

Women and Water in Indian Culture: Nurturers, Connectors, and Custodians.

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- Geographical Scope
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- Conclusion

Introduction

1. Adopting a **feminine lens** in water philosophy deepens our understanding.
2. It encourages a **holistic perspective** that reflects nurturing and interconnected qualities.
3. Water holds central importance in **Indian culture**, symbolizing **life, purity, and renewal**.
4. Goddesses like Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati embody the divine feminine.
5. **Indian philosophy emphasizes interconnectedness and the cyclical nature of existence.**

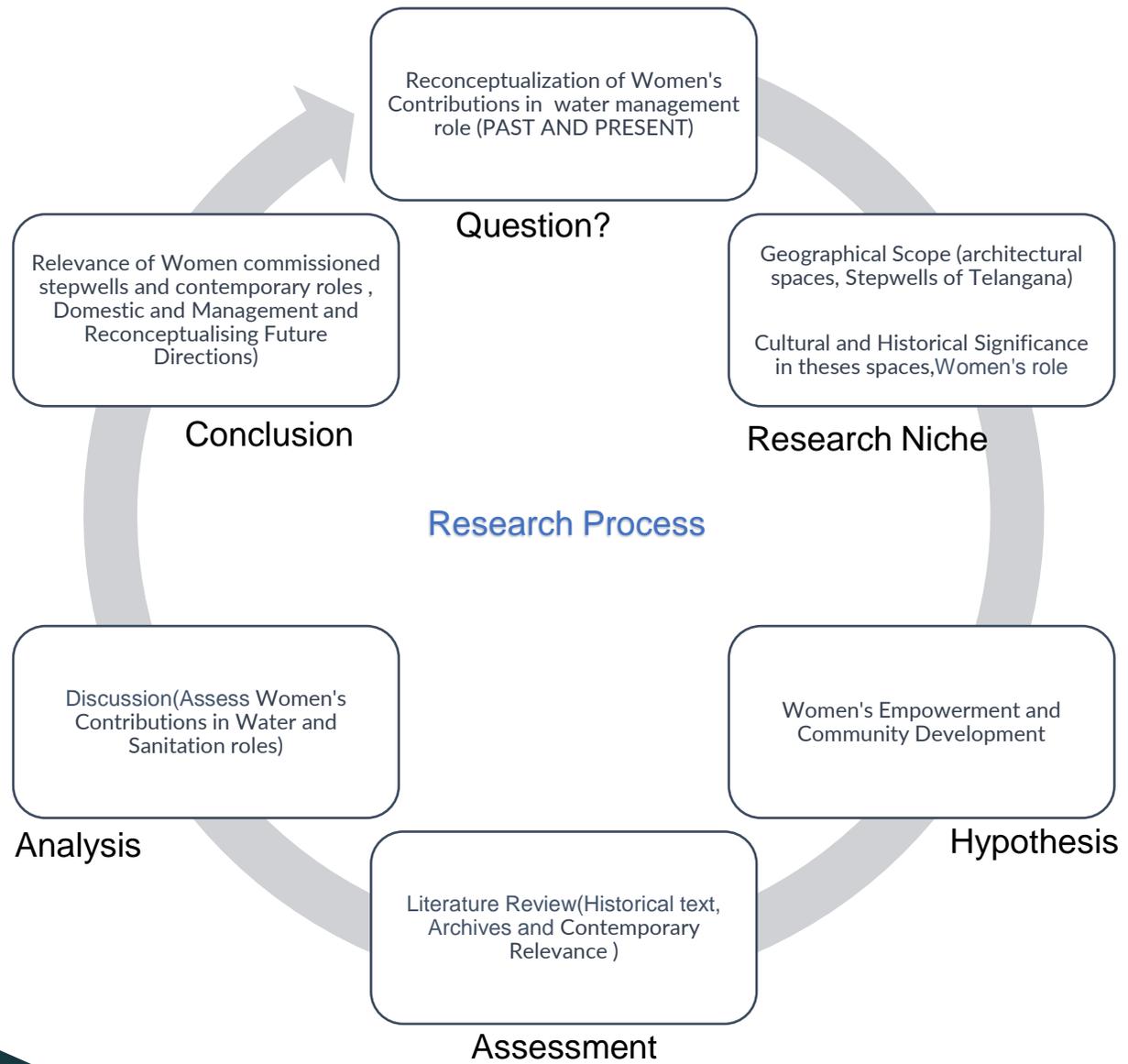


Methodology

1. **Analysis** is based on cultural narratives, historical texts, and contemporary insights.
2. **Perspectives** from Indian philosophy, religious beliefs, and societal norms are incorporated.
3. **Case studies and examples** are utilized to illustrate key points.
4. The intersection of **gender, culture, and water management** is examined.
5. Insights are drawn from **interdisciplinary** research and community perspectives.

Approach





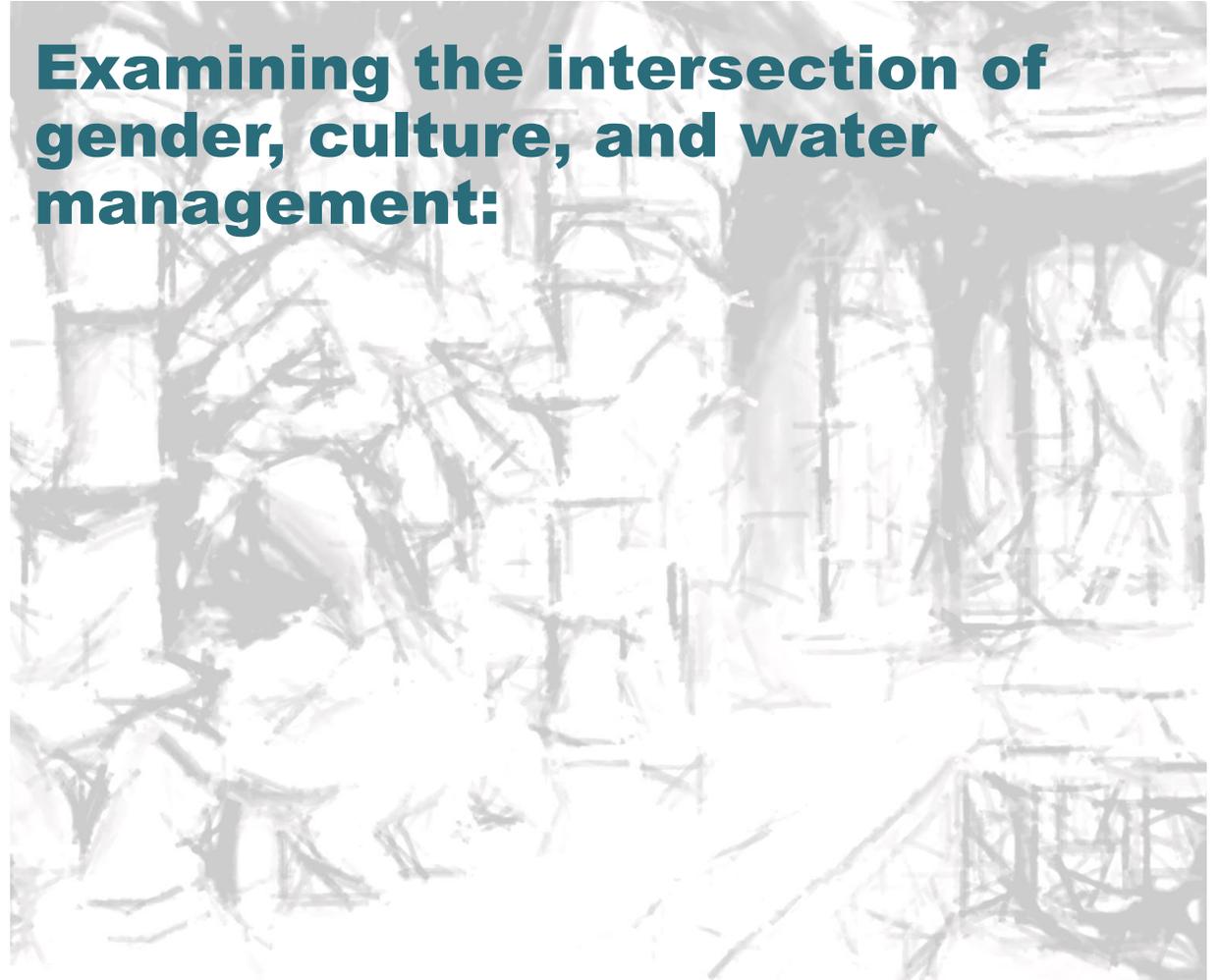
Cultural narratives, historical texts, and contemporary insights:

