# Bundelkhand in poetry: Water, water everywhere!

water WISDOM PART-VIII

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**JHANSI/MAHOBA:** Bundelkhand's history is replete with tales of water, apparently because people in this water-challenged area valued (and still do) water more than anything else.

Just like Rajasthan, the folklore in Bundelkhand talks a lot about water. So much so that even its poetry uses water similes and metaphors profusely. Take for instance Alaha, the medieval epic-valour poetry of the region, which refers to 'water' several times.

"People in water-challenged area are far more romantic and respectful towards water. Bundelkhand and Rajasthan are such areas. Their folk art reflects this. It is amazing to know how many different names people in Rajasthan have for clouds in their local dialects. They have a specific name for specific kind of cloud. People in such regions cherish clouds and water more than the people in water-rich regions," says Rajender Singh, a Magsaysay awardee and water activist from Alwar, Rajasthan.

The folk poetry and songs are replete with 'water' and water harvesting structures. Alaha Khand in a verse says: "*Joh nahaaye nisdin madansagar mein, toh mehra sur hoi jaye* (daily bath in Madansagar would make even a meek person brave)" Madansagar is a famous 1,000-year-old pond in Mahoba. It was built by a Chandela king.

Another folk song blesses Mahoba in these words: "*Kirat sar ki vimal kirti, nirbhik Mahoba nagar rahe* (The glory of Kiratsagar be forever and Mahoba be fearless forever and ever)."

A folk song describes beauty and significance of water bodies in a fort: "*Aath kua, nau bawri; solah sau panihar, jiske awat jat se gadh per hoye bahar* (the fort looks beautiful because of 1600 water carriers which frequent the eight wells and nine step-wells)".

This olden verse describes that it were its water harvesting systems that make Jatar a town.

The verse goes like this: "*Nabbe ber, nawasi kua, chappan tal Jatara hua* (It's the ninety step-wells, 79 wells and 56 ponds make Jatara a town). Jatara is a town in Tikamgarh district of Madhya Pradesh part of Bundelkhand.

A valour poem says: "*Jaise badariya mein jal ghume, ran mein ghum rahi tarvar* (the way water circulates in clouds, so swiftly moves the sword).

And a famous Bundela poem reads: "*Bundelkhand ki sunoh kahani, Bundelon ki baani mein; Paanidaar yahan ka paani, aag yahan ke paani mein* (The water of Bundelkhand is the best, and the water has fire (bravery) in it as well).

One poem describes a threat and warning that Prithivraj Chauhan (an invader here) issued to the Chandel King, Raja Parmardev. "*Khod ke Mahoba khandhar kar den, Paaka tal dey banaye* (I will dig up Mahoba kingdom and make permanent ponds everywhere).

Now, the contemporary folk groups—like Bundelkhand Sur Lehariya—too sing about water. But they sing in pensive and sad ways instead of glorious rendition. Apparently because the water has turned scarce like never before in the region.

(Next: Olden water-harvesting structures and concept still relevant)

## RICH FOLKLORE

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A millenium old bawri (step-well) in Mahoba. The bawri is dilapidated, but retains its original form. PANKAJ JAISWAL/HT