



Chapter 2

Forgotten history lessons, Delhi's missed date with water

India's capital is one of the oldest cities of India, indeed of the world, if you believe mythology. It began as Indraprastha probably around 5,000 BC, grew through seven other cities into New Delhi. Among the metros, Delhi is certainly the only one old enough to have a tradition of water conservation and management that developed indigenously and wasn't imposed by the British.

Delhi lies at the tail-end of the Aravali hills, where they merge with the Indo-Gangetic Plains. The Aravalis taper down from the southern to the northern end of Delhi, forming one watershed. Along the southern side, they run east-west forming another watershed. All the drains and seasonal streams flow north and east in Delhi, some making it to the river Yamuna, others terminating in depressions to form lakes and ponds. These artificial ponds helped recharge wells, that were the only source of water in the rocky Aravali region, and the baolis that also tap into groundwater flows, in the rest of the city. The rocky Aravalis were ideal for bunding and making more such depressions to store water that was used either by people or recharged the aquifers. In south Delhi and a little beyond, there are many artificial lakes and ponds created centuries ago for just this purpose. The western part of Delhi falls in the Najafgarh drain's watershed, which was originally a river that rose in the Sirmaur hills in Haryana.

The city first came up on the banks of the river Yamuna, once a holy river but now little better than a drain outside the monsoon months, that flows north-south along the city's eastern side – actually a quarter of the city is now in trans-Yamuna areas. The first city of Delhi probably existed between the ancient Aravali hills, north India's oldest range of hills, and the river, in a sort of natural trough. Later rulers shifted the scene of action south, while the Mughals and British brought it back to the river. The river flows to the east and the Aravalis formed the western and southern borders of Delhi. Things have changed since 1947 when hundreds of thousands of people, displaced from Pakistan, made Delhi their second home. The city expanded rapidly over the Aravalis to the west and in the far south.

For over two decades after Independence, the city grew at a moderate pace. There appeared to be a modicum of planning and development of infrastructure that accommodated Delhi's slowly expanding population. Water shortages had surfaced in resettlement colonies like Chittaranjan Park and its surroundings but the abundance of groundwater, at just a few feet below the surface, helped tide over summer shortages. There were no farmhouses, only farms. Mehrauli near the Qutab still had its famed mango orchards and Gurgaon was just another halt en route Jaipur. Patel Nagar and Karol Bagh defined west Delhi and most industrial activity was across the river in Ghaziabad, or in Faridabad or along Rohtak road.

Then the Asiad came in 1982. An unprecedented Rs 1,000 crore was poured into developing new parts of the city. Houses sprang up in the south, far west, north and east – in the east particularly, multi-storeyed apartments sprouted, while farmlands disappeared under the 90-odd 'vihars'.

All these areas needed water and power and the manageable shortages exacerbated. Farms became farm houses with vast lawns and swimming pools. Borewells replaced wells, and quickly



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dried them up. Green areas and water bodies were cleared for settlement in the Delhi Development (sorry, Destruction) Authority's headlong rush to create housing.

By the turn of the century, Delhiites living outside the pampered New Delhi Municipal Corporation and Cantonment areas didn't know what assured water and power supply meant. Come summer and water pumps connected directly to the mains – strictly illegal, but permitted by the Delhi Jal Board after greasing the palms of engineers – ensured a steady trickle of water to their owners; those without these devices got nothing. Soon even those with online pumps got nothing because there was no water to be had. Officially, Delhi gets 75 percent of the water it needs. This does not account for the lack of piped water to slums and several 'authorised unauthorized colonies' (an euphuism for a bunch of people living on land they have forcibly occupied); if you take these into account, the shortfall will be much more.

The situation is all set to get worse. The Commonwealth Games has become another occasion for politicians, bureaucrats and builders to convert parts of what little green and blue cover it left into housing and sports facilities. They are especially keen to build on the Yamuna River's floodplain, that feeds aquifers on which most of east Delhi depends. But being the capital city has its advantages – the Central and state governments bend over backwards to ensure water and power supply to its pampered citizenry. The Tehri dam, completed at enormous financial, social and environmental cost about 250 KM away in the Himalayas, is the latest in a series of projects to bring more water and electricity to Delhi.

Delhi wasn't always short of water – power was unknown in the past. All its rulers ensured that Delhi had enough water from the Yamuna, canals, wells and baolis. Delhi was the capital of north India for long periods in its history. Archeological evidence dates the city from 300 BC, the Maurya period, when a city existed under the Old Fort on the banks of the Yamuna. In 736 AD, the Tomar Rajputs founded their city of Delhi in Lal Kot, near Mehrauli on the Aravalis, and began a long tradition of harvesting and managing water for their needs. The Rajput bits of Lal Kot are all but gone save for a rubble dam across one of the gullies nearby. This is probably one of the rulers' irrigation schemes. I drive off the Mehrauli-Mahipalpur road a little to the south and the curving road takes me to Lal Kot. It's more famous now for Sultan Ghari's tomb.

Lal Kot was a sprawling city 1300 years ago but only the tomb and some ruins survive today. The octagonal tomb itself is a fine example of early Islamic architecture; the grave is in an underground chamber and there are verandahs on the surrounding plinth. The entrance, from the east, is richly covered with Quranic verses. To the south is a large well, about 30 feet across and 100 deep. I peer in – it is bone dry. It has been restored and covered to keep people from tumbling in. The ground water here is at least 100 feet below ground and the reasons aren't far to seek. I shall return to this later.

The Tomars' most famous contribution is Suraj Kund. It's across the southern border of Delhi in Haryana. The ancient complex of Suraj Kund, or the Pond of the Sun, was made in the 11th century by one of the Tomar Rajput Kings, Suraj Pal. Suraj Kund may be one of the earliest water harvesting structures in the Delhi region. Literally translating as Pond of the Sun, it has semi-circular stepped embankments made of large stones that impound rainwater flowing downhill. Legend has it that there was a temple to the Sun on the western side. The construction of Suraj Kund reminds me of other kunds made by the Bundela and Chandela Rajputs in



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Bundelkhand, a few hundred KM further south. Those tanks are of similar vintage and also have stepped embankments leading down to the water. At intervals there are stone arms reaching out, probably the remains of platforms for people to get to water from the kund. Strange that warring Rajput tribes thought alike when it came to water.

