

II.B.6. Current Concepts in Water Resources Management and their Limitations

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This paper primarily looks at water for irrigation. A number of alternatives to the Government's approach to water resources management, both conceptual and practical, have been tried by individuals and organisations. Water- centred watershed development work has been done at Ralegaon Siddhi by Anna Hazare and at Alwar by Tarim Bharat Sangh. The work done at Sukhomajri and by V.B. Salunke in Pani Panchayats have underlined the importance of equity distribution of water and delinking land rights from water rights. K.R. Datye and others have done further conceptual work on the principle of equity as well as on technological modifications for equitable distribution of water. With equity and sustainability of resource use as their cornerstones, they have enunciated the principles of an integrated approach to land, water, biomass and energy. The area of water rights has emerged as a field of legal research; its main focus being to arrive at a balance between the rights of individuals, communities and the State over water resources. Chhatrapati Singh, M.S. Vani and Marcus Moench have done much valuable work in this field.

But these alternatives too have their limitations. The specific practical experiments of Sukhomajri, Pani Panchayat, Relegan Siddhi, Tarun Bharat Sangh etc, have been successful because of a unique confluence of causes. In that sense they cannot be replicated. The alternatives proposed by Datye, Singh etc. pre-suppose a political environment which does not exist. This paper has examined these specific projects from the environmental and economic points of view. It has further examined the contradictions in the field of water resources management in the contemporary macro-economic and political settings of India. These settings will in turn be historically analysed to arrive at the essence of the problem of water as a social good versus water as a commodity. On the basis of this essence we will take a fresh look at the alternatives.