

WATER BODIES OF AJMER

A community
perspective



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A Community Perspective

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Preface

Urban water bodies have historically been integral to the ecological, social, and cultural fabric of Indian cities. In water-scarce regions such as Ajmer, lakes, ponds, stepwells, and wetlands evolved as carefully managed systems that enabled communities to cope with uncertainty, store water, recharge aquifers, moderate floods, and sustain livelihoods. Over time, however, rapid urbanisation, unplanned land-use change, encroachment, pollution, catchment degradation, weak institutional coordination, and increasing climate variability have significantly undermined the health and functionality of these water bodies. As a result, many have become disconnected from their natural inflows, burdened with untreated wastewater and solid waste, and addressed through fragmented, short-term interventions that fail to secure lasting outcomes.

This compendium responds to these challenges by repositioning Ajmer's water bodies as critical urban commons and climate assets, rather than residual spaces or isolated projects. It brings together the histories of public water bodies in Ajmer as narrated by the communities who have lived alongside them for generations. These residents have witnessed multiple transformations over time, changes in physical form, patterns of use, and social and cultural significance. They have seen water bodies shift from collectively cared-for community resources to government-owned assets, and from primary sources of water to neglected spaces in an era dominated by taps and alternative water sources. Through these voices, the compendium documents lived experiences, memories, and everyday relationships that are rarely captured in formal records.

Drawing on local assessments and sustained community engagement, the compendium seeks to support planning and action that are context-specific, inclusive, and sustainable over time.

The analytical lens guiding this compendium is the SECURE (Strengthening and Enhancing Contextual Urban Resilience) Framework. SECURE provides a structured approach to urban water body rejuvenation by emphasising sustainability, equity, convergence, systems understanding, and resilience. Together, these dimensions respond directly to the challenges observed in Ajmer, where technical solutions have often been pursued without sufficient attention to social inclusion, institutional coordination, or long-term operation and maintenance.

The compendium offers important directions for the preparation of the City Water Action Plan (CWAP) under the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2.0, which recognises water body rejuvenation as a cornerstone of urban water security, flood mitigation, and climate resilience. Central to this effort is the recognition that rejuvenation is not only a technical exercise, but also a social and institutional process. In line with the AMRUT-GESI 2.0 Guidelines, the compendium foregrounds gender equality and social inclusion as essential to sustainable water governance. Women and residents of informal settlements often experience the most severe impacts of water scarcity, flooding, and environmental degradation, yet their voices remain underrepresented in planning and decision-making. Integrating a GESI lens helps ensure that rejuvenation efforts enhance safety, accessibility, participation, and dignity, and that benefits are equitably distributed.

This compendium is intended as a practical and accessible resource for urban local body officials, elected representatives, planners, community organisations, Self-Help Groups, and civil society actors working in Ajmer. It may be used to inform planning and DPR preparation under AMRUT 2.0, support participatory and inclusive processes in line with GESI principles, and strengthen coordination across institutions and stakeholders. It is not a prescriptive manual, but a guiding document to be adapted, updated, and strengthened through learning and practice.

By integrating national missions with local realities, this compendium seeks to contribute to a shared vision for Ajmer, one in which water bodies are restored as living systems, climate resilience is strengthened, and urban development is inclusive, sustainable, and community centered.

Dr. Anshuman Karol
Lead – Governance and Climate Action
Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)



MESSAGE

In the face of growing urbanisation and climate-related challenges, it is increasingly important to recognise the traditional water bodies of Ajmer as heritage assets and as critical infrastructure for sustainable water management and urban resilience. Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) has undertaken commendable work in advancing the rejuvenation of these water bodies through inclusive, community-led approaches.

This compendium is a valuable effort to document Ajmer's lakes, talaabs, baodis, and jhalras through the lens of community knowledge and lived experience. By bringing together local histories, present conditions, and community perspectives, it offers important insights that can inform future planning, conservation, and rejuvenation initiatives.

The Ajmer Municipal Corporation appreciates this collaborative and participatory approach, which aligns with our commitment to inclusive urban development and climate-responsive planning. I hope it serves as a useful reference for citizens, planners, and policymakers, and encourages collective action towards protecting and revitalising Ajmer's traditional water bodies for the benefit of present and future generations.