1. Exploring ancient texts like the Vedas and Upanishads for insights into water's cultural significance.
2. Examining myths and religious narratives about water, such as the reverence for rivers like the Ganga in Hinduism.
3. Analysing contemporary perspectives on water management and conservation efforts, and how they relate to cultural beliefs and practices.
4. Drawing parallels between historical water management practices and modern approaches to understanding water's societal role.



Examining the intersection of gender, culture, and water management:

1. Investigating how Indian philosophical traditions view water as a symbol of interconnectedness and life.
2. Considering societal norms that influence perceptions and behaviours related to water, including gender roles and caste dynamics.(ancient and contemporary occurrences)
3. Understanding how these perspectives shape water management practices and policies in India..



Interdisciplinary research and community perspectives:

1. Synthesizing findings from disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, environmental studies, and gender studies to deepen our understanding of water philosophy.
2. Incorporating perspectives from diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, scholars, activists, and community members, to capture the complexity of water issues.
3. Emphasizing the value of community engagement and participatory research methods in addressing local water challenges.



In a traditional Indian marriage where a young girl is dramatically uprooted from her childhood home and the protection of her parents and friends, the stepwell could be seen as a place for her to forge new friendships.

The few minutes or hours of leisure at the stepwell offered her the opportunity to express her fantasies, to imagine the unimaginable, and to momentarily enjoy the freedom of her childhood.

She could escape her confining environment and the restrictions placed on her movements and enjoy a few hours with other women.

The stepwell served as a substitute for her childhood.



1. Bhatt, P. M. (2014, December 16). Her Space, Her Story. Zubaan.

WOMEN AND SPACE

From the very earliest of times, in virtually all societies, women have been relegated and confined to the 'domestic sphere' while **men's** activities link them to the **public' realm**.

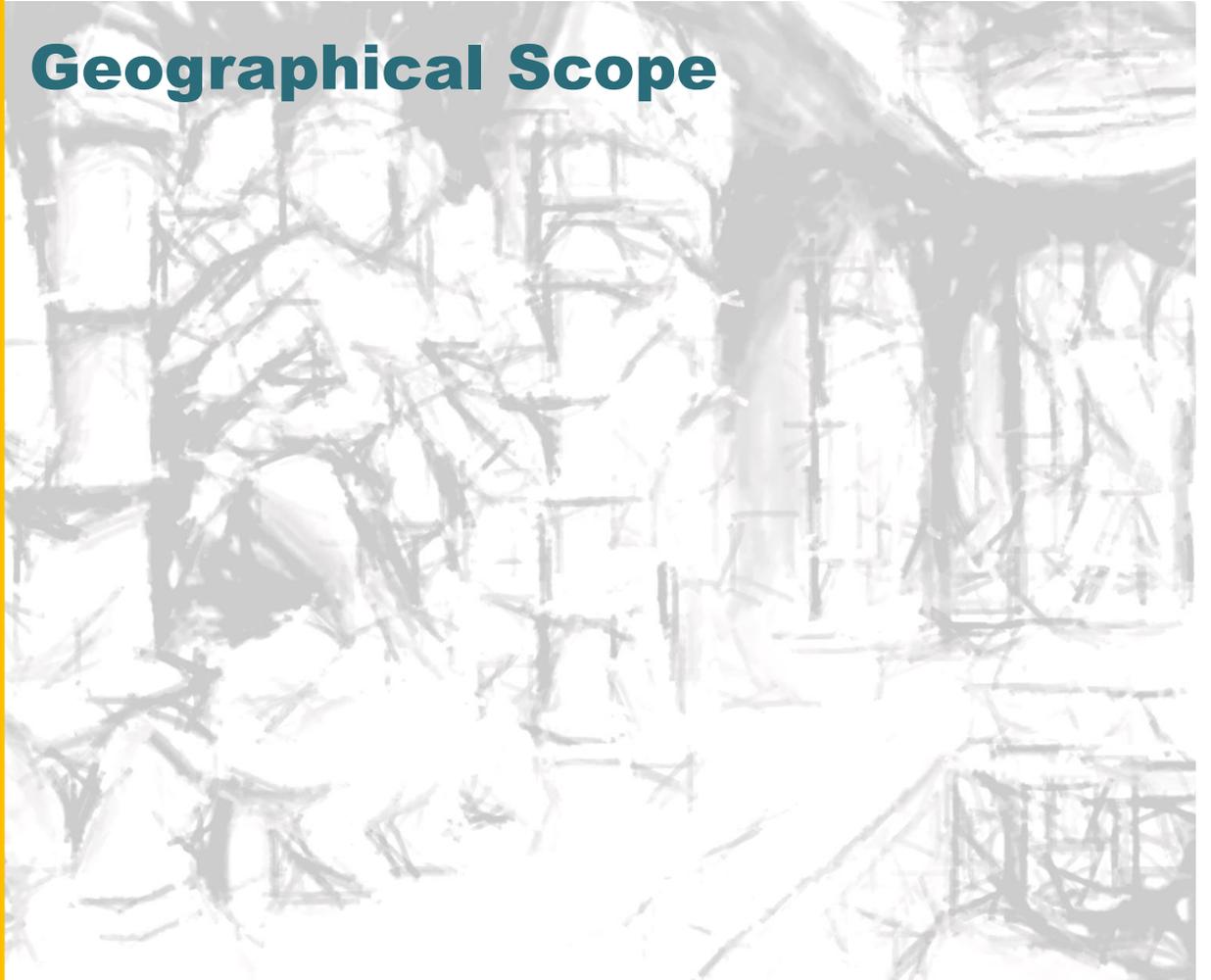
The underlying assumption here is that it is their biological role, the fact that **women** give birth to children, which would explain their being identified with the **private realm**.



