

Peace Movement in Contemporary Rajasthan

Narendra Nath and Bajrang L. Saini

The land of Rajasthan has been endowed with rich traditions of multiculturalism since ancient times. (Shah, Ganshyam 1998) We find that it is a traditional state with age-old social structure giving way to changes brought in by the market forces through the engine of liberalization. In a way, one could say that the exploitative elements of both traditional as well as modern society are present in the socioeconomic structure of today's Rajasthan. In Rajasthan, social evils like Sati system, dowry system, girl infanticide, domestic slave system, buying and selling of women, prostitution, bonded labour (sagri system) etc., are some of the social evils this state has faced the brunt of. (Sharma, K.L, 1986) Despite its not-so-clean history, the Rajasthan society has incessantly made attempts to create a peaceful society through emphasis on justice, equity, and rights in the social and political spheres. The wave of social renaissance, which blew in the entire India, also affected Rajasthan. As a result of the ongoing movement under the aegis of Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, etc., fundamental change started taking place within the traditional religions, and their preachers and followers. (Jain, Pratibha, 1985) If the social evils had got multiplied in numbers, then there was no dearth of reformers in the land of Rajasthan, as well. The British period of colonial rule actually triggered many socio-reform movements. As it was true for the entire India, in Rajasthan too, because of the contact with the British, there was both inward looking tendency as well as learning tendency directly from the occidental values. Of course, Rajasthan being a princely state, these tendencies were limited to the extent of their restricted contact with them. Rajasthan State was a heterogeneous conglomeration of separate political entities with different administrative systems prevailing in different places.

The State is characterised by a non-nucleated, dispersed pattern of settlement, with diverse physiography ranging from desert and semiarid regions of Western Rajasthan to the greener belt east of the Aravallis, and the hilly tribal tracts in the Southeast. (Bhalla, L.R, 2004) Set within this diverse

geographical terrain, Rajasthan encompasses a wide range of livelihoods. The State is home to, on one hand, prosperous “Green Revolution” peasantry in Ganganagar, and, on the other hand, subsistence farmers in Dholpur. Other contrasts are between the small artisans engaged in traditional crafts and the trading empires of the Marwari community, as well as the nomadic herders of sheep and camel to the dairy producers relying on stall-fed milch cattle. (Bhalla, L.R, 2004:45)

Given the wide variations in terrain, social structure, livelihoods and cultural patterns within the State, no un-dimensional measure of growth such as income can be adequate. A more comprehensive, people-oriented approach is needed to capture dynamics of local economies and social transactions and provide a vision of the direction in which the State and its people can develop. In this context human development approaches and measures, which go beyond income to include dimensions related to human capabilities such as quality of life, are indispensable. (Saxena, H.K, 2005) Today’s Rajasthan The table below gives us a bird’s eye view about the shape of the state in all significant aspects. Table- 1(Official link of Govt. of Rajasthan)

The social economy of Rajasthan is characterised by diversity in terms of livelihood sources and consequently low level of income poverty and unemployment. More than 60 percent of the State’s total area is desert, with sparsely distributed population, entailing a very high unit cost of providing basic services. Agriculture continues to be dependent on rainfall. Failure of the monsoon causes severe drought and scarcity conditions. Growth of population continues to be high, with decadal rates being the highest in India. Growth in labour force outpaces employment generation. Rajasthan is deficient in water (surface and ground). Ground water at many places is unfit for human and livestock consumption. Various sectors of the economy share common constraints of low levels of technology, high levels of risk, and poor credit and market infrastructure. Land inequality is compounded by ecological fragility. Low productivity of agriculture and the dimension of ecological risk make food security and subsistence the primary concern of farmers. High levels of urban poverty, with trends consistently higher than rural poverty levels, are a salient feature of Rajasthan’s poverty profile. This problem assumes greater proportion given the high rates of growth of urban population (40 percent between 1981-91), in contrast with that of rural population (22.9 percent). A gender bias is seen in the current trends of employment diversification and increased “feminisation of poverty”. (Rajasthan UNDP Report, 2002:19) In

the sector of health and survival, Rajasthan shows that, despite the creation of extensive healthcare infrastructure, health outcomes lag behind global norms and national commitments. The progress made since independence in terms of infant mortality, case fatality rates of various diseases, especially those related to reproductive and child health, is less favourable compared to other states. Rajasthan's problems of malnutrition and lack of sanitation are also severe. (Joshi, Hemlata, 2007) The growing incidence of HIV/AIDS requires urgent attention. So, the status of health in Rajasthan, despite progress made since 1949, is quite poor both in absolute and relative terms. The health targets set at Alma Ata have not been realised till date. (Rajasthan UNDP Report, 2002:82)

Primary health care has not reached a large number of poor people, especially women, dalits, and communities living in remote areas. The health scenario in Rajasthan is still characterised by gender imbalance, low vital rates (lower than the ones for the nation) and an uneven health care coverage. Global prescriptions for health sector "reform" have focussed on privatisation of curative health services as well as on a public-private mix in primary and secondary care. However, the challenge of ensuring universality and affordability has not been addressed thus far. An appraisal of the current health situation and the disease profile of Rajasthan vis-à-vis goals of universal health care shows that there are substantial shortfalls in the efficacy of the public health system in the state. In the early 1950s, the health profile of Rajasthan compared favourably with that of other Indian states, and with the national average.