It’s a pretty drive to Suraj Kund through a narrow winding road past a shooting range and the Jasola wildlife sanctuary. The complex is perpetually crowded with day-trippers. The lawns are clean enough because of the dustbins but the kund area isn’t so lucky. I even see a mother holding her child over the miserable little puddle of water in the kund to pee. I give her a stare, which is lost on her, and turn away. The southern side of the kund is shaded by keekar so I sit there and watch the massive red ants go about their business.

To the north and east, Haryana Tourism has built a sprawling tourist complex – actually, its three complexes rolled into one. Between them, they have completely blocked water flow into the kund – whatever little water it has at the bottom is rainwater that’s fallen directly into it. From 15 years ago, when I last visited it, the water level has dropped at least 20 feet, to the lowest possible level. Nearly all the steps in the kund are visible, like ribs on a malnourished human.

A short walk from the kund is the Suraj Kund lake, a medium sized water body formed in a natural depression in the Aravali hills. A little gate regulates the outflow of water. I drive up the path, that was just a walking track earlier, and stop at what used to be boat jetty. There are a few hawkers lying on the low wall running along the depression. Because its just a depression now – the water has dried up completely. I am stunned because many years ago, there was a lake that stretched away to the south and west on which people boated. It used to be full and quite an awesome site and in summer, sitting by its side, one could quite forget the 40 plus temperatures.

“When did this dry up?” I ask one of the men sprawled on the wall.

“Last summer,” he replies.

A lake that size could not have disappeared in a year. Why it’s disappeared isn’t hard to understand. It was shallow – around 20 feet deep at most. A spanking new Hill View hotel across the road from the Haryana Tourism complex, flats on the hillock and widening the Suraj Kund – Faridabad road have combined to lower the water table and reduce water flows to the lake. The small drain that used to transport water from a depression to the north has also been blocked at places to accommodate the annual Suraj Kund Crafts Mela and the depression has turned into a giant parking lot.

Between the land sharks and Haryana Tourism, strike one water body.

I drive still further south along the rocky Aravalis. The road is wide and relatively empty till it meets another coming from Gurgaon. Then trucks takes over, carrying stone and rubble, mined illegally, for construction. In the early 1990s, the Supreme Court banned quarrying in these parts but work goes on, far from the main roads hidden by the hills. The road used to be deserted save for a few huts, but it’s a highway now, a by-pass for people traveling from Delhi to Haryana. Then come the eye-sores.



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There is a series of huge residential schools with fancy names and a massive temple painted in garish colours, with a traffic jam around it. The Haryana Urban Development Authority has carved plots out of the hills. Land sharks have gone a step further and have made entire housing colonies here. All this is supposed to be forest land and these developments have happened without formal notifications for change in land use. Construction continues and the further I go from Suraj Kund, the more apartments I see. The Supreme Court did intervene in 2004 to stop the construction but evidently money talks louder than court orders. The Aravalis here were a watershed for south Delhi and the town of Faridabad but soon there will be neither shed nor water. There is already evidence of this, with the dry Suraj Kund lake behind me.

I reach another lake called Badhkal, formed by the Anangpur dam, that is actually a short distance as the crow flies from Suraj Kund, but a 20 KM drive. This was made by Anangpal, also of the Tomar dynasty, who also made Lal Kot, by building a dam between two hills; the other three sides of the lake have low hills. It is a massive lake, a favourite of bird watchers and Delhiites wanting a quick getaway. The Haryana Tourism Development Corporation has a restaurant and a hotel, sewage from which flows untreated into the lake. Badhkal's waters were used for irrigation and they recharged the aquifers in this extremely over-irrigated part of Haryana. Markings on the stone-faced dam indicate the water levels and there is a large sluice gate in the centre of the dam. The Tomars were big water harvesters, like their Rajput counterparts in Central India.

Badhkal Lake is also dry save for a puddle in the middle. Its bed is overgrown with keekar and grass. A woman washes her clothes in the puddle. The boats that used to take visitors around at Rs 150 an hour lie abandoned, rotting on the side where the jetty used to be. On my last visit, in 2003, the lake was full. It's taken some effort empty this vast manmade lake, but Haryana's builders have succeeded here as well. Quarrying in the lake's catchment area has also impeded the flow of rain water, aiding its demise. And to cap it all, there is a water bottling plant right outside the Haryana Tourism complex that has been built up around the lake. Far be it for Haryana Tourism to protect the golden goose. A waiter in the restaurant informs me the lake dried up in the last one year because of quarrying and low rainfall but the trees on the lake bed could not have come up in year – this is several years' concerted effort.

I am struck by the sorry state of the Tomar's legacy, compared to what is left of their contemporary rulers' architecture in Bundelkhand. There are hardly any palaces, talaabs or kunds that have survived the 1300 years since they ruled here. It's also amazing that the descendants of those who built water conservation structures are hell-bent on doing everything they can to destroy them. Truly, as the Sufi saint said, only donkeys and gujjars will inhabit Delhi.

I take a leap forward in time, and northwards in space, to Mehrauli. I drive the still-picturesque route back to Tughlakabad and then west along the Mehrauli-Badarpur road. You could call this the Tomar-Sultanate road as well – it connects the capital of the Tomars with those of the Sultanate dynasties. The road terminates at Mehrauli though, through a slight diversion, you get to Lal Kot.

Mehrauli is probably one of Delhi's oldest and best-known living villages – a misnomer really, its now been swallowed up by the city and there is no farming anymore – is better known for the Qutab Minar than for water conservation. It's located on the southern Ridge, the tail-end of the



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Aravali hills and has hauzs (large artificial ponds) and baolis (step wells) that form an ancient and intricate network of monuments around the village. Hauzs were the peculiar urban water structure that Muslims introduced when they entered India.

Mehrauli was famous for its mango orchards as recently as 25 years ago, but they have gone the way of Suraj Kund, thanks to the Delhi Destruction Authority's decision to make the housing colony of Vasant Kunj nearby. A few trees in the erstwhile orchards still cling on but they are also disappearing under plant nurseries.

Hauz-i-Shamsi is the largest and oldest surviving tank in Mehrauli. It was built by Sultan Shamsuddin Iltutmish in 1230, one of the Slave Dynasty who ruled Delhi, and is named after him. It is said the Prophet came to Iltutmish in a dream and pointed out the spot where the hauz of his dreams would be built – in the morning, the king saw the hoof-prints of a horse there and built the hauz around it. He made a large platform in the centre of the hauz where the hoof-print was and this could only be reached by boats. It was probably much larger than it is now because the platform is now accessible by a ramp from the western side. Iltutmish incidentally also completed the Qutab Minar, standing about 2 KM to the north-east.

