

All is well if you have water wealth



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BANDA: The entire Bundelkhand region is dotted with wells, both for drinking and irrigation purposes. These too are a legacy of the past and seem to suggest that all is well if you have water wealth.

While the rulers built dams and ponds in parched Bundelkhand in the olden days, the local fief-holders and communities dug wells.

There were two kinds of wells across the region — *bawris* and *kuans*. As for the *kuans*, there were two categories — *pucca kuans* and *kachcha kuans*.

“The *kuans* are conventional

OLD IS GOLD Ancient *bawris* and *kuans* of Bundelkhand reveal fascinating ingenuity

wells. The *pucca* ones were those that had a solid inner wall to the well-shaft. The *kachcha* one is just a dug-up well without any plaster on the inner walls. From *kuans*, the water has to be pulled out with a roped bucket. But *bawris* are step-wells. One can just walk down the steps and lift water,” said Manoj Dwivedi of Kriti Shodh Sansthan that has engaged itself in identifying the Chandela wells in Mahoba.

Supa village has a *bawri*, which is famous as Supa ki Bawri. It is the biggest of all step-wells in the region and has been recently renovated. Its sheer size and concentric steps are mesmerising. Supa *bawri*'s grandeur spellbinds anyone who sees it for the first time. It has 178 steps in three concentric circles.



■ A traditional Chandela *kuan*.
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Srinagar in the district has 18 Maratha period *bawris* made on the Chandela model. One is called ‘Ghud-behar’, in which a rider could make the horse step into the well to make it quench its thirst. All that the horse needed was to crane its neck to the

water.

Locals say travellers used these *bawris* to cool off in summer. “They became roadside air-conditioned chambers in the region's intense summers. People walked down the steps and sat near the base of the well. They were the coolest places in the region,” said a Supa villager.

While the ‘Supa Ki Bawri’ is a renovated one, there are several others whose original form is intact. But they are almost abandoned now and not many draw unclean water out of them.

Prof Ram Chandra, head of the department of geology, Jhansi University, said people used to dig a lot of irrigation wells in the vicinity of dammed reservoirs or ponds because a reservoir recharged large tracts of land

around it. So, a reservoir's water could be drawn even a few kilometres away.

Some of the notable Mahoba wells that are still functional include Madnau well, Sadnau well, Chandeli well, or Purani Galla Mandi well. There are 56 identified Chandela wells in Mahoba. There are many but a large number of them have been plastered with cement and fitted with pulleys. Thus, they have lost their original lime plaster. It was the culture of the time that made the Chandela and Bundelas build *kuans* and *bawris* on the roadsides and provide tree canopies and resting places around them. All the *kuans* were given a unique architectural identity with six pillars in a hexagon. Each pillar had a spike atop it.

“Even the site selection for wells used to be scientific. The water-engineers in those days used to make wells in a natural trough (depression) in the topography. In such places, wells give



■ This ancient step-well famous as *Supa Ki Bawri* was built by Chandelas. It has 178 steps in three concentric circles leading up to the water. While most of the similar *bawris* are dilapidated and retain their original lime plaster, this one has been renovated with cement plaster.
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water quickly and for long. In trough (depression) areas, ground water gets recharged faster than the higher places or slopes. This is the reason that even now most

of them have water,” said Prof Ram Chandra. He said government agencies or people should apply this site selection logic even today. A majority of hand-

pumps or tubewells go dry within a year or two because they are not installed in places where ground water recharge is regular. (Next: Spinning water out)