Today, Rajasthan's health indicators are among the poorest in the country, indicating that the state's performance in terms of improvement in vital statistics and case fatality from various diseases has been comparatively lackluster. The persistence of ill health in Rajasthan is strongly correlated to social variables, in a context of patriarchy where expectant mothers and girl children are neglected, and women as a cohort are more vulnerable to diseases that afflict the population in general. This is borne out by an examination of indicators such as life expectancy, infant and child mortality, fertility and other vital rates, as well as of the state's disease profile. Expectation of life in Rajasthan is amongst the lowest in the country. (Rajasthan UNDP Report, 2002:85) The Human Development Report 2002 discusses the condition of Rajasthan in terms of Human Development Index (Indrayan A., et.al.,1999). In the field of education, the literacy level, especially for girls, is among the lowest in the country. Other social and economic infrastructure is also deficient. (India,

2006) Despite the high decadal growth rate, the challenge of Education for All is still substantial especially for rural areas, women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. (Jain, Ajit Kumar, et.al., 1999) Thus the education scenario is doubly constrained: not only is the achievement level relatively low in absolute terms, but also its distribution across social groups is highly uneven. (Joshi, Hemlata, 2003) Therefore, some people suffer more than others in educational terms. That is why large-scale inequalities are observed in the literacy achievements of groups located at the polar extremes of the socio-economic prosperity scale. For example, in 1991 the literacy rate of 79 percent for men in urban areas and only about 5 percent for Scheduled Caste women in rural areas represents two practically incompatible realities and raises serious doubts about the equity effects of the state's education system. (Rajasthan UNDP Report, 2002:44-68)

The atrocities against women in Rajasthan, as registered under I.P.C have always been higher in incidence when compared with the national average. The Rajasthan average percentage was 8.74 as against national average of 7.83. In 1995, the registered cases of crime against women were 9422 that increased to 13451 in 2006. Similarly, around 30% of the population is constituted by the SCs and the STs. There has been a long record of atrocities in the state against them. Due to a long feudal set-up in the state, a radical change in their condition cannot be possible. The statistical interpretations indicate a decline in the incidence of crime against them but their complete amelioration demands a drastic change in the social mindset. (Official link of Rajasthan Police)

Hence, here we observe that the people of Rajasthan today are in a living condition wherein the basic minimum needs are not available to them. We see that if the civic life of a citizen here is deplorable, then the socio-economic conditions are not better either. The political rights are there but more in principle than in practice. The constitutional rights and remedies are only scantily available for the obvious reasons. We also know that in India, (and hence in Rajasthan also), poverty operates in a vicious circle wherein the poor is condemned to face multiple deprivations once he is trapped into it. The basic issues are of man and environment, displacement and degradation of social and tribal groups; human rights abuse, and ultimately the displacement and reduction of economic man from his native cultivation and production process to the condition of a degraded human labour in the urban development process. People in underdeveloped areas have been demanding basic irrigation

facilities, drinking water, transport, primary schools, housing, health, and loan facilities through banking system, basic employment, and minimum wage, conditions. So, as per our definitions of peace (as enumerated in previous chapters), we can say with utmost humility that the life in this state of India can be termed as being far from peaceful. In sixty years of independence, our efforts so far have not been up to the mark. A civilized society essentially has to be peaceful. What efforts the State and the Civil Society have made thus far in this regard? (Pawar S.N., et.al., 2004)

In modern Rajasthan, we find that there are a rich variety of movements, which have been there to secure peace to its people, in real sense of the term. (Sharma B.M., et.al., 2004) They collectively create conditions of peace. There has been a renewed resurgence of such movements. They may be recognised as new social movements since they qualitatively differ from the old movements. They are considered to be new because they have a participatory, nonhierarchical pattern of organisation. More importantly, their activities have or are in the process of developing a far-reaching critique of the existing political, economic, and social order. They also strive to change social values as well as public policy. (Ponna Wignaraja, 1993:122-23) They collectively focus on the quality of human life, that is, life in peace. More crucially it is this framework, which locates these movements as part of the process of social transformation, which is new. (Guha Ramchandra, 1989:12-15) They are anti-war, anti-nuclear movements, ecological movements, human rights movements, movements of indigenous peoples and other survival related movements. Though varied in approach and conditions, the issues raised by these movements are interlinked and the problem of peace gets reflected as part of this linkage. (Cohen Robin, 2000)

They together provide some of the creative responses to the challenges of our time. The role and meaning of the peace movement in Rajasthan, as in India, emerges on the ground that each social movement is related to other movements and, more importantly, functions as a component to the holistic view of peace. The peace movement that has arisen here, as it has in India, is more than the sum total of these traditions or the organisations that represent them. These movements may remain, in physical and organisational sense, fragmented and scattered. But they are no longer restricted to specific situations or particular places. (Puri H.K, et.al., 2000) They provide, in fact, continuity over time and connection from region to region. They have begun to share and learn from the experiences of other situations. The increasing integration

of movements struggling in response to political, economic, ecological, social, and military conditions, despite the diversity is due to their common concern for future that is seen as threatening, more so in the wake of the L.P.G phase which India embraced in the early nineties. (Khanna Kewak, 2003) Of the numerous such movements, we shall be enumerating some of the most illustrious ones around which the peace movement in Rajasthan has the potential to emerge shall be discussed. Before that, it becomes almost obligatory to discuss the State efforts through Rajasthan Human Rights Commission. It would be pertinent to comment here that the state agencies and the new social movements are complementary to each other, and a comprehensive peace operating in totality warrants such complementarities.

Rajasthan Human Rights Commission

In a state like Rajasthan, where the social problems have persisted through the ages, the feudal set-up stubbornly ingrained into the society, where millions of humans are still struggling to eke out a sober living for themselves, the role of State Human Rights Commission is indispensable. The main mandate of the State Commission is to function as a watch dog for human rights in the State. Under the 1993 Act, human rights are defined in Section 2(d) and are those justifiable rights, which can be enforced in a court of law in India. Most of the universal human rights as defined in the UN Charter of 10th December, 1948 are included and are being vigorously enforced. Keeping in view the significance of human rights, (Singh Nagendra K, 1986) the Government of Rajasthan is committed to the protection of human rights and has taken several steps in this direction. Rajasthan is one of the few distinguished States in the country to have a State Human Rights Commission since 1999. The commission monitors human rights in the State and looks into the complaints received in connection with the violation of human rights and ensures appropriate corrective action.

Hence, the State Human Rights Commission can be seen doing its bit. This is highly inadequate, keeping in mind the social and economic predicaments of the people of Rajasthan –even if other state agencies and commissions like Women Commission, SC/ST Commission, Minority Commission, OBC Commission, etc. are taken into account. Therefore, the necessity of new social movements and other civil society actors for the meaningful, non- violent transformation of the society of Rajasthan and India is almost compulsory.

