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WELLS AND STEPWELLS (WATER RESERVOIRS) CONSTRUCTED DURING THE (PALEGARS) CHIEFTAINS OF TUMAKURU DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT:

The economic system in the Middle Ages was mainly depended on the agriculture. Therefore, sovereign kings, feudatory chiefs, chieftains and bureaucrats had made efforts to provide irrigation facilities. Construction of water reservoirs is one of the great endeavors, and the medieval people felt that it was a righteous deed. While the local administration considered the construction of these water resources as part of public service, the various classes of the society constructed them for uplifting their societal positions. The water resources built by such people were: tanks, ponds, lakes, wells, step wells, etc.



KEYWORDS: Middle Ages, sovereign kings, feudatory chiefs, chieftains, bureaucrats, irrigation, facilities, great endeavors, medieval people, righteous deed, water resources, public service, societal positions, tanks, ponds, lakes, wells, step wells, etc.

INTRODUCTION :

All archaeological habitats of the world are available on river plains. Information came upon in the archaeological excavation is very thrilling. In the countries like India which have ancient civilizations, we can find many signs of agricultural life. We can get the details of the irrigation system from the inventions which are being done till date in the regions of the Sindhu Culture (Indus Valley Civilization).

Many literary works of India such as, *Vedas*, *Arthashaasthra*, *Amarakosha*, *Shukraneethi*, *Gaatha Saphthashathi*, etc. give information regarding the Indian agriculture and irrigation. According to them, construction of wells and stepwells was the ethical responsibility of every king who was ruling in the ancient India. The wells and Stepwells which were once an indivisible part of the community life are now being destroyed due to the selfishness of today's humans. Resources collecting water were becoming empty. Underground water is

going deeper and deeper. Many water reservoirs are being dried. Therefore, the present article explains about the wells and stepwells constructed in the Tumakuru district during the time of chieftains.

OBJECTIVES:

➤ Wells, and step-wells of Tumakuru are now in adversity and being victimized to the interests of the changed socio-economic systems. Therefore, a serious effort should be made for their protection.

- The level of underground water is decreasing day-by-day due to scarcity of rains, draught and increased number of tube-wells. Therefore, we have an urgent need to enlighten the people regarding the significance of water resources.
- The wells and step-wells have a religious base. So, there is a need of creating awareness in people regarding the importance of religious activities in the community life.

METHODS:

With reference to the present topic, primary and secondary data have been collected and studies analytically. For collecting further information related to the topic, field visits have been made and explanations were obtained from the native people. A description was made on the basis of these studies.

RESULT:

- It is our essential responsibility to understand the significance of wells and step-wells and to protect them.
- Many blighted resources of water have been cleansed and are being reused.
- Compounds have been constructed around certain wells and step-wells.

DISCUSSION:

Water is the most essential thing in the lives of all creatures. Evolution and development of human beings has a long history. From the beginning, man has been facing many difficulties during the stages of his physical as well as psychological development. His stagnant civilized habitat which was shifted from the uncivilized was established on river plains. This immobile dwelling was started in his life through cultivation. Agriculture impacted his systematic life.

When man started cultivation, he was completely depended upon the rains and sources where water was available. When he experienced the scarcity of water due to lack of rain, he thought of storing rain water and made efforts to collect water. As a result, many water reservoirs like wells, tanks, ponds, etc. were constructed.

As civilization developed, and as he started believing the existence of God, man started treating water as a Divine gift of god. His systematic community life created a religious faith in humans which made him worship water as a goddess. (Especially in India, water is considered as the Goddess Ganga. In Vedas, a shloka has a reference of major rivers which are being worshipped till date.) This religious faith caused for the construction of wells and step-wells especially near temples and religious centers.

Tumakuru district does not have any seas, oceans or large dams. No rivers do flow continuously the whole year. But, small streams or tributaries which roll down from certain hills, and which are filled with water during the rainy season, fill many ponds and tanks of the district.

