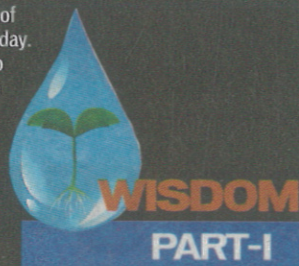


Lesson from Bundelkhand: Tap the past

Bundelkhand's history has nuggets of wisdom for the governments of the day. These lessons from the past need to be learnt to insulate the region from recurring drought. The Chandelas, the Bundelas and even the British made continual efforts, in a scientific manner, to drought-proof the region. Here is a nine-part series on the region, its miseries and what needs to be done.



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BUNDELKHAND REGIONS OF UP/MP: Bundelkhand is one of the most water-challenged regions in the country today. A decade of drought till 2008 has shown that. The serial droughts led to an agriculture crisis, suicides, hunger deaths, mass exodus, and conflicts for water.

But the situation was radically different between the ninth and the 17th centuries, though there were droughts even then,

after every 20-25 years. The region was always semi-arid with normal annual rainfall of 800 millimetres.

"The only difference is that the rulers then knew the region, the governments today do not. Despite the fact that science is more advanced today, the ancient regional water science and wisdom was far superior, logical and committed," said Diwan Kesri Singh, 95, a descendant of the Bundela rulers of the erstwhile Charkhari estate in the present-day Mahoba district of UP.

It was the traditional rainwater harvesting systems of the ancient rulers that made the difference, so much so that the region could even grow water-intensive crops like paan (betel leaf), sugarcane or paddy.

Mocking at the water planning of today, Geological Survey of India former director VK Joshi said, "Today, we think rainwater-harvesting is putting a pipe from the rooftop to the ground. Nonsense! Look at the ancient giant as well as small (region and area specific) water-harvesting systems of those times. The science and wisdom they reflect is awe-inspiring."

The Chandelas and the Bundelas made tanks by damming rain rivulets. They also created massive as well as small ponds (including many interconnected ponds) by catching rain water from catchment ridges, took out irrigation canals from dams and ponds, built infinite kuans (wells) and bawris (step

GROUND ZEROS

Bundelkhand today straddles the two states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The UP districts are: Jhansi, Lalitpur, Hamirpur, Banda, Chitrakoot, Jalaun and Mahoba. The Madhya Pradesh districts are: Datia, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Panna, Damoh and Sagar. The region has undulating topography with coarse soil and hard rocky mountains and large tracts of ravines as well.

wells).

So numerous were these water-harvesting systems that even today, one would find a structure or two after every few kilometres of travelling through the region—despite the fact that the greed for land flattened an unspecified number of tanks, ponds, and wells. "But those that exist today prove how effective and long-term planning went

into the conception and construction of those structures. As a result, most of them still have water," said Professor Ram Chander, head of the department of geology, Jhansi University.

Tikamgarh district in Madhya Pradesh, where the Chandelas made their maximum water harvesting structures, still has 870 of them. The reservoir area of each one exceeds 400 acres. Charkhari has over ten ponds, and Mahoba, apart from the ponds, has hundreds of wells.

Raja Bundela of the Bundelkhand Mukti Morcha said, "The governments today should follow Chandelas-Bundelas, instead of doing loan-waiver or drought-package politics".

Over the centuries, the communities in the region had a sustainable water resource pattern. People still say that the rulers used to take more pride in the water structures they built than their valour stories.

Next: Damming rainwater.



The Nandanwara reservoir in Tikamgarh district is a classic example of rainwater harvesting by damming a rivulet between quartz reefs.

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