Eco-Religious Movement: The Bishnois of Thar Desert

The Bishnois are known as the conservationists to whom the preservation of animal and vegetable life is a religion and has been so from the early 15th century. The basic philosophy of the Bishnoi religion is that all living things (including animals) have a right to survive and share resources. It is astonishing that more than 450 years ago, a simple villager from a remote desert area, without even the basic education, clearly understood the importance of preserving bio-diversity. He not only understood it himself, but also had the wisdom to influence generations of people to preserve it by weaving it with their religion. The Bishnoi tribe of the western Indian state of Rajasthan has, over centuries, made a unique blend of ecological sense and religious sensibility their faith's cornerstone. (The Bishnois)

The Bishnois worship nature in all its manifestations. Not the ripe, yielding nature of ancient pagan societies, but the ruthless and demanding desert where a desolate horizon meets a blazing sky. Here, women suckle motherless deer, die to save trees, go hungry to provide food for animals and live a strictly sattvik (simple) life advocated by their guru Jambhoji. Guru Jambheshwarji, or Jambhoji launched the Bishnoi religion in 1542 AD as his followers affectionately refer him to. He was a great saint and philosopher of the medieval period. He was disillusioned by communal antagonism between Muslim invaders and the native Hindus. However, instead of wallowing in despair, he went ahead to form a religion of peace based on 29 (bish: twenty, noi: nine) principles that included compassion for all living beings, cleanliness, devotion, vegetarian diet and truthfulness. Thus, the Bishnois came into being. The tenets were tailored to conserve bio-diversity of the area but also ensured a healthy eco-friendly social life for the community. Out of the 29 tenets, 10 are directed towards personal hygiene and maintaining good basic health, seven for healthy social behavior, and five tenets to worship God. Eight tenets have been prescribed to preserve bio-diversity and encourage good animal husbandry. These include a ban on killing animals and felling green trees, and providing protection to all life forms. The community is also directed to see that the firewood they use is devoid of small insects. Wearing blue clothes is prohibited because the dye for coloring them is obtained by cutting a large quantity of shrubs. The Bishnois are presently spread over the western parts of Rajasthan and parts of Haryana and Punjab. They are more prosperous than the other communities living in the Thar Desert, probably because of their eco-friendly lifestyle. Their villages are easily distinguishable with plenty

of trees and other vegetation, and herds of antelopes roaming freely near their homes. The fields are ploughed with simple ploughs using bullocks or camels and this causes minimal damage to the fragile desert eco-system. Only one crop of bajra is grown during the monsoon season. The bushes, which grow in the fields, protect the loose sand from wind erosion and provide the much-needed fodder for animals during a famine. The Bishnois maintain groves, locally known as orans, for the animals to graze and birds to feed. Organizations serve as important recharger of rain water in the aquifers in the desert, where every single drop of water is precious in most orans, particularly in western Rajasthan. The rainwater is stored in underground tanks called 'tankaras' which is being used for only drinking purpose. The chemical fertilizer usage in their agricultural fields is very low and they are using natural manure (cow and buffaloes dung). They use only cow-dung flakes for their cooking. The Bishnois keep only cows and buffaloes as rearing of sheep and goats, which devour desert vegetation, is taboo. They store water during the year in under-ground tanks by collecting rainwater, as it is precious in this dry desert area. The Bishnois are environment friendly people of a brilliant order. Though they are Hindus, they do not burn their dead but bury them to save precious wood and trees.

In 1737, when officials of the king of Jodhpur started felling a few Khejri trees in Khejerli village, men, women and children hugged the trees that were being axed. In all, 363 Bishnois from Khejerli and adjoining villages sacrificed their lives. Later, hearing about it, the King of Jodhpur apologized for his action and issued a royal decree engraved on a copper plate, prohibiting the cutting of trees and hunting of animals in all Bishnoi villages. Violation of this order by anyone including the members of the ruling family would entail prosecution and a severe penalty. A temple and monument stand as testimony to the sacrifice of the 363 martyrs. Every year, the Bishnois assemble there to commemorate the extreme sacrifice made by their people to preserve their faith and religion. The Bishnois aggressively protect the khejri trees and the antelopes, particularly the blackbuck and chinkara, even now. (Desert Shinto, 2006) According to them, if a tree is saved from felling at the cost of one's head, it should be considered a good deed: "Sir Saate Roonkh Rahe, To BhiSastoJaan". They not only protect antelopes but also share their food and water with them. In a number of villages, Bishnois hand-feed the animals.

It's for this environmental awareness and commitment that Bishnois stand apart from the countless other sects and communities in India. They have

learnt, with time and hardships, how to nurture nature and grow with it instead of exploiting it. So, we see in the form of this community a sort of peace movement being run in the western part of Rajasthan. Ecology, biodiversity, non-violence towards living creatures, are all part of the peace agenda. Peace here implies survival amidst natural hardship. The Bishnois do not command the level of respect they ought to—the reason being that they often also get violent in their penchant towards environment and living beings. The formation of Bishnoi Tiger Force, a self-styled formation of the Bishnoi youth is an institutional expression of this. Though their argument is genuine as its leader RampalBhawad believes—”Because of the ongoing 193 famine, the encroaching hunters, non-cooperation from the forest officials etc. have forced them to take such an extreme step. (Dainik Bhasker, Feb. 16, 2007)

Anuvrat Movement

ANUVRAT GLOBAL ORGANIZATION, with its widely publicized acronym ‘ANUVIBHA’, is a non-profit socio-cultural organization dedicated to peace and non-violent action. Founded in 1982, mainly to disseminate the message of ANUVRAT MOVEMENT globally, ANUVIBHA has created a worldwide network of thousands of people spread the world over, which believes that all conflicts should be resolved through nonviolent actions. ANUVIBHA is also formally approved by the United Nations for its association with its Department of Public Information. In pursuance of ANUVIBHA’S avowed objective of popularizing ahimsa at the global level, it has so far organized a series of international conferences on different aspects of peace and nonviolent actions. (Anuvrat Global Organization(Anuvibha):A Profile) One of its aims is to extend support to U.N. and its agencies in their endeavor to achieve world peace. It also launches peace initiatives from time to time with a view to educating people and preparing them to face the challenge of violence under the leadership of the internationally revered nonviolence crusader and the spiritual patron of ANUVRAT MOVEMENT.

