

DOCUMENTATION OF SUCCESS STORY
ON
GROUND WATER CONSERVATION & PROSPECTS TO ENSURE
SUSTAINABLE WATER SUPPLY IN DURGAH PREMISES

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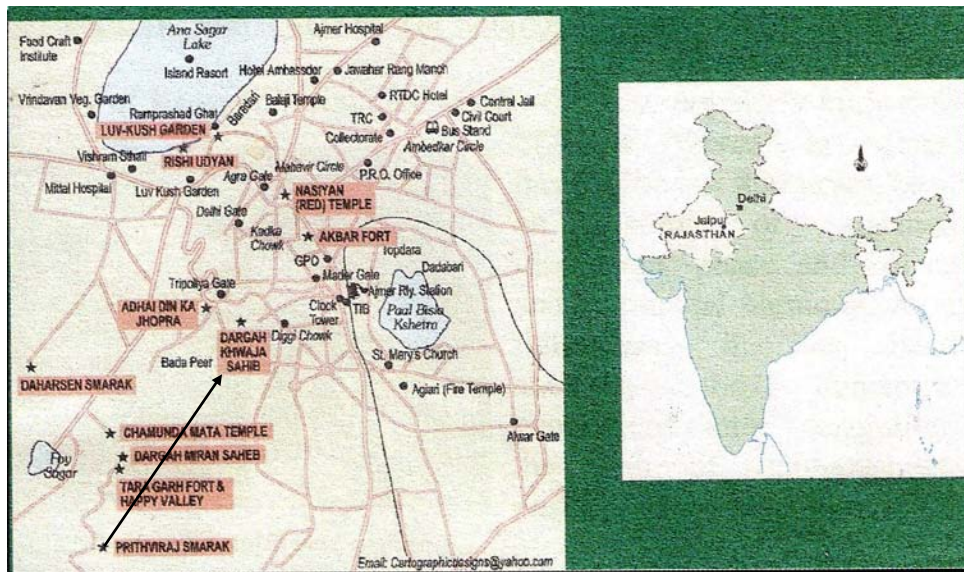
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I. BACKGROUND OF DARGAH OF KHWAJA MOINUDDIN HASAN CHISTY, AJMER

Gharib Nawaz, the Dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Hasan Chisty at Ajmer is a world famous religious pilgrim spot to both Hindus and Muslims. The shrine is located near Ajmer town, an area which has scanty rainfall and limited ground water resources. The rainfall in this region is very erratic. The average annual rainfall is around 50 cm and average humidity is 57 %.

Geographically the area is underlain by igneous and metamorphosis rocks which are hard, massive and generally considered to have limited ground water potential.



Dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Hasan Chisty at Ajmer

II. EXISTING WATER SUPPLY ARRANGEMENTS AT AJMER SHERIEF

Ajmer city is well know for drinking water crisis and in past it's major source of water supply to the township was from surface water reservoir know as " Ana Sagar" and few identified ponds. Over the period of time these water bodies have been polluted and are being treated at various stages before passing on to the water supply pipelines. Presently the drinking water supply arrangements to the Ajmer town is being made from the Bilaspur Drinking Water Supply Project which is around 90 Kms away from the town.

III. HUGE GAP BETWEEN DEMAND AND SUPPLY Vs WATER FOR PILGRIMS

The shrine complex comprises 48 shops, 175 hujras, 4 mosques, 1 madrasa, a guesthouse of 180 rooms, besides a number of other commercial establishments. More than 35 lakh pilgrims visit the annual Urs in the Islamic month of Rajab and mini Urs in Muharram. 17 crores litres of water is required annually for the shrine complex.

To augment this, the PHED is able to supply less than 2.0 per cent of the water requirement, leaving a huge gap between demand and supply. Since past many years, the Dargah Committee has been making alternate arrangements to meet the gap.

IV. INITIATIVES FOR WATER CONSERVATION

Dargah premises is having a ground water reservoir popularly known as Jhalra, which is the main source of drinking water to the complex. It is fed by the drainage from the foothill of Taragarh. Due to poor maintenance for a number of years in the past, the Jhalra dried up in July, 2007.



