

# Defend the Sacred Alliance Pilgrimage to India November 2023

Welcoming in a year of Water and Peace in 2024



# GUIDE



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# Defend the Sacred Alliance

We are a global alliance united in prayer, mutual support, culture-to-culture healing, and shared actions. We come together to contribute to the growing practice of sacred activism, to catalyze regenerative systems change, and to protect the sanctity of all Life.

We opened our rings and invited other Defend the Sacred members to join us, nominated new members, and found others along our journey.

Water Man Rajendra Singh- India\*  
Barbara Kovats - Portugal  
Aida Al-Shibli - Palestine  
Joshua Konkankoh Ngwa- Cameroon  
Salim Bah Dara - Benin  
Miguel Angel Pimentel Paz- Peru\*  
Miguel Humblet - Portugal\*  
Idomar Vargas Gonzalez - Colombia  
Nevaitth Vargas Guisao - Colombia  
Silvano Rizzi - Portugal +  
Noah Williams - Bishop Paiute Tribe USA +  
Teena Pugliese - USA\*  
Gabriel Isaac Meyer - Israel/USA\*  
Indra Shekhar Singh - India +\*  
Indira Khurana - India +\*  
Ramesh - India +

*\*part of the organizing/manifesting team  
+ new members*

## Intention

DSA member Dr. Rajendra Singh invited the alliance to his homelands for our 6th Annual gathering to experience the power of his work and attend the 2nd World Water Conclave International Conference on Defending the Sacred for Sustainable Development of Nature and Humankind, with a theme of Shaping a Resilient and Equitable Future.

We came together as an alliance to bear witness to one of our member's work and to focus on the water, the communities, and the sacred places where we were invited. We saw this journey together as a time to deepen our cross-cultural relationships and explore the next best steps as an alliance.

## Funding

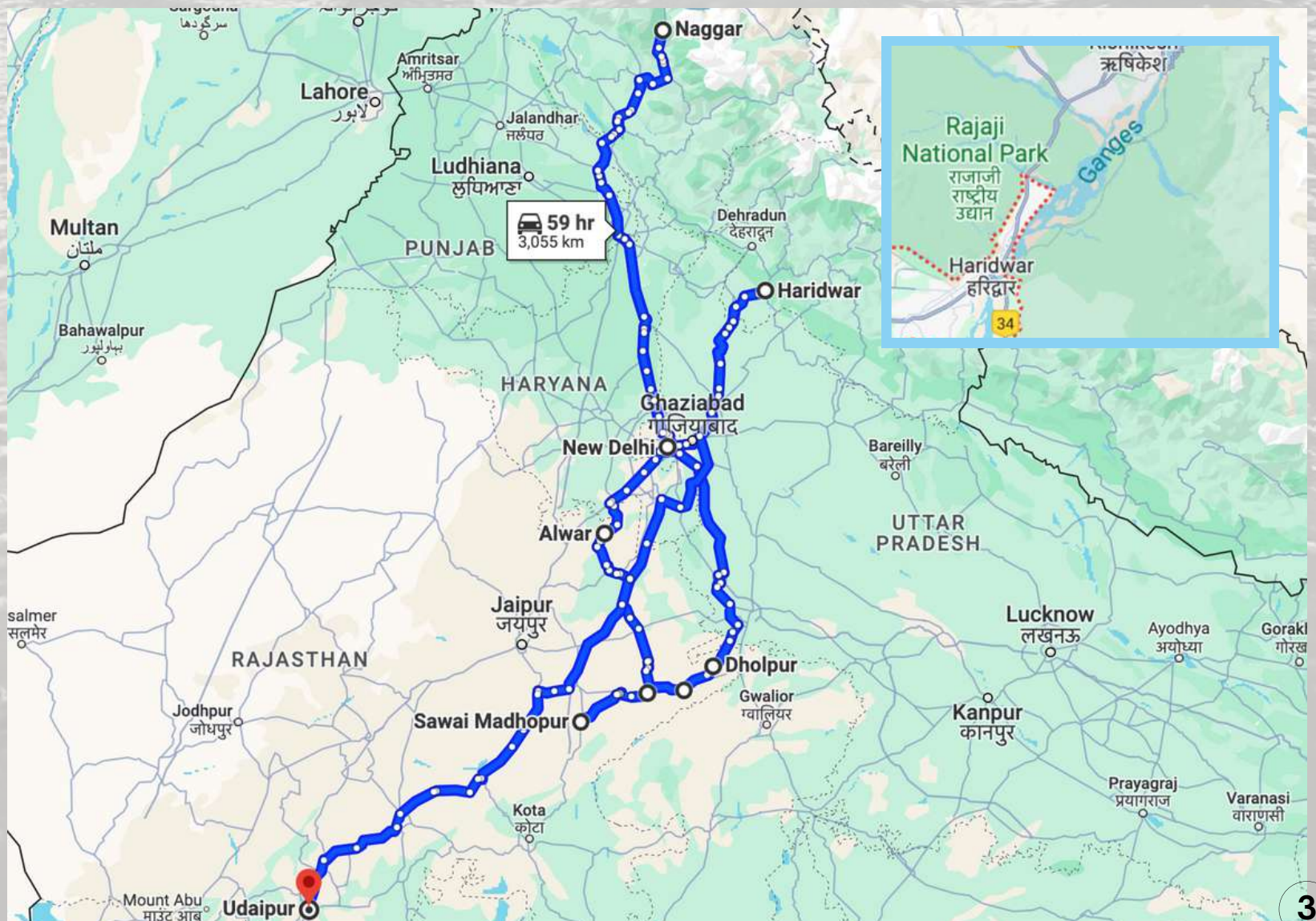
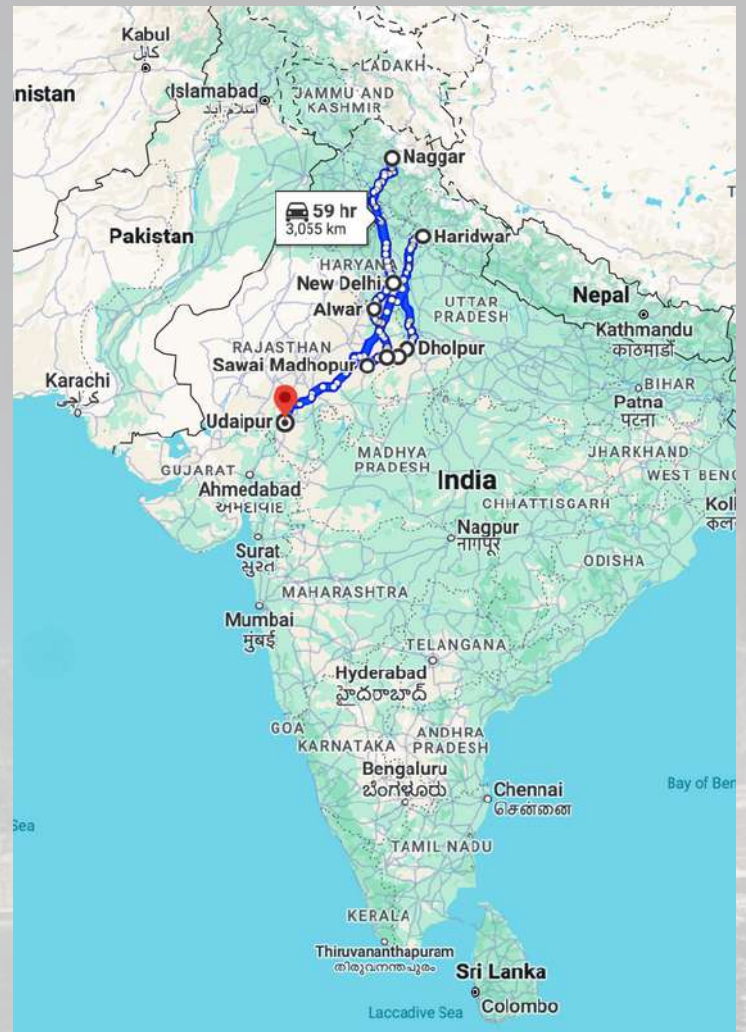
We were blessed to have all costs for Indigenous members of DSA covered by the generous support of a community in deep study of reimagining money and protecting the sacred. Big thanks to DSA member Pat McCabe for making this opportunity possible. \$18,000 was spent on flights, buses, trains, cars, and hotels.