Another distinctive fact of the region is springs (fountains) or flowing wells. They are in more numbers in the Taluks of Madhugiri, Koratagere and Pavagada. They can be seen in beside the canals of the large tanks of Bijjavara, Siddupura, Midigeshi, etc. of this region. Water available in these flowing wells is being used for agriculture. These water resources are alive only in the rainy season and are dried in the summer.

Water reservoirs of Tumakuru region were constructed during the ancient times. As time changed, chieftains who ruled the regions of the district built many wells and step-wells. The present article has made an effort to explain the geographical features and historical time related to these water resources. It is found that most of the wells and step-wells of the district were constructed with the purpose of using water for religious practices. Therefore, they were constructed in the premises of temples, mutts, and other religious centers. Also, these water sources are meeting the purposes of holy bath of the idols of Gods and Goddesses; drinking and bathing by the devotees, animals and birds; cleansing the temples, etc. They are also being used for agricultural lands of temples and mutts. Construction of these water sources was considered as a virtuous endeavor. Thus water hoarders

constructed for religious purposes are symbols of devotion, loyalty, as well as of caution for difficulties in future.

Our ancestors thought that the construction of temples was as good deed as donating food and clothes, and it would give many merits to the contributors' families. Similarly, they thought of constricting water collectors near temples. Thus, these water sources became a part of human life.

Like wells, step-wells too are part of religious practices. Many kings, chieftains, bureaucrats and rich people donated land and money for the construction, maintenance and renovation of wells, step-wells, ponds and tanks, and there by contributed a lot.

The level of underground water and water collectors have been decreasing in the district. Therefore, there is an urgent need of doing something for their protection. This article tries to shed a light on such wells and step-wells constructed during the reign of chieftains. They are:

EERANNANA BAAVI AND SEEGE BAAVI (BAAVI = WELL)

Two wells named Eearannana Baavi and Seege Baavi are located in front of the Parshwanatha Jain Temple at Nidugallu Durga. On the third story of Nidugallu Durga Veerabhadra temple, Aadi Narayana temple, a Jain temple and Durga temple are located on one side, and on the other side, Ugra Narasimha temple, Someshwara temple and Nagareshwara temple are located. A large field is there in between the two premises. There we can find these two wells. Both were very deep and constructed one beside the other. It is said that they were the major sources of water for people and temples during the chieftains' times. Now people are using their water for agriculture by lifting it with the help of motor pumps.

SEDU BAAVI

A circle-shaped well named Sedu Baavi is located at the foot of Nidugallu Durga. It is always filled with water. A compound-like building has been constructed around the well. Two pillars have been set up on both the sides of the well. Each pillar has been stood in its opposite direction. A beam has been placed on the pillars. In the mid of the beam, an iron wheel has been fixed through which water can be lifted up using a rope fixed to the wheel. On the top of each pillar, statues of Nandi (mythological name of bull, the vehicle of the Lord Shiva) have been carved attractively.

SUBBARAYANA BAAVI

Another very large and deep well named Subbarayana Baavi is located on the left side of the main road towards the entrance of Nidugallu Durga village. The native people believe that this well would be built during the reign of a chieftain. But, there are no authentic information regarding its construction or about the person who constructed it. A compound-like wall has been built around the well using bricks and mortar. Water of this well too is being used for agriculture.

KONERI BAAVI – GUNDAALAMMANA BAAVI

Koneri Baavi or Gundaalammana Baavi is located in front of the S.S.K. Samudaya Bhavan at Pavagada. It has been named after a brave warrior of Pavagada and his wife who fought courageously in a battle. The native people remember that a religious ceremony worshipping the warrior had been in practice for many years.

This step-well is very large in size with the dimension of 125 feet × 100 feet. From the four directions it has steps to get down. If it is filled up to the brim, the facility of sluice in the direction towards the East has been made to make extra water flow out of the well. Another small well has been constructed beside this well towards the East, and the water flows out of the Koneri well reaches that small well.