1. Bhatt, P. M. (2014, December 16). Her Space, Her Story. Zubaan.

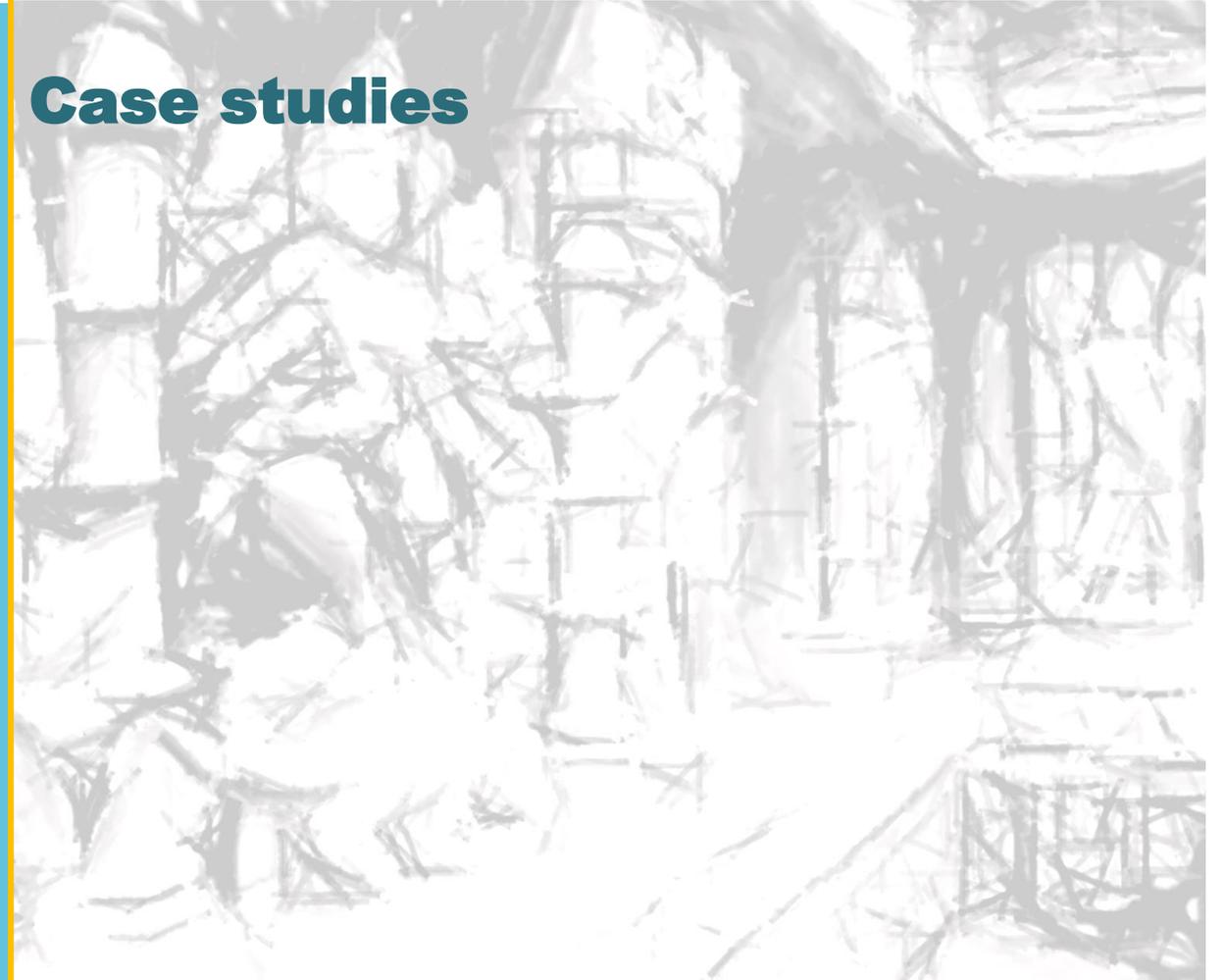
Geographical Scope

- 1.Exploration of specific region Telangana, know
- 2.Consideration of global perspectives to enrich understanding.
- 3.Emphasis on local contexts and community engagement in water conservation efforts.



Case studies

1. Cultural practices include the construction of stepwells by women like Mah Laqa Bai Stepwell.
2. Case studies of successful community-led water management, Bansilalpet stepwell an initiatives highlight the importance of local knowledge and participation.



2 CASE STUDY: TELANGANA WELLS

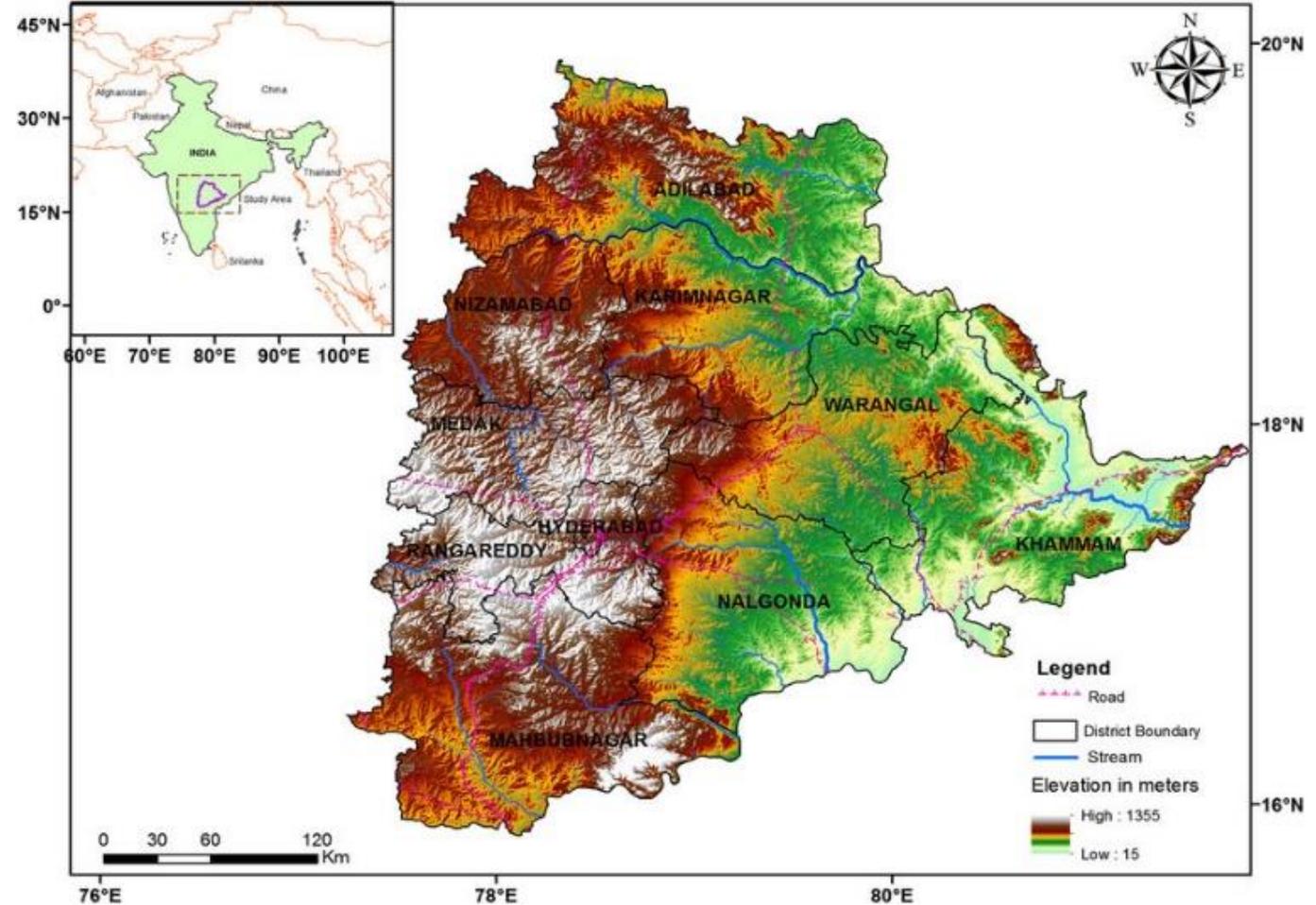
Maha Laqa Bai Stepwell

Bansilalpet Stepwell





STEPWELLS OF TELANGANA



Mah Laqa Bai Stepwell



The stepwell is a six-level structure with steps on opposite sides and a platform in the middle. It was constructed to provide drinking water during the dry season, and also served as a venue for intellectual and cultural gatherings. The stepwell existed even before the university was founded, and the land was donated by Mah Laqa Bai to the Nizam.

The Mah Laqa Bai Stepwell is a testimony to the rich legacy of Mah Laqa Bai, who was a remarkable woman of her time and a patron of arts and education. It is also a symbol of the architectural and engineering marvels of the Deccan region.