The hauz now covers about 2.3 hectares and is roughly rectangular in shape. Like the talaabs of Rajasthan, from where its builders seem to have drawn inspiration, it has stone-faced sloping walls that disappear into very murky, mucky, smelly green water. On the western side, the platform with a chhatri extends into the waters and even on a hot day, the breeze from the hauz acts as a natural air-conditioner. Its catchment, to the north, west and south, is almost completely encroached by locals with their houses. A road runs along the west, blocking water flow. To the south is a sewer that diverts sewage from the hauz; presumably before it was built, the sewage comprised a fair percentage of the hauz's 'holi waters'. The sewer stinks, as expected and the blood of slaughtered animals decorates its covers. To the north, houses barely 50 feet from the hauz's wall discharge their filth into it through a little hole in the wall.

To the south is a small ground, presumably used for fairs and weekend markets. The local strongman – or thug, if you like – has built his palatial house next to this on land he has grabbed. This effectively blocks drainage and along with the sewer, prevents any clean water flowing into the hauz.

The hauz is quite full of water despite the locals' best attempts even though the water is filthy. It is all rainwater that falls into the hauz, as natural flows into it are blocked. Standing on the platform, I see three men on the far side bathing in the water with apparent relish. It does not matter to them that the water reeks and is a bilious green; that the entire stretch along the walls on all sides is full of discarded bottles, chappals, plastic bags of household garbage; that from the far side, sewage trickles into the hauz. But then, I ponder, such is faith that maketh pure the impure.

The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) has restored the hauz – I wonder what condition it was in before. It has built a wall with a steel grill atop it to prevent people from using the hauz as an open air toilet and garbage bin. It has worked to an extent though I can see water hyacinth creeping across the hauz from the north. In a few weeks, it will have taken over the water completely. At the entrance to the platform, where people can access



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the hauz, it is a rubbish dump. The locals have no respect for their natural resources, far less their history. It’s also to do with the land mafia that seems to run India's cities – they encourage and participate in this desecration so that water bodies can be polluted, filled with garbage and ultimately, grabbed for building hotels, flats, restaurants, or whatever brings them money.

Our ancient rulers, who we now despise as conquering and plundering Muslims, felt more for the land and its people than those who jingoists who call who themselves sons of the soil. The ‘invading Muslims’ did more for water conservation and distribution than most local people of Delhi have done since. The Rajputs who ruled before the Muslim conquest realized the importance of water security and made an elaborate system of bunds across the gullies and ditches that criss-cross the Aravalis to provide water in this otherwise rocky landscape.

I walk around the hauz along the road that runs to its west. At one point, there is a large parking area for trucks that extends into the hauz. Another encroachment, this time by the owner of the transport company, whose office and godown abut the hauz. The road turns left, I turn right and enter a smelly swamp north of the hauz, that lies between the houses and the hauz’s wall. My destination is the Jahaz Mahal to the north-east, somewhat tumbledown but still a testimonial to its splendid past. Sewage flows across the swampy ground and enters the hauz through a gap in the wall where residents, full of concern for their environment, have removed a stone to let their filth into the sacred waters.

Jahaz Mahal does not show any signs of its colourful past, save for the handful of blue tiles set in the domes. It was probably a pleasure palace made the Lodhis a few centuries after the hauz was built when the place was greener and the hauz flowed past the Mahal into the forests to the east. The chhatris atop Jahaz Mahal still sport a few of the original blue-green glazed tiles, again reminiscent of its past. Most have fallen off during the centuries. It has a large central hall, with its roof now gone, surrounded by smaller rooms with jharokas. The building was surrounded by a moat that is now dry. The jharokas, also all gone, extended over the moat. Presumably, it was shaped like a ship, once, with the moat giving the impression of a building floating on water.

The caretaker is an old Malayali, George. His mundu has been replaced by trousers, but the white shirt is in place. Sitting on a piece of cloth on the ground floor, he muses with his flask.

“Namaskar sir.”

“Can I walk upstairs?” I ask. There are remains of a staircase behind him but they have broken from shoulder height down.

“Munni,” George calls to a girl in a lime green frock, flitting in and out of the arches of the rooms flanking the main hall. She reminds me of the child guide for Jennifer Lopez in Tomb Raider II who flitted in and out of the ruined temple in Cambodia. “Show him the way to the roof.”

Munni appears in an archway with the sun on her face. She darts in and reappears in another one, two arches down, dodging the sun. She is barefoot.

“Come,” she says, and patters across the floor of a room to a narrow opening in the wall. It’s barely two feet side, just wide enough for me to go through. Munni darts through and disappears



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to the left. I peer in and see typical high stone stairs leading to the roof. The staircase is also narrow. It turns at 90 degrees to the left and I emerge on the roof – no railings or parapets up here.

Munni escapes from the blazing sun under the largest dome that has little recesses, where the supporting pillars join it, for placing lamps. In each recess is a blue-painted tile. There are four other, smaller domes. This chhatris is directly the main entrance to the haveli and looks imposing from the street below.

There is a breath-taking view of the hauz from up here. Before my greedy countrymen grabbed chunks of land beyond, to the west, to make their ugly mansions, forests or orchards would have extended to the hauz's margins on all sides, save this. The breeze coming off the hauz is cool and strong, even in the late morning heat. It's tranquil, inspite of the busy bazaar next door.

Munni has disappeared, presumably to flit in and out of arches. George appears and picks pieces of garbage from the corner of the roof, dumping them into the dry moat three floors below. Three men sit on the hauz's wall under a tree below, talking about their masculine exploits.

“I beat the shit out of him,” says one, brandishing a short bamboo cane.

“I fucked the shit out of her,” says another, scratching his balls.

The third has his mouth so full of paan he cannot add to the conversation.

I leave the scintillating conversation behind and go down the stairs. There is a large open space in front of the haveli, with a tumbledown mosque in a corner. An ugly fountain, with whitewashed steps, sits behind the mosque. The local Waqf board, that owns all this land, decided to create a small park on the eastern side of the hauz, that encroaches on yet another part of the hauz. It's pretty but further reduces the size of the hauz. These grounds are from where the annual Phoolwalon Ki Sair ends in Mehrauli.

Phoolwalon Ki Sair is a deliciously colourful festival celebrated at the end of the monsoons at the shrine of the Sufi saint Khwaja Bakhtiyar Kaki, also known as Qutab Sahib. It begins from the Jog Maya temple in Mehrauli and goes through the village bazaars to the saint's shrine, that's across the road from the Jahaz Mahal.