The Anuvrat Movement, started by the great Jain Saint Acharya Tulsi in Rajasthan in 1949, is a positive evidence of the vitality of the Jain religion as also of the presence of the life – and world - affirming elements in it. It contains, therefore, the vows and beliefs traditional to Jainism but against the background of the corruption of man and society that had come about at the time the movement was thought of and launched and of the immediate necessity of rebuilding of character felt at the time. (Gopalan, 2000:33-39)

Acharya Tulsi believed that the aim of Jainism (from an empirical standpoint) is the development of the individual character. He emphasized the fact that the ills of society automatically get cured by means of the process of self-purification and self-control. From this point of view, he maintains that the view sometimes expressed that the function of religion is the control of society is incorrect. By developing the character of the individual, the level of social morality is made to go up but the latter is not the main aim of religion.

The movement was not confined to India merely as it spread to other countries as well. The success of a movement is to be measured by the results it produces. Of course the Anuvrat Movement has in no sense failed. In fact it has succeeded in all places. It has left its imprint on the Indian psyche and has effectively contributed to a moral renaissance. Success encourages more action. New vistas opened as people of different classes and categories got attracted towards the Movement. It grew in new directions. Different vows were fixed for students, businessmen, government servants, teachers, workers, etc. From time to time students' weeks, government employees' weeks, businessmen's weeks and prohibition weeks were celebrated. Anuvrat Student Councils were formed at Delhi and many other places. The Anuvrat Committee was formed to coordinate various activities of the Movement. It started the publication of the fortnightly 'Anuvrat'. The Anuvrat Thinkers' Forum was started. Anuvrat activities are not confined to towns; they are carried on in villages also. As a matter of fact, efforts are on in a few cases to change whole villages into anuvrat villages.

Whether these efforts to make the Movement popular were adequate is not possible to say. As a matter of fact full advantage was not taken of the widespread contacts that had been made, of the attraction of the people towards the Movement and of the almost magical effect of Acharya Shree's personality on the people. There were also other weaknesses like lack of proper organization and absence of direction before the fieldworkers. A situation developed in which the mellifluous voice of Acharya Shree flowed like a torrent wherever he went but lost its momentum for want of an adequate follow-up. Consequently the results were not commensurate with the efforts. Again, in the absence of adequate preparation the anuvrats cannot have any meaningful effect on life. The life of the masses is so shackled with cramping traditions, that without breaking them it would not admit of anything new. For this reason, Acharya Shree gave the following message to the people: "The rituals observed at the time of birth, wedding and death must be given up, dowry must be put

an end to and the use of the veil must be discontinued. Once these basic problems are resolved a new way of progress will open itself.” Even today the Movement is engaged in many-sided activities aimed at the welfare of the people. It is going on thanks to Acharya Shree’s inspiration, active work by the monks and the nuns and the devotion of sympathetic householders. If it succeeds in creating a band of dedicated workers, India, will once again earn the right of preaching morality to the world. Anuvrat and Preksha Meditation Mental tension has emerged as a dreadful disease of the age of industrial progress. To remedy it, the Anuvrat Movement has been added with a new chapter in the form of Preksha Meditation. Through its practice thousands of people have had a profound experience of both physical and mental peace. An organized programme to include Preksha Meditation as the science of living (JeevanVigyan) in the fields of administration and education has also been undertaken. The possibilities of future growth are in fact immense. The organized activities of Anuvibha are organization of International Conferences, holding RashtriyaAnuvratShikshakSansad (National Parliament of Anuvrati Teachers), developing Gramodayas (Centres for a phased programme of improving the quality of life in one hundred villages each), launching Balodayas(Projects for moral and spiritual transformation and all-round development of children). Among other important wings of Anuvibha are Pragya Research Centre (to conduct research on causes of violence and their elimination); Anuvrat Centre for International and Multicultural Understanding (to develop strategies for promoting cultural conciliation and world friendship); International Anuvrat Council for Ecological and Environmental Ethics (to evolve a new culture embedded in ecological lifestyle); Centre for Inter-religious Dialogue and Interfaith Education (promoting religious reconciliation and unity and diversity); Centre for Sustainable Development Through Nonviolence (for discouraging excessive consumption and exhibitionism); Anuvibha Poverty Elimination Council, etc. It has also constituted an Anuvibha Award for International Peace for honouring people committed to ahimsa.

Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS)

The work of Tarun Bharat Sangh, and its founder Rajendra Singh in the districts of Rajasthan can easily be over-simplified as water-shed management whereas, it is in fact a revolution in regenerating life and society in denuded and deserted lands. The birth of TBS took place in 1975, when a group of likeminded colleagues, who wanted to operationalise the Gandhian philosophy, got together at Jaipur. Among them was a young activist Rajendra Singh, who

was stirred by the movement launched by Vinoba Bhave and who was guided by Gandhi's teachings of local autonomy and self-reliance. TBS first became active in rehabilitating a group of poor laborers whose peaceful existence was gutted in a fire. From there, their work started to spread to other people, areas and problems.

In 1985, TBS started their work of water conservation in Alwar district of Rajasthan having a meagre 620 mm average rainfall and where animal husbandry and agriculture were the main occupation. (T. Chandini, 2004) For rapid progress, they rediscovered traditional methods of rainwater harvesting. By 1995, over 4000 water harvesting structures had been built by the local people with the support arranged by the TBS. A geographical area of 6500 sq.kms comprising 750 villages had been turned into "white zone" from "Dark zone". By June 2002, another 111 villages out of the 850 will also become drought-proof, thus taking the total to 201. This is clearly the only example of its kind in the whole world. New changes are almost always faced by challenges. TBS fell in the same category. In initial stages, people did try to oust the TBS, there were confrontations with the government agencies, and local administration chief brought outsiders to be resettled on the villagers' community land. The 'mining Mafia' was encouraged and forest preservation laws were ignored. However, TBS faced all these with Gandhi means like undertaking protest march, demonstrations and networking with other NGO's in search for peaceful solutions. (Agrawal Anil, et. cl. 2001)

