. And once it's inside the earth's womb, even the sun can't steal the water. So, we're filling the earth with these lakes and when the womb is filled, even the dry river comes to life. More than half the villages are now water sufficient. I can name a lot of villages which, even during this drought, are green and prosperous. The others are trying. Under these drought conditions, most

**Whatever the men earned in the cities,
they would spend it on alcohol. How
could they sleep in the stink and the
mosquitoes without numbing the
senses? They had to drink**

of the villages would have been destroyed if things were as before. This area, in the official records, was the dark zone. Now, it's the white zone. They had to change their records. Everybody changes history but when someone changes the geography of a place, what does that say?"

He smiles again, at receiving the reaction he expected and turns full face towards me, making sure I hang on to every word. "Water conservation has done two important things. The youth have stopped going to the cities and the ones there have started returning. They used to leave everything and go, leaving their wives behind - they used to live in those *bastis*, in hell. *Pade rehte the sharab pike, badbu mein* (They used to lie drunk in the stink). The villages don't stink. They all have place to live. But the villagers would still bear all the dirt of the city, in fact, drink all the filth through the air. But now, husbands and wives are living together. Whatever the men earned in the cities, they would spend it on alcohol. How could they sleep in the stink and the mosquitoes without numbing the senses? They had to drink. Now, the money earned through agriculture is all going into the women's hands. *She ties it in her pallu and keeps it,*" he says with a laugh. "And she teaches her children with that money, sends them to school. The girls go to school. Where there was not even one girl in the villages who used to study, now they're over 70 who do. We got schools opened, put pressure on the concerned authorities. TBS opened 70 to 80 more."

During the festival, Rajendra *bhai* had risen from the podium, taken a deep breath and announced for Jagdish as one of the workers who would be honoured with the *pagdi*. Jagdish, smiling shyly, took the mike and relived his past. A former dacoit, he gave up that life some years ago and since then, has been working with TBS for forest and water conservation. There were thunderous claps, a few tears, and universal, undisguised love. "You heard Jagdish's story today, of how he surrendered. In Ranthambhore National Park, there's a district called Keladevi where these dacoits used to cut the jungles and sell the wood. We started work on water with them and through this work on conservation, life of 32 families changed. Also, because of the water conservation in the Sariska Tiger Reserve, there's complete rejuvenation. In 1985, there were six tigers now there are 26," he says nodding slowly. "There's another incident. Poaching had increased tremendously in Sariska and on September 11 of this year, we made 11 poachers surrender. They swore in front of the forest officials that they'll stop all poaching activities. How do we know

who they were? We stay night and day in this jungle, we don't sit in offices, we know everything. But all this happens gradually and we can't be boisterous about it. We worked with them quietly and now all their cases have been taken back. And this revolutionary work happened through water. We aren't great social reformers or anything."

The driver negotiates the dirt track, lined by streams of colourful doorways, adorned by drawings and tiny mirrors, avoiding the livestock crossing the street. Some women, winnowing in their courtyard, turn to look at the passing car and turn back. A lot of men seem to be returning home for lunch, shovels in hand. We are, they say, just five minutes from the dam. "The middle class - upper middle class - has this strange disease, where even between close friends, I don't know what kind of forces work, especially those who are *bodhik* (cerebral), *jo keval buddhi bechkar khaate hain* (who just sell their intelligence for food), they have no idea. *Unki to mat hi mar jaati hai*, I don't know what happens to them. We eat out of our physical labour. From the actual work we do with our hands. It's more respectable," he affirms and backs up his argument with a quote in Sanskrit. "*Jo tyag kar grahan nahin karta woh chor hai*. Which means that he who doesn't do hard work, who doesn't make efforts to give back to nature, who doesn't eat off his toil, he's a thief. That's written in the Gita. What's in the Quran? He who works for the conservation and protection of nature, *woh pegambar hai*. He who protects nature is a *pegambar*. So you understand one thing," he shouts over the honking truck as we reach closer to the dam, "That living by actual, physical hard work is the only way to win respect. And we also remain physically and mentally fit. Man comes closer to nature, so is more peaceful. And the conservation of water required physical labour because of which these people now have milk, they have agriculture."

