WATER ARCHITECTURE OF JODHPUR

Dr. Samiparna Rakshit
Assistant-Professor of History
Vijaygarh Jyotish Ray College (Affiliated to University of Calcutta)
Kolkata
West Bengal

The Main Focus

- The current paper would concentrate on the water architecture of Jodhpur from historical perspective.

- The present paper would seek to find out the variations, characteristics of water architecture of Jodhpur.

- This paper would try to throw some light on the necessity of conservation of these magnificent water architecture of Jodhpur.

Water Architecture of Jodhpur: its variations

- **Jodhpur is a place of diverse forms of water architecture.**
- **Different forms are:**
- **Kua or bera (well)**
- **Jhalra**
- **Baori**
- **Kund** (stepped ponds, wells and hybrids)
- **Sagar or talab** (lakes and tanks)
- ***Arhat*** *(*water wheel*)*

Wells : Jaitha Bera

- This well is situated in the Brahmin quarters (Brahmpuri) of the walled city of Jodhpur.
- This well is still used by the local people as a source of their drinking water.
- It is said to have been built by the Mootha Brahmin Jaitha during the reign of Jodhpur's founder Rao Jodha (1416–89 AD).

Stepped Wells, Ponds And Hybrids

- According to a survey conducted by the School of Desert Sciences in 1989, there exists 48 baoris and 8 jhalras in the city of Jodhpur.

Tunwarji ka Jhalra

- Tunwarji ka Jhalra is the largest surviving jhalra in the city and was constructed by a Tunwar queen from Patan, who was the chief queen (*patraṇi*) of Maharaja Abhai Singh of Jodhpur. It was completed in 1748 AD.

Suraj Kund

- Suraj Kund is named after its patron Raja Sur Singh of Jodhpur (1595–1619 AD). The structure was also built on by his descendants Maharaja Gaj Singh (1619–38 AD) and Maharaja Jaswant Singh (1638–78 AD).

- Suraj Kund's construction is highly influenced by Mughal architecture, a testament to Jodhpur's close relationship with the Mughals in the period of its construction.

Lakes

- According to the School of Desert Sciences survey, there were 46 talabs or lakes in Jodhpur once, of which only 40 could be traced in 1989.

- One of the few talabs which still holds clean water is the Ranisar Talab in the old city which was once the main water source for the walled city and the fort.

Ranisar Talab

The Ranisar's name commemorates its patron, one of the queens of Rao Jodha, the founder of Jodhpur. It was constructed in 1460 AD at the same time Jodhpur was being built as a new city.

Tanks
Gulab Sagar

- Gulab Sagar is a large twin-tank within the city which was once fed by rainwater and water channelled from the Balsamand Lake in the outskirts of Jodhpur.

- The lake is best-known for its patron—the formidable concubine Gulab Rai from the court of Maharaja Vijai Singh of Jodhpur (1772–93 AD).

Uses of these Water Architectural Structures

- The stepped wells provide cool shelter and were often the venue for leisurely gatherings, especially for the elite.

- In the absence of caravan sarais, stepped wells in the desert tracts of Rajasthan also provided refuge at night to travellers, traders, pilgrims and even bandits as they braved life on the road.

- Water was a necessary component for religious rites and as a result one finds that many stepped ponds were constructed adjacent to a temple, mosque or shrine nearby and themselves hold small shrines where the neighbourhood community offered prayers or performed rites of birth, marriage or death.

Patronage

- Water architecture being indispensable to life in Rajasthan, across time, both individuals and communities commissioned waterbodies of various types to meet their needs. Ordinary wells (kua and bera) being easier to construct were built by most segments of the society to cater to their own communities.