Mumtaz Mahal, the wife of the Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah Zafar, started the festival in the 19th century and its story goes like this. The British chose Bahadur to succeed Akbar Shah II but Mumtaz made him change his mind, and put her son Mirza Jahangir on Delhi's throne. The British didn't agree and after an altercation, exiled Mirza to Allahabad. Mumtaz took a vow that if the boy was allowed to return to Delhi, she would offer a four-poster bed of flowers at Kaki's shrine. The British finally allowed the boy to return to Delhi on promise of good behaviour and his mother carried out her promise. Mirza didn't reform though, and was eventually sent back to die an alcoholic in Allahabad, but the festival continues to this day.

Across the road to the east of Jahaz Mahal is Jharna, literally meaning waterfall. It's a pretty little garden set in a rectangular area of about 1500 square yards. It was originally built by Iltutmish in the same year as the hauz, proclaims a board by the Municipal Corporate of Delhi.



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Later rulers restored it, as did the MCD in 1988. Water from Shams-i-Hauz flowed through an underground channel to one end of this garden, cascaded down its side into a small covered area and flowed through shallow channels to cool the place. In the centre is a domed platform with a water channel running beneath, to keep it cool. From here, the water flowed to the end of Jharna and into the forests of Mehrauli.

Now, the only cascades in the garden in Jharna are of sewage and garbage. The sewer that skirts Shams-i-Hauz gurgles past the walls. No water cascades down the ancient waterfall set in the side of Jharna. To the south is a small slum of Bangladeshis. Plastic jerry cans to collect water from taps or tankers stand on a mud embankment next to the sewer. A small child plays on the embankment; the sewer is fast and deep enough to sweep him away. Inside Jharna, all the water receptacles and channels are full of garbage and shit, presumably from the Bangladeshis. The locals have certainly found use for the remains of our past. I shake my head in disgust and, suppressing the urge to spit, leave.

Goats are now the only occupants of an area where once the Mughal royalty chilled out in late summer. After the Sair, the king and nobility would retire here before moving to the nearby mango orchards, that Mehrauli was famous for. To the north of Jharna is Khwaja Bakhtiyar Kaki’s tomb. A couple of children scurry about in the heat – all else is still.

The sojourn, if I can call it that, in Jharna has cooled me off. It was much needed after the walk around the hauz in the heat. I ascend to the chaos of Mehrauli’s main bazaar, immortalized in Lakdi Ki Kaathi, the song from the film Masoom. I remember coming here many years ago for a picnic, but in those memories, Jharna didn’t have goats, garbage, goo or even Bangladeshis. It was reasonably pristine; a quarter century and a lifetime since, it is in a sorry state.

Water from Hauz-i-Shamshi flowed into Jharna and thence into a natural drain that carried it east to the Satpula dam about 4 KM away. There, impounded, it provided water to settlements and further, fed the lake outside Tughlakabad. This was one water system of ancient Delhi spanning a few centuries of early Muslim rule.

Manohar Singh runs a tiny street side shop selling hand-made garden tools. He looks younger than his 60 years; Manohar has been born and brought up in Mehrauli. He has seen it being swallowed by the city and change from a village to a multi-storeyed labyrinth.

“People didn’t even own cycles when I was a boy. We had to reach Delhi on foot, a full day’s journey or depend on the odd bus. There was a single narrow road and no traffic lights. We had to travel through forests and only in groups, during the day,” he says.

And now, Mehrauli is on a main road to Gurgaon. What was a day-long journey now takes 30 minutes. The drive to Gurgaon is as fast.

“Land was 25 paise a square yard, and there were no takers,” he continues. “It’s priceless now. Where do you think you will find any hauzs? Here? Only one survives, the rest have been swallowed up by the rich and powerful to make houses and malls. There were dozens of hauzs here once, but now they are all gone.”



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Sure enough, like elsewhere in India, where cities have decimated their own water resources, localities have been named after the talaab, baoli or other water source that once existed there. Strange, human beings who cannot do without water for more than a few days find it hard to keep their sticky hands off the few sources of fresh water in India.

Shams-i-Hauz also drives home the interconnectedness of religion and water. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians accord this simple liquid a holy place. No temple or mosque is complete without a water source. All gurudwaras have a talaab. All churches have at least one small receptacle of water for baptisms. Making a well was one of the most righteous things for Hindus and a shortcut to Nirvana; no temple was complete without an accompanying source of water and conversely, no large source of water exists in India without temples.

Kaki’s shrine is a stone’s throw from the hauz. Water was needed for the faithful to cleanse themselves ere they appeared before the almighty. It was needed for weary pilgrims to refresh themselves. But increasingly, the connection is being lost and the reason is not far to seek – land grabbers along with our politicians and bureaucrats find water tanks easy to fill and convert into apartments, making a quick buck for all concerned.

Curiously enough the Qutab complex nearby does not have a water source, save for a single small well. It was once a thriving centre of learning and religion. There is a tank built by the irrigation department at the highest point in the complex – this is now a garbage dump. The well seems too small a source for the large number of people who must have lived there. But nearby, in Mehrauli, there were many other sources of water, now fallen into disuse. There is Gandhak Ki Baoli, or sulphur springs also built by Iltutmish, the Dargah Qutab Sahib Tank and Rajon Ki Bain made a few centuries later by Sikandar Lodhi. The whole area was enclosed by Qila Rai Pithora made earlier by Prithviraja Chauhan.

The Tughlakabad fort is some 8 or 9 KM east of Mehrauli, the next large settlement of ancient Delhi. I remember the imposing fort as an exotic picnic destination from decades ago. The Mehrauli-Badarpur road was a tenuous link and the remains of a vast lake lay to the south of the fort. It still remains as awe-inspiring as ever but the road has trebled in size and our defence forces, ever watchful of the country’s culture and heritage, have built multi-storeyed flats opposite the fort. The ugly blue and yellow matchboxes – that’s what they resemble from the fort’s walls – stick out like sore, well, matchboxes, against the green of the surrounding countryside.

My car is the only one in the parking lot in spite of a holiday. There is another bike and the sundry staff you see loitering around all our monuments, in the name of taking care of them. More like, harassing visitors. The ticket is a pittance, Rs. 5, and the camera is free. The disinterested ticket guy, a tall, poncho-ed balding man with a pinched and long suffering expression, hands over two tiny blue tickets. Another short, extremely dark character materializes behind me.

“Is there a guide?” asks Malvika, my wife.

Mr. Disinterested nods at the dark character. “You can use him.”