All other members paid their own expenses throughout the journey and even supported others who needed spending money.

## Mapping out our Journey

India, officially the Republic of India (Bhārat Gaṇarājya), is a country in South Asia. It is the seventh-largest country by area and the most populous country as of June 2023, and from the time of its independence in 1947, it has been the world's largest democracy.

We traveled 3,085 km on our journey through the North of India over the 3 weeks we were together.



## **...Words from the Waterman...**

“I invited the Defend the Sacred Alliance of global water warriors to India to experience the vibrancy and diversity of decentralized community-driven water systems and to dream of a common future together. A future where Mother Nature grows with humanity and humankind respects all beings as part of our world family - 'Vasudeva Kutumbhakam'”

DSA are dedicated people aligned with the Earth and promote the revival of indigenous knowledge traditions.

For the last five decades, I have been in service of nature, water and building peace in society. Nature has been my guide, she has always showed me the right way to fight for her.

I am grateful that DSA came and spent time sharing our waters, spending time with our communities, and seeding hope for a better future. The river Ganga teaches us love, and when the water reaches even the most parched and violent communities-- it can have the transformative power to bring back peace and dignity.

DSA has a lot of love and respect for our people, and this was a great opportunity for me, my organization, and for my country. I am very pleased and grateful for my Defend the Sacred friends.

**Dr. Rajendra Singh**

*(excerpts from a conversation with DSA members Teena Pugliese and Indra Shekhar Singh)*

# The Ceremony Begins

*“Water is our ambassador to spirit, the holder of our prayers, the space that re- configures its structure by itself to embody this frequency.*

*We wish to deposit our resonance into the energy grid of Mother Earth. We as an entity, are holding this frequency of love and wisdom, we attempt to transfer the geometry of this frequency into the telluric field, energetic matrix of our planet. ”*

**Miguel Humblet**



Our DSA Members Miguel Angel, Miguel Humblet, Konkankoh, Indra & Gabriel traveled to the Himalayas, in Kullu Valley - in the village of Naggar.

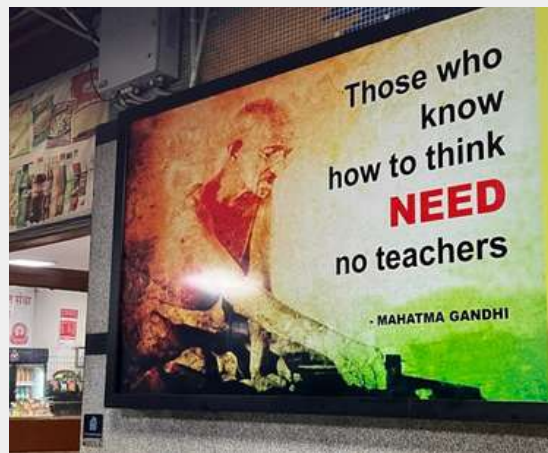
They held a waterfall ceremony in Hallan and laid down prayers for our journey...





**The alliance met in New Delhi and took the train to Rajasthan, beginning our journey to the village of Mathera to see the work of Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS)**

We crossed landscapes covered in plastics, polluted skies and people of the land living in the streets. The sun was red and tried to peak it's starlight through thick skies-- all this was beautiful as well as shocking for some to witness.



We were met by a delegation of men who laid marigold flowers around our necks and welcomed us with beaming smiles. "Guests are Gods" they said as they guided us toward our first stop.



Ramesh, one of Rajendra's mentors, joined us as well as one of our hosts and organizers, Indra Shekhar Singh, an agriculture writer, talk show host and also was the Director- Policy and Outreach for the National Seed Association of India.



Once forced into a life of banditry and thievery for survival, the people of Mathera, now thrive as farmers, all due to their trust in Rajendra's vision for a better future. Together, they built a decentralized rainwater retention system, which has become the center of their newfound livelihoods. This transformative shift has empowered them to heal and bring peace to their communities, find new societal roles with meaningful and nourishing work, and grow their villages.

Their restored connection with water inspired them to relinquish their weapons to the local authorities, seeking forgiveness for their past violence and offering a new way to peace between people and place. In exchange, they embraced tools that breathed life and harmony into their society. The powerful impact of water on their inner and outer landscapes stirred deep emotions in each of us.

**Local communities now live together peacefully because of the security of their livelihoods. Local communities have even organized "river parliaments" to preserve water as a common good for the benefit of all.**

During the village meeting, it became clear that women were essential in facilitating this transformation. With water returning to the villages, women no longer were burdened with a four-mile trek for water, they contributed significantly to the progress.

The women of DSA were welcomed in for an intimate moment with the women and children, where they were dressed up in garments and had a chance to experience more of the culture. The men were given headdresses and honored outside as well. Later, we were led to one of their outdoor spaces where we sat on the floor and were fed delicious food by the community.

The women of DSA found themselves with questions about the roles of men and women in this culture and wondered why we all weren't sitting together. As an alliance, we focused on being respectful and students of cultural differences.







# Bringing Water to the Lands of Dust

We traveled to rural Karauli and Sirmathura regions in Rajasthan, where Rajendra Singh— the “Waterman of India,” awaited us. He welcomed us near a water reservoir built by him and the local village and honoured us with gifts and gratitude. It was powerful to enter his bright field, his loving vibration touched each of our hearts.

These regions were once called “the lands of dust” because it was an arid, rocky, sandy region denuded of trees and life. To our amazement, we learned that with the dedication and effort of TBS and the local community and village, they transformed this dry, lifeless land into a green and fertile one in only a decade.

It was powerful to stand and feel the reality of this new oasis and watering hole TBS had inspired to spring up in this rocky red desert region. We wondered what the model was for inspiring a community to believe in their ability to transform dust into water.



The TBS team shared their simple model.

**They believe that it must come from within the community, within the people themselves, from their own hearts and hands toiling on the land.**

**Their work is simple and powerful: to revive Mother Earth's belly through Indigenous water harvesting techniques, giving opportunities to remember and rebirth long-lost rivers and self-reliance within local communities.**

We traveled to TBS's recently established site in Karauli district, a transformative water restoration project about three years old. We learned how the engineering of each site was created and connected to the Indigenous knowledge of the region.

**Each water restoration site was a manifestation of the collective wisdom handed down through generations. Water Traditions. We learned how drought and flood aren't a matter of how much rain falls but of whether we, as stewards, can remember how to help water return and sink into the belly of the Earth.**

Joshua Konkankoh asked us for a moment of silence to hear the voices of the animals who had returned with the water. It was a strong moment. We stood next to the water and listen to the new life that had gathered around it.