In 2023, the Telangana government and the Osmania University administration collaborated to restore the stepwell and revive its heritage value. The restoration work involved clearing the garbage, desilting, structural repair, and beautification of the stepwell.

A Brief Curated Collage Revealing Historical Reservoirs Baodies/Stepwells , Telangana



Katora House, Langar-House (Khosa, 2023)



Anand Colony Stepwell, Hayathnagar (HERITAGE - Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority, 2023)



Bansilalpet Stepwell (2022)



Stepwell at Bapughat (2022)



Bhagwandas Bagh Stepwell, Gudimalkapur, Mehdipatnam



Step well in the Qutb Shahi Tomb complex (Today, 2022)



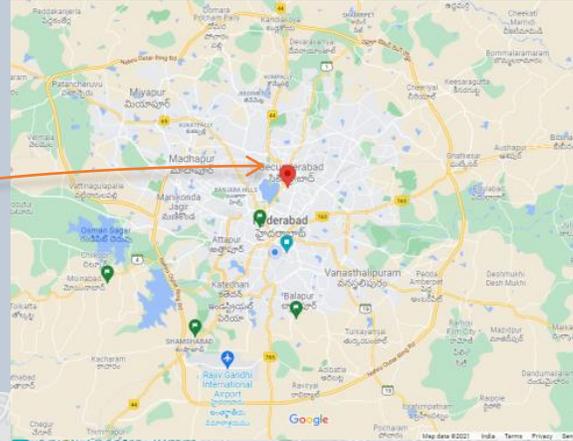
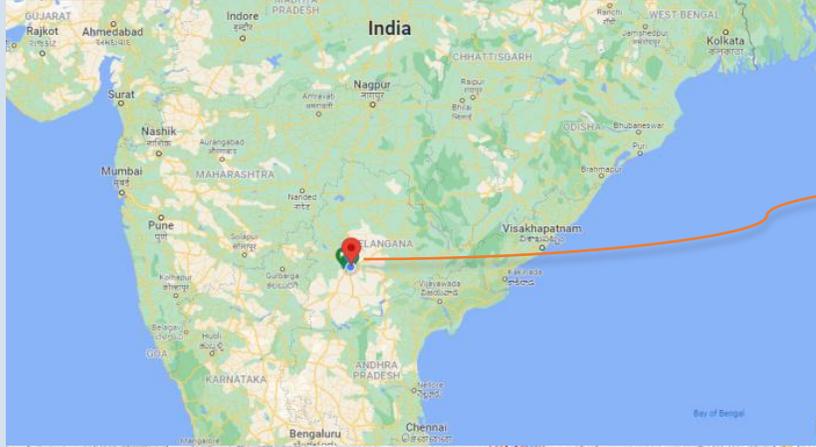
Gachibowli Step-Well (2021)



Mah Laqa Bai Step-Well at College of Education, OU Campus (Lab, 2023)

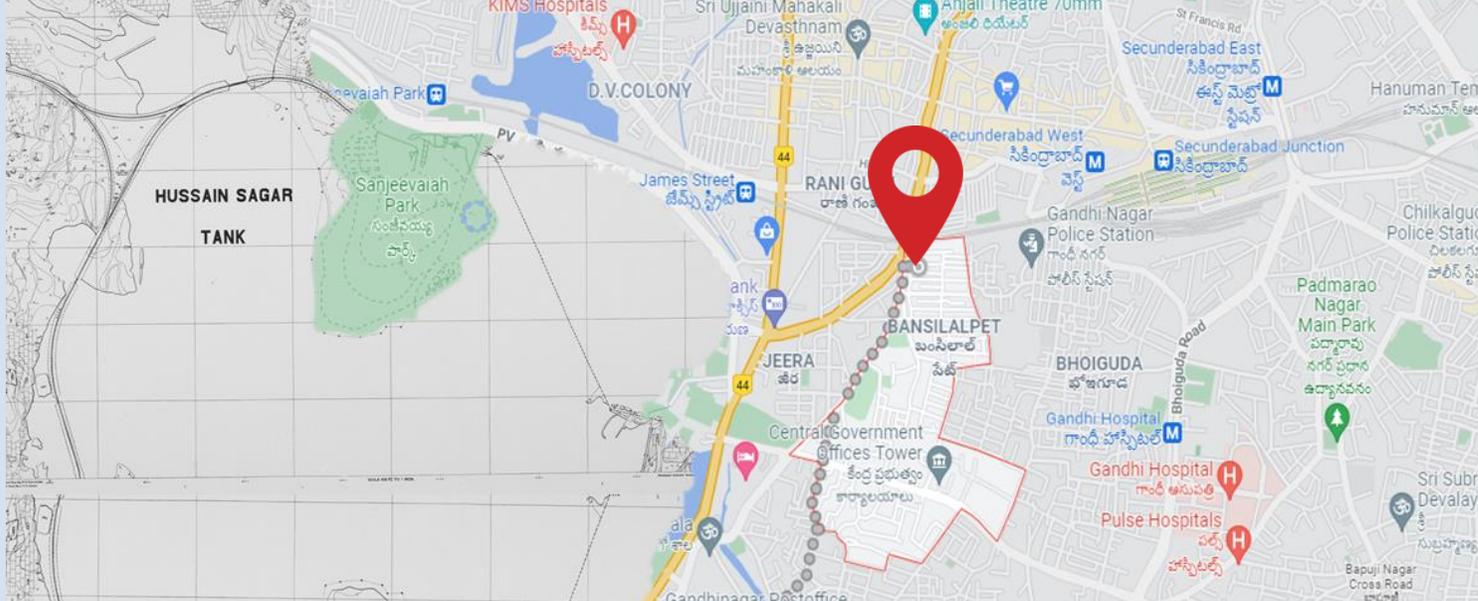
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LOCATION:

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Parsigutta, Bhoiguda,
Secunderabad, Telangana 500003



A role village for labourers created at the time of the Nizam's by Badrivishal Pittie, a socialist. Bansilalpet step-well served water needs of Gandhi Hospital and surrounding communities. Slowing this step well attracted EWS inhabitants and turned to a slum. As the economy of the community grew the lifestyle of the residents improvised and kuttcha houses turned to multi storied residences



CONSERVATION CASE STUDY APPLICATIONS:

For step wells of telangana which are being used as dumping yards Reviving forgotten ancient architectural and engineering marvels to address the greater problem of urban flooding and effective utilisation of surface storm run off.

The stepwell ensures the availability of water during periods of drought. The stepwells had social, cultural and religious significance. These stepwells were proven to be well-built sturdy structures, after withstanding earthquakes.