**Now, the money earned through
agriculture is all going into the
women's hands. And she teaches
her children with that money,
sends them to school**

All of a sudden, the dirt track ends and the car is perched precariously over a recline. The wind is cool and there are large embankments in the distance. Rajendra suggests we walk it from here and we do, after we are introduced to an old man who seems to be more-or-less in charge. Lava ka Baas, a small village along a dry *nallah* with only one hand pump as a water source for humans and livestock, constructed an earthen check dam over the small *nallah* that feeds into the Ruparel river. The structure was built in record time of less than four months with three lakhs (of the total cost of eight lakhs) being contributed by the villagers themselves. With the first shower of rain, the structure was brimming with

He who doesn't do hard work, who doesn't make efforts and give back to nature, who doesn't eat off his toil, he's a thief. That's written in the Gita

water. But the jubilation ended soon. There were orders from the state irrigation department to demolish the structure and arrest Rajendra Singh since the construction of the dam violated Article 55 of Rajasthan Irrigation and Water Drainage Act of 1954 and was thus illegal. The notice issued said, 'The unauthorised earthen dam constructed at Lava ka Baas is unsafe as it has not been made according to the technical standards. You are directed to drain the filled water in that dam within 15 days, and in future, no water should be stopped in that dam'. After a series of demonstrations and semi-confrontations (with the irrigation minister Kamla Beniwal's declaration that "every drop of water that is received through the rains comes under the irrigation department") where Rajendra Singh asked for Anil Aggarwal's (of CSE) help, the matter now is at a standstill. "You know what's the actual objection against Lava ka Baas? The fact that they can't bear to see that we did it on our own. The dam was made in eight lakhs and the government can't even make it in 80 lakhs. *Pehle to itne engineers ki pol khul gayi*, then the politicians, the bureaucrats...they couldn't tolerate the poor, dying of thirst for so many years get water. These are the same politicians who've looted the area upto now and now they are protesting against it. The same politicians who've collected votes," his anger seems to subside. "They took out arrest warrants twice but didn't arrest me. I don't know why. If they would, I might have rested for some days, would have got time to read, write and chat. Out here, we work like donkeys, day and night..." he says, smiling at his own ironic humour, with pride. "One talks of food security but never of water security. What do you need first - water or food? Water. Everyone has to get water. When the society did it on its own, the government didn't have to worry. But the government snatched everything from the people's hands. But, you are morally bound to give them water."

Rajendra marches ahead, his feet accustomed to the terrain and leaving me behind with *kaka* who in his quaint dialect explains the technicalities, the effort, the emotion that went in building the life-giving, controversial water body. Of how they organised a *shramdan shivir* or voluntary labour camp to organise the workers for the dam where people from nearby villages came and became a part of the project. Of how, he himself donated Rs. 15,000 for the dam, like some others, because that was the best use of their money, he said. But most of all of how the village people see Rajendra *bhai* - '*Ramji samajhte hain hum unko* (We consider him Ram)', he says loudly. 'We were asleep...I was asleep for 44 years of my life and then he came along. So many politicians came and went...' Rajendra *bhai* lets out a smirk.

"Sometimes, the people do suggest that I enter politics so that there is a larger address of their problem. But I won't be able to do it. This infrastructure of the government runs by power brokerage, *dalali se chalta hai*, and I don't know how to do *dalali*. So, even if I think of entering the system, I'll be beaten, I'll fail, I'm not compatible with the system. I won't be able to do as much by being part of it as I do by being outside it. There are too many negative forces there," he pauses but just to elaborate further. "The rainfall in our country is unique. Jaisalmer recorded the minimum amount of rainfall and it also has the minimum amount of people. *Jitne log hai, utna paani barasta hai*. There was twice the population in Jaisalmer before independence. It was the trading centre of India. And it had abundant water. So, if the rains could feed twice the population, why can't it be sufficient now. Now why do we have to ask others for water? We've become greedy. If Delhi wants water, then we'll get it from Haridwar, further up, from Bhagirathi, Tehri. If we want water for Jaisalmer, we'll get it from Gangotri or even further up. But what if we become water efficient ourselves? This, the society has no understanding of. Or it does and did have but the ruling class, the politician, the bureaucrat and the merchant - they don't believe in eating the fruit of their own labour. They know how to bring others' work under their own control.