Rajendra pulled out a giant map of India and showed the 14,800 water conservation structures that have been co-created thanks to the work inspiring communities to come together. This has led to the revival of groundwater in wells, streams, and 11 rivers across the region. He introduced us to some local community members and we heard more about their stories. Witnessing the local farmers speak before our global alliance, who had journeyed to meet them, felt empowering for everyone.

In Rajasthan, decentralized rainwater retention has given people and nature the gift of self-sustaining water systems, even in regions with a mere 9 inches of annual rainfall. **These small structures have sparked a shift in local climate: rainfall patterns have improved while temperatures have dropped by 2-3 degrees Celsius.** This work is stewarding a positive and essential regional transformation in India.



It was impressive to see how they achieved their goals and to hear they didn't rely on government funds for these projects. Most of their projects succeed without government involvement.

**Our hosts spoke about how important it was to instill a sense of dignity and not allow any step to feel like charity.**

They required the community to invest 33.33% into each project. This did not have to be financial; it could be labor, food, or whatever they could contribute. Some might feed the community or work in construction, but everyone contributed directly in their unique way.



By working together to recharge aquifers — vegetation began to grow and springs, creeks, and rivers started flowing again...  
With the water, life is returning to these regions.

At the end of our second day, we traveled to a river that the community had revitalized together.  
Bori spoke beautifully, “we swam in Rajendra’s vision.”



We were invited into the Mahavir Ashram to hold our opening DSA circle, where the alliance shared our individual intentions for joining this journey. It felt important to deepen our understanding of what we each were holding as individuals, especially with the heaviness in the world.

**Aida invited us to pray every day at 3:30 pm for a cease-fire in Gaza, each time a different member of Defend the Sacred leading us. We all felt this was important and agreed to hold this together.**

Later that evening, we were invited into a ceremony and prayer in the Red Temple, a very spiritual place of the Jain religion. We were taken underneath and invited to meditate in a chamber for seekers and special guests. We sat in reflection, prayer and silence, surrounded by 400 statues made out of precious stones with a unique energy all their own.

## Rejuvenating Communities

We started our time sitting in the committee room of the Red Temple, sharing what we had experienced in the last few days and visiting the sites where water had been rejuvenated in these communities. Rajendra invited a few scholars and spiritual teachers to join us.

Silvano asked how Rajendra inspires the community and about the principles of his work.

Rajendra spoke of the importance of understanding and identifying a community—

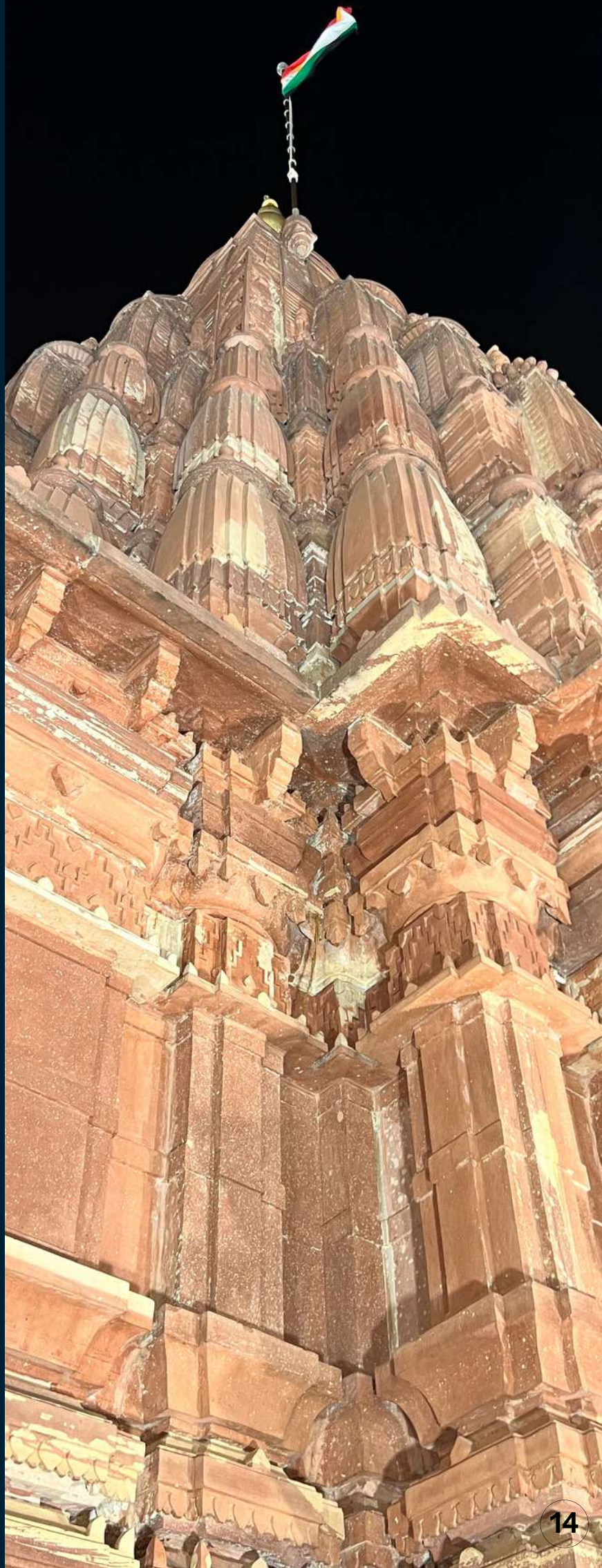
Finding the 4% of people who are the inspirational leaders. Understanding that 90% of people are often not inspired and must be guided by those few people in the community with passion, dedication, and heart.

**It is essential to find those devoted and committed to rejuvenating their community, those who care about a better future for the next generations, and nurture and provide opportunities for them.**

He also spoke about the importance of identifying the other 4% who are in it for themselves, the 1% who are the gurus, and the 1% to watch out for, as they are the people who resist and fight against innovation.

We spoke about how World Water Day 2024 was declared Water for Peace by the UN.

Rajendra and the team drafted the Mahavir Nonviolence Water Declaration, and together, we added our voices and read it aloud on the steps of the Red Temple.



## Mahavir Nonviolence Water Declaration

**The members of Defend The Sacred, a total of 25 members from 12 countries and 6 continents, pledge on the ancient temple of Mahavirji on the auspicious day of Diwali the following -**

*Water is life and love; we pledge to defend it.*

*Non-violence is a force of love, and it is the force of water.*

*Water is an experience; we aim to uncover the physical, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of this divine medium.*

*Water is the carrier of our wishes and love - we want to release violence and accept justice and love for all beings.*

*A new world will be born when the water is clean and free.*

*Rivers, lakes and all water bodies have inalienable rights, we have to advocate for legal and social rights for them.*

*Water transforms life-- from crops to human life; we are all connected with water.*

*Water is a basic need of all.*

*God is a keeper of water, and water should not be privatized.*

*The selling of water is a sin against humanity.*

*Water is the spiritual vehicle to experience quietness, to surrender our ego and human entitlement over nature, which is the embodiment of God.*

*Water is the first medicine to clear our pain and sorrow and guide us to become light and free into love.*

*Water is the carrier of the most essential nourishment for keeping the rainbow of our dreams and hopes.*

**The UN declared that the theme of World Water Day in 2024 would be Water for Peace. We commit to continuing the work needed to transform violent communities into peaceful rejuvenated agriculture with the help of water.**





The next day, we journeyed into the future of the water retention landscape, where the coolness in the air was a testament to the trees flourishing from 40 years of dedicated work— a transformational effort that had cleansed the region of pollution within a radius of 100 kilometers, bringing life back to the forest.

