



Water Conservation: Traditional Approach

According to experts, **traditional knowledge of water conservation** is the only sustainable way to counter the dangers of National Water Emergency.

India with its rich culture and heritage in terms of images, rituals, traditional knowledge to conserve water, cultural practices and metaphors on water wisdom can suffice the efforts of water conservation in a traditional way by using cultural images on water, ancient practices and work by water warriors to affirm the value of traditional heritage on water wisdom.

Traditional ways of water conservation

Women's Role: In ancient times, women were considered as the gatekeepers of water ecologies and were responsible for:

- **Building water bodies like** step-wells, tanks and even ponds such as the world heritage site of Queens Step-well (Rani Ki Vav) in Patan, Gujarat, and the Rani and Padam Sagar in Jodhpur, Tank Nagamandala in Karnataka.
- **Cleaning and Maintenance** of water bodies
- **Performance of dances and songs like:**
 - Girja Devi singing the story of a woman making her way to fetch water.
 - Tales of Vidyadhari Bai of Varanasi practising to capture in her voice the friction of the rope against the stone wall of the well.
 - Songs like "Ganga Geet" in Uttarakhand.
 - Bhawai dance of Rajasthan.
- **Performance of water rituals like:**
 - Worship of water body.
 - Jal yatras on Bhagwat pooja.
 - Jal yagya etc.

Sacred aspect: of water bodies can utilised for cleaning and maintenance water bodies.

- Like in **Uttarakhand** it is believed that the **water spirit (masaan)** is present in all irrigation channels and he needs to be mollified to protect the crops.
- **Rajasthan's pre-monsoon ritual** called **Lasipa** ensures gathering, cleaning, and desilting of all water bodies by all villagers.
- During fertility festivals of **Gangaur and Akkha Teej**, women come together to clean lakes and tanks.

Tribal Practices: Irrigation of the paddy fields in the entire **Ziro valley** (where the main source of water for households and irrigation is from a single small river and some spring wells) is carried out through a network of irrigation canals.

Heritage knowledge: On irrigation is also practised in the remote cold desert of Spiti.

- The **Khuls (channels)** are designed to carry long distances the water from glaciers to villages. On reaching a village the water falls in a central tank and the use is regulated by the community.

Traditional water knowledge

- **Rain water harvesting** such as building tanks.
- **Rejwani** system where water percolates through sand, settles on the gypsum layer, and is brought for use by a complex capillary system called **Beri**.
- **Patali pani** which are the deep aquifers that is determined by geological formation.

Community ownership: Traditionally, the water management was a community responsibility.

- **Neeruganti in Karnataka** was a person who controlled and managed distribution of water.
- System of water ownership is still prevalent in **Spiti and Arunachal** and few desert areas.

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