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Mr. Dark isn’t really a guide – Tughlakabad is poor pickings for any guide, what with a near total lack of tourists. This man, Gyan Singh, is a caretaker of sorts and has been posted by the Archeological Survey of India at Tughlakabad for the past decade. We settle for Rs. 50 as his fee and follow him up the fort’s entry ramp. The doorway looms above us and voices pour forth.

It’s a busy day here, with village men and women squatting and talking in the shade of the doorway. They give us the once-over as we pass, and I can almost hear their thoughts – no, these aren’t lovers in search of a quiet getaway. Beyond the doorway, the fort suddenly opens up. Paths lead off left and right inside the walls while straight ahead is a large open area from where stones were extracted to make the fortress.

Gyan takes us up a flight of steep steps to what he calls the city area, where the rich lived. A girl and boy quickly separate from their embrace and the boy presses his mobile phone to his ear. Gyan Singh glares at them but they are oblivious. He pauses next to a large long stone lying on the ground.

“This was the top post of the city gate. To the right and left were guard rooms.”

The one on the right still stands and is a toilet; the one on the left has collapsed. This section of the city was guarded, evident from the remains of the high walls with slits for archers to shoot from. Beyond, there are ruins of many houses, big and small, for the city’s nobility.

“This is the VIP area. It was separated from the military part of the fort and the commoner’s area by a wall. See the underground market,” says Gyan, pausing in front of a tunnel. From beyond him emanates the stink of bat shit and the sounds of their conversation. We enter the tunnel – there are rooms on both sides which were shops, and openings in the roof to let in light and air. At intervals, there are large recesses in the walls where candles and lanterns were kept.

We emerge at the far end, about 50 M down and walk through an opening in the outer wall onto a ledge.

“Why did they build the fort here, where there is no water?” I ask.

“There was water. The entire area in front was a huge lake,” says Gyan waving his arms. “It stretched from the wall to those hills and was as long as the fortress. This was the end of the road for water from Hauz-i-Shamsi in Mehrauli. Water was not a problem here at all. Then there are the lakes at Suraj Kund and Badhkal and the Yamuna.”

Now there is no lake, just blue-and-white flats and some scrubland, playgrounds for the local village kids. The lake would have been huge indeed, about a kilometer across and a few in width but fairly shallow. It would have held enough water to keep groundwater levels high enough for wells or baolis inside the fort to have fresh water.

“There are seven baolis inside the fort for water. These were deep enough to be fed by underground water, whose level the lake maintained,” says Gyan Singh. “This is a tunnel that connected this fort to the Adilabad fort.” This outside a dark passage that leads into the fort’s bowels.



Jalyatra – Exploring India’s Traditional Water Management Systems

We climb a tall square structure, the remains of an administrative palace in the centre of Tughlakabad’s VIP area. I am horrified to see an entire housing colony in the middle of the fort. There are hundreds of multi-storeyed houses that belong to the city’s new, elected rulers. Ramvir Bidhuri, Shish Pal and other local strongmen have happily encroached on a substantial part of the fort. Thereby hangs a tale.

Ghiyasud Din Tughlak, the fort’s builder, on his rounds one day, saw a group of labourers sleeping on the job. He roused them saying, “Don’t I pay you fare wages. Why are goofing off on the job?”

A man answered, “We work for you in the day and for Sheikh Nizamuddin at night.”

Not wanting to anger a holy man by confront him directly, Ghiyas-ud Din banned the sale of oil to that settlement so that no work could be done at night. Undaunted, Nizamuddin told his labourers to use the water of the baoli at Nizamuddin, and he blessed it so that it turned to oil. Sheikh Nizamuddin cursed the fort, saying henceforth only donkeys, Gujjars and horses will live there. He also prophesied that Ghiyasud Din, away on a military campaign, would never rule from there. Ghiyasud Din didn’t – he died short of Tughlakabad while returning. His successors built Adilabad across the Mehrauli-Badarpur road. The owners of houses that now encroach inside the fort are supposed to have descended from the original inhabitants of the fort. They are mostly Gujjars – Nizamuddin’s prophecy has come true.

“Where are the baolis?” I ask Gyan.

He points to the west of the mound we are standing on. A high wall rises next to the Baoli that supplied the VIP area. I can see a depression next to the wall. It’s about 40 feet wide by 60 long. Walking through bushes and brambles, I get to the remains of the Baoli. It’s at about 80 feet deep, and was deeper still if it had to reach the water table. The walls have collapsed on three sides. The one remaining one is faced with large rectangular stones forming four very high vertical steps. There were steps leading down to the water but they have also disappeared.

The Baoli only tapped underground water; surface runoff was limited as it was in the middle of a built-up area. It was a chore to climb nearly 80 feet down to bathe, wash and get drinking water. It’s a small Baoli but the VIP population wasn’t very large either.

Further west are the remains of the king’s palace surrounded by the remains of his servants’ quarters. Here is another Baoli, in much better shape. It’s about the same size but three walls still stand. All have large stone blocks – but where the ASI has ‘restored’ it, small irregular bits of stone embedded in mortar have taken over. There are remains of stairs leading to the bottom; the top of the staircase has disappeared and needs to be rebuilt. At the bottom of the Baoli are two giant ledges, one above the other, that allowed people to use the water at different levels. These are the two surviving ledges of what must have been a series that started at the top.

“Where are the others?” I ask Gyan.

He points to the far walls of the fort that stretch away to the west and north. That’s where the bulk of the people lived and the other five baolis were their source of water. Baolis were essentially stepped wells that led down to the water fed by underground streams. In



Jalyatra – Exploring India’s Traditional Water Management Systems

Tughlakabad, their water was probably also used for drinking – maybe people used the lake outside for other purposes.

Going back in history, almost to mythology, I travel to Agrasen’s baoli in Connaught Place. This is one of the best preserved baolis in Delhi and looking at it, I wonder what state the others are in. Agrasen’s Baoli reflects the ancient baoli building tradition in north and western India. From Gujarat, right across the Indo-Gangetic plains, baolis were one of the main sources of water for travelers. I recall the spectacular Chand Ki Baoli, about 200 KM south-west of here near Abhaneri in Rajasthan, where the magnificent architecture all around contrasts with the puddle of filthy water at the bottom. Or the derelict one near Mayur Dhvaj’s ruined city near Dausa with its perfectly sweet water.

Whatever the size, the construction was such that travelers could rest in solitude inside the baoli.

An interesting aside, from O P Jain: sarais or stops on a route were 11 miles apart, this being the distance a horse could gallop at a stretch. Therefore, Ghaziabad is 11 miles from Shahjahanabad and Meerut 44 miles. This spacing made it possible for virtually overnight delivery of mail, from Delhi to Calcutta or Bombay and the Mughals, who devised the system, managed to rule their empire relatively efficiently.