I saw this even before I was a part of the government. I spent my adolescence in the Sampurn Kranti Andolan under Jai Prakash Narain where he blew the bugle for a complete revolution against the emergency. During that time, we were the little soldiers. I realised then that in this country, a very small group of people are capable of controlling the country's resources. I realised that the majority and the larger section of society can be controlled by a small section, by the minority. That the poor, the majority should know how to organise, combine, be resourceful, manage and make a success out of their own natural resources. And *Mangu kaka* just put it all in perspective."

What's the actual objection against Lava ka Baas? They can't bear to see that we did it on our own. The dam was made in eight lakhs and the government can't even make it in 80

'Haan, Rajendra *bhai* just won that award. We won that award, he says. That's good,' shares the old *kaka* walking with me. "What am I supposed to feel?" asks Rajendra when I mention the Magasaysay Award which he received just a month ago. "What I did appreciate was that it increased the self respect amongst the poor. They were honoured, all those who did the water work. It wasn't me alone. Didn't you see today? Everybody was excited that we'd received this award. They feel proud. And when I see them, the people I live with, eat with, who are my friends, if they are happy, then even I'm happy, enjoying it. I'm also glad that their ancient traditions are recognised."



The shimmering water emerges from the naked, brown dunes. The wind blows fast and heavy. There is a moment's silence, a silence no one wanted to break. Buffaloes make their way slowly into the water and bulkily dip themselves. Rajendra looks at me, eyes glowing. "Bahut achcha lagta hai (I feel great). You asked whether I'd made any sacrifice and I'd said no, there wasn't. Because when I see something like this," he says pointing to the tiny rivulet being formed on the outer periphery of the dam, moistening the earth, flowing into the horizon, "I forget all problems. Life is anyway full of problems...when the Satyagraha (against the irrigation authorities) happened, I was lying there for 15 days and only drank the water of this lake. I fell ill. But there was also the realisation that you are doing something right, correcting something that had gone awry. And that gives you the inner energy. When you hear people, see them happy." He stops to greet a few young men on the way to the dam, all smiles. "So many groups of men, women and children come here to bathe early morning, because there is so much clean water, so much peace, something they have never seen. It's become a pilgrimage for them."

We make our way back slowly, watching the 28 feet deep lake sink back into the lap of the mud embankments. Kaka stays behind, maybe just to admire their handiwork one more time. "Till four years ago, my father would call me a *nalayak* (useless). He was very angry with me. He wanted me to do some government job or something 'big' like that. But I always had support from my mother. She was there for me while I was studying and even after that. Whenever I needed money she would give me quietly, without telling my father. And I feel that whatever little values I have are my mother's.

The politician, the bureaucrat and the merchant - they don't believe in eating the fruits of their own labour. He knows how to bring others' work under his own control

I go to meet her regularly and she comes and visits. She came here, saw everything...*Bachpan se hi mein pagal tha* (I was crazy since childhood). That madness is still intact. And till this madness carries on, I will carry on working. The day it gets over, I don't know what will happen. Though, right now, I feel that this madness is immersed in my blood and will remain there till I'm alive." Now, settled in Jaipur with his wife and son, he grins at a memory. "There was a strain on my marriage when I'd just started out. But this was when she didn't understand what I was doing and actually thought I was crazy. But then she understood. And if I give any one person the maximum credit for my life, it's my wife. She saved me and also helped me." I walk alongside him, he who spends most of the time away from his family, sharing his life with his extended family. The wind blows even faster. "Nature has made a place for everyone. For you and for me. Everyone has a role to play and everyone has to fulfil that role. And if you fulfil your role well, then you are great. I felt that I was just being wasted in the government as a cog in the wheel. I wanted to do something on my own, and then yes, I found my role." ■