Upon our arrival after sunset, the Tarun Bharat Sangh team warmly welcomed us with fire; Gabriel serenaded us with songs near a stone circle featuring pictures of our DSA members—among them, Ladonna, Sabine, and many other DSA members graced the space.

Amidst this tranquility, we enjoyed our dinner made by our generous hosts and were blessed to see Rajendra in his role as a grandfather and father. We met his granddaughter, who was working on an animated short film, narrating her grandfather's story through her eyes. Our alliance received the heartfelt invitation to participate in this project, a truly special inclusion.

In this peaceful place, where the air was crisp and the silence profound, we were serenaded by the sounds of monkeys, the pulse of thriving forests, and life all around us. Above us, the stars twinkled against a clear night sky, a sight we beheld for the first time on our journey. Rejuvenating the water brought back the stars.

## The Origins of the Waterman

We met Rajendra at dusk, where he read the sign on the entrance wall of his ashram.

***“Where water runs, make it walk.***

***Where it walks, learn to make it crawl.***

***Where it is crawling, learn to bring it to rest.***

***Where it rests, learn to put it into the womb of the Earth where it is safe from sun rays.***

***When there is famine and drought, use the water in a disciplined way in order to live.”***



We were guided to a pond and water retention basin, where we learned lessons on the landscape's geology. There we saw examples of solid rock, porous stone, vertical and horizontal fractures.

He explained how the groundwater in the earth has revitalized the region despite the scarce rainfall over the last three years.

Later that day, we journeyed to the Gopalpura Village in the Alwar district to see the first aquifer and water retention site that Rajendra began 40 years ago.

He brought us to the well where his mentor sent him 150 feet down and explained traditional Indigenous water conservation methods of reading the land.

In only two days, he learned what he needed and built a “johad,” a small unsealed pond-like structure that retained the rare rain and allowed it to filter into the aquifer. To the surprise of many, groundwater levels in the local wells rose several meters soon after the next rains.

We felt blessed to stand where it all began, to sit with his guru's son and visit the community with his grandchildren. Rajendra sat, visited with them, and left smiling calling it his true community.



We learned again of the red, green, and yellow heat walked through the water cycle together and discussed how this is something humanity needs to remember:

**Where there is water, water comes.**

We drove high up in the mountains and had lunch with a woman visiting from the government. She was invited to join us in our visit to one of the biggest johad in a series of water restoration sites, created with the inspiration of Rajendra and his organisation



Back at the TBS Ashram that evening, we joined Rajendra in a circle to discuss community rejuvenation and the future of DSA. The conversation included the importance of aligning spiritual vibrations with tangible impact generated by the hands of the community.

As an alliance, we reflected on our collective actions and community endeavors.

We spoke about our actions against the offshore oil drilling in Portugal in 2017/2018 - where we joined together in sacred action - and the oil is still in the ground today and will stay there.

As nightfall descended, **we joined the celebration of Diwali, the Festival of Lights**—an auspicious occasion welcoming the New Year. Diwali symbolizes the triumph of good over evil, illuminating both communal and personal realms of light and life. Its the beginning of the first harvest and the onset of the year's second crop.

We were invited into traditional rituals; we honored the altar, indulged in sweets, and admired the children creating sand art. The night sky lit up with fireworks, echoing the joyous spirit of the neighborhood's celebrations.





We met on the roof and listened to the stories of the TBS team, including Rajendra's son Maulik Sisodia who is one of the leaders at TBS. We learned how they came to find themselves in this work they call "holy soul work."

**18 employees run all of TBS, most of them managing anywhere between 10-50 communities and building between 100-160 water retentions structures a year.**



The TBS team taught us how to identify water body placements and how to draft out and identify a proposed site according to topography maps.

We learned about the [CSR Law](#) & [Water Credit in India](#).

A model of one of the regions showed us how the water retention sites worked together; how they only captured 20-30 percent of the rainfall so that other places in the region received the water they needed.

We watched 3 films, [Resurgence](#), [Restorer of Rivers & Paya](#) (a film about Payahuunadu featuring Noah's dad, Harry Williams as it was his birthday) and a rough cut of a film about TBS by [Vincent Delbos-Klein](#), a filmmaker staying at the Ashram.

Noah was invited to share more about his work and the need to stop the water extraction that the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power continues over many years.





*Liminal Night Time Before The Bus to Haridwar  
by Gabriel*

The Riverlution is  
“beaver-ing” into reality  
Free for all

Filling aquifers deep down in the womb of the ground  
Dancing in right relationship with the sun

Joy protectors all around in the midst of war  
singing the water, as animal, bird and tree  
As Mountain, cloud and bee  
As the farmer and the sea

Raining presence of the heart in the belly of the dark  
Where the diagonal cracks shine crystalline  
Bringing back the  
Memory of light

## The Gate of God

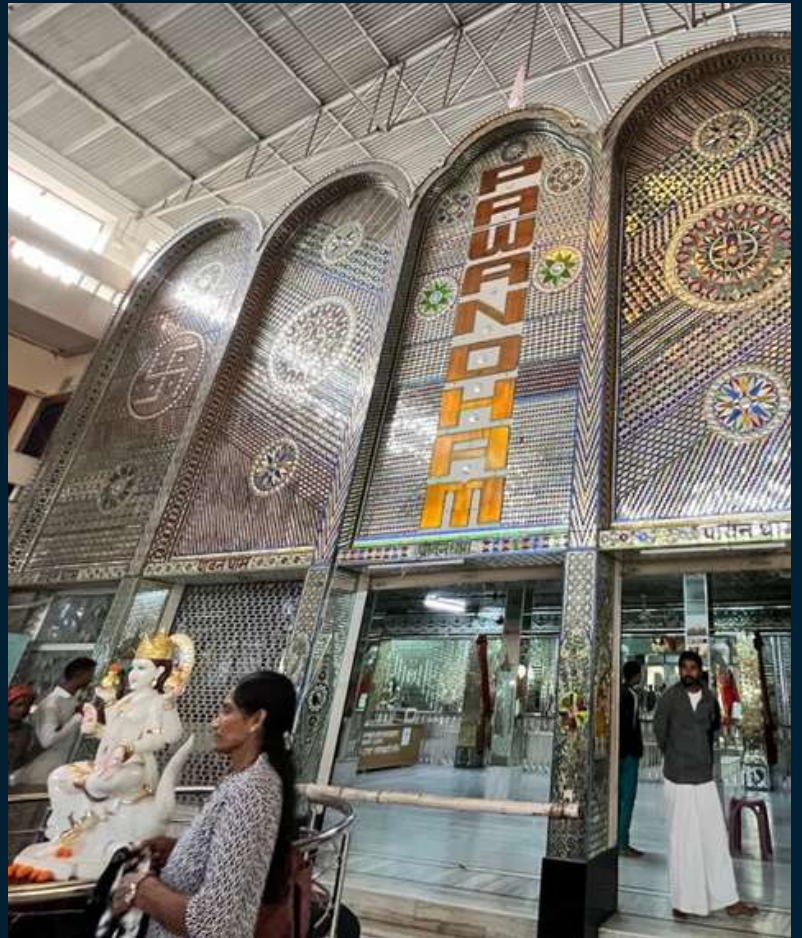
We said our goodbyes over chai and ginger tea before departing on a bus destined for Haridwar.

We arrived and were honored with scarves and given flowers to offer to Ganga at the Pawandham Ashram.

Rajendra and our host invited us to share how we felt in this holy place, Haridwar the Gate of God.

**He shared the big news that he would stop working on the small water restoration structures and give his life to the Ganga. His life work now was to save the sacred waters of Mother Ganga.**

With our host, we fed sugar to the sacred cows and approached the Ganga River to greet the Mother and pray — with the people, the fire, and the water.









