

**National Workshop FOR Freshwater flow in Rivers
Facilitated by SANDRP; RIVER RESEARCH CENTRE and SVARAJ
3-4 January 2009, Bangalore**

**Bharti Patel
Director Svaraj
Introduction to workshop**

Respected friends.

A very happy and an environmentally prosperous new year to you all!!!

On behalf of SANDRP, the River Research Centre, and Svaraj a very warm welcome to you all to Bangalore and my sincere gratitude to you all for accepting our invitation for this consultation workshop.

My Name is Bharti Patel and I am the director of Svaraj – a national voluntary organization working with communities on water, food and livelihood security.

For Svaraj, it is indeed an honour to have been given this opportunity to support this national consultation on Environment flows - with a focus on social and environment water needs in India.

And I am personally honoured to be amongst such distinguished guests from across the country. Some of whom I have had the privilege to meet and work with in my last three years in India. And other I am hoping I will get the opportunity to work with.

Although Svaraj is a relatively new entrant in the field of water and development, Svaraj has been working on environmental **disasters** since 1975.

From earthquakes to droughts, from floods to famine affecting regions across india, Svaraj has played a crucial role in responding to community rehabilitation and livelihood needs as well as questioning the causes of environmental disasters in our country.

With our new vision for a just society in a just environment our work on strengthening food security through integrated management of water by communities in the last four years, has given us much insight on the challenges facing communities whose livelihoods are directly dependent on climate sensitive sectors such as agriculture, forests and fisheries and on natural resources – water, biodiversity and land.

With one in four of India's population are at risk of losing their livelihoods as they are directly dependent on these sectors, what we see is how the efforts of communities for sustainable livelihood are undermined by the tide of practices that bring about further damage to their basic resource

Rapid and unchecked industrialization has not only increased demand on water, but the over extraction of water, together with pollution and other physical abuse to the ecosystem, has already resulted in the unavailability of safe drinking water and the destruction of natural ecosystem - threatening humanity's ability to feed itself

The Climate change discourse with experts warning us of the grave impact on the natural ecosystems as well as socio-economic systems are a daily headlines today as we observe - often silently - our rivers drying up, our water polluted and forests barren and our earth deprived of valuable nutrients.

.Traditionally Indians have great respect for nature where water plants and soil are treated as sacred, valuing their properties that give us all life and livelihood. But increasingly these sacred elements are under great threat - as we began to view them as resources to be exploited for our growth.

The Indian Constitution's is among the few in the world that contains provision for environment protection - explicitly stipulating and imposing *responsibility on every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forest, rivers, lakes tanks wild life*, and to have compassion for living creatures

As one listens to the current debates on climate change and its causes you cannot help but recall Gandhiji's warning almost a century ago. Gandhi's writings were full of thoughts on the environment.

The famous "*The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed*" is well rehearsed and quoted by many across the globe - but not practiced by any.

Gandhiji's thought -

- "*God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the West. ... If [our nation] took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts.*"

India failed to heed to this.

- "*This little globe of ours is not a toy of yesterday.*"
- "*We may utilize the gifts of Nature just as we choose, but in Her books, the debits are always equal to the credits.*"

These thoughts are now being quoted by presidents, PM and activist alike worldwide, but with little action to follow.

Gandhiji's trinity of :

First - *Sarvodaya* (up-liftment of all) - included the care of the earth; of animals, forests, rivers and land

Second - *Swaraj* (self-government). Self-transformation, self-discipline and self-restraint which was to bring about a social [transformation](#) - a moral, ethical, ecological and spiritual foundation as necessary to build good governance.

And finally third - *Swadesi* (local economy) where Gandhi believedrelentless economic growth would destroy the fabric of human communities as well the integrity of the natural world.

Whilst Gandhiji was not given the full the opportunity to work for a new social order and his trinity had only a limited impact, sixty years later it is clear that the India or rather the world has more need of it than ever.

Today this is the discourse that is beginning to take centre stage.

Already questions are raised on platforms across the global –be it political, social, economical or environmental - what is going wrong, who is responsible, what we need to do and what we can do, where we can do more and where more is possible.

The next two days gives us an excellent platform to bring together our individual thinking for a collective understanding on the critical issue of our environment, as we hear the different viewpoints, different approaches to concerns and debate on environmental flow to find its true meaning and value - be it political, economic, social, culture or environmental.

I hope this will help us advocate for considered and the right choices on the use of water, our priorities, as well our responsibilities to conserve and share equitably our nations true heritage - water and the need for fresh water to flow in our rivers.

The sessions and its objectives are drafted carefully by the facilitators in discussions with all of you, are an attempt to provide us a framework for further discussions. The rest is up to all of us.

I take this opportunity to thank Dr latha, Himnanshuji, Parineeta and Sujatha for their efforts in bringing us all together to this important workshop.

And I wish us a successful workshop and welcome the opportunity to interact with you all in the course of next two days and beyond. .

Thank you for allowing me to introduce the workshop

Bharti Patel