The focus throughout remained firmly on rebuilding johads (a traditional pucca rainwater storage tank) and on generating and managing their flow. From this activity all other progressive activities flowed viz. water generation, water management, its conservation and economical use, etc. These activities highlighted that water-protection; support systems like afforestation and hill slope protection are all inter-linked. The johads were rebuilt in the parts of the contiguous districts of Alwar, Dausa, SawaiMadhopur, Karoli and Jaipur districts. Johads and the other appropriate water structures have also been built in the districts of Jaisalmer, Ajmer, Udaipur and Bharatpur. As a result of these efforts five seasonal rivers in the northeastern Rajasthan area, that had nearly dried up have now become perennial. These rivers are Ruparel, Arvari, Sarsa, Bhagani and Jahajwali. For every Rs.100 invested in small earthen check-dams known as Johads, the economic production in villages has risen by Rs. 400. And all this prosperity has come through the use of only three per cent of the total rainwater. However, after the regeneration of these rivers, the

Government of Rajasthan gave contracts for fishing in certain stretches of Arvari River . To oppose this policy and to protect fish and other riverine life forms, a three-month long Satyagraha was organised for not allowing any fishing. This Satyagraha resulted in reversal of govt. policy. To sustain this unity and the river in future a decentralized power model has been structured among the 70 villages of Arvari River, i.e., the ARVARI PARLIAMENT. All these efforts were motivated by the desire to maintain an ecological balance between the nature and man. This is, of course, an ongoing process. The prime motivation of TBS is to be vigilant and togetherness. Since then TBS has also hosted many international and national deliberations to further understand these issues. Employment opportunities have increased and migration has reduced substantially. Studies have shown manifold increase in the enrollment of students in school and output of food grains and milk production."Several hundred villages in the Alwar district of Rajasthan have achieved water self-sufficiency and increasing agricultural stability through water harvesting structures promoted by the Tarun Bharat Sangh." (Kothari Ashish, 2007)

The issues

- (1) Environmental Degradation
- (2) Government Resistance
- (3) High Costs & Low Benefits
- (4) Inadequate Finances & Lack of Information

The strategies

The TBS strengthened by constant contact with the villagers thus beginning to evolve a method of working with the people. Their strategy gradually crystallizes into five themes. The first was the effort to be a collective one from the villagers in which all would benefit. The second was that this collective wisdom could be conceived in an atmosphere where informal communication took place. The third was that all decisions would be strictly enforced. The fourth was that each person in the collective community would be individually responsible to carry out the tasks. The fifth was that the community would only use outside help as a catalyst for their guidance. After discussions with the villagers, they found that they could provide most of the materials required, except technical help. TBS always insisted that in some way or another, the community would have to bear at least 25 percent of the cost of repair, and after they worked out the benefits, the community would always agree.

The foremost benefit of the water harvesting structures is conservation of rainwater, which helps in Recharging of ground water by harvesting each single drop of rainwater. This not only preserves water for use during the drought but also leads to rise in the water table in the adjoining areas of the structure especially in the wells existing in the fields. Easier availability of the water in these drought-affected regions results in drastic improvements in the life of the people of these areas. This makes irrigation possible throughout the year and opens new avenues of the income for them. This is indeed an effort towards reducing poverty that emphasizes poor people to become self-reliant. Agricultural production has also increased. Further, time devoted earlier in search of drinking water by people, especially females are now used in other productive works. Now lesser males migrate to other area for employment as laborers. Instead they cultivate their lands, which earlier was uncultivable. At least 5 rivulets which were dry during the last 50 years have become perennials. Watershed work has been undertaken in more than 850 villages. Of these, 90 have been made drought-proof. This means, that even if these villages receive less than 3 inches of rain per annum they will face none of the hardships of drought. The only awareness that they will need to have is not to take crops, which consume too much water, and not to waste any water.

In view of the emphasis given by the Human Development Report 2006 on water, and the slogan of ‘Water Wars’ emerging on the horizon, the efforts of Tarun Bharat Sangh have a real message to give to the entire world.

The MazdoorKisan Shakti Sangathan and the RTI Movement

The most important feature that distinguishes the movement for the people’s right to information in India from that in most other countries, whether of the North or the South, is that it is deeply rooted in the struggles and concerns for survival and justice of most disadvantaged rural people. The reason for this special character to the entire movement is that it was inspired by a highly courageous, resolute, and ethically consistent grassroots struggle related to the most fundamental livelihood and justice concerns of the rural poor. This inspiring struggle in the large desert state of Rajasthan was led by the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), as part of a people’s movement for justice in wages, livelihoods and land. The story of the MKSS, enables a deeper understanding of why the movement for the people’s right to information in India has developed as part of a larger movement for people’s empowerment and justice. Some struggles of weaker sections appear to be very small struggles

at first glance, but they have the potential for much wider social change of great significance. If this potential can be tapped properly at the right time and linkages established with wider issues, then results can be achieved which are far greater than the issues involved in the immediate struggle. A clear example of this is a struggle for minimum wages, which took place in Rajasmand district of Central Rajasthan in 1989-91. This entire effort had a very small beginning in Dev Dungri village of Rajsamand district (the nearest town is Bhim on the Ajmer-Udaipur highway). This small group lived an austere life and worked without any institutional funding, obtaining just an occasional research or writing project to ensure survival. Their dedication and openness soon attracted a large number of villagers and their organisation was named Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS). One of the first challenges the MKSS faced related to payment of legally fixed minimum wages. In the precarious rural economy of Rajasthan, the workers are supposed to play an important role in protecting rural poor from the worst forms of deprivation, particularly drought years. However apathy and corruption had badly eroded this role of relief work, as was evident in the open and large-scale flaunting of legal minimum wage laws. Despite the administration's heavy-handed methods, the movement succeeded in drawing attention to the issue of non-payment of minimum wage at rural employment works. This prolonged struggle against corruption led further to the idea of several jansunwais or public hearings against corruption. These public hearings also provided a good example of how the participation of various sections including officials, media persons, social workers, elected representatives and other prominent citizens was obtained to expose the shocking levels of corruption in rural development works. This entire difficult and prolonged process convinced the MKSS that one of the most effective methods of fighting village-level corruption is to provide people the right to obtain copies of official records (such as muster rolls, bills and vouchers) relating to rural development and anti-poverty programmes implemented in their areas. This soon became a central point in the demands being raised by MKSS. Meanwhile the struggle for the enactment of right to information legislation in Rajasthan continued which culminated in the enactment of this legislation in 2000. Side by side MKSS activists have continued to play a very important role in the national campaign for right to information and effective legislation on this right at the central level. At a time when the right to information campaign is spreading to many parts of the world, a special strength of the Indian experience is on show, thanks largely to MKSS. It was closely linked up with the struggles of the weakest sections. MKSS was involved in the