I congratulate PRIA for bringing out this compendium and convey my best wishes to them for this initiative.


(Deshal Dan)
(IAS)

Commissioner
Municipal Corporation Ajmer



Celebrating Ajmer's Water Heritage

On 10th January 2026, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), in collaboration with the Ajmer Municipal Corporation, Swachh Bharat Mission and the ward councillor of ward no. 62—Mr. Narendra Nicky Tunwal, along with the support of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), conducted an awareness building session for school and college students of Ajmer, focusing on the importance of traditional water bodies and the need to maintain them well. The session was followed by a drawing competition on the same topic. The winning entries are displayed here.



Sanskriti Naruka
Sophia College



Harshita Gunrat
Shri Mangalchand Sakhlecha Govt. Senior Secondary School

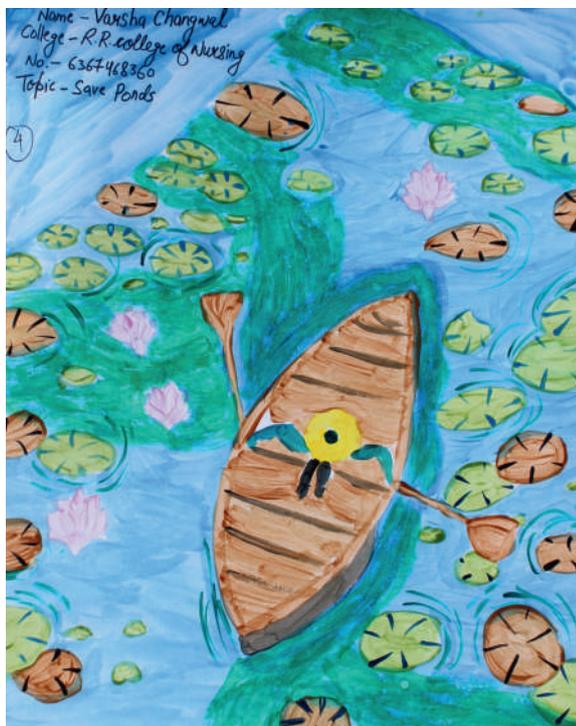


Kusum Sharma
Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati University



Sandhya Bhati
Tak Global Academy Senior Sec. School

Celebrating Ajmer's Water Heritage



Varsha Changwal
R.R. College of Nursing



Tanvi Vijayvargia
Sophia College



Shraddha Public Senior Sec. School



Yashika Singh
Tak Global Academy Senior Sec. School

Acknowledgements

At a time when urban water stress, flooding, and the loss of shared natural resources are becoming increasingly visible, documenting and revitalising these water bodies through community-led processes is both timely and necessary. This compendium is the outcome of a collaborative effort that recognises local knowledge and participatory planning as essential to strengthening sustainable water governance in Ajmer.

This compendium was generously supported by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). We are extremely grateful to the guidance and support provided by the IIED team, especially Alejandro Barcena, Julio Araujo, Anna Bishop and Georgia Grist.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC) for their invaluable support in conducting this study under the project 'Community-Led Water Body Rejuvenation and Green Space Development using SECURE Framework'. This initiative aims to enhance climate resilience in the city of Ajmer by preparing plans for the rejuvenation of traditional water bodies and development of green spaces through community-led participatory planning. Leveraging the SECURE framework and AMRUT 2.0 guidelines, it aims to build the capacities of the community in general and women self-help groups in particular as climate champions for sustainable water governance and ecosystem restoration.

Several government officials generously contributed their time and energy in making this initiative a success. We are extremely grateful to Archana Mathur (Superintendent Chemist, PHED, Ajmer), Babita Singh (Assistant Engineer and Incharge, Swachh Bharat Mission, Ajmer) and Manohar Songar (Senior Engineer, Udhyan Shaka, Ajmer) for their valuable efforts and support, particularly in facilitating community engagement activities. We also acknowledge the support extended by the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM), the Water Resources Department, the Forest Department, and the Tourism Department.

We are grateful to the Municipal Commissioner, Deshal Dan, who provided unwavering support and served as the backbone of our work in Ajmer.

