

Toshiba hails Waterman's vision and work

Special Correspondent



'Impressed': The Toshiba delegation with Waterman Rajendra Singh at Tarun Ashram in Bhikampura at Alwar in Rajasthan after a tour of the NGO's water conservation works. - Photo Rohit Jain Paras

Toshiba, a world leader in high technology, thinks that it can learn a few lessons on conservation from India's "Waterman" Rajendra Singh. The company, a diversified manufacturer of advanced electronic products and information systems, considers that the practices adopted by Tarun Bharat Sangh, Mr. Singh's pro-conservation NGO, can be a model for eco-friendly action as well as involvement of

local population.

"Toshiba wants to become an eco-friendly company. We are impressed with the work of Magsaysay Award winner Rajendra Singh who has turned the Alwar countryside green and made rivers, once dry, flow," said Philippe Delahaye, President, Toshiba Tec Imaging System France (TFIS), a French subsidiary of Toshiba. Mr. Delahaye led a group from his organisation the other day to Tarun Ashram, the headquarters of TBS situated in the countryside near the Sariska tiger sanctuary.

"We accept his model, strategy and the participatory nature of the work," he said.

The 20-member team included Jean-Igor Mailfait, Executive Vice-President of the Toshiba subsidiary. The group stayed overnight in the countryside nurtured by Mr. Rajendra Singh for the past quarter-century. It was visibly impressed by the network of water conservation structures built by TBS with the support of local villagers, which enhanced the groundwater level and consequently led to revival of the river systems in the region.

"Toshiba the world over is now giving a lot of attention to renewable energy, conservation of water and electricity and eco-friendly habits. We are looking for models which have helped the communities in better management of their resources," said Mr. Delahaye. "We find here that harnessing of water and its judicious use has helped the villagers survive with dignity. Those who had left their villages in search of jobs in the past have now returned. This is an example of finding local solutions to global problems."

The presence of flowing water in arid Rajasthan was a heartening as well as convincing sight, the visitors confessed.

Mr. Singh, accompanied by a group of villagers, explained to the visitors the actions and processes which had been carried out in over 10,000 villages in Rajasthan in half-a-dozen districts covering a geographical area of 6,500 sq km. "I learnt it from the village elders here after I came to work with them," he said talking to them about the beginning he made in 1985 at Gopalpura village in reviving traditional knowledge on simple water harvesting structures, locally referred to as "johads".

"Just as Toshiba with its innovative technology has contributed to a better quality of life in the urban context, Rajendra Singh has illuminated the lives of thousands of villagers," Mr. Mailfait said to media persons. "We are much impressed with his vision, especially the way he involved the local people to help themselves and make life better with locally available resources."

The TFIS team gifted 20 bicycles to the local villages and a cheque to TBS before leaving. As for future cooperation between the company and TBS, Mr. Delahaye hinted that something was in the offing. "We are creating a foundation for this kind of activity," he said.

"India is a magic country. Rajasthan is very beautiful!" said the group members who were here on the penultimate day of their five-day trip. The visitors were feted before their departure, men with Rajasthani *safas* (headgear), and the women with traditional *chunris* (scarves).