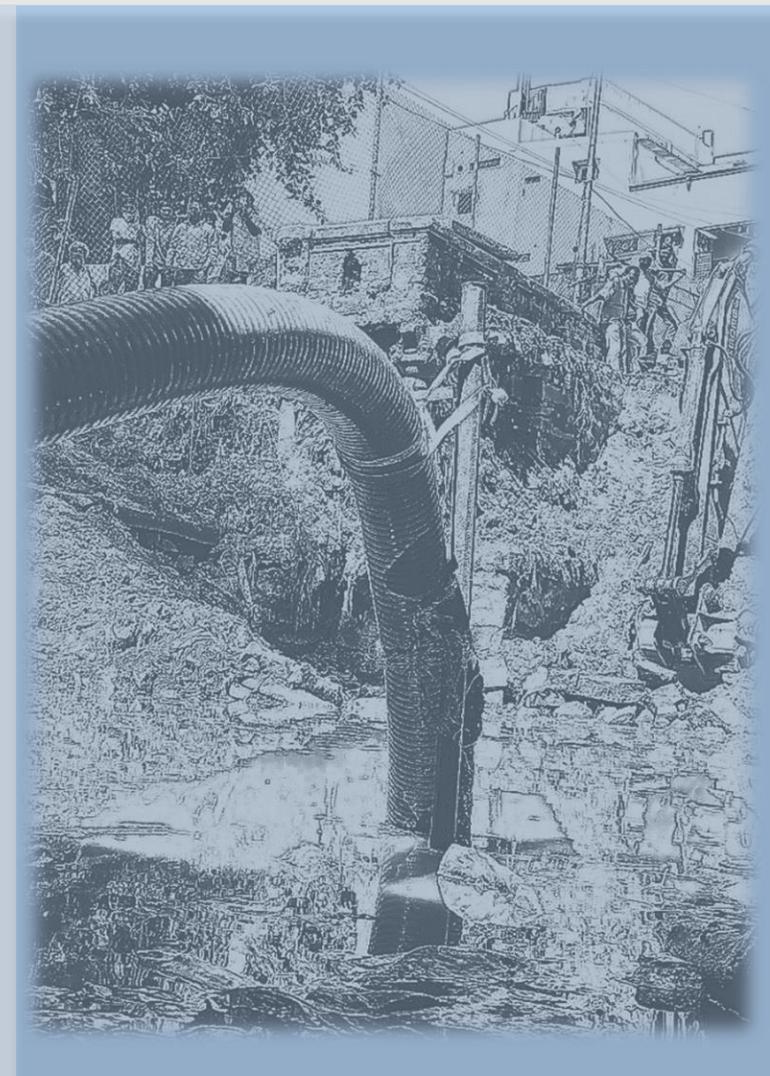


CONSERVATION CASE STUDY; HISTORICAL REVIEW:

---There are several step wells/boalies, many unprotected, within Deccan region and other places, which were constructed to supply water to the inhabitants and for agricultural purposes-Once restored, they could be integrated with the Telangana government's Mission Kakatiya programme of restoring tanks and wells in the State to see that they could store water during monsoon.

Stepwells played an important role in the development of Hyderabad during the Nizam era. They were a key source of domestic water for inhabitants of labourers who contributed to the development of Hyderabad and the Gandhi hospital which was earlier known as People's Medical College.

This 18th century Stepwell at Bansilalpet, Secunderabad (Nagannakunta) has been neglected for decades .This well represents the heritage of Telangana region in water centric development of Human settlements. This beautiful monument is in deplorable condition , dilapidated, damaged and submerged in garbage and litter





CONSERVATION CASE STUDY, DAMAGE SURVEY:

- Used as a landfill(7 years old construction debris noticed along with garbage and plastics)
- Was planned by the locals to be used as a parking area(basti encroachments were observed onto the well premises)
- Structural damage over the years of poor maintenance to built structure.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SURVEY:

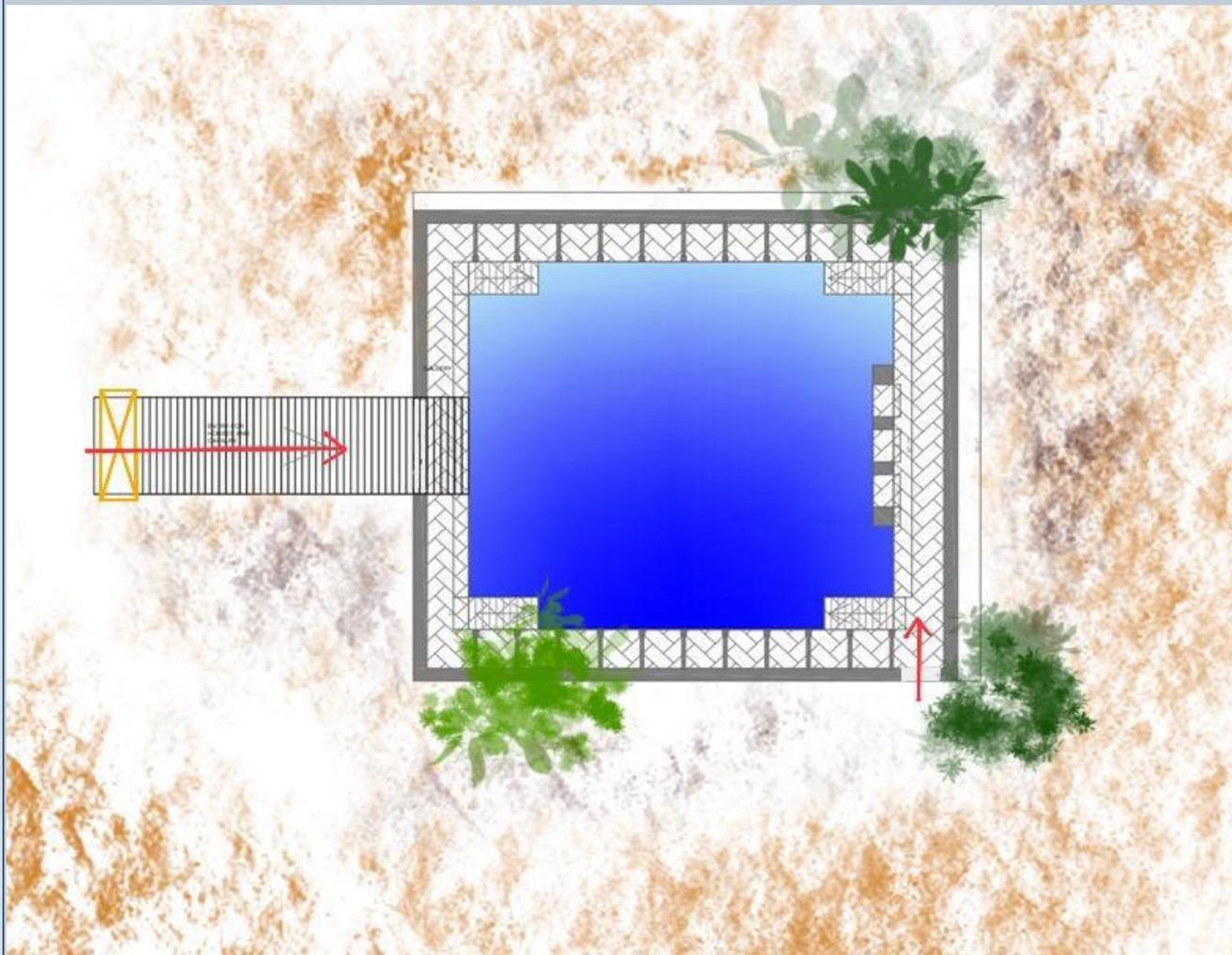
- Studied history of the well associated to secunderabad bansilalpet basti
- Its importance and connection to the ecological an social well being with religious harmony
- Creating a biological diversification in the local ecosystem.



CASE STUDY EXECUTION DETAILS:

Careful examination and study of it's current situation with respect to it's construction strategies and details of the materials and principles to bring it's charm back to life, Through collective effort THE RAIN WATER PROJECT.

The Rainwater Project, a social enterprise working towards water conservation , initiated working towards the restoration of this Well . Initial support from GHMC for clean up of the well has begun .



Access and approach

Usually, women were associated with these wells because they were responsible to get water. And majorly they used to pray and offer gifts to the goddess of the well for her blessings-the steep approach of the well through the steps was also accessible to the cavalry and cattle. This led to the building of some significant decorative (like the inverted lotus bud, horse heads, nagabanda and floral indosarcenic motifs) and architectural structures, often associated with dwellings. ensured their survival as this stepwell ensured availability of water during periods of drought for the bansilalpet basti. it had social, cultural, and religious significance with a temple in its periphery.