Agrasen is said to be the founder of the Agrawal clan, one of India's leading trading communities. The Baoli named after him is tucked away between high-rise apartment and office blocks that have come up in place of old houses in the Connaught Place area. All the magnificent houses of the rich, famous and the royalty, abandoned by their Muslim owners after partition, were taken over by their latter day Hindu owners and over the past three decades, have given way to high-rises. These now peer into the tiny square that houses the 60 M by 12 M Baoli, running roughly north-south. A road runs along three sides and the dhobi ghat makes up the fourth side.

It’s extremely unimpressive from the outside. Stone and mortal walls tell me it’s a monument. The outside walls of the Baoli have archways that lift the wall to about 15 feet above road level. The entrance is at the southern end, through a barred gate. On either side are plaques explaining the Baoli’s history. There is a masjid at the southern end, near the entrance. The gate is locked; it’s 5:30 PM.

I climb over the low iron railing that runs along the wall to get to a ladder propped inside one of the archways. That will take me to the top of the wall and into the Baoli. A boy comes running from one of the houses next to the Baoli, seeing me trying to ‘break in’.

“Come down,” he yells. “You aren’t allowed in that way.”

“I am going in this way,” I say, stubbornly. It’s broad daylight and the gate has no business being locked.

“I will let you in. Just give me some money,” he says.

“How much do you want?” I ask, thoroughly irritated by now. He has a leer on his face that makes me even more furious.



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“50 rupees.”

“Forget it. I am going in like this,” I say, and start up the ladder. Its rickety and I am not sure the ladder can take my 80 kilos.

“You will get hurt. Give me 30 and I will take you in,” he says.

“Do it for 20.” This when entry to monuments like the Qutab costs 10.

“OK.”

He fishes out a key from his back pocket and opens the lock. The gate opens silently, on well-oiled hinges. I walk through the arched entrance into the Baoli. It’s huge inside, deceptively small from the outside. The baoli stretches away in a north-south direction, with me standing at the southern end. The stone sides reach down into the bowels of the earth, a pathway for people seeking water. Just behind me a small broken down mosque and a locked room. There is a bed and a mattress inside.

“I come here sometimes when the weather is good,” Anil, my reluctant guide says. “Do you want to go down?”

I nod and he leads the way down to the bottom of the Baoli. It’s a steep climb, as with all ancient structures. Our ancestors were giants, given the height of the steps. There are five visible storeys to the Baoli and Anil claims there is a sixth one hidden under the filth accumulated at the bottom of the structure. That is, the Baoli is about 10 M deep and there is filthy water at the bottom.

The Baoli’s water was used for everything but drinking by humans; there is a well adjoining the Baoli to the north for that. Men and women could bathe in seclusion in the Baoli. Descending the steps, I enter a passage way that leads to an inner chamber, that has five floors with a central opening for water. Small rooms surround the central opening and this is where people could bathe, pray or camp. Each floor has its own access from the surface so the Baoli’s ‘guest house’ could accommodate several families at the same time; the rest could camp around the Baoli in the archways.

I remember seeing water right up to the top 30 years ago, when we used to stay near the Baoli on Ferozeshah Road. Now, there are a few feet of dirty water at the bottom. The well, however, is full of water though the level is low, around 10 M below ground level. The water is stagnant and quite undrinkable but the fact that it has water shows that the groundwater levels are high in this part of Delhi despite the fact that most houses, apartments and offices have their own borewells.

“It used to be full of water till the third floor,” says Anil. “The level has fallen since the Delhi Metro Railway Corporation began work here. They pumped out a lot of water and the water levels fell to this.”

Agrasen’s Baoli is one of many that dotted Delhi once. Most have decayed or have been filled up and converted into residential areas. Each sarai, or resting places for travelers, and many of the city’s urbanized villages grew from sarais, had its own source of water that could have been either a baoli or a well. These sarais dot all the approach roads to the walled city of



Jalyatra – Exploring India’s Traditional Water Management Systems

Shahjahanabad. There are remains of baolis in Palam and Vasant Vihar in south west Delhi and a corner of Shahjahanabad. The rest, as they say, are history.

“Delhi had an estimated 794 water bodies, manmade and natural,” says V K Jain, founding chairman of the NGO Tapas that he runs out of his farm-house in Mehrauli. He has surveyed the city and found these things all over the city, with a somewhat high concentration in the south. Jain has filed a petition in the High Court of Delhi to improve the quantity and quality of water in Delhi. Taking an average of two per village – one for human beings and another for animals – he has arrived at this figure. His figure, though does not take wells into account – it was too tedious to identify and count the exact number of wells that once were the sole source of drinking water in the city.

“Just 13 are manmade out of these. The rest are natural water bodies, usually depressions that have filled up with water. Many of them are not being used any more because the Delhi Jal Board promises water to everybody through tubewells,” says Jain. “My contention is that they have to be preserved to augment water supply through tubewells. I have estimated that if they are all protected and restored, they can contribute to 15 percent of Delhi’s water requirements.”

Till the Mughals came and shifted the action to the banks of the Yamuna, Delhiites had to depend on water conservation and harvesting to meet their needs. The work of the Tomars, Chauhans and the Sultanate rulers is ample evidence of their expertise in using the rocky terrain to advantage.

Shah Jahan made the Red Fort and the walled city, Shahjahanabad. This remained the capital till the British declared that Calcutta was the capital after the 1857 war of Independence. That short interlude ended in 1911 when the British shifted their capital back to Delhi, a little north of Shahjahanabad in Civil Lines.

Shahjahan was a builder par excellence. He planned for the water needs of his new city, the army and his palace. He made a system of canals and dighis – a small square or circular reservoir with steps to enter to divert water from the Yamuna. His engineer Ali Mardan Khan not only did this but also linked this canal with what has now become the Najafgarh drain, that rises in the Sirmaur hills in Haryana, south-west of Delhi. The new canal was named after him. It charged the dighis and wells on its way into town.

People were not allowed bathe or wash clothes inside dighis, but could draw water. Most houses had their own wells or dighis for water. If the canal ran dry they fell back on wells. Water carriers, called kahars or mashkis, supplied water to households in hogsheads. They were either employed full-time, if the household was large enough, or visited houses with leather bags of water drawn from common wells. Some of the major wells were Indara kuan near Jubilee cinema, Pahar-wala-kuan near Gali-Pahar-Wali, and Chah Rahat near Chhipiwara (the source of water for the Jama Masjid). According to the site, Rainwaterharvesting.org, in 1843, Shahjahanabad had 607 wells, of which 52 provided sweet water. Today 80 per cent of the wells are closed because the water is contaminated by the sewer system. This is the Jal Board’s water cycle.



