



MR. ANUPAM MISHRA

Recipient of the Award for Application of Science and Technology for Rural Development - 2011

Born: June 5, 1948

For over four decades, Anupam Mishra has traveled across our country to understand the most pressing concerns of our people. His writing goes beyond environment policy discussions to the philosophy that governs societies' relationship with their physical environment. He has fostered relations with activists across the country, maintaining associations over the years, mentoring activists and journalists, offering warmth and friendship and support. His work is unerringly punctuated with common sense.

Anupam Mishra is best known for his research and writing on traditional water management, but that has been only over the past 25 years. He started as a young writer-activist in 1971 at the Gandhi Peace Foundation, where he has been working since then. His first major assignment was with a team negotiating the surrender of the dacoits of Chambal.

From the ravines of Chambal, he headed north in 1973 to the Chamoli district in the high Himalayas to investigate a germinating popular resistance to the government's logging permits to a sports good manufacturing company. It was through Anupam Mishra's reportage that the world learnt of the Chipko Movement, which has since become a symbol of environmentalism. He remained a friend and supporter of the people who led the Chipko Movement, and a guide to people seeking to understand them.

The early 1980s took him to Rajasthan to figure out a movement for the protection of grazing lands traditionally protected by religious sanction. This engagement with Rajasthan brought him to a revelation during the severe drought of 1987. The villages far removed from all government water supply systems were coping better with the drought, while those relying on new water infrastructure were in terrible conditions.

Anupam Mishra's research told him there was something wrong with new water management practices, and not just in terms of policy and engineering but in fundamental, philosophical sense. Those in charge of water management were ignoring time-tested systems of handling water; systems which have supported life and civilization in India for millennia, and which did not need any government support or engineering intervention. These systems were woven into the lives of peoples and societies, in their aspirations and their religion. Anupam Mishra set about traveling through the country, documenting these traditions.

The result was a book in 1993 titled *Aaj Bhi Khare Hain Talab*. It is celebrated as much for the depth of its research and its refreshing perspective as for the quality of its writing. Anupam Mishra chose to forgo his copyright. Where other books preserve the rights, his book said, "Any material from this book can be used in any way by anybody. It will be nice if the source is mentioned." The book has sold out five editions from the Gandhi Peace Foundation. Because it is free of copyright, 40 other editions have been printed in about 10 languages, including a Braille edition. About 2,00,000 copies got sold at a time when Hindi publishers complain about falling readership. The book has won several awards and ratings. The book's real success, though, lies in how it captured the imagination of a wide range of environmental activists. It refreshed India's traditional water philosophy, inspiring activists to think beyond social and civil engineering, and recover and revive practicable water solutions. In Garhwal, a traditional water

management system called `chaal' was put to disuse over the past 200 years. After finding out about it in Anupam Mishra's book, villagers have built more than 20,000 new chaals. About 5,000 large and small ponds/tanks/lakes have been revived by people inspired by the book, the cost of which (if calculated) will cross a few hundred crore rupees. The World Bank has offered the governments of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka a project to translate the book and distribute 50,000 copies to revive existing ponds instead of building new ones.

Anupam Mishra continues to work at the Gandhi Peace Foundation, where he is the editor of the bimonthly Gandhi Marg, besides running the environment unit there. He lives at the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, New Delhi, along with his wife Manjushri and his son Shubham.

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