Photograph of Dried Jhalra (Traditional Water Tank)

V. WORKS UNDERTAKEN/PROGRESS

- 5.1 To resolve the water supply problem of the holy pilgrimage, the Dargah Committee held a detailed discussions to revive the dried up traditional water supply structure i.e., Jhalra. The outcome of the discussions revealed that due to poor maintenance for a number of years, the Jhalra got dried during July 2007, which was the only source of traditional water supply for the Dargah which led to acute water supply problem in the Dargah premises. Although

Public Health & Engineering Department (PHED) supplied the water to the Dargah premises but it was to the ratio of 2 : 100 (Supply : Demand).

- 5.2 To meet the gap in demand and supply of drinking water, Dargah Committee took-up a reclamation project through community participation. The Committee decided to engage local traditional labourers having knowledge of restoration of wells, ponds and old Jhalaras. The work continued for a whole month and around 6000 sq.ft. area of Jhalra was scientifically excavated upto 22 feet depth. Garbage and debris were removed and the openings passes which were choked/closed for years were opened up and made pathway for ground water movement/flow. This resulted in restoring water level to a desired extent to resolve the drinking water problem of the township through community participation.

VI. RESULTS OF THE NOBLE INITIATIVES

By December 31 2008, water level in the Jhalra reached 40 feet, making available 63 lakh litres of water per day. An average of 4.75 lakh litres of triple/double filtered water is supplied to the Dargah premises, meeting nearly 99 percent of the demand. In addition, three shallow tubewells have also been constructed, supplying pure water to pilgrims. Tests indicate that the water quality is very good.



Photograph of Revived Jhalra (Traditional Water Tank)

VII. FUTURE PLANS OF THE DARGAH COMMITTEE

The future interventions planned by the Dargah Committee include detailed ground water investigation of Taragarh hills, ground water quality appraisal, construction of storm water drains, preservation of water bodies around the shrine etc.

IX. DOCUMENTATION PROCESS

Looking into the success of Dargah Committee of Ajmer to resolve the drinking water problem, IDI thought of documenting the success in the form of a film for dissemination to other parts of the country and in the process IDI prepared and submitted a proposal to India Water Partnership (IWP) which was duly approved. The following steps were taken up for documenting the success of Dargah Committee for revival of dried Jhalra.

X. PROPOSED RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY TO DOCUMENT THE SUCCESS OF DARGAH COMMITTEE TO REVIVE THE JHALRA

The challenges of IWP include collection of evidence of local wisdom on IWRM through the network of partners and NGOs, with particular focus on backward areas, training of groups, research and documentation of low cost water saving technology etc

Having known the success of Dargah Committee for revival of Jhalra, Institute for Development Initiatives (IDI) proposed India Water Partnership (IWP) for producing a five minute documentary film on this successful experiment made for disseminating information on this highly successful experiment in rejuvenating traditional water harvesting systems.. The proposed documentary will research and document low cost water saving technology used in Ajmer and also help to disseminate the message of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM).

Religious and pilgrim places have huge tracts of land and other natural resources, which are, in places in degraded conditions. In some religious places pilgrims do free labour to develop land, plant trees, clean up the premises etc. Though government is striving to provide facilities to pilgrims, community action will go a long way to bring about sustainability to the solutions. It is in this context that the proposed documentary on the Gharib Nawas experiment assumes importance.

The following steps have been taken in making the documentary:

- i) detailed discussions with Dargah committee, residents, shopkeepers etc;
- ii) study of the water supply problems of the township
- iii) study of traditional water harvesting systems in the region, including the reasons for their deterioration
- iv) document efforts taken by the Dargah committee
- v) document the role of the community in restoration efforts

The documentary will interweave the culture, dance and music of the region to the social and religious life in the Dargah complex, including the perceptions of both Indian and foreign pilgrims.

XI. DOCUMENTATION OF JHALRA – WHY ?

On the basis of dialogue with the Dargah Committee, it is felt that places of worship have the potential role in community mobilization for conservation of natural resources. The laudable initiatives taken by the Dargah Committee in raising the water level to 40 feet and making available 63 lakh litres of water per day from December, 2008 certainly needs documentation.