movement for minimum wages of workers at relief work sites in a drought-prone area, and it was in the course of this struggle that the importance of information right was realised. Poor peasants got the strength and the confidence to go to meet the highest officials (they even went to meet the President of India who received them most cordially) because they had realised the importance of this right while breaking stones in the parched land of their drought affected villages. The moral force of MKSS campaign increased to such an extent that at jan-sunwais organised recently in some villages, the persons who faced charges of corruption from people agreed on the spot to return the money so that it could be used again for welfare of people. While there are many campaigns against corruption, such success is extremely rare. It is not enough to expose corruption, on the constructive side we should present examples of how honest panchayat representatives can give better results. Therefore MKSS candidates fought and won sarpanch elections in Tadgarh village of Ajmer district and Kushalpura village of Rajsamand district. Although there are extensive checks and balances built into the functioning of all public bodies, but traditionally these have been based on supervision by superiors within the hierarchy, audit by specialised bodies within government, judicial scrutiny and accountability to the legislature. However for the first time the movement for the right to information has paved the way for audit and supervision also directly by the people, of which some major steps can be abstracted. Here one can see a working model of how honest and entirely transparent elected representatives work, leading to much better results than before and much closer involvement of people in development tasks. However, the RTI movement has still a long way to go! The movement has achieved what was unimaginable.

People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL)

The doctrine of PUCL is to ensure the sanctity of the rights of the individual, consistent, as it always must be, with the rights of others, for only then can we aspire to call ourselves a truly democratic country. With the broad area of concerns that PUCL has and its reach in almost all the States of India, it has been involved with and acted in a variety of matters ranging from the deprivation of rights of the disadvantaged, poor and subjugated both in the rural and urban areas, who would otherwise have no say, women's rights, corruption in our polity, preservation of human rights, independence of the Judiciary and freedom of the press, and the likes. PUCL has through various actions and interventions, worked for these issues.

When acts like TADA and POTA, which are basically anti-people, are framed, the Government sees to it the rules for the act are also framed along with the act. But, when acts which are framed for the welfare of the people viz., Child Labour Abolition Act, Bonded Labour Abolition Act and Family Courts Act, the rules are not framed immediately and for certain acts the rules have not even been framed so far. For the Protection of Human Rights Acts, so far no Act has been framed despite the directions given by the High Court. The Government is now making steps to frame certain Preventive Detention Laws. With growing emphasis on “privatization” in all walks of life, the rights of poor people have come under severe stress. Protests due to rising rural and urban poverty and shrinking employment opportunities are met with laws that limit the scope of protest. The state has not only been showing insensitivity but also a degree of intolerance in this regard. This is a serious challenge for PUCL. The task becomes more daunting because it involves launching systematic campaign to educate those who matter in influencing public opinion and are not adversely affected by these policies. The state has been dealing with terrorism as a law and order problem without considering the socioeconomic factors. Its actions have become more strident after the 2001 September 11 attack in the U.S. Anything in the name of anti-terrorism is condoned such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), which has been used against the people selectively.

Similarly, the number of cases of “encounter” deaths in various parts of the country has risen; many encounters were allegedly faked. Much of the civil liberties problems in India revolve around non-adherence to the rule of law. The police lacks autonomy of action as it remains under the influence of politicians. The police investigation process remains problematic in terms of professional standards. Recommendations for police reform by the Police Commission have remained unimplemented. Similarly, millions of cases are pending in courts. As a result, victims do not get justice. The country urgently needs a campaign to reform its criminal justice system so that adherence to the rule of law is ensured and the civil and human rights of the people are protected. Legal action is one of the means that can be used, in a democratic political system, to hold the state accountable to its responsibilities. It is in that spirit that People’s Union for Civil Liberties (Rajasthan) went to the Supreme Court in April 2001 to seek legal enforcement of the right to food. The “public interest litigation” (PIL) initiated by the PUCL petition is a complex plot with many actors. (Shiva Vandana, 2004)

Over the time, the scope of this PIL has considerably expanded. Today it covers a wide range of issues related to the right to food, including the implementation of food - related schemes, urban destitution, the right to work, starvation deaths and even general issues of transparency and accountability. PUCL has also been spreading awareness through road march especially on female feticide. It raised voice against the peacefully illegal disposal of sting operations conducted on various clinics where ultrasounds were being used for sex determination. PUCL is also observing the 'right to food' as mid day meal in various schools.

Bhoodan-Gramdan Movement

After having achieved freedom, the Indian leaders took little time in abandoning the Gandhian principles. Nonviolence gave way to the use of India's armed forces. Heavy industries were called as 'the temples of modern India'. The new leaders discarded Gandhi's vision of a decentralized society—a society based on autonomous, self-reliant villages. These leaders spurred a rush toward a strong central government and an industrial economy as found in the West. Yet all did not abandon Gandhi's vision. Many of Gandhi's "constructive workers"—development experts and community organizers working in a host of agencies set up by Gandhi himself—resolved to continue his mission of transforming Indian society. Like Gandhi, Vinoba believed that the divisiveness of Indian society was a root cause of its degradation and stagnation. After India got independence, Vinoba advised that, now that India had reached its goal of Swaraj— independence, or self-rule—the Gandhians' new goal should be a society dedicated to Sarvodaya, the "welfare of all." Bhoodan (Land-gift) and Gramdan (Village-gift) are actually practical applications of the philosophy of Sarvodaya. They collectively were 'trusteeship in action'. Connected with Bhoodan and Gramdan, there were other programs. Important of these were Sampatti-Dan (Gift of the Wealth), Shramdan (Gift of the Labour), Shanti Sena (Army for Peace), Sarvodaya-Patra (the pot where every household gives daily handful of grain) and Jeevandan (Gift of Life). Over a period of twenty years, he walked through the length and breadth of India persuading landowners and landlords to give a total of four million acres of land to the poor and downtrodden. His Bhoodan (Gift of the Land) movement started on April 18, 1951. He attracted the attention of the world. Untouched by publicity and attention, Vinoba had continued his efforts for a just and equitable society. History of Bhoodan-Gramdan movement in Rajasthan Siddharaj Dhadha, a veteran Gandhian from Rajasthan, and a close associate of Vinoba was greatly inspired by his Bhoodan Gramdan movement and brought the idea to