Jalyatra – Exploring India’s Traditional Water Management Systems

The Red Fort’s intricate channel system is one continuous stream that goes from building to building. That and the river combined to make the place habitable. Given the abundance of water, it is unlikely that the Mughals had much need to set up elaborate water conservation and harvesting structures in Delhi, like their predecessors had done. Elsewhere in India, especially in the Deccan, they made some of the most elaborate rainwater harvesting systems. The Mughals built water systems for recreation.

Chandni Chowk, the Mughal’s shopping arcade opposite Red Fort, is a contrast to the tranquility inside the fort. Its still one of Delhi’s main shopping areas, some 350 years after it was built. The crowds, congested shops and tortuous streets crammed with shops make it hard to believe that this was once a fashionable promenade, designed by Shah Jahan’s daughter Jahanara. It got its name from a pond in front of the Fatehpuri mosque at the far end, that used to shimmer in the moonlight.

Water ran short in Chandni Chowk a few years after it was completed, because it became such a prominent trading centre in north India. Shah Jahan asked Ali Mardan for a solution and he renovated an old canal to supply water to the complex, and renamed it Faiz Nahar. It ran the length of Chandni Chowk and probably ended in the pond in front of the mosque. The British revived it in 1820 after the decline of the Mughal empire, but it was finally buried in 1910. Now the main road of Chandni Chowk runs over the canal. It is said that when it was well kept, the canal could supply water to all of Shahjahanabad; when it fell into disuse, it bred disease and malaria.

Shahajahanabad was one of the Mughal’s many contributions to Delhi; the other was the innumerable sarais that grew into villages and now, into shopping areas. Sarais were places for caravans to rest – Delhi dominated the east-west trade routes. They offered shelter for the night, food and water. Sarais were set up by Muslims, ashrams by Hindus. Sarais were named after the person who set it up, usually an officer of the court or an entrepreneur.

O. P. Jain, convenor of the Delhi Chapter for the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, says, “The ashrams were completely free to stay and provided no amenities; you used what you brought. But sarais charged for extras such as bedding. They were run more like motels and named after the person who started them. So there is Yusuf sarai, Ber sarai, Neb Sarai and Katwaria sarai – their namesakes long lost to history.”

Each sarai had its own water source, either a baoli or a well. Nearly all have disappeared. There is one inside Lado Sarai, near Mehrauli, that is supposed to be the centre of this stopover. It’s under a badh tree, duly covered with an octagonal concrete roof and all but eaten up by multi-storeyed buildings. The well has water and is covered with a heavy grill to keep humans and cows out. It’s not been used for years, the locals assure me. All the roads in Lado Sarai seem to radiate from this well, that shows it was the centre of life in the village in the not-too-distant past.

After Independence, Delhi grew at a phenomenal rate fueled initially by the influx of refugees from Pakistan and later, by India’s economic prosperity. It’s the only big town in north India and it took a little Punjabi enterprise to transform it into an economic powerhouse. From just 350,000 people before 1947, the National Capital Territory of Delhi has 15 million now. If you add the suburbs of Ghaziabad, NOIDA, Faridabad and Gurgaon, that’s another 5 million people, making



Jalyatra – Exploring India's Traditional Water Management Systems

this the biggest urban sprawl in India. It takes three hours by road to drive from one end of this thing to another on a good day.

To understand where this is going, take a look at Delhi's geography. Delhi has three regions – the Yamuna flood plain, the Ridge and the Gangetic plains. The land slopes from west to east and from south to north. Delhi's highest point about 1100 feet above sea level is near its southern border on the ridge, but the average altitude of the Aravalis is about 800 feet. The Yamuna has dykes about 4 KM apart, on both sides to control floods. The river cuts the city into two bits, one third to the east and two-thirds to the west. A lot of the ponds and lakes in east Delhi are depressions that used to accumulate flood water from the river but now are totally cut off from that source; the ponds are now garbage dumps and the only water in them comes from domestic and industry effluents.

The Najafgarh drain rises from west, flows north for a distance and then meanders north-east till it joins the river, just north of the Inter-State Bus Terminal. It was a major drain carrying water from the Najafgarh lake to the river, and replenishing water sources in west Delhi. The British and later, the Indian town planners, found in it a convenient outlet for a burgeoning city's municipal and industrial waste. The result is that till the Najafgarh drain hits the Yamuna, the river is halfway clean. After their confluence, the river becomes one of the world's most polluted stretches of water.

The Yamuna Action Plan, or YAP, lives up to its acronym of being more hot air than action. The decades-long programme to reduce pollution by first reducing the number of drains pouring into the river, and then putting up effluent treatment plants to treat water from the Najafgarh and other drains before they enter the river have come to naught because the authorities are simply not serious. Also, it's a milch cow with over Rs 1,000 crore having spent on it since 1993.

An immediate fallout of abandoning the jheels, kunds, baolis and other traditional sources of water supply has been that Delhi, sprawling over 1,483 square KM, has little water to call its own. Groundwater is seriously overdrawn. It depends on dams in the Himalayas and the goodwill of riparian states for its water. The day Haryana and Uttar Pradesh decide they need more water, Delhi has a shortage. Supply has become completely inelastic, but the demand continues to grow – the urban sprawl is the second-fastest growing region in India.

The modern city of Delhi, founded by the British, was provided a water supply and sewage disposal system. The water intake for all the water treatment plants was upstream of the place where the Najafgarh drain runs into the Yamuna in north Delhi. After this point, the Yamuna becomes a highly polluted channel of stinking black water. The only water treatment plant in south Delhi at Okhla had to be closed down because pollution levels were too high for it to treat; South Delhi has been water-deprived since then. The trunk mains carrying water from north to south are old and pass through slums and illegal colonies where people tap into them. This wastes water and deprives the areas at the tail end of their supply system of water – the government acknowledges that 44 percent of water is lost in transit. Thus, Vasant Kunj in the south and Dwarka in the South West are perpetually short of water.

