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WATER HARVESTING: A HISTORICAL RECORD OF MARWAR STATE

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Water Harvesting: A Historical Record of Marwar State

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Abstract – Water is an important element of conservation in the history of Rajputana states. Aravalli mountain range divides Rajasthan into two parts eastern and western. Western Rajasthan consists of desert and receives low rainfall. In this article we have taken the evidences of Bahis which helps us in understanding the importance of conservation of water. These unpublished Bahis are in the state archives of Bikaner which explains the economic, social and administrative conditions. These Bahis carries records relating with administrative decisions and activities. KagadBahi, Sava Bahi, JakatBahi describes about the conservation of water by the people of Marwar. Jhalras, Kuai, bawaris, talab. Taanka, Nadi, Kosita, Kohat and Canch were the Marwari names given to the Water bodies. These Bahis teaches us how to use water in the contemporary world when potable water is getting beyond the approach of common man.

Keywords – Water, Conservation, Marwar, Bahis, Rural Areas, Rajputana

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Water is an important element of conservation in the history of Rajputana's states. Aravalli Mountain range is the dividing line from climatic point of view, Eastern part of the state have average rainfall whereas western part of state consists of desert and have low rains.

Bahis are the important records in the History of Rajputana States. Day to day activities of administration is recorded in it. We have written our article of following evidences of Bahi's which helps in understanding the importance of conservation of water. These unpublished Bahi's are in the State Archives of Bikaner which gives abandon source for writing Regional History.

Kagad Bahi is also known as Rampuria records because it was maintained by Rampuria community of Bikaner. It contains records of State's order and instruction. The economic, social and administrative condition of the state can be easily accessed through it.

SawaBahi's are the monthly Journals of the Mandis (Markets) of Bikaner state.

JakatBahi's are related to commercial transaction and collection of Jakat (tax) at different routes from Mandis of Bikaner state.

Sanad ParwanaBahis (Marwar records) it carries records relating with administrative decisions and activities of the state officials of Marwar State. People rely on agriculture and animal husbandry in the

Marwar region of the western Indian state of Rajasthan, one of the world's most densely populated deserts. Water is a scarce resource for the villages in the region, many of which do not have even a single source of safe drinking water within a 1.6 km radius of their homes. On average, this region witnesses six drought years in a decade. It is no wonder that Marwar is known as the land of extremes - with low annual rainfall, non- perennial rivers, that flow only during certain times of the year, saline groundwater and extreme temperatures.

Western part of Rajasthan consists of arid region therefore state administration always tried their best for the conservation of water; every drop of water was given wastage. The depths of wells in Bikaner State, and Marwar State of Jodhpur are from 76 to 122 meters. The people of the state adopted natural way of collecting drinking water through rainfall by digging pits called kund and tankas. Other daily needs of water were fulfilled by digging small well called Kui's. The people of state have created many water bodies like Nadi's Talab, Jahad, Bandha, Sagar and Sarovar where rainfall water was collected.

The arid regions of Marwar faced acute water scarcity and famines. but because of wise policies of its rules and its efficient water management system, the people of Marwar did not lack this elixir of life. Water was used wisely, never exploited relentlessly. Water reservoirs were dug not only in the urban areas but also in large numbers in rural areas. "Marwar ra Pargana riVigat" of Nainsi bears testimony to it. Nainsi has described in detail the number of water

reservoirs in various villages of the Marwar state. The level of underground water points to the fact that this region was (once upon a time) watered by the Vedic Saraswati. not only the rulers of Marwar, but their Queens, paswans and pardayats, were equal participants in water conservation. it is interesting to note that majority of water reservoirs of Marwar have been dug by women, who spent their pocket money on building temples and reservoirs.

Kagad Bahi elaborates that how the Kings and Queens of the State took keen interest in developing water bodies. Ravi Kund Sagar was built by Raja Ravi Singh for human beings and cattle's. Shiv Badi Talab[1] was constructed by Dungar Singh which has a potential to harvest water for the whole year. References of constructing Wells were vividly written in the Bahi as it was the only source of drinking water in all the seasons. The map for the construction of village was passed by the state only when it has a provision for Well[2], besides relief in tax land and money was financed by the state.

Kagad Bahi of Bikaner carries evidences where relief in tax was given for repairing the well. The king interferes in feuds of common man created for division of water for drinking and irrigation purposes. The king paid attention that enough water is available for animals and human beings. He himself gives order[3] for digging new Wells during the summer period.