XII. CONTENTS OF THE DOCUMENTARY FILM

The documentary film will contain the following :

S.No.	Particular	Duration (approx.)/ Content	Visuals
1.	Opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 seconds • The overall scenario of drinking water problem/shortage in India 	People in shortage of water in various settings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fetching water from dirty locations (near drainage, etc.), • From Municipal Corporation tankers, • Queuing with buckets/containers in slum areas, etc.
2.	Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 seconds • Drinking water shortage in Dargah area, • Background of the problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life, in & around, Dargah area • People, culture, music (quawallies) • Dramatized shots of water shortage in Dargah area, • Bytes of Dargah committee head discussing the time when there was no water in Dargah premises, how people managed the situation, problem they faced in the past, etc. • The inability of PHED in supplying sufficient water in Dargah area. • Data regarding the gap between the demand & supply of water in Dargah.
3.	Findings/solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 seconds • How Dargah committee came in contact with IDI. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bytes of Dargah Committee chief on how they found solution in IDI. • Bytes of IDI official/spokes person about their suggestions to root out the problem.

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S.No.	Particular	Duration (approx.)/ Content	Visuals
4.	Project for rejuvenating the Jhalra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 minutes. • Bytes of important people and common men, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deciding upon rejuvenating the Jhalra. • The problem faced in organizing the excavation, funding issues, manpower shortage, any other problem. • Solution in terms of volunteers, fund raising, etc. • The rejuvenation activity, visuals from stills and video (if any) available with the Dargah Committee, excavation shots from other locations will be mixed.
5.	Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 seconds • Bytes of IDI officials/Dargah Committee members, etc. • Graphics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facts & findings of the project. • Data related to the demand & supply chain of water.
6.	Future plans/ Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 minutes • Bytes of IDI officials/Dargah Committee members, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To initiate similar projects in other areas around Ajmer. • Appeal to the masses to seek inspiration from The Dargah model of community involvement. • To replicate such community movement in their respective area to root out water problem. • This model can be applied to root out other problems like garbage management, health & hygiene issues, road construction, etc. • Montage of other holy shrines like Pushkar, other temples, etc. • Concluding with the montage of the shrine, life in & around Dargah, people doing wazoo, Bhishti who sprinkles water in the premises, making food in the giant "deg", Quawalli sessions from various performers in the Dargah premises, etc. • Credits to IDI, Dargah Committee, Crew, etc.

VIII. EMERGING ISSUES AND FUTURE ACTION

In order to ensure sustainability of water supply to the pilgrimage at the Ajmer-e-Sherief, it would be pertinent that a consolidated action plan is taken up. In this regard, actions are suggested to restore/conserves the water resources.

- (i) Detailed groundwater investigation of the Taragarh hills, which acts as main source of groundwater to the wells at Dargah ;
- (ii) Groundwater quality appraisal of the tube wells that are in operation ;
- (iii) Construction and improvement of drains/storm water drains ;
- (iv) Preservation of water bodies in and around Dargah ;

- (v) Improvement in infrastructural facilities and assistance in creating durable water assets and quality oriented services for the pilgrimage ;
- (vi) Quantification of total water exploited from these tubewells constructed on the periphery of this Jhalra (Water Reservoir) ;
- (vii) Creation of awareness among the masses to adopt similar model of water storage in the drought hit areas ; and ;
- (viii) Proper press/media coverage and preparation of documentary films in vernacular language.

XII. CONCLUSIONS

The documentary will not only be a record of a historic natural resources restoration effort but will also act as a motivational tool for other religious places. The documentary can be aired on the national broadcast media, and IWP's contributions will be duly acknowledged and communicated to the masses. It will create awareness among the masses to adopt similar model for water restoration.

This documentary film, we hope, will play a catalytic role, after its dissemination to the other parts of the country to revive such Jhalras, ponds and the reservoirs which have already dried-up or at the verge of drying up due to various natural and human reasons. The efforts made by the State Government, the Dargah Committee with the support of peoples' participation to revive the dried Jhalra at Ajmer Sherief are commendable.