DALAVAYI BAAVI

Dalavayi Baavi is located behind the Kashi Vishwanatha Temple at the foot of Pavagada Hill. This is also a large well in size with the dimension of 40 feet × 40 feet. It has been well constructed

using huge stones. The entrance to get down into the well is in Southwest direction. An arch-type construction was made the mid of the entrance.

The well has a unique feature in architecture, that is, a drawing well has been built inside this step-well. A stone compound has been built around this drawing well. Here also, four pillars have been set up on both the sides of the well. Each pillar has been stood in its opposite direction. Two beams have been placed parallel on four pillars. In the mid of each beam, an iron wheel has been fixed through which water can be lifted up using a rope fixed to the wheel. The reason for constructing a well within a well would be to draw water from the inside well when the water level of the outside well goes down during the summer. Many weeds, thorn plants and bushes have been grown up inside the well due to improper maintenance.

Along with these, many wells named Shaakhaayi Baavi, Killedaar Baavi, Jangamayyana Baavi have been almost in destroyed condition. We can also see several such wells constructed in the times of chieftains at Hagalavadi, Sira and Koratagere.

RAMA THEERTHA AND LAKSHMANA THEERTHA

After crossing the entrance of the Pavagada fort at Nidugallu towards the village Belli Battalu, we can see two step-wells named Rama Theertha and Lakshmana Theertha. According to a myth, Rama and Lakshmana, the Princes of Ayodhya who came in search of Sita, the wife of Rama, took bath in these wells. Therefore, they are named after Rama and Lakshmana. So, people treat the water of these wells as sacred.

Both the wells are very large and deep. We can see hundreds of statues of Nagadevathe (Goddess of snakes) on the top steps. Devotees worship the Goddess Nagadevathe here to fulfill their desires. It is also believed that if any childless people whorship the Goddess Ganaga in these wells, they will surely get children. The fair celebrated during the Shraavana (the 5th month of the Hindu Calender) is very popular. A temple for the God Ramalingeshwara has been built beside the well. Because of no protection, the temple has been in the condition of destruction. But, the government has recently renovated the wells.

Another large step-well can be seen in the left outer part of the Pavagada fort. It is always filled with water throughout the year. The well has been surrounded by many hectares of agricultural land. Still today farmers are using the water of this well for agriculture.

GANGADHARESHWARA PUSHKARANI (PUSHKARANI = STEP-WELL)

This step-well is located at the left side of Gavi Gangadhareshwara temple on the Koratagere hill. This large step-well has been constructed on a natural rock using bricks and mortar. Water stores more during the rainy season but never dries in the summer. This square-shaped well has twenty stone steps. While getting down, its diameter becomes small. The well is 30 meters deep × 28 meters width. On the left side rock, a statue of Nandi with the dimension of 35 centimeters width × 15 centimeters length has been carved. The statue is well-known for its intricate carving. The well is providing water for the worship of Gangadhareshwara and the devotees.

KOTE VENKATARAMANA DEVALAYA PUSHKARANI

Kote Venkataramana Devalaya Pushkarani is located in front of Kote Venkataramana temple. With the dimention of 12 feet width × 12 feet length, the well becomes small when getting down inside. This well too is providing water for the religious practices of the temple as well as the devotees. A *Deepa Sthabha* (a pillar on which a lamp is lit) of 9 feet height has been stood in front of the step-well.

DODDA KAYAPPA DEVALAYA PUSHKARANI, KURANKOTE.

A 6 feet width × 6 feet length × 8 feet dimensioned step-well named Dodda Kayappa temple's step-well is located behind Dodda Kayappa temple at Kurankote. Water of this step-well is being used for cleaning the idols and temple. It is believed that this water has a medicinal quality of curing skin-diseases. It would be true as water of this well flows down from the hill with substances of many herbs.

WELLS IN THE REGION OF MADUGIRI

We can see many wells and step-wells near temples of the Madhugiri region. A few important of them are: Devaraya Samudra, Aidu Kannina Baavi (five-eyed step-well), Pradhaanara Baavi, Tengina Marada Baavi, Jirale Mallamma Majjanada Baavi, etc.

