

**DISCUSSION ON RIVER REJUVENATION, 13-14 JUNE 2014:
WATERMAN, RAJENDRA SINGH CALLS FOR PHASEWISE NATIONWIDE
MOVEMENT TO MAKE WATER A BASIC RIGHT**



[Held at Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi]

A discussion on River Rejuvenation was held on 13-14 June at New Delhi. The aim of the discussion was to initiate a dialogue process with the new Union government, share experiences and build a strategy to make it a people's movement to sensitise on River Rejuvenation and Water Security.

The programme was dedicated to the Late Minister for Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Drinking Water and Sanitation, Gopinath Mundeji.

The Minister for Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Drinking Water and Sanitation, Nitin Jairam Gadkari (who also holds the Road Transport and Highways and Shipping portfolio) inaugurated the two-day programme. He informed that government was making plans to clean and free all the rivers, including Ganga and Yamuna from all illegal encroachments and ensure unobstructed flow for '*Aviral Ganga, Nirmal Ganga*'. The priority of the government will be to make small check dams for water conservation and irrigation.

About 200 participants including social scientists, water activists, religious and spiritual leaders, political leaders, media persons, senior academicians, technocrats, senior government officials and management professionals actively deliberated on the subject.

The day started with a Round Table, where people working on this in various regions of the country shared their experiences.

Many recent projects inspired by the Alwar experiments have successfully revived the rivers that had dried since many decades. This resulted in solving the drinking water and irrigation problems, enhancing agricultural productivity and rejuvenation of the eco system.

The enthusiasm of the people indicates that social transformation is possible only through projects that strengthen community access and control over common property like rivers, ponds and water bodies. There is now clarity on useful technologies that has been endorsed by the community also. These initiatives have led to creating more conscious citizens, thus facilitating

resolution of water related disputes.

Responding to the experiences shared by women from many states, Rashmi Singh, Executive Director, National Mission for Empowerment of Women said that rivers and water bodies had more significance and influence on women and were vital for their honour, security and livelihood.

Dr. Yogiraj Vishvapal Jayant, Famous Power Yoga Expert & Founder, Kanv Rishi Ashram (India & Canada) said, “There should be a ban on cremating human bodies and dumping waste after religious functions in and near the rivers and water bodies. Priests and religious leaders should be involved for creating awareness on these issues and help in its proper implementation.”

Dr. T. Karunakaran, Vice Chancellor, Gandhigram Rural University, and Mahatma Gandhi Chitrakoot Gramoday Vishwavidyalay pointed, “Just as salt was a powerful symbol used by Gandhiji against the Britishers during the civil disobedience movement, water can be the symbol for the movement for rejuvenation of rivers and ponds.”

Waterman Rajendra Singh (Magsaysay Awardee), Chairman Jal Biradari and Tarun Bharat Sangh said that it was not the second freedom movement, but a true movement for freedom of the society from various ills.

As a follow up plan, it was decided to compile the River Rejuvenation experiences of various groups all across the nation to prepare ground for replication of projects throughout the country. The congregation decided to hold a Water Parliament that includes meeting with the media and people’s representatives on 11 July at the Constitution Club of India.

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