## ***Fasting for the Ganga***

We journeyed to a more secluded natural area, the Matri Sadan Ashram, along the banks of the Ganges. The rush of Mother Ganga's waters surrounded us as we learned it's customary for the Ashram to bathe in her waters twice daily.

We met Guru Swami Shivananda, a partner of Rajendra's in his fight for the life of the Ganga. We learned that this Ashram is one of the places for that fight - this is why Rajendra chose this place for us to be. One of the devotees, a close friend of Rajendra and vice president of his organization, was Professor G.D. Aggrwal.

He fasted for 111 days and was tragically poisoned by the government, sacrificing his life for the cause. This fasting is. Form of Satyāgraha, or "holding firmly to truth", or "truth force", is a particular form of nonviolent resistance or civil resistance.

According to Gandhi, Satyagraha was a unique weapon to fight injustice. The idea of satyagraha highlighted the power of truth and the need to search for the truth, as well as hold tolerance, non-violence, and peaceful protests.

The devotees of this Ashram are still fighting for the truth behind the death of those who have fasted. Many of them have become lawyers to fight these injustices, yet no one has ever heard of this dedication and sacrifice.



***The Ganga is not just a river; it's Ma Ganga, the mother river. According to the Bhagavata Purana, it was created when Lord Vishnu pierced the universe, letting divine water flow into the world.***

Dr Indiria Khurana, a highly accomplished environmentalist, social activist, and vice chair of TBS, shared that they were worried at the time that Rajendra might also sacrifice himself in this same way. It became even clearer to us how dangerous this work can be and what dedication it demands.

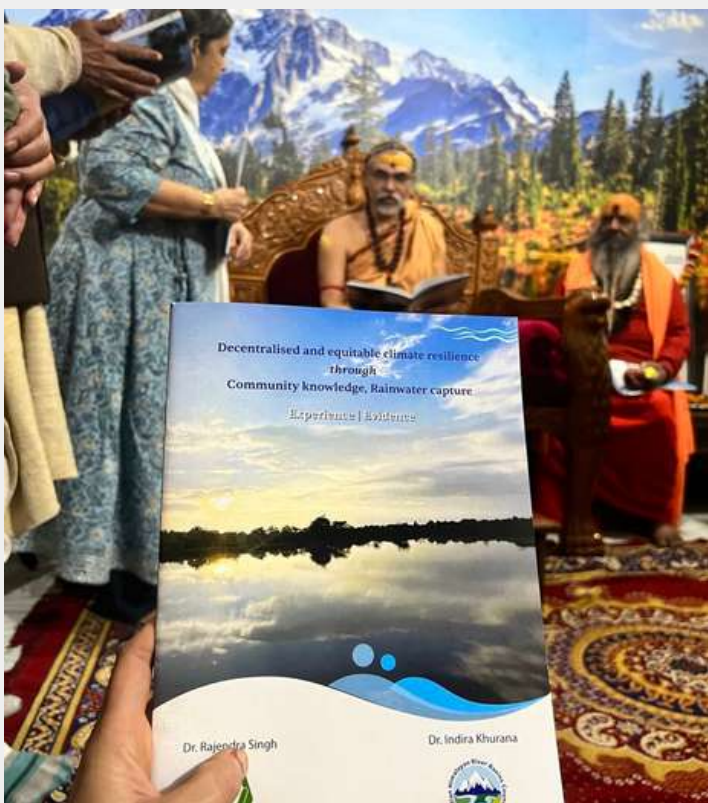
We spoke about the sacred picture of Ganga; she is the mother of all things and therefore needs to be taken care of - no pollution, free-flowing (no dams), and no extraction! Give her back her divinity!

Guru Swami Shivananda was generous with his time; he spoke of the equality of all religions, that they pursue the same thing, and that we should learn to live this truth - he calls this spirituality and not religion.

Spirituality here comes entirely from the inner work of the individual - "if you have peace and purity within yourself, then you can spread it outside. Get to know yourself, learn to concentrate your cheti (conscious and subconscious) and keep still."

**Noah asked Guru Swami Shivananda and Rajendra what the biggest threats were to the Ganga- he shared that they were dams, extraction and daily pollution through something ironically called the Beautification Act.**





We traveled to meet Shankaracharya, the religious Hindu authority of North India—one of four individuals holding this esteemed office representing the cardinal directions. This position stands among the highest authorities in Advaita Vedanta Hinduism in India, akin to the Pope's role in the Christian realm.

During our meeting, Indira and Rajendra presented their latest research and writings on water restoration. Indira was honored with a new name in front of the crowd, The Water Fairy, and we celebrated her together.

Shankaracharya graciously sat with the Defend the Sacred Alliance for over an hour and invited us to introduce ourselves and ask any questions. Observing silence after sunset, he wrote his thoughts in a book Rajendra then read to us.

It was profound to witness a figure of such power advocating for a free-flowing, unpolluted Ganga—a spiritually powerful support to have in this fight.

**“The reverence for the Ganges as a sacred entity, often called the mother of all things, amplifies the spiritual significance of its purity and need to be free.”**



We returned to our hosts at the Bramacharians Ashram for dinner and were welcomed into a special hut with walls braided out of natural material, a place where not many are invited. Guru Swami Shivananda sat with a young woman in a wheelchair who had joined us earlier in the day.

He shared with us that she fasted for 57 days for the rights of Ganga before the police came and removed her. They took her to the hospital, where she was poisoned and she slipped into a coma. When she came out of it, she could barely talk and couldn't walk, yet she survived and is healing at the ashram.

Rajendra noted how challenging it is for someone like young Greta to do something in Europe and the whole world knows about it, but no one has ever heard about these people giving their lives for the Ganga. For all our mother waters around the world.



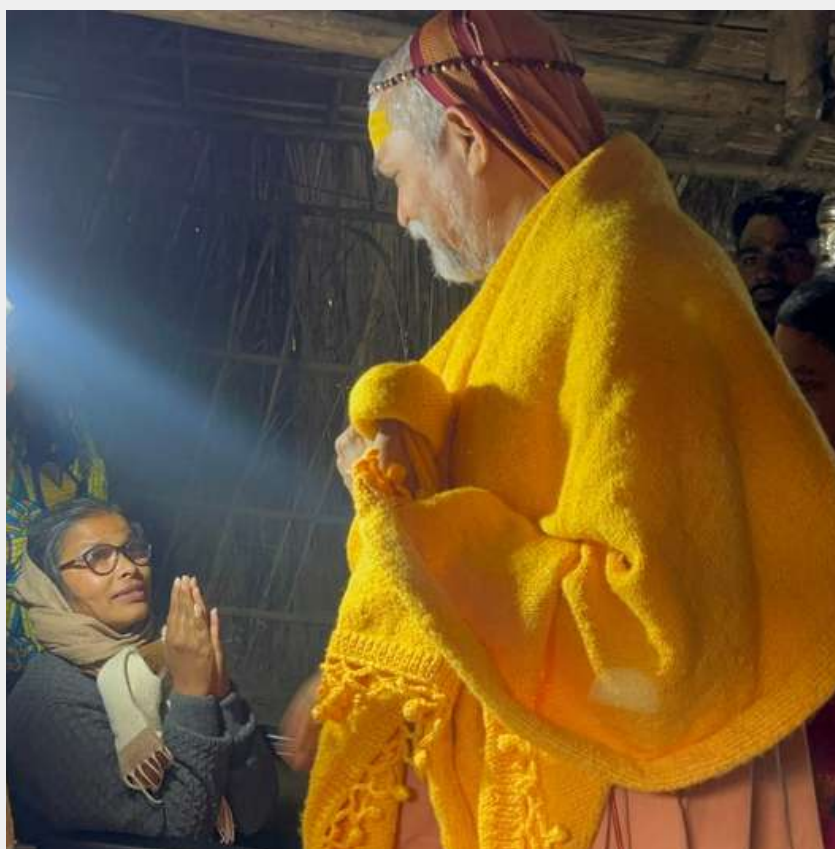


We began our morning with Shankaracharya, witnessing the beautiful, genuine connection between him and Rajendra. Suddenly, there was a flurry of activity as Shankaracharya decided to visit the Madre Ashram, the place of Guru Swami Shivananda and the activists fasting for Ma Ganga.