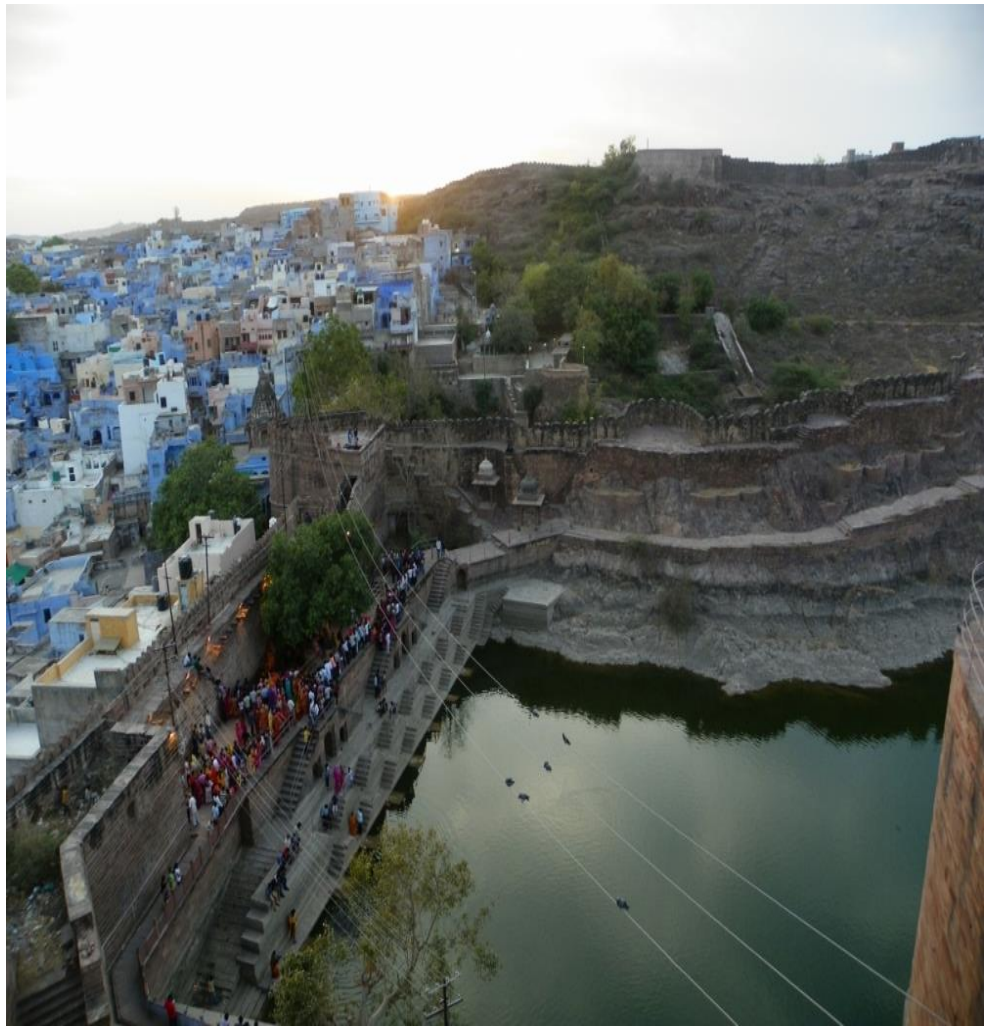
- Among the prime patrons of such expensive constructions were royalty and nobility. To their patrons, the construction of stepped wells and ponds, like the construction of temples, were charitable acts that earned them religious merit and the affection of their subjects and community members. The construction of large waterbodies was also unmistakably an assertion of power—demonstrating the ability of a patron to command vast resources.

Patronage

- A majority of large waterbodies in Rajasthan were constructed by royals belonging to different Rajput clans.

- Interestingly, in Rajasthan and neighbouring Gujarat, a number of royal patrons of waterbodies can be seen to be queens and other noble women, pointing to an arena of widespread architectural patronage by women which is worthy of close investigation.

- Among Jodhpur's female patrons who were not born into the traditional aristocracy but who gained power by their proximity to the royal household



Ground Reality

- In the recent past, Jodhpur, like other cities of Rajasthan, has let its water architecture collapse and fall victim to rapid urbanisation and public apathy.

- Historic waterbodies now lie covered in garbage or have been ruined by encroachments. Channels that transported water from lakes outside the city to tanks within for public use even as recently as the mid-twentieth century have also been destroyed, leading to the degradation of the reservoirs that they once fed.

Ground Reality

- The Chankelao, Phoolalao and Naya talabs have been lost predominantly due to heavy urbanisation.

- Gangelao talab, a major source of drinking water until 40 years ago, has now become a source of disease with the accumulation of dirt, filth and garbage, because of local residents diverting their sewage lines into it.

- Today, the only safe talabs - whose waters are still used by the people - inside the city's boundaries are Ranisar and Padamsar. However, urban activities are already eroding their catchments also.

Ground Reality

- Among tanks, Gulabsagar and Fatehsagar are also polluted. Their rainwater-bearing feeder canals have been turned into drains, with residents having opened their sewage lines or dumped garbage into them and encroaching their banks.

- However, these two tanks can still be restored if their feeder canals and catchments are protected.

- Jodhpur has five large lakes located on the outskirts of the city in a more or less natural setting. But nowadays, even during years of normal rainfall, these lakes do not get adequate water because of the poor state of catchments and canals.

Ground Reality

- A survey found 45 baoris - 16 inside the city and 29 outside. While the public water supply department, is exploiting the waters of 11 baoris, hardly any effort is being made to improve their conditions; 11 more have been abandoned and two totally lost.

- Of the eight jhalaras, four have been abandoned, the public water supply department is using these two for water supply and the Nolakha jhalara is being used for irrigation. These jhalaras provide breath taking and exquisite examples of architectural design, and need to be protected - both as the city's heritage and as unique water bodies.

Steps to Conserve

- Mining and all urban and industrial activities in catchments must be stopped.
- No agencies should be allowed to interfere with forest areas and catchments in the name of urban expansion.
- The forest department can undertake afforestation of catchment areas.
- Rejuvenation of the long-neglected nadis, talabs, tanks, wells, baoris, jhalaras and canals by cleaning and repairing them, is another necessity.
- Legal support will be needed to remove unauthorised constructions and encroachments in catchment areas and canals.
- However, for achieving all this, complete public support is the prime prerequisite.

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Thank you