Rajasthan for its successful implementation. He invited firstly Vinoba to a remote village in Dholpur, where he was presented with a small gift of land. So, Bhoodan in Rajasthan took its first practical shape in 1951. With this started the Bhoodan-Graamdan campaign in Rajasthan. Meetings, contacts, publicity campaigns, newspaper appeals, etc. created a conducive environment for Bhoodan. In Feb. 1952, in a conference, an ad hoc committee was formed for planning the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement. District conveners for Bhoodan program were appointed. The leadership of the movement shifted into the hands of Gokul Bhai Bhatt. Gandhi's close associate S.D. Jaju's frequent visits to various parts of Rajasthan guided and shaped the movement. Various padyatras (or foot marches) by famous personalities and their followers kept the movement 'alive and kicking'. National leaders like J.P., Dada Dharmadhikari, Vimla Bahin Thakar, Shanta Narulkar, Sant Tukodi Maharaj, Congress President U.N. Dhebbhar, Sriman Narayan etc. contributed heavily towards the cause of Bhoodan-Graamdan movement in Rajasthan. In 1954, the reigns of this movement were taken over by Rajasthan Samagra Sewa Sangh.

Achievements

The first governmental initiative came in the form of donation of one lac acre land. This gave a tremendous spur to the movement. Other related activities like publishing literature, involving educational institutions in its fold were part of its constructive program. In this year only, Bhoodan Act was introduced and promulgated. Rajasthan Bhoodan Board was formed in 1958 on the lines of similar boards in other states. Maharaja Amar Singh of Bikaner donated the single largest share of 142393 bighas of land in Chhatargarh. The Bhoodan-Gramdan movement reached its peak at this time wherein 8150 donors in Rajasthan gave away 422245 acres of land out of which 50902 acres of land was distributed among 7098 families. Landless farmers and Scheduled Castes were given priority. (Gram-Swaraj Udbodhan, 2000) But it turned out that it was far easier to get a declaration of Gramdan (Bhoodan later on merged into Gramdan in a way) than to set it up in practice.

Still, the Graamdan movement left behind no mean achievements—what could be procured under the force of Land Reforms Act was very less when compared to what was obtained from Bhoodan-Gramdan movement through non-violent and peaceful means. There were more than a hundred Gramdan “pockets”—some made up of hundreds of villages—where Gandhian workers settled in for long-term development efforts. These pockets today form the base of India's Gandhian peace movement.

National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM)

National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM) is a network of over two hundred people's movements in India with a clear ideology against corporate globalisation, religious fundamentalism, discrimination of any kind and struggling for people's right over natural resources, for dalit and women's rights, for true internationalism and for a just and egalitarian society. (Giri Ananta K, 1998) NAPM is a coming together, a process of like-minded groups and movements who while retaining their autonomous identities, are working together to bring the struggle for a people-oriented development model to the centre-stage of politics and public life.

NAPM brings together struggles of various marginalized sectors into inter sectorial alliance, which asserts the primacy of natural resources ownership to communities, who live and sustain by those resources. The bringing together of these traditional communities also brings with it a new politics of natural resource ownership and control. It is understood that such an alliance, emerging with a definite ideological commonality and common strategy, can give rise to a strong social, political force and a national people's movement. (Cohen Robin, 2000)

The Organisation has both short term and long term goals. While it plans to turn around the development paradigm in the long run for an equitable, gender just and participatory development, in the short term it aims to bring justice to those groups affected by the present socio – political system and ensure more voice and visibility to their struggles in various national and international fora. It uses mass mobilization along with advocacy lobbying and networking with like minded groups to achieve these ends. NAPM in its organizational form tries to integrate not only sections of marginalized communities but also their supporters with individual membership. It attempts to link between the struggling rural masses, urban civil society, laborers students and intelligentsia. Within its structure, it aims at a democratic functioning and also consensus-based decision making. Sharing of resources and access to relevant governmental and non governmental resources has been one of the prime features of this network with organizations with more experience and resources helping newer struggles to break new paths. (The Hindu, 2004)

They struggle along with Dalit, Adivasi, women, fisher communities, minorities and other marginalized groups to bring about social, political and economic justice based on Equality (SAMTA), Simple Living (SADGI) and

Self-Reliance (SVAVLAMBAN). They believe in non-violent means of struggle, people's democracy and respecting the individual identities of diverse people's movements. 'Struggle along with Reconstruction' through alternative politics is their vision. The Genesis Millions of marginalized people of India are struggling against the present methods of development based on oppression, injustice, exploitation, destruction, displacement and discrimination. They are struggling to protect their livelihood resources, and to shape an alternative social political and economic vision of sustainable, humane development with equal right to livelihoods. NAPM also aspires to develop a discourse of harmonious relationships among various communities based on true democracy and pluralism, and against the threat of fundamentalism and communalism.

The struggle has sharpened due to imperialist globalization based on neo-liberalism, new economic policies and the onslaught of religious fundamentalism. The movements can no longer fight the battle alone on their own issues at their own geo-political situations. Thus, many movements have felt the need to come together as a collective while retaining their individual identities to struggle against the imperialist global forces. Thus was the genesis of the National Alliance of People's Movements in 1992, by various movements in India including Narmada BachaoAndolan, National Fish Workers Forum, Samajwadi Jan Parishad, Ganga MuktiAndolan, Shoshit Jan Andolan, SarvaSevaSangh and many others. It was based on common strategies, programmes and common minimum ideological understanding while respecting the diverse ideologies that influence the people's movements including Gandhian, Ambedkarite, Lohiaite, Feminist and Marxist. NAPM's ideology is an ongoing and evolving process, constantly changing and adapting to situations around us. It challenges the various organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, World Bank and IMF. It stands out as a unique force of people's politics that challenges present corrupt and criminal electoral politics in India. They believe that social transformation needs a multi-pronged strategy. NAPM thus uses four tools to bring about social change: Values and Thought, Struggle, Reconstruction and Electoral Politics.

