

HISTORY OF WATER MANAGEMENT IN RAJASTHAN

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Abstract:

To understand the need and importance of water management in the history of Rajasthan, it is essential to explore its origins in the universe, the significance of water management in religious texts, and the traditional practices based on Rajasthan's geographical conditions, climate, and rainfall patterns. In princely Rajasthan, various rulers established wells, stepwells, ponds, lakes, and tanks for water conservation to ensure an adequate supply of water for agriculture and drinking throughout the year.

Origin and Importance of Water in History:

In Sanskrit, the term "अमृतः" translates to water in Hindi. Hindu scriptures, particularly the 17th verse of the *Purusha Sukta*, state that the supreme being created water by combining the atoms of fire with those of water. According to the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, the sequence of creation begins with the union of the divine and nature, leading to the formation of the sky, followed by air, fire, water, earth, herbs, and then food. Thus, the supreme being created the five great elements: space, air, fire, water, and earth. Modern science identifies water as a combination of hydrogen and oxygen.

Vedic sages also acknowledged water as being composed of hydrogen and oxygen and recognized its presence since the beginning of creation. Water is crucial for all forms of life, much like air. The Rigveda highlights the significance of water in one of its hymns:

"*Apasvantaramritam apyasu bhashjam apamva prasamsataye | Deva bhaktah varitah ||*"
"O learned men, water is the nectar that removes diseases and is the source of strength; therefore, understand its potency and become powerful."

In the Rigvedic era, water was worshipped as *Apas* or Varuna. The Rigveda mentions Indra, the deity associated with rain, who dispenses water on Earth and fights against drought and darkness. Prayers were made to the deity Apas to protect from all types of water-related adversities.

Historical Water Management Practices in Rajasthan:

Rajasthan's diverse and harsh climate necessitated ancient water management practices. The region frequently faced droughts, prompting rulers, nobles, and the general populace to conserve and manage water resources carefully.

One of the oldest examples of water management in Rajasthan is found in Kalibanga, near the Ghaggar River, an important site of the Indus Valley Civilization. Evidence from the Chalcolithic period has been found in Bhilwara, Udaipur, and Chittorgarh, showing advanced skills in pottery and the use of water containers. The civilization primarily relied on rivers and rainfall for irrigation.

The significance of water management is evident in the various water reservoirs built by Rajasthan's rulers, including the construction of tanks, stepwells, and wells. Notable examples include:

- **Maharaja Hammir:** Built a reservoir near the Mokal Ji Temple in Chittorgarh.
- **Maharana Lakha:** Constructed three ponds in Kelwara and Lakhawali.
- **Maharana Mokal:** Created a water reservoir in Chittorgarh and a pond named after his brother.
- **Maharana Kumbha:** Developed several water bodies including Ramkund, Bavdiya, and wells.

In addition, rulers like Maharana Uday Singh, Maharana Pratap, and Maharana Jai Singh made significant contributions to water management by creating lakes and reservoirs such as the Pichola Lake, Fateh Sagar Lake, and the Jai Samand Lake.

In desert regions, rainwater was collected and stored in ponds, which was crucial for agricultural and drinking purposes. Techniques like the *Khadin*, where rainwater was collected and stored in underground layers of gypsum, were employed for irrigation.

In cities like Bikaner, Ajmer, and Tonk, rulers constructed various water bodies such as the Chhoti Nadi well and the Anasagar Lake to ensure a steady supply of water.

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