CHIEF MINISTER'S WATER SELF-RELIANCE SCHEME

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Water is life. A person can survive for a month without food, but cannot live for more than a week without water. Water is the force that can play a crucial role in India's high economic development, environmental sustainability, and improving the standard of living for its citizens.

Due to adverse geographical conditions, Rajasthan experiences drought every fourth year, which increases the importance of water conservation. Historically, Rajasthan was a territory of kings who adopted a scientific approach to preserve rainwater by constructing dams, ponds, stepwells, tanks, and Khadins. They stored rainwater in these structures to provide the common people with sufficient water for drinking and irrigation.

In the present time, tube wells have replaced wells, stepwells, and ponds, leading to the over-extraction of groundwater. In Rajasthan, 41 blocks are critically over-exploited in terms of groundwater. To fulfill the minimum water requirements in rural areas, the Rajasthan government launched the Chief Minister's Water Self-Reliance Scheme on January 27, 2016, starting from the village of Gardan Khedi in the Jhalawar district."

उर्ज वहंतीरमृतं घृतं पयः कीलालं परिस्रुतम ।

स्वधा स्थ तर्पयत में पितृन्।।

In the Yajurveda, water is regarded as equivalent to nectar, a symbol of purification and strength, a nourishing element of nature, a provider of food, and a destroyer of enemies; hence, water is considered the giver of life. Water is the essence of life, and conserving water is akin to giving life. A person can survive for a month without food, but can live only about a week without water. Water is life. It is a force that can play a significant role in India's high economic development, environmental sustainability, and elevating the standard of living for its citizens.

Rajasthan is located in the northwestern part of India, situated between 23°3' North latitude to 30°12' North latitude and 69°30' East longitude to 78°17' East longitude. It is surrounded by the vast plains of the Ganga-Yamuna rivers in the east, the Malwa plateau in the south, the plains of the Sutlej-Bias rivers in the north and northwest, and the Thar Desert in the west. The desert comprises 61% of the total area, while the northeastern and southeastern regions are characterized by plains.

Geographically, Rajasthan has a predominance of arid and semi-arid climate conditions, with inadequate and uncertain rainfall and uneven distribution of rain, which lead to climatic diversity and a lack of fertile land, making drought and famine common occurrences. These circumstances have compelled the residents of Rajasthan to adopt water management measures to sustain their existence. The inhabitants have preserved the raindrops like silver droplets and collected the blessings of Indra (the rain god) as if they were nectar.

The tradition of water management in Rajasthan dates back to ancient times. The rulers of this region considered the construction of wells, ponds, dams, stepwells, tanks, and lakes as their moral responsibility within their states.

In independent India, several multi-purpose schemes have been formulated for water conservation, enabling easy access to drinking and irrigation water for the public. Under the leadership of former Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje, the Rajasthan government initiated efforts to meet the minimum water requirements in rural areas and address issues arising from water scarcity during drought.

On January 27, 2016, the Chief Minister's Water Self-Reliance Scheme was launched in the village of Mardankhedi in Jhalawar district. This campaign is a flagship scheme of the Rajasthan government. Under this scheme, a geological structure is constructed in the adopted village for rainwater

harvesting, enabling the village to become self-reliant during droughts. A water scientific unit is established within the village, focusing primarily on water conservation plans related to water management, which includes the conservation of available resources in rural areas, water harvesting, proper usage, renewal, and the construction of new water storage structures.

The government has implemented four phases under the Chief Minister's Water Self-Reliance Scheme:

1. **First Phase**: Traditional water conservation systems such as ponds and tanks were constructed in selected villages. New tanks were also built. In the first phase, 3,529 villages from 295 panchayat samitis were selected, resulting in the completion of 95,192 works.
2. **Second Phase**: Launched on December 9, 2016, this phase completed approximately 150,393 water conservation works in 4,213 villages and included six cities in the initiative.
3. **Third Phase**: This phase completed 156,152 water conservation works in 4,314 villages. Additionally, about 1.48 million plants were also planted. Across all three phases, a total of approximately 120,056 works have been completed in 381,737 villages.
4. **Fourth Phase**: Initiated on October 3, 2018, this phase identified 180,000 works in 3,963 villages.

The MJSAP (Mukhyamantri Jal Swavlamban Abhiyan) is an unprecedented project that has brought miraculous changes to Rajasthan's drought landscape. In the first phase, success was achieved in making 3,529 villages self-reliant. With an investment of approximately 1,192 crores, 94,000 water bodies have been constructed. These water bodies now hold around 111,270 million cubic meters of water, benefiting approximately 4.1 million people and 4.5 million livestock. In just two years, the groundwater level has risen by 1.3 meters.

The main objectives of this scheme are to increase groundwater levels and conserve rainwater. For this purpose, lakes and ponds in every city, village, and town will be deepened and maintained. Rainwater harvesting will be incorporated into every government building and household.

References:

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