NAPM in Rajasthan NAPM is a network of diverse people's movements and organizations that resist across India against injustice, subjugation and inequity. In Rajasthan, it has been activating local organizations and movements. During and Godhra controversy, the people's movements and civil society groups in the state became acutely aware of the need to seriously mobilize and strategize against communal and fascist politics. Various people's organisations

and civil society groups in Rajasthan have embarked on a series of mass contact programmes, workshops for activists and strategy meetings. Women's Day Celebrations this year, in most parts of the State had the theme Right to Work, Communal Harmony and Equal Citizenship. When the Desh Bachao-Desh Banaoyatra initiated by the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) passed through Rajasthan Over a period of three days more than seven big public meetings were held between Udaipur and Jaipur against communalism and against Globalisation. The Jan Morcha, a people's front has been suggested to contest elections, much on the lines of its national equivalent, Lok Rajnitik Manch, floated by NAPM. (The Hindu, 2004) On the success and the progress of NAPM depends the future of the new social movements and ultimately the peace movement in Rajasthan. The MKSS, Akal Sangharsh Samiti, a coalition of some eighty organizations in agitating for the Right to Food and the Right to Work, have great promises to make and NAPM has the credit to it. The creation of Vividha Feature Service, as an umbrella organization of small newspapers in Rajasthan is yet another welcome development to add to the cause of NAPM, and ultimately the cause of peace movement in the society of Rajasthan.

Brahma Kumaris

The Brahma Kumaris seeks to help individuals re-discover and strengthen their inherent worth by encouraging and facilitating a process of spiritual awakening. This leads to an awareness of the importance of thoughts and feelings as the seeds of actions. The development of virtues and values-based attitudes creates a practical spirituality, which enhances personal effectiveness in the workplace and in family life. An understanding of the spiritual context of human existence is offered, helping to make sense of contemporary issues. Based on the principle that the roots of change lie within, the university encourages individuals to live by their highest values, vision and purpose. It holds that this commitment to self-transformation will create peace and a better world for all. What does 'Brahma Kumaris' mean? Brahma Kumaris means 'daughters of Brahma.' Seminal to the vision of world renewal was the revelation of the important and prominent role of women as spiritual teachers.

The main principles in the Brahma Kumaris way of life. There are four main principles:

Study – The daily study of spiritual knowledge provides nourishment to create a healthy and stable mind.

Meditate - The practice of soul-consciousness creates inner strength to overcome negative self-beliefs. Connecting to God in a personal relationship removes blind faith and instills a deep sense of trust. The relationship charges the battery of the soul and fills it with love, peace and power.

Practice - To live a life dedicated to improving one's character by imbibing universal truths and higher motivations in thoughts, words and actions. Serve - To share with others on the basis of one's own life experiences.

Conclusion

In this research paper, we gathered that there are a number of insurmountable problems facing the common man in Rajasthan. The natural and man-made problems of the state have social, historical (of course imperial too), geographical and other significant dimensions. The Rajasthan of today is the result of a complex interplay of these vital dimensions. But we also found that this observation may not be as striking as is the potential of the movements going on there. We found that the State in Rajasthan attends to its problems dutifully — and both Constitutional and extra-Constitutional mechanisms support it fully, yet it leaves much more for other actors to do. Thankfully, we also find here that there is no dearth of such actors in Rajasthan. The state is actually known for a number of people's movements, which are going on in full swing, and they have an excellent future here. A healthy development in this regard has been that now the government is, apart from being forthcoming in establishing commissions like human rights, women, etc., encouraging the NGOs, which can be termed as the catalytic agents of these movements. These Civil Society actors have now more acceptability in the powers of corridors and there are more projects jointly taken up by the government departments and the NGOs, active in the state. This can be explained by the fact that in the new world order, the international watch agencies are more active, economic sanctions against human rights violation are rampant, and foreign direct investments are threatened on these grounds. So, people are not just passive targets of development assistance but active agents of change. Rajasthan is among the states of the country that has witnessed several important initiatives involving voluntary groups, issue-based citizens' action, and democratic decentralisation. India is referred to as an "NGO power country", and the activities of many NGOs account for 2.5% of the service share to GDP, according to the Voluntary Action Network India (VANI). It is, however, very difficult to ascertain the real number due to the varying styles of registration, the differences between the authorities concerned and so on.¹ The voluntary

or the NGO sector in Rajasthan has emerged as an effective “third sector” after the government and the private sector. This has been a result of some local and professional initiatives taken by institutions and individuals in the mid-seventies and early eighties. In the light of the growing positive impact of the NGO grassroots projects and in response to the international and academic opinion in favour of their greater involvement in government programmes, in the 1980s the State Government opened up new frontiers. As a result erstwhile small experimental initiatives were substantially scaled up.

The NGO is seen as the way towards greater community participation to foster sustainability of development programmes. We have discussed here a few of them yet there are many, which could not be discussed in detail. Actually, the VidyaBhawan Society and SevaMandir in Udaipur, the Social Work Research Centre in Ajmer, and Urmul in Bikaner are some of the illustrious movements, which have done commendable work in different parts of Rajasthan, and served the cause of peace. Apparently these movements appear to be sprinkled and isolated when taken into account singly, but considered collectively, and keeping in mind the convergence of interests and ideologies, and the growing coordination network, they are increasingly registering their conspicuous presence in the social scenario of Rajasthan. A strikingly noteworthy emergence and sustenance of a growing network of over two hundred people’s movements in India, National Alliance of People’s Movement (NAPM), with a clear ideology against corporate globalization, religious fundamentalism, discrimination of any kind and struggling for people’s right over natural resources, for Dalit and women’s rights, for true internationalism and for a just and egalitarian society, is a definite indication that people’s movement may not remain scattered and weak, in the days to come. The peace movement in Rajasthan is a solid possibility, beyond doubt.

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1. For example, according to VANI, the number of NGOs is estimated at approximately 1.2 million while the Voluntary Organisation Database of the Planning Commission shows the number at 16, 430 as of June, 2006

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