Delhi now needs over 1,000 million gallons of water a day (MGD) but all its water treatment plants, including the new showpiece called Sonia Vihar, produce just 651 MGD; the rest comes



Jalyatra – Exploring India's Traditional Water Management Systems

from private tube wells. In other words, 86 percent comes from surface water and the rest from underground. Delhi is simultaneously home to the most under- and most over-supplied parts of India. The Cantonment area gets over 500 litres per capita per day (LPCD) of water but large parts of rural Delhi get just 1/18 of that. The norm is 315 LPCD but by this definition, just the New Delhi Municipal Corporation, Karol Bagh and Cantonment areas get enough water; the rest make do with less.

Delhi's traditional solution has been to dig for water, but even this isn't working in most places. O P Jain remembers that in New Delhi, the walls of houses would get wet because water from underground would seep up through the foundations. Groundwater was available just a few feet below the surface. That doesn't happen any more. The Central Ground Water Board reckons that Delhi's water table was fallen by a foot a year, or by 8 M in 20 years. If that does not sound like much, consider this: it is the height of a four-storeyed block of flats. And that is just an average figure.

The situation in some parts like Mehrauli in south Delhi is worse than average because it's the farmhouse belt. These are farmhouses in name. From Jasola in south east Delhi across to Najafgarh in the south west, a distance of 20 KM in a swathe about 2 KM wide, are the sprawling mansions of the city's super-rich. These have huge lawns and swimming pools; they are the city's largest water suckers. Not surprising that Mehrauli where most of these are concentrated, and Najafgarh, are the two blocks where the water table has plummeted the fastest. These are also hilly areas, so water was hard to find in the first place. It is also the region where life in Delhi could be said to have begun with the Tomar Rajputs 1300 years ago.

Being the national capital has its advantages. For Delhi, the government has spent Rs 7,000 crore to build the Tehri dam so that it gets 140 MGD of water and 1,000 MW of power. It already depends on high dams in the Himalayas for its water. Another three – the Renuma, Kishau and Lakhwar dams – will be built to provide another 782 MGD of water to the city. Now, if only others were as lucky.

Delhi's dependence on high dams in the Himalayas is disastrous for everybody concerned. The Himalayas are ecologically fragile and all the dams built so far have been faulty. Higher-than-calculated siltation rates have reduced their lives by 30-40 percent. Millions of people have been displaced and never compensated adequately for the loss of their lands or resettled properly. The Tehri dam alone has displaced 100,000 and drowned the historical town of Tehri, after which it is, ironically, named. But people living close to the dam get neither power nor water from the dam. They still have to make do with whatever scanty springs they had, or wait for the promised tankers from the dam to come. Dams like Tehri worsen an already inequitable water situation. They will lead to conflicts in the near future between all the states that have to share this diminishing resource.

Unfortunately, in Delhi there is little sense of responsibility about using water. Sonia Vihar commenced supply in August 2006 and dry Vasant Kunj heaved a sigh of relief. Water supply doubled from an hour a day. Nearly everybody in this affluent colony of around 20,000 houses has selfishly installed pumps on the main water lines to fill their own tanks, and beggar their neighbours. Now, tanks overflow while people refuse to spend the Rs 100 needed to fix a ball cock that would save water. There is little recognition of the fact that thousands of crores of



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rupees have been spent, and hundreds of thousands have sacrificed their lands and way of life, so that these few could get some water. The story is the same across south Delhi, that has benefited most from the new water treatment plant. Perhaps the government was right to attempt privatization because then, these same people would have had to pay higher rates for the water they so blithely waste.

As Delhi doesn't have much by way of water resources, rainwater harvesting is a viable alternative. The city gets about 610 MM of rain a year. A RWH system on a roof with an area of 100 SQM can yield 36,000 litres in a year. That's enough water for one person for 4 months, going by the government's water supply standards. If you reduce the water used for flushing toilets, watering plants and washing the house, this can be stretched to six months. Most DDA flats and private houses have that sort of roof area. Multiply it by millions of houses across the city and the quantity of harvested rainwater goes up substantially. However, as the managing director of DLF, a large private property development company, says, "Rainwater harvesting will not work in Delhi." With an attitude like that, it's no surprise that this has not caught on in Delhi save in a few pockets.

Delhi's continued splurge – people hosing down cars, owning private swimming pools, watering expansive lawns and wasting water in hundreds of other ways – is set to get worse. Malls and hotels are coming up across the city and these will strain an overstretched system further. Both are notorious for being intensive consumers of water and power. In fact, in water-scare Vasant Kunj, three large malls are to come up by 2008. On the other hand, area for water harvesting and conservation continues to diminish.

A combination of factors can ameliorate Delhi's disastrous water record. Rainwater harvesting, recycling waste water and a sensible use of this scarce resource can contain its continuously increasing demands. For any of this to happen, education has to begin at home. The government has tried to encourage RWH but it's not worked. Residents Welfare Associations in some parts of the city have used rainwater and recycled waste water for watering lawns. Best-case scenarios show that, taken together, these three simple steps can save a third of water needed by the city; that's more than the current shortage.

If Delhi's historical rulers took special care of the water supply, its current ones are marching in the opposite direction. Delhi wasn't dependent on the goodwill of four states for its water – it managed quite well, thank you. But when politicians, land developers and land sharks, the plethora of (un)civic agencies and plain citizens decide that their individual needs come first, things deteriorate fast.

Delhi has completely abandoned its rich and varied past of managing its water resources sensibly. Its citizens abuse water and waste much more than I have seen anywhere else in India. I have seen tanks overflowing in Vasant Kunj, supposedly a dry area, while a few kilometers away in Dwarka, people still queue up for water. I have seen thousands of litres of water let out of full overhead tanks to flush them. I have seen leaking water mains turn streets into swamps in the height of summer. I have seen restaurant owners in Delhi convert ponds into parking lots and get away by bribing a judge of the high court. I have seen water flooding enormous lawns while poor people ferry the same liquid past these lawns to drink.



Jalyatra – Exploring India’s Traditional Water Management Systems

Perhaps this is due to the fact that it’s a city of migrants who feel little empathy for it. Perhaps it’s the city’s commercial bent of mind, that sacrifices everything to Mammon. Maybe Delhiites just don’t care because they know that at the end of the day, water will come from some distant land. They forget that this water comes at the expense of someone else, who one day will come knocking on their door for a job, and justice. And the former head of Delhi Jal Board, charged with delivering water to the city, had instead been charged with taking a bribe of \$75000 in kind for awarding Kaveri Infrastructure Limited a contract for renovating the water mains at an exorbitant amount of Rs 36 crore. A few enlightened resident welfare associations have taken matters into their hands and built rainwater harvesting systems – more such initiatives may yet save the city from a completely dry future.

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