Building systems

It is a stepped arch design, built in the year 1888 AD. This step well is a type of storage and irrigation tank that were developed, mainly to cope with seasonal fluctuations in water availability. The galleries and chambers surrounding the well were not carved profusely but elaborate detail like horse heads-naga banda –lotus buds etc .They became cool, quiet retreats during the hot summers. The stepped well is: -57 FEET at the approach x 62 FEET LONGITUDNALLY -It is approximately about 45 to 50 feet deep.



Structure- Column, beam, etc.

Ashlars' type stone masonry in granite with lime mortar is used for the construction of this step well. Masonry is plastered with lime plaster, which bears following designs/details to enhance the elevations.

Environment and micro-climate

Stepwells were introduced by the Kakatiyas and Qutb Shahis to provide a place to rest on a sunny day. The temperature in the stepwells is up to 5°C cooler than outside-surviving stepwells originally served relaxation purpose along with providing water. This was because the base of the well provided respite from high temperature during the day, and relief was amplified if the well was covered as it also served as a place for social get-togethers and holy rituals for the Parsigutta, Bhoiguda temple .

22-05-2020

It had social, cultural, and religious significance with a temple in its periphery. Stepwell were proven to be well-built sturdy structures, after withstanding earthquakes.



Building Materials:

Walls were covered with layers of paints followed by a layer of traces of plaster, especially observed on internal walls of the step well gallery the plaster is chipped, exposing the Ashlar granite stone masonry from about more than 200 years old.





OUR EXPERIENCE:

Along with my colleagues Ar Khusboo Khanna, Ar Shahbaaz Quadri, and Ar Mohammed Muzakir, along with our students, we played a crucial part in ensuring cleanliness and forming a human chain during the restoration of Bansilalpet stepwell. As faculty members at JBR Architecture College, our involvement in this restoration project aimed at spreading the message of sustainability in the built environment, particularly focusing on water sustainability and resilience using traditional knowledge systems of stepwells within our architectural curriculum.

The restoration of Bansilalpet stepwell represents a comprehensive approach to sustainable development, involving community engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the revival of traditional knowledge systems. Our collaboration with Kalpana Ramesh Ma'am from the Rain Water Project was central to our efforts. She led the restoration project, utilizing networks and resources to gain support from local authorities and community leaders. Through active involvement of colony presidents and volunteers, including students, we aimed to instill a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for preserving and revitalizing Bansilalpet stepwell.

Despite Kalpana Ramesh Ma'am's busy schedule, we maintained communication and coordination. She provided constant updates on the event's progress and motivated us to become advocates for water conservation. Organizing the clean-up event on the 75th Independence Day involved collaboration with various stakeholders, resulting in over 75 volunteers participating actively. During the event, students and faculty members, including Ar Khusboo Khanna, Ar Shahbaaz Quadri, and Ar Mohammed Muzakir, played key roles in ensuring cleanliness and unity, with Mohammed Muzakir leading the singing of the national anthem.

Moreover, we utilized our position as faculty members to engage students in the restoration project, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge in practical scenarios and develop a deeper understanding of indigenous architectural practices. Through hands-on involvement in the clean-up drive and subsequent restoration efforts, students gained valuable experience and appreciation for sustainable development principles.

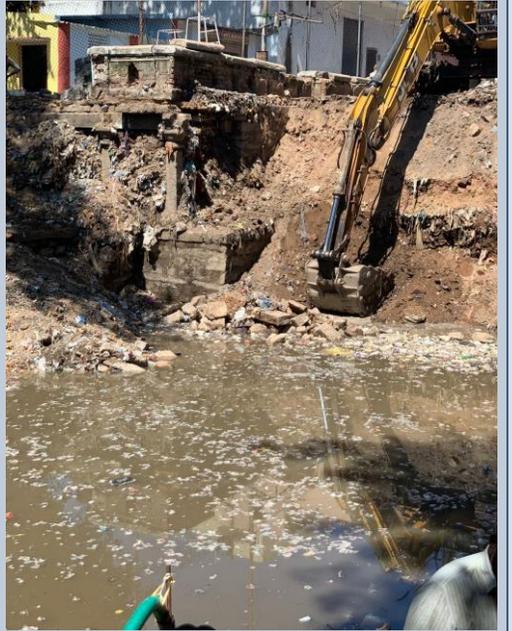


GANESHA IDOL AND DANCING HANUMA IDOL WERE EXCAVATED AT THE SECOND GALLERY LEVEL OF THE BANSILALPET WELL



Our focus during the event was on raising awareness about urban population growth, water scarcity, and the importance of preserving aquifers in urban areas. As faculty members, we facilitated discussions and educational sessions, emphasizing the historical significance of stepwells like Bansilalpet and their role in sustainable water management. We stressed the importance of integrating traditional water harvesting techniques into modern urban planning practices to our students, aiming to inspire a sense of responsibility and duty towards preserving cultural heritage and natural resources among the community.





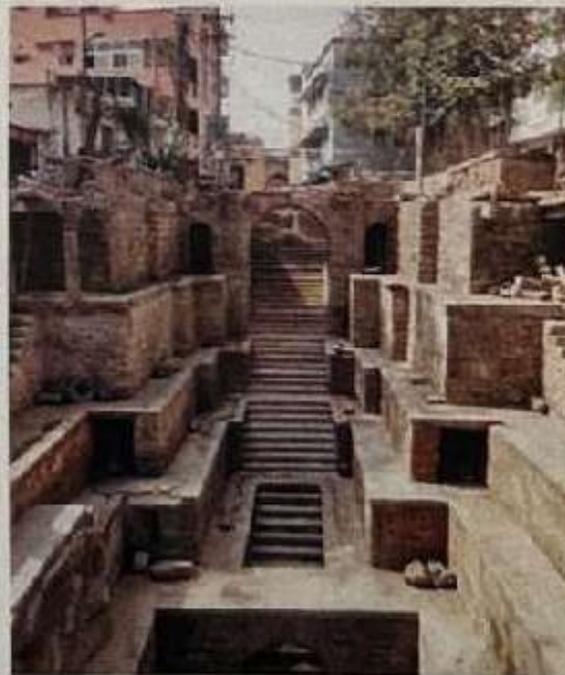
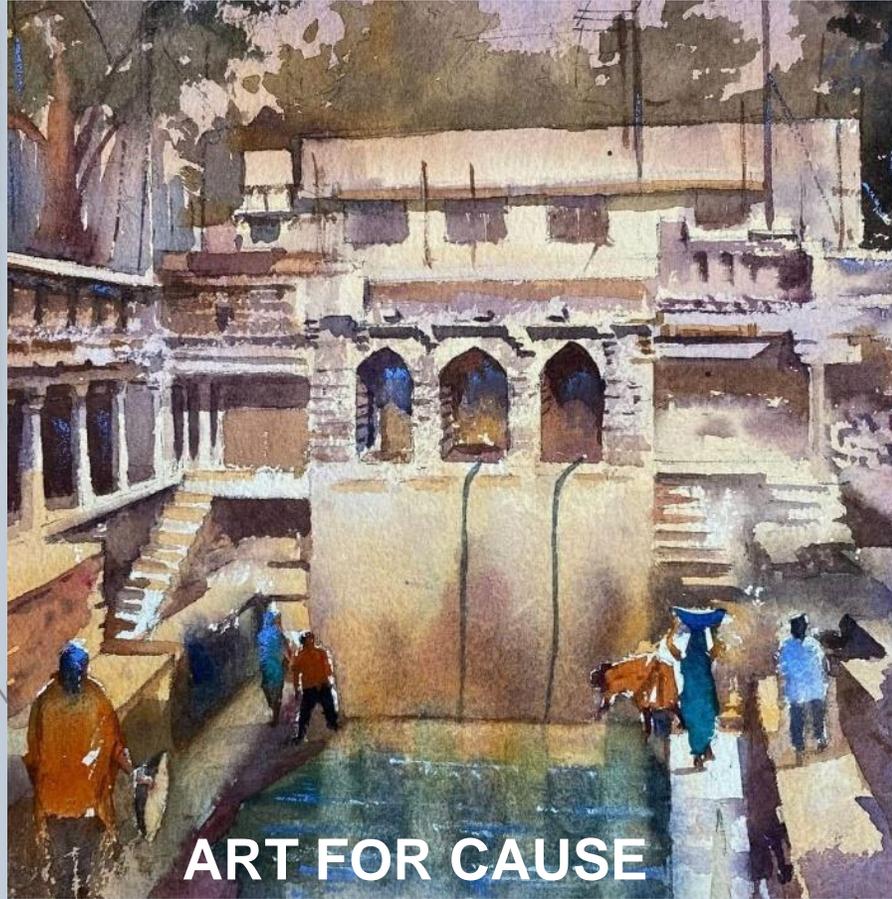