Shankaracharya entered the hut we had sat in the evening before and engaged in an inspired conversation with Guru Swami Shivananda and Rajendra. Rajendra shared that Shankaracharya encouraged his new step in his work fighting for the Ganga:

***“Now is the time to raise one's voice for the Ganga and for that voice to be heard.”***

Aida asked Rajendra how he felt about standing up for Ganga—was it a joy or a burden? He expressed that it was both; in the past seven years since making that decision, the weight on his mind and heart was substantial due to the magnitude of the task and the many problems.





Miguel Angel led a ceremony on the banks of the Ganga, accompanied by Guru Swami Shivananda, a journalist, and a few disciples. Teena had invited the alliance to bring waters from our respective lands, which we united in a bowl, embedding prayers for healing and liberation of all waters. Guru Swami Shivananda emphasized the significance of rituals, highlighting their role in fostering growth and supporting spirituality.

***“Respecting all rituals is crucial.” he shared.***





We dedicated time to silently clean up trash and plastic along the Ganga, holding an intention to listen to the water and focus on what we were purifying within ourselves. After our time, we prayed for the Ganga and immersed ourselves in the sacred waters one last time.

Gathering along the Ganga's banks, we engaged in our final sessions of inner work as an alliance. Beginning with reading of words from Gigi and Babette that had been shared on November 9, Global Grace Day. We centered our discussions around their insights.

**What is ours to do together as a global alliance?**

**How can we share and connect these stories so the world can hear about them?**

**What are next steps and actions?**

**Where are our priorities?**

## ***Actions & Priorities for Defend the Sacred Alliance***

- **Coordinating global actions** to unite all waters and voices. We discussed coordinating walks along our waterways and 24-hour fasts in honor of those giving their lives to the Ganga. Reaching out to our networks, inviting others to join us before April 2024 (before important elections in India). We understand with the timeline that this needs to be taken care of as soon as possible. Bori and Teena feel called to bring media attention, especially considering the sacrifices of the people protecting the Ganga.
- **Joining Comunidad de Paz Anniversary**, our Colombian relatives Navaith and Idonar in celebrating the anniversary of Comunidad de Paz on March 23rd, 2024. Spreading the word through our networks...they are also exploring the possibility of having the land recognized as a nature reserve, so Teena and Indra agreed to look into finding cameras for documenting the pumas.
- **Supporting our relative Josuha Konkankoh** by following up on the vision for a campaign and letters to support the youth of Ambazonia.
- **Extending an official invitation and welcome** to Indra, Indira, Noah, Ramesh, and Silvano into the Defend the Sacred Alliance.
- **Continuing to integrate Indigenous knowledge** into the work, adjusting and adding it to the most recent description of DSA.
- **Melting the Rings** created in DSA and welcoming the community back together again. We want to see who has the energy, heart, and capacity to hold space for this community to connect and continue. We want to have some zoom calls and see who is ready to step in and support. Gabriel and Teena agreed to support as the manifesting/coordinating team until we find the right members to fit into these seats.



## World Water Conclave

We arrived in Udaipur and were driven to a university where we joined the **Second World Water Conclave Conference On Defending the Sacred for Sustainable Development of Nature & Humankind.**

We explored the city of Udaipur and visited the city palace and lake, one of the first man-made lakes documented in history.

Lake Pichola was created by Maharana Udai Singh II, the founder of Udaipur, to provide a source of water for the city and its inhabitants.



Hosted by The People's World Commission on Drought and Flood (PWCDF) and TBS, we began the World Water Conclave with a ceremony honoring the water and the land.

The focus of the evening was on the importance of Indigenous wisdom. We sat and listened to the voices and experiences of those working with water, including many of our Defend the Sacred Alliance members.

Teena addressed all the women and youth in the room and shared how grateful she was to see them and how essential their voices were.

There were heartfelt words from water activists in the rural areas. We witnessed how Rajendra had inspired millions to heal their relationships with water and thus themselves.

We listened to ideas on how to clean rivers with plant-based sewage treatment plants, how to bring back freshwater dolphins and work on a law to declare the Ganges a living being.

**Overall, the theme of the evening was a need for people to find their way back into a connected life with the sacred, with the land, with the waters.**





Turning the sacred indigenous knowledge into sound government policy requires cooperation. Having completed the journey into the rural country, into sacred spirituality, it was time to make policy recommendations for cleaning the Ganga. The Udaipur Water Declaration was endorsed by two recent Padma Shri awardees (India civilian honour) for water conservation, Laxman Singh and Uma Shanker Pandey, and also by the Director of the government's National Mission for Clean Ganga G Ashok Kumar.

Uma Shankar Pandey, a panellist, was recently awarded the India Civilian Honour award for his water conservation work, inspired by Rajendra's work. **He suggested that water universities be set up worldwide and that the movement campaigns work to bring more money into those kinds of projects.** This way, we can create positions that encourage people to leave their corporate jobs and create work opportunities that bring people back to nature so they may heal their natures. It was a rich conversation.

Thirty speakers from all over India presented their work, some sharing how they have had transformative results after only one year of devotion, and many of them emphasized the importance of Indigenous knowledge.

One speaker and ally of Rajendra, Manish Jain, co-founder of [Swaraj University](#), shared a beautiful still-living tradition in Udaipur: There are places all over the city where drinking water is distributed. A service that people do in the spirit of a divine service. We learned that selling water is considered by many one of the biggest sins in India.

***It is not enough to clean the water physically; we need to give it back its divinity.***

# विश्व जल सम्मेलन का आगाज

उदयपुर, (कासं)। भारतीय ज्ञानतंत्र की लंबी गहरी विरासत और सामुदायिक विकेन्द्रित प्रबंधन से ही इन प्राकृतिक आपदाओं से मुक्ति मिल सकती है। इतनी प्रतिकूल परिस्थितियों में भी भारत अपने ज्ञानतंत्र और समृद्ध प्राकृतिक परंपराओं के कारण ही आज विश्व में अपनी जगह पर अडिग खड़ा है। भारतीयों के लिए जल मात्र प्राकृतिक पदार्थ न हो कर जीवन, जिविका और जमीर है। भारतीयों



After the second day of the conference, we came together to draft a declaration on drought and flood on behalf of the People's World Commission. The idea was to read it at the close of our time together, to share our collective commitments as a commission.

Our dinner that night was at the vice-chancellor of the university's home. We gathered on the grounds of what felt like a palace and were welcomed with dances by three decorated young women and an abundant buffet in our honor. It was a beautiful time of celebration and togetherness.



We opened our final day sitting outside in a circle and working on the declaration we started the night before. Rajendra spoke about five steps toward creating a better future.

**Atmosphere:** Create awareness about the sacredness of water and rivers and the importance of water. Help others understand the state of water in the world-- and the role water can play in our world for peace, security and equality.

