Watering the roots of prosperity

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

Medieval Bundelkhand had an elaborate system of inter-connected ponds

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MAHOBA: It seems there was pond polity in medieval Bundelkhand. First, the Chandela built a grid-like network of ponds in the region during their period. Then, the Bundelkhandi tried to outclass them by developing an even better system.

Properly principled planners flourished in the region where these networks of ponds were built. The work done by the Chandelas in Mahoba and the Bundelkhan in Chhatarpur town are being examples of this.

Today, the entire Mahoba town gets its drinking water supply from Madan Sagar. This is the pond that Chandela king Mahendra Varman built in 1030-1031 AD. The Mahoba Jal Samity has the pumping station on the pond.

“Today’s rulers must learn how much importance one paid to water and water management for just being one of the most basic requirements,” said Pankaj Pratap Singh, the Mahoba Jal Samity secretary.

“Madan Sagar, with the prototype of four square kilometers, was built to trip run-off rains into the natural system. Unlike Madan Sagar, the Chandela king Vijeal Varman built Ram Sagar in 985 AD and Ram Sagar built another one in 1095 AD. The Chandela’s method of funneling the water into a reservoir was named as Kothi Tal, Jai Sagar, Madhesh Sagar, Pahar Ghar, Aman Tal, Orta Ghat, and Ram Sagar. These ponds were built between 722-1108 AD.

Today, the water was nulla-like drains were built on the slopes of ridges to direct the water towards inter-connected ponds. When the pond gets filled to its brim, the water then overflowed to the next and so on and so forth. Ratan Sagar had irrigation channels for agriculture use. All the ponds were beautified with cropped trees, ghats, temples, and recreation halls. “One can imagine the planning and forethought from the fact that all the nullahs that diverted water to the ponds was covered with stone slabs so that the water did not get polluted today, most of them have turned into open drains with every sewage flowing into them,” said Arvind Singh Chauhan, chairman of the Chhatarpur Sagar Nigam.

Chhatarpur had 11 more ponds. The science of inter-connected ponds was not restricted to Chhatarpur alone. Many ponds in Tikamgarh and Lalpur too, were inter-connected. The only difference is that the inter-connected ponds in Chhatarpur are closer to each other. But there is a distance of one to seven kilometers between the inter-connected ponds elsewhere.

There was a scientific indicator system built into the ponds to indicate overflow. Kothi Tal in Chhatarpur had an idol of Chandrawat carrying the Infant Krishna in a basket with the feet of the idol dangling out. The moment the water in the pond touched a toe of Radha, water started to begin flowing out to the last pond irrigation pond in the series,” said Chhatarpur resident Bhuvneshwar Singh, a water expert who retired from the Agriculture Department, Madhya Pradesh. He said that all ancient civilizations in the region had brilliant water management projects.

Even the inter-connecting conduits were scientific. They had steel meshes to prevent inter-mixing of the pond ecosystem, and any contamination.

Therefore, Bundelkhand region in its glory days had riverine systems that have survived till today.

(Swami Atmaram)