

Watering the roots of prosperity



**water
WISDOM
PART-III**

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

Medieval Bundelkhand had an elaborate system of inter-connected ponds

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MAHOBHA: It seems there was pond politics in medieval Bundelkhand. First, the Chandelas built a glorious network of ponds in the region in their period. Then, the Bundelas tried to outclass them by developing an even better system.

Prosperous principalities flourished in the region where these networks of ponds were built. The work done by the Chandelas in Mahoba and the Bundelas in Charkhari town are living examples of this.

Even today, the entire Mahoba town gets its drinking water supply from Madan Sagar. This is the pond that Chandela king Madan Varman built in 1129-1163 AD. The Mahoba Jal Sansthan has a pumping station on the pond.

"Today's rulers must learn how much importance was paid to water and water management for public welfare in the past. Bundelkhand and Rajasthan are examples of this. They had 'soch-samaji' (understanding and wisdom) of water," said Rajender Singh, the Magsaysay award-winning water activist.

Madan Sagar, with its reservoir area of four square kilometres, was built to trap run-off rainwater in a low land between ridges. Like Madan Sagar, the Chandela king Vijay Pal Varman built Kirat Sagar in 1035 AD, Kirti Varman built another one in 1060 AD. Migratory birds from colder regions of the world chose Vijay Sagar as a haunt. Even today, it is a sanctuary for many an exotic bird. There are other Chandela ponds like Dispura Sarovar or Kalyan Sagar.

Then there is Charkhari town. It was the Charkhari estate of Bundela rulers. It is probably the only example of a pond-town in



These kinds of nullahs (drains) were built on ridges in the catchment area to direct water to the ponds below.

the country. It has seven main inter-connected ponds and 17 others.

Ninety-five-year-old Diwan Kesri Singh, a descendant of the Bundela ruler of the erstwhile Charkhari estate, said, "It is a brilliant example of how every drop of water falling in the catchment area—the ridges around Charkhari—was collected to make them into massive ponds. The ponds are Kothi Tal, Jai Sagar, Malkhan Sagar, Rapat Sarovar, Banasia Tal, Gola Ghat and Ratan Sagar." These ponds were built between 1732-1862 AD.

To tap the water, nullahs (drains) were built on the slopes of ridges to direct the water towards inter-connected ponds. When one pond gets filled to its brim, the water then overflows to the next one and so on and so forth. Ratan Sagar had irrigation channels for agriculture use.

All the ponds were beautified

with canopied trees, ghats, temples and recreation halls. "One can imagine the planning and its execution from the fact that all the nullahs that diverted water to the ponds were covered with stone slabs so that the water did not get polluted (today, most of them have turned into open drains with even sewage flowing into them)," said Arvind Singh Chauhan, chairman of the Charkhari Nagar Palika Parishad.

Charkhari has 17 more ponds.

The science of inter-connected ponds was not restricted to Charkhari alone. Many ponds in Tikamgarh and Lalitpur, too, were inter-connected. The only difference is that the inter-connected ponds in Charkhari are close by. But there is a distance of one to seven kilometres between the inter-connected ponds elsewhere.

"There was also a scientific indicator system built into the ponds to indicate overflow. Kothi Tal in Charkhari had an idol of Vasudev carrying the infant-Krishna in a basket with the feet of Krishna dangling out. The moment the water in the pond touched a toe of Krishna, water used to begin flowing out to the last pond (irrigation pond) in the series," said Charkhari resident Balbhadra Goswami, a watershed expert who retired from the Agriculture Department, Madhya Pradesh. He said that all ancient principalities in the region had brilliant watershed management projects.

Even the inter-connecting conduits were scientific. They had steel mesh to prevent inter-mixing of the pond eco-system, said Goswami.

The entire Bundelkhand region is replete with glorious ancient watershed systems that have survived till now.

(Next: All is 'Well')



■ The Kothi Tal, one of the seven inter-connected ponds built by Bundelas in Charkhari.

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