We would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to all the ward councillors who supported us in this work, particularly Narendra Nicky Tunwal and Pinki Balotiya. Their role was essential in encouraging and motivating community participation.

This compendium would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions of the women from self-help groups in Ajmer — Anuradha, Bhuvnesh Kumari, Ganga, Kalpana, Khushbu and Priyanka, as well as our field coordinator — Yogita, who worked closely with us throughout the documentation process. As residents of the city, they served as vital links between the project team and local communities. Their commitment, insight, and active participation as co-researchers greatly enriched the depth and authenticity of this compendium, and we acknowledge their efforts with deep appreciation.

We are also extremely grateful to Dr. Kaustuv K. Bandyopadhyay, Director, PRIA for his valuable and timely inputs which significantly strengthened the analysis and overall quality of our work.

Lastly, we express our sincere gratitude to Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Founder — President of PRIA, for his guidance and direction, which played a crucial role in shaping this report.

This report reflects a collective effort towards strengthening water governance and improving service delivery in Ajmer, and we hope it will serve as a valuable resource for future urban resilience initiatives.

Sowmia Philip
Programme Officer, PRIA

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Senior Programme Officer (Research), PRIA

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Lead – Governance and Climate Action, PRIA

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Acronyms

AMC	Ajmer Municipal Corporation
AMRUT	Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation
CWAP	City Water Action Plan
DPR	Detailed Project Report
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
PHED	Public Health Engineering Department
PRIA	Participatory Research in Asia
SECURe	Strengthening and Enhancing Contextual Urban Resilience
SHG	Self Help Group
WB	Water Body

Introduction and Background

Rooted in centuries of ecological wisdom, Rajasthan's traditional water bodies reflect a deep community-led understanding of scarcity, climate, and survival in an arid landscape.

Focusing on Ajmer, this compendium documents how lakes, baodis, and jhalras continue to shape the city's ecology, culture, and collective memory.

Rajasthan is a land defined by its climate and landscape – an arid region where water has always shaped civilisation, culture, architecture, and survival. Stretching across the western part of India, the state receives some of the lowest rainfall in the country. Its climate is characterised by extreme heat, low humidity, erratic monsoons, and long dry spells that leave landscapes parched for most of the year (Mundetia & Sharma, 2015).

In this vast semi-arid and arid terrain, water has never been taken for granted. Instead, it has been nurtured carefully, harvested strategically, and woven into the fabric of daily living through the creation of ingenious traditional water systems. These systems – talaabs, baodis, jhalras and naadis – were not merely physical structures but expressions of a sophisticated ecological intelligence that communities honed through centuries of living in harmony with their environment.

Rajasthan's traditional water bodies were built with a deep understanding of the natural contours of the land, the movement of rainwater, and the geology beneath the surface (Nair & Bithoo, 2025). Large lakes captured rainwater and served as municipal lifelines. Baodis and jhalras – the iconic stepwells, provided long-term storage and access throughout changing seasons. Their form was as much functional as it was artistic. They were designed to keep water cool, to allow easy descent even as water levels fluctuated, and to offer a microclimate that brought relief from the searing heat (Kumawat, Matwa, Anand, Gupta, & Sapre, 2023; Jandaghian & Colombo, 2024).