Figure Contextual Plan and History: Naganah Kunta Stepwell at the Heart of the Precinct Neighbourhood, Administered by Bansilal Motilal Charitable Trust



Emphasizing the value of community engagement and participatory research methods in addressing local water challenges, community stewardship for funds collection through NGOs



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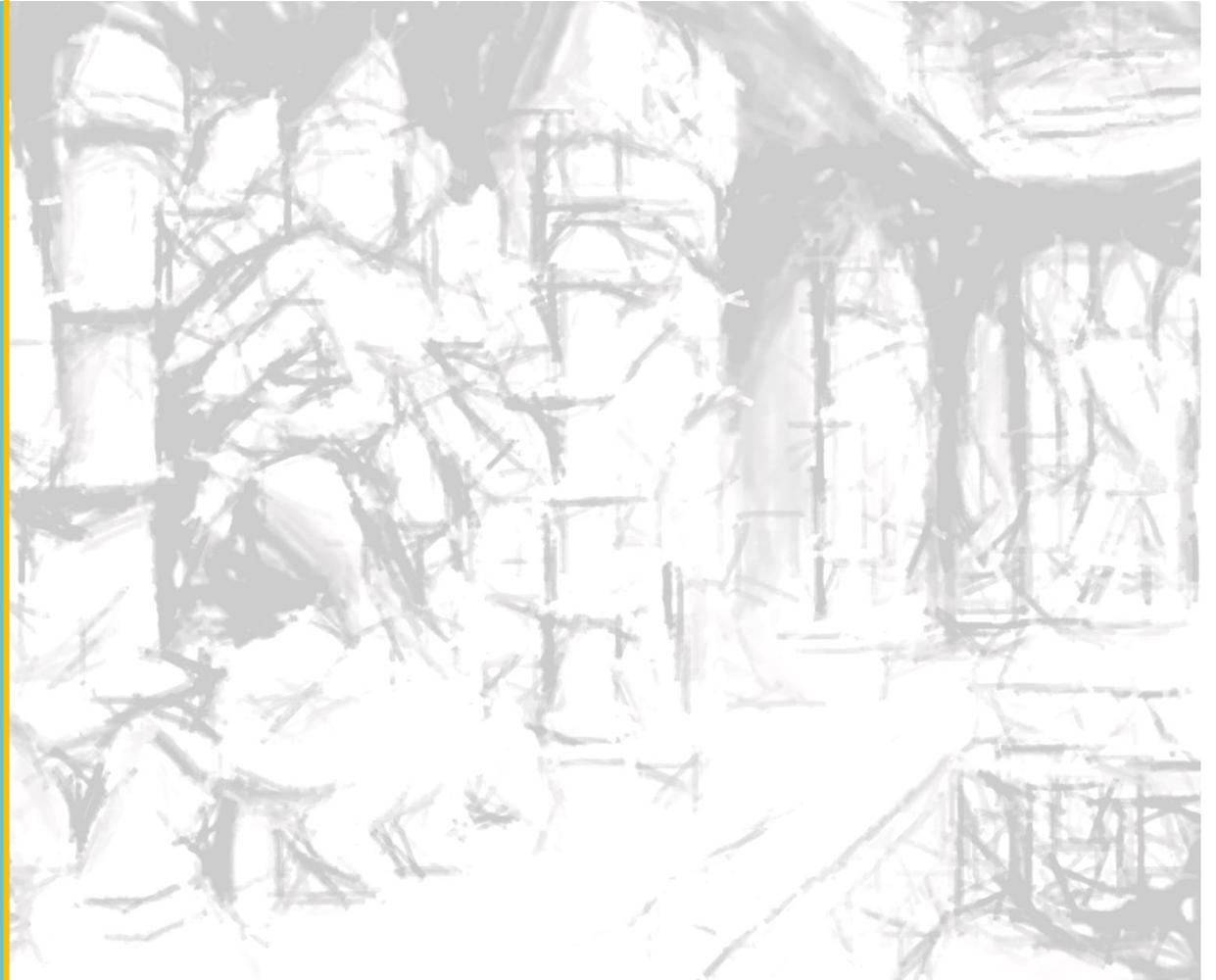
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KR Kalpana Ramesh

This fundraiser will benefit
BS Bansilalpet Stepwell Restoration
from Hyderabad, Telangana

Women as givers

1. Women's visibility in ancient Indian historiography contrasts with their invisibility in global historical writings.
2. Queens in medieval India exhibited political acumen and initiated projects for water and urban systems.



Women's Empowerment and Community Development

1. Women play crucial roles in commissioning and maintaining stepwells.
2. Stepwells have a significant impact on women's social and economic empowerment.
3. Access to water through stepwells facilitates community development.
4. Case studies showcase women's leadership in water management.
5. Stepwells provide opportunities for women's collective action and participation in decision-making.



Impact of WASH on Women

The Jal Shakti Abhiyan (Water Power Mission) was launched by the Government of India in 2019. It focuses on water conservation and rejuvenation of traditional water bodies, watershed development, and promoting water-use efficiency in agriculture, industry, and domestic sectors. 20 Jun 2023



Women collect water in nearly two-thirds of households in the developing world. In the 12 % of households where children collect water, girls are twice as likely as boys to be responsible for that task. 2.1 billion people lack safely managed drinking water. 4.5 billion lack safely managed sanitation services.



Barriers to Women's Participation in Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene

- Social norms,
 - Patriarchy, and
 - Gender stereotypes
- keep women out of decision- making roles