**Community Building:** Mobilise communities and all stakeholders to realize the sacredness of water and their role in keeping water sacred and working collectively.

**Sacred Model in the Center:** Create a model that demonstrates how this can be possible. This model must be culturally, socially, geographically, ecologically, spiritually, and equitably acceptable.

**Sacred Action:** Work on the ground, not only talk. The vision for TBS this year is to double the number of Indigenous knowledge-based water systems. Pledging to complete 1,000 in 2024.

**Impact:** Measure the impact of the above four steps for continued learning and sharing.



We traveled to the agricultural department of the university for our closing ceremony where we read the declaration to a large audience of students, professors and allies from the conference. Miguel Angel held a closing ceremony at the same time on the stage next to the speakers. Konkankoh gave a powerful keynote speech, Bori spoke about the power of the journey we had been on in India as an alliance, and Teena shared an invitation to fall in love with the lands we belong to.

# PEOPLE'S WORLD COMMISSION ON DROUGHT AND FLOOD UDAIPUR DECLARATION

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Defend Sacred Alliance, JRN Rajasthan Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University) and the Peoples World Commission on Drought and Flood

We the people of the world, having met together for our Second World Water Conclave at Udaipur, to review the global ethical, economic, and environmental crisis and our response to it, welcome the UN declaration that dedicates the theme of World Water Day in 2024 to Water for Peace.

We pledge to include all species and natural cycles as the primary context for aligning human behavior with the flow of nature.

We pledge that our efforts will be to ensure a healthy water cycle for water, food and climate security for all beings.

We know that the water is sacred, and we want to spread and establish its sacredness across the world. In pursuit of this, we will collaborate to stop the consumerization, commodification, privatization, corporatization and weaponization of our sacred water.

We are rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems which teach us love, respect, and care for Nature through an effortless and dynamic oneness with Her.

We know that if all aspects of inner and outer human life align with circularity and sustainability, we will align with the natural cycles of water and give birth to a non-violent world.

We believe the state of our rivers is a mirror of our internal behavior patterns, therefore we are committed to the purification of ourselves, tending to our own bodies of water and taking accountability for every aspect of our daily individual and community behaviors.

We are against war, and we know that water is an essential key to peace. If future wars are to be prevented, adequate water with equitable distribution should reach every community.

Our establishing of decentralized, community-driven water adaptation cultures will bring water-security, dignity, and livelihood-security. The community free of acute water scarcity will have the adaptive space to undergo profound holistic transformations in individual and community lifestyles and cultures which comprehensively address their different agro-hydro-ecological climatic zones. This profound self-administered security will advance to the inevitable happiness and contentment that will be the foundation of generosity, forgiveness and the learning of a life of global collaboration beyond war. It is thus water security that will give us this lasting and enduring peace that is the celebration of successful, responsible holistic living founded on our profound respect to the diverse indigenous cultures.

We hold the river Ganga as an internationally acknowledged inspiration of the sacredness of water and the need to rejuvenate the sacred (Gangatva). The Ganga is the soul and mother of India, and is a living being. She is a source of life, one of the most important sources of water and an international symbol of purity and sacredness. India can be a global example for protecting and rejuvenating this sense of sacredness of water. We want to establish and enhance legal rights for the Ganga, to serve as a model of how to hold a river truly sacred.

As it is from water that we get life, in the last conference we had pledged to act and work in 100 places on our beloved planet Earth and, thanks to nature, we have managed to successfully initiate 508 water conservation programs to bring water security to new communities.

And so, therefore, we have decided to advance this celebration of life to further these 508 water conservation initiatives; and to add new 500 initiatives in a modest increase of responsibilities. To accomplish this, we will reach all our nations, cultures and ecological zones, and evolve a robust and widening, deepening collaboration between People's World Commission on Drought and Floods, Defend Sacred Alliance and our hundreds of associate movements, organizations and initiatives. The instrument of transformation will include our growing General Assembly, Commissioners from different ecological zones and our local and Global Advisors.

"Be the change you want to see" - M K Gandhi

22 November 2023

We came together one last time in a circle as the Defend the Sacred Alliance. Some spoke about what they were returning to; some shared gratitude for the hospitality and all that was on their hearts before leaving each other's company.

We said our goodbyes and began our journeys back home. All were changed by this time together....moved like the waters that TBS are rejuvenating...grateful for this once-in-a-lifetime invitation to experience a culture while being held in such a generous and loving way by our hosts and each other.

**“Nature is my God,”** Rajendra's voice echoed as we returned to Delhi's polluted streets and skies.

It was clear that we all are doing this sacred holy work together, bringing people back to nature, back to themselves, back to community, back to making space for spirit.

What are we willing to sacrifice? What are we giving our life to? How do we hold each other in this work as we travel to the places we belong to?



Indra invited us back to his home, where his mother, Malvika Singh, cooked us a delicious meal and served us homemade chai as we awaited our planes' departure. We sat together and sang in our final hours, a song had held us well in our journey thanks to our sacred fool Gabriel. It does feel like a prayerperformance each time we bring our voices together.

**The hospitality of our hosts was inspiring - guests truly are treated like God. A strong teaching to carry home with us.**

## Teachings/Reflections from the Manifesting Team

We learned a lot during our time about caring for the individual and the whole of our alliance. There were significant challenges for some and different reactions and experiences of what we did. We trust the circle to continue and for us all to continue the gift of sharing our hearts as we listen to how to be part of the healing in our own being and the earth's body.

This pilgrimage was a dance of empathy and learning. It involved honoring traditions, customs, and values and seeking guidance when unsure if our messages or requests were received fully. What was most essential was embodying a spirit of openness and curiosity when rubs between alliance members occurred and always asking questions - even if there felt to be an understanding of the rules of moving in and out of sacred spaces.

Cross-cultural protocols serve as bridges, connecting diverse worlds and encouraging respect between those worlds. It's not just about visiting our beloved partner Rajendra and learning about his powerful work; it's about immersing ourselves with reverence and understanding.

We also learned that preparation for a pilgrimage transcends logistics; this is soulful work and requires a lot of tending and clearness. Clarifying our intentions and establishing agreements before embarking on this profound journey would have set the compass for collective purpose. Aligning our hearts and minds and recognizing that each step on this sacred path carries significance beyond the physical journey.

It would serve next time to ask others in our alliance with experience about cross-cultural protocols and best practices for being on pilgrimage together. What are good agreements to make when we travel to other cultures together? What happens when there is conflict? Who is tracking when harm is done and how do we best address it together?

The courage and field of safety we create to voice our needs are essential. Despite the fear of taking up space, it's caring for the whole circle to share what we need, trusting our circle can hold us. And what happens when we feel a circle can't hold us? The depth of understanding and support we needed to cultivate within the alliance was a huge part of our experience.

Thank you all for saying yes to this journey and coming together to activate and inspire our work in the world. Traveling to meet in pilgrimage and be in prayer with our DSA members worldwide is a precious, invaluable gift, and we have already begun to see the ripples of positive change since this constellation of water warriors has come together.

## Ripples since our Gathering

- Purchased wildlife cameras for Colombia relatives, working to get them to the land.
- Indra, Teena, Gigi, Gabriel, Rajendra, and Noah are discussing the possibility of shared global action and prayer on Indigenous World Water Day on March 22nd and joining in the celebration with Colombia on March 23rd.
- Indra traveled to Payahuunadu to speak at the Cultural Center with Noah and Teena and share what they learned on the trip. It was a powerful community conversation.