DEVARAYA SAMUDRA

According to the inscription available in the well, this step-well was built in 1699 as ordered by Chikkadevaraja Wodeyar of Mysuru. Therefore, this well has been named after the wodeyar. It is located in front of the Mdhugiri KEB Office towards the North on the way to Sira. It has been built at eight stages. Entrance is in the West direction. On the wall near the entrance, a sculpture of a dancer wearing a *Kulavi* (a cap specifically designed for children) has been carved. On its East and West directions, pavilion-like (*Mantapa* in Kannada) structures have been built. The statue of the Lord Bhyrava with four hands has been placed inside the East *Mantapa*, and the statue of the Lord Ganesha has been placed inside the West *Mantapa*. The Bhyrava statue has a garland of skulls surrounding its neck, a sword in one hand, blooded heads in the other, a trident (*Thrishoola* in Kannada) in another, and a *Damaru* (a kind of small drum shaped like an hour-glass) in another one hand. On its left side, an image of a dog licking the blood dropping from the heads was carved.

Another pavilion having the statue of the Lord Anjaneya has been built in the North. The statue has a flower in its left hand. The door frame is carved with the images of creepers, peacock, goats, women, etc. on the mid of the top frame, the image of the Goddess Gajalakshmi has been carved. On the wall of the South direction, carvings of a monkey and creepers have been made.

Towards the Northwest direction, another square-shaped step-well has been built. Towards its West, an 'L-shaped' entrance has been designed to get down. This step-well also has eight stages. Both pillars of the entrance have the carvings of Jaya and Vijaya (the two angels cursed by the Lord Vishnu to do the duty of security at the entrance of Vaikunta, the dwelling of Vishnu). Door frame of the entrance has the carving of a festoon. The East wall has the carvings of the Lords Ganesha, Nagadevathe, Bhyrava and a couple, and the West wall has the carvings of the Lords Rama, Lakshmana and Sita. The North wall has a carving of the Lord Anjaneya killing a monster holding a sword and a shield in his hands.

AIDU KANNINA BAAVI (FIVE-EYED STEP-WELL)

Aidu Kannina Baavi is located inside the fort and is still being used. It has entrances from five directions and so that it is called five-eyed step-well. Beams have been placed across the well to lift water.

JIRALE MALLAMMANA PUSHKARANI

This step-well was built by a *Shiva Sharane* (devotee of the lord Shiva) of the 16th century named Jirale Mallamma at Gundlahalli. Her statue has been carved on a step towards the East.

The chieftains of the Hagalavadi Dynasty also built many wells and step-wells during the time of constructing temples. A few of them are explained below:

WELL IN FRONT OF GURUPADA SWAMI TEMPLE

This well is located in front of Gurupada Swami temple beside the way to Kurehalli from Hagalavadi tank. It was built using stones only. It is a large step-well having entrances from all the four directions. Water of this well was being used to clean Shivalinga (form of Lord Shiva). But water can be seen in the well only when the tank is filled with water.

A small step-well is located in front of a mutt beside Gurupada Swami temple. Along with these, there are three step-wells in the middle of the village. Another step-well is near the place where the chieftains were living. Once upon a time, all these wells provide feed people, animals and birds. But, they are now polluted completely.

SOMANAKATTE KALYANI

A step-well named Somanakette Kalyani is located towards the mid of the southward fort of Hagalavadi. To protect from the land-sliding, a stone compound has been built around the well.

If we observe all the above said wells and step-wells, we come to know that people have been maintaining an indivisible relationship. Most of them have religious background; some have historical; some have real-life bases; and some have mythological. The wells and step-well found inside the forts too have a cultural background. On the basis of their shape, size and specialty, they are named as Hanumana done, Chndra done, Emme done, Jaldhi done, etc.

On the whole, the wells and step-wells constructed as part of community life and religious practices are being destroyed. We are in urgent need of taking up the responsibility to protest them.

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