

Stepwells – A Subterranean Architecture

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Abstract

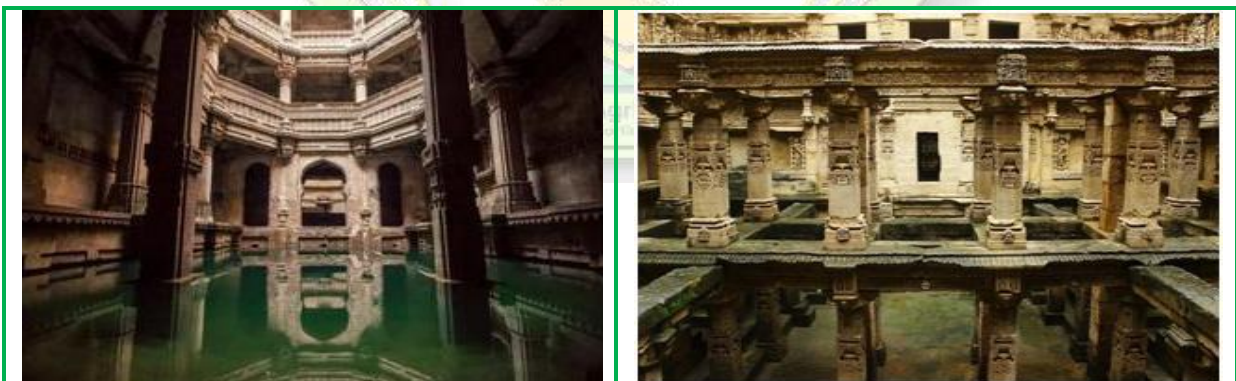
Water is the basic essential of a living being which is used for multiple purposes such as drinking, bathing, irrigating fields, and so on. There is going to be a global crisis in the future. In a diverse country like India, water scarcity is an important issue. The traditional construction of building stepwells has helped people to overcome scarcity. There are many step wells in India. "Rani-ki-vav" is a stepwell in Patan with beautiful, magnificent architecture.

Introduction

Stepwells are storage structures that are used for multiple purposes which includes irrigation as a major part. The city of Gujarat is a place where rainfall is scanty. So, people living there started to build these storage structures to store water. The architectural site named "Rani-ki-vav" is a famous place in Gujarat. It is situated on the banks of the Saraswati River in the city of Patan (the former capital of Gujarat). It is at a distance of 110 km from Ahmedabad.

Construction Details

It was built by Queen Udayamati, the wife of King Bhima I of the Solanki dynasty during the 11th century. Their son Karna Dev I completed the structure. The well is 64 m long, 20m wide and 27m deep with 7 storeys. It is said that the well had an underground passage below the last step which was used by the king's family to escape during war. Over time, the passage was blocked due to the sliding action of stones and sand.



Excavation and Sculptures

The archaeological department excavated this site in the year 1960 which then came into people's vision. Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesha, Kubera, Lakulisha, Bhairava, Surya, Indra and Hayagriva, and goddesses like Lakshmi, Parvati, Saraswati, Chamunda, Kshemankari,

Suryani, the Saptamatrikas and Durga were sculpted in the walls of the well. The pillars too had a lot of artistic features.



Recognition

This magnificent site was featured on the new hundred rupees note by RBI (Reserve Bank of India) in July 2018. It was also included in the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Site on 28 June 2014.

Conclusion

This stunning structure shows the technology of utilizing and storing groundwater resources. This water management system is very useful and thus helps during water scarcity. It shows the wisdom and architectural excellence of our ancestors in an age without technology.

References

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