Irrigation facilities were prohibited from those Wells constructed for drinking water purposes but sometimes relaxation was given by the king in lieu of tax. The land lords of the villages were officially ordered that in case of drought or non-availability of drinking water in Wells they will provide facilities for potable water.

The prosperity of the villages in the desert are of Rajputana was totally dependent on the availability of water. Celebration were made when new Well was constructed. If any person helps in digging the Well the state gives special order for him in tax relief[4], besides other concessions. The demand for constructing new Well according to the need of people of the villages were provided by the Chaudhari's to king from time to time, who gives special attention to it. The Chaudhary of the villages has a right to repair.[5] Wells from other budget expenditure at the time of emergencies.

These water bodies are not only reservoirs, but also monuments of history of art and architecture and bear testimony to the policies of the rulers towards their people. They are also evident proofs of the works of public-welfare done by them. These water bodies present before us a technique of water management and conservation, which is matchless. Even in this century of advance technology we are not able to create such technologically sound artistic monuments of water. Boaries, have an important place amongst all the water bodies in Marwar. Built on the technique of maximum usage of underground water, with minimum amount of evaporation, these baories are

technological and architectural delight. These were built by rulers, their queens and contributions were also made by the feudal lords, Mutsadis and common people. It is our duty to conserve this heritage. Present paper is a study of some prominent baories built by the Thikanedars (feudal lords) of Marwar.

The king has the right to repair personal Wells of the people as it fulfils the need of water for the entire villagers. In case of financial crises at the time of construction of Well the king provided helps from government treasury.[6] Prior permission of king was required by the Chaudhry's for repairing water sources of the villages. Mali's a farmer community works as the caretaker of Wells. Land for constructing wells was provided by the state as it is referred in PattaParwanaBahi. Sawa Mandi Bahi of Bikaner states[7] refers about the construction, maintenances and cleanness of wells. Jhalaras: In Johana there are eight jhalaras in the city — two inside the city and six outside. Seven still hold water, but none is being used for drinking. Old records also do not suggest that their water was ever used for drinking purposes. Jhalaras were essentially meant for community bathing and religious rites. Often rectangular in design, jhalaras have steps on three or four sides. The Mahamandir jhalara, which is more like a baori, is the oldest one, having been constructed in 1660. Kriya ka-jhalara and Mandore jhalara are reported to be about 400 and 500 years old, respectively. Four jhalaras have been abandoned and the water of the rest is not fit for human consumption.

Water conservation were also given importance by the monarchs of Marwar State they paid personal attention on building of wells, talabs. (Ponds) and Nadi's (small ponds) Marwar Ke Pargana Ri Vigat is an important sources for the knowledge of water conservations. Wells were also known as Kosita, Kohat and Canch. In the year 1455 A.D. Rao Jodha Founder of Jodhpur state build a big ponds (Talab) for the need of the people's.[8] Law was made in Marwar that in every village or town water of pond (Talab) to be consumed first than when crises of water starts Wells should be used for drinking and other purposes.[9] Relaxations in various taxes were given to landlords and Chaudhary's for the construction of Ponds (Talab) by the state.[10] New villages construction were permitted only, to enlarge the water bodies resources i.e. talabs and wells.[11] Transportation of water from one well (village) to another well village) were permitted by the state itself.[12]

The king and the upper echelons of society expressed their sentiments by building step wells and ponds (talab) on various auspicious occasions like birthdays, marriage anniversaries and in the memories of their near dear ones. Donation of water was treated as the most precious work. Rawal Jetha the commander in chief of Marwar build a Rajwani step well from the prize money of rupees fifteen thousand given by monarch Mal Deo.[13]

Thus, we conclude that evidences found in the various Bahi's are providing vital information for regional histories of Rajputana States. The approach has been people-oriented – that is, the community itself developed solutions to water scarcity and assumed the lead in constructing and conserving water structures and sources. Communities were organised into groups to restore/build and manage water harvesting systems which resulted in restoring and building close to 300 water harvesting structures. This community approach also paved the way for decentralized social governance systems and community level social capital was created through managing and implementing micro projects by the communities themselves. Through the Jal Kosh or water development and management fund, It is an important sources material to know the method of water conservation during the state times. These Bahi's teaches us that how to use water in the contemporary world where potable water is now getting beyond the approach of common man in big metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Calcutta, Jaipur etc. It provides help in the synthesisation of tradition and modern trends for the conservation of water which is the need of the day.

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V.S. - Vikram Samvat

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