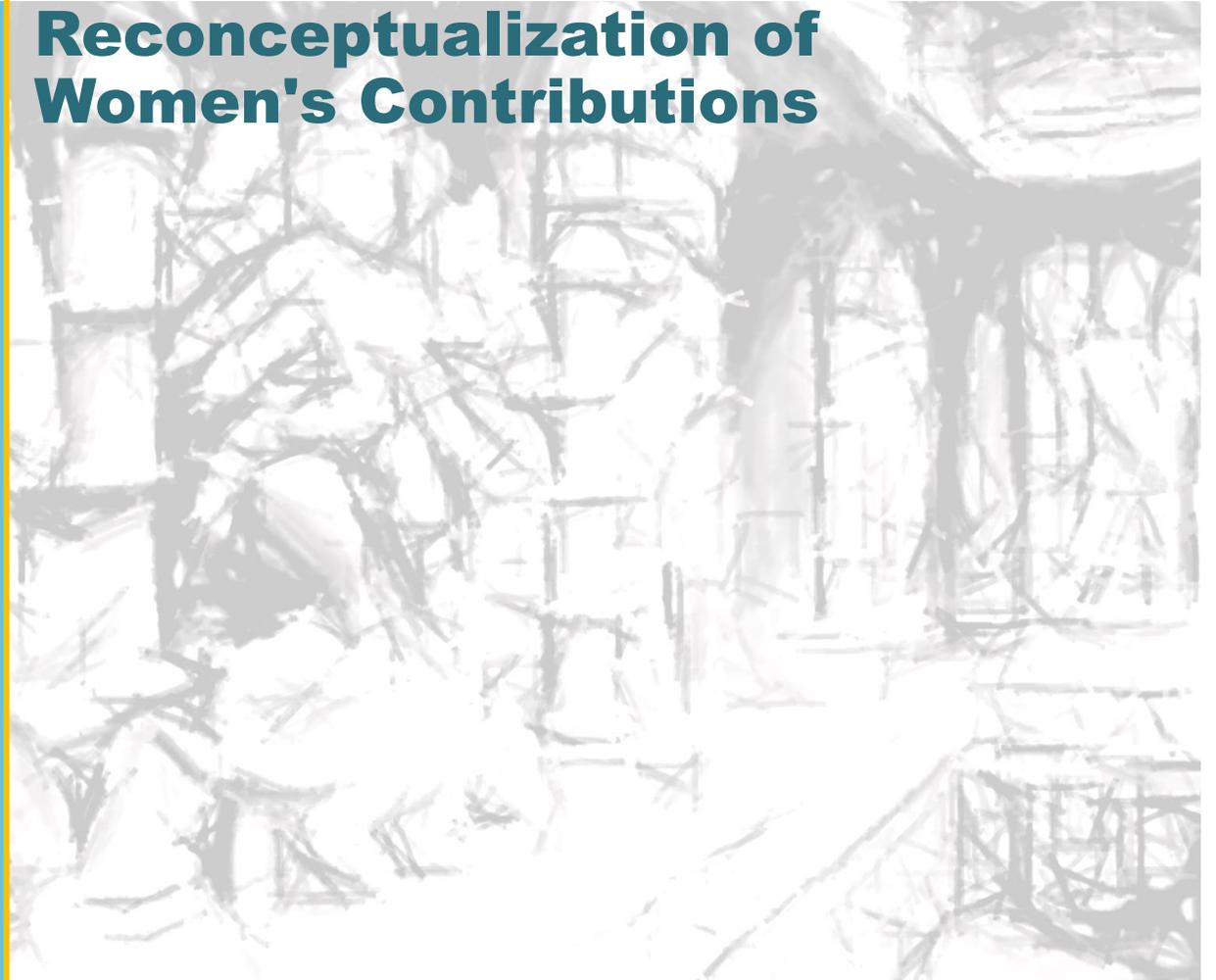
- In patrilineal societies, women *do not* own land rights and water rights, which shrinks their bargaining power in households and the community.
- The disproportionate responsibility women and girls bear as primary users, providers, & managers of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) at the household level is yet to be matched by a commensurate representation in WASH-related decision-making

Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)

- GOI restructured and subsumed the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) into the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in 2019.
- The policy aims to ensure affordable and adequate drinking water supply through Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC) to every rural household by 2024 with a service level of 55 litres per capita per day (Jal Jeevan Mission n.d.).
- The JJM guidelines (2019) recognise the challenges faced by women and girls due to the unavailability of water and notes that the **provision of tap water connections** to households **will relieve women and girls** of the struggle of walking miles to fetch water, **alleviating 'time poverty'**

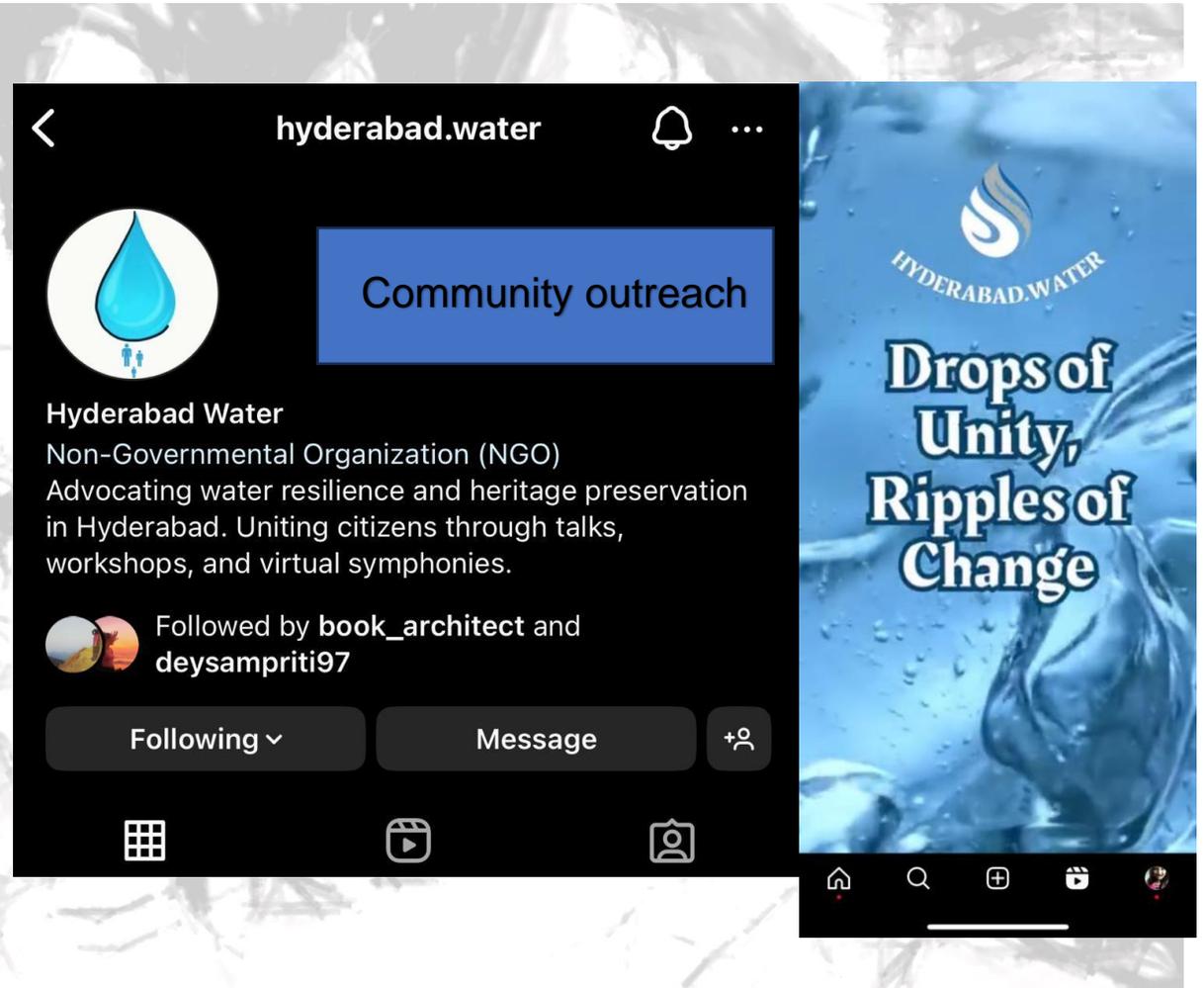
Reconceptualization of Women's Contributions

1. Women's agency in historical narratives is recognized.
2. Traditional gender roles in water management are reevaluated.
3. Diverse experiences based on social status and occupation are acknowledged.
4. Breaking down stereotypes and promoting gender equity is deemed important.
5. Women's perspectives are incorporated in shaping water policies and practices.



Conclusion

1. Embracing a feminine lens in water philosophy enriches our understanding of water as a sacred and life-affirming force.
2. Women's contributions to water management and community development are integral to India's cultural heritage.
3. Addressing gender disparities in water access and decision-making is essential for sustainable development.
4. Preserving and reviving cultural practices like stepwell construction can empower communities and promote environmental stewardship.
5. Continued research and advocacy are needed to ensure equitable and inclusive water governance for all.



Thank You

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