# WATER STORIES OF INDIA

## RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE IN AGRICULTURE

Bishop Tribal Member **Noah Williams** and Three Creeks Collective core partner **Teena Pugliese** are joined by agriculture analyst and writer **Indra Singh** to share tales and teachings from their recent water journey across India with Waterman Rajendra Singh and the Defend the Sacred Alliance.

Please join us for a conversation on India's people-led resistance movements around water and agriculture. With a focus on Indigenous community-led movements, community-driven water management systems, and the Indian Farmer's Revolution.



**INDRA SINGH**  
Writer & Agri-Policy  
Analyst



**TEENA PUGLIESE**  
Three Creeks Collective  
Core Partner



**NOAH WILLIAMS**  
Big Pine Tribe Water  
Program Coordinator

LIGHT SNACKS AND WARM SOUP  
WILL BE PROVIDED. PLEASE BRING  
YOUR WATER BOTTLES & BOWLS.  
THIS IS A PLASTIC FREE EVENT

[THREECREEKSCOLLECTIVE@GMAIL.COM](mailto:THREECREEKSCOLLECTIVE@GMAIL.COM)

**JANUARY 18TH, 2024**

**5:30 PM - 7:30 PM**

**OWENS VALLEY PAIUTE  
SHOSHONE CULTURAL  
CENTER**



## **Voices of the Water Reflections from DSA Members**

*India has shining examples of regenerative models that everyone in the Sustainability Movement should know and learn from. I collected some fine material which is helping me build a prototype for West and Central Africa. For me, the 2nd World Water Conclave, Internal Conference on Defending the Sacred for Sustainable Development of Nature and Mankind revealed itself as a monument of sound principles and acupuncture point for global change"*

### **Joshua Konkankoh, Cameroon**

*"The water pilgrimage to India was one the most profound experiences of my life. Seeing first-hand how water transformed the lands and livelihoods of millions of people gave me a deep appreciation and greater understanding of the expression "water is life". I will carry forward with the knowledge that was shared with me to advocate for the return of land and water rights for Tribal nations in the United States. I agree with the statement that I heard while I was in India that described the sale or privatization of water as being one of the "greatest sins of humanity."*

*We are all connected to water, it is central to our lives, water deserves respect and does not belong to humanity, it is the nectar that we depend on that is provided to us by our Mother Earth."*

### **Noah Williams, Bishop Paiute Tribe**

*"By accepting the sacredness of water in our lives we can transform the world. India was global convergence point for DSA which helped bring the waters of the world to India to form a new spring of ideas and holiness which will reverberate the message of love and peace throughout the world. I am deeply grateful to the goddess and water spirits for letting me be part of this sacred journey"*

### **Indra Shekhar Singh, Manifesting Team India**

*“Being invited and hosted by our beloved member of the Defend the Sacred Alliance, Dr. Rajendra Singh, was a life-changing experience. This powerful pilgrimage through India, where our network of global activists spent time with communities and bodies of water that have been rejuvenated over the last 50 years, has activated and inspired the waters in our own bodies.*

*The work of Tarun Bharat Sangh demystifies the idea that we cannot see the impact of our work in our lifetimes. Instead, it invites us into a narrative where humanity understands that water truly is life, and where we become the voice and hands of waterways around the world. This was an impactful example of how, if we as humanity can devote ourselves to restoring our relations with nature and water, we can heal ourselves, our communities, and bring dignity back to all beings.*

*People around the world need to experience this work and understand the dedication and commitment of the souls that brought back water to millions. It is essential for our survival in the times to come and something we must remember and embed into our blood. I feel a clarity, excitement, and a sacred responsibility to bring back the wisdom and teachings I received on this journey to my communities here in the United States.*

*Mni Wiconi - Water is Life.”*

**Teena Pugliese, Manifesting Team USA**

*“Through the magical ancient wisdom and nature of India, at the 6th annual gathering of the “Defend the Sacred” global alliance of sacred activists, we witnessed first hand the sacred affirming life work of our brother Dr Rajendra Singh, and his organization for the last 50 years. “Tarun Bharat Sangh” has rejuvenated 15000 bodies of water across India - 13 rivers - and millions of people who now live with healthy waters, skies, forests, animals, and a re-dignified livelihood.*

*In the Karauli arid lands of Rajasthan, we broke bread with some of these simple and beautiful people. They, who although conditioned by their social cast and economic status for poverty, have transformed a life of crime as bandits, to become proud farmers as the water, and abundance came back to their villages. This quest for dignity and the re - hydration of their communities was led at first by their women, the ones carrying the water on their heads sometimes for long distances.*

*One of the most important principles of this epic water work by the “Waterman of India” and his team, has been to identify local leadership and empower them to act to benefit their communities. This monumental endeavor, rooted in the love, protection and right relation with Nature is based on Indigenous knowledge kept by the elders and requires the villagers' accountability to fund a third of their projects and thus commit to protecting and taking care of its future sustainability.”*

**Gabriel Meyer, Manifesting Team USA**

## **Gratitudes**

Thank you to **Rajendra Singh and the Tarun Bharat Sangh Ashram, Beekampura team**, who made this all possible. To our beloved DSA member Rajendra, who invited us to have our 6th annual gathering in his homeland,

Special thanks to **Indra Shekhar Singh** and Sylvano Rizzi for translating throughout our journey.

Thank you to all **the Ashrams** that took such good care of us-- Matri Sadan, Haridwar, Shri Shankaracharya Ashram, Haridwar, Mahaveerji Jain Mandir, Karauli, Janardhan Rai Nagar Rajasthan Vidyapeeth (deemed to be university) Udaipur

Thank you to **Pat McCabe** for working on planning, organizing, and securing funding for our Indigenous relatives. You were missed on our journey and always in our hearts. Thank you to all who gifted financial support and donations in kind.

Thank you to the DSA Manifesting Team-- **Miguel Angel Pimentel Paz, Miguel Humblet, Teena Pugliese, Gabriel Meyer, Rajendra Singh, Indra Shekhar Singh and Indira Khurana**-- for the dedication, love, and work it took to make this all come together.

**Special thanks to Ma Ganga and every land and body of water we were blessed to meet.**



This story report was put together by **Teena Pugliese**, with editing and text support by **Barbara Kovats**, who journaled throughout our trip. **Gigi Coyle** contributed to the text and the overall design, highlighting the importance of this story. Significant contributions were made by **Gabriel Meyers, Miguel Humblet, Indira Khurana, Rajendra Singh** and **Indra Shekhar Singh**.

Photos were donated by **Teena Pugliese, Noah Williams, Vincent Delbos-Klein**, and **Silvano Rizzi**.

**It has been a long-distance community endeavor as was the journey.  
It takes a village.**

To anyone we missed, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for the radical hospitality we experienced from all our hosts and guides. It was truly inspiring to learn from you and your beautiful spirits and culture.

## ***Closing for Now***

We continue in this time of incorporation, digesting and reflecting on all that we experienced.

**What were we able to offer?**

**What did we learn?**

**What is there now to do, weave, witness,  
work for or change inside and out?**

**What might we have done differently?**

**What follow-up is needed?**

## ***For the Future***

Over the next weeks and months, we encourage communication to continue and trust that more voices, prayers and actions will be shared.

This way as an Alliance, we can truly deepen our abilities alone and together to Defend the Sacred.

Please join us in whatever ways you can.

For more information about **Rajendra**  
contact [Tarun Bharat Sangh](#)

For more information about the  
**Defend the Sacred Alliance**  
contact [Teena Pugliese](#) &  
[Gabriel Meyer](#)