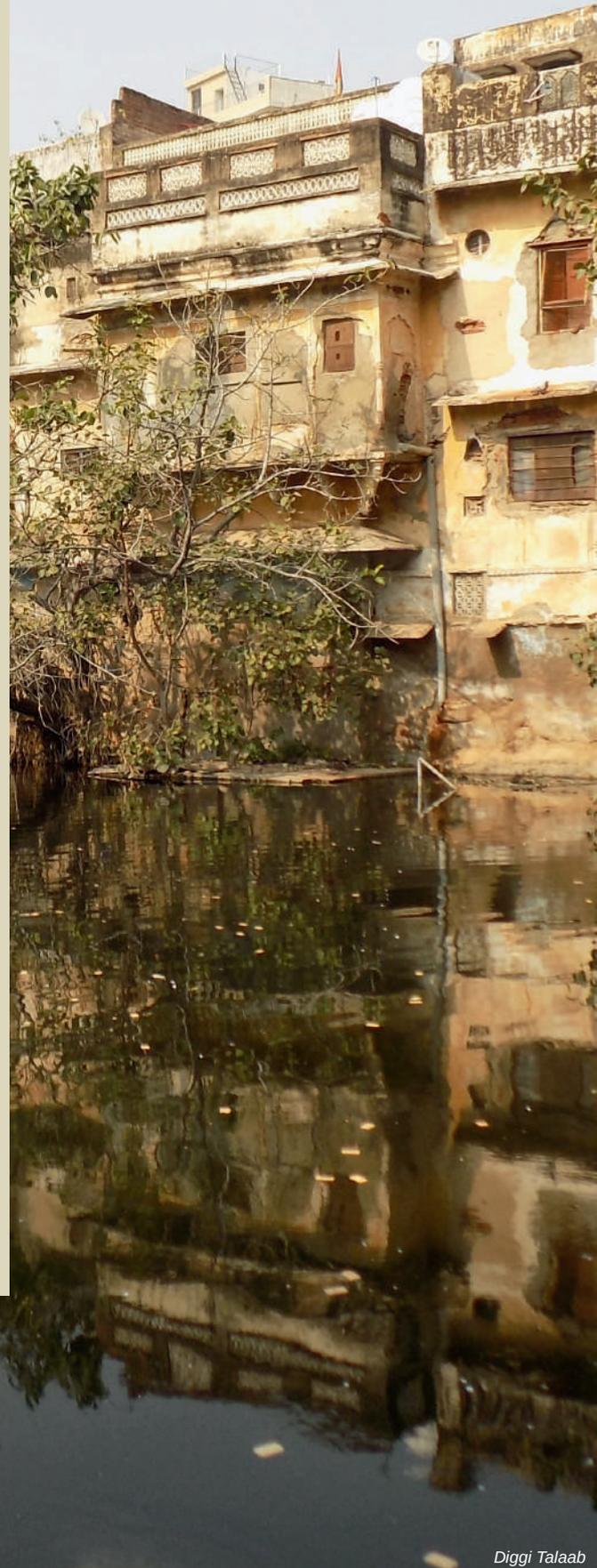
These water bodies stood as physical reminders of a worldview that understood water as priceless, requiring collective responsibility and thoughtful management.

Within this broader context lies the city of Ajmer – one of Rajasthan's most culturally rich and historically layered cities. Nestled in a hilly region which is part of the Aravalli Range, Ajmer stands out because of its unique topography: a plateau surrounded by hills, where water naturally gathers, flows and settles. The city sits on the lower slopes of the Taragarh Hill (Britannica, n.d.; India Meteorological Department, 2010).

This made it an ideal location for building a network of water bodies that sustained the city over centuries. From the majestic Anasagar Lake built in the 12th century to the small, neighbourhood-based baodis and jhalras scattered across localities like Taragarh, Anderkot, Topdhara, Diggi Bazaar Ajmer's waterscapes reveal a legacy of community-driven conservation.

Each water body – large or small – has a history. Some were created by kings or governors as acts of public service; others were built by local communities or religious leaders to support daily needs or ritual practices. Many are closely tied to temples, shrines, mosques, and dargahs, reflecting the intertwined nature of water, culture, and the sacred. Even today, they continue to shape local microclimates, influence settlement patterns, and hold deep emotional associations for the people who live around them.

This compendium brings together the stories, histories, present conditions, and community relationships of a selection of public water bodies in Ajmer. It is an effort to understand not only the structures themselves but the lived realities and memories that have kept them alive across generations.



Aim and Purpose

This compendium has been created with a clear purpose: to document, celebrate, and critically reflect on the water heritage of Ajmer. At a time when climate change is intensifying water scarcity, heat waves, and urban flooding, it is more important than ever to acknowledge, conserve, and revive traditional water systems. The water bodies captured in this compendium represent only a small portion of Ajmer's hydrological heritage, yet they offer invaluable insights into how people relate to water, how communities adapt, and how local knowledge can support environmental resilience.

Building a database of public water bodies in Ajmer

The first aim of this compendium is to develop a clear, accessible database of public water bodies within Ajmer city. Many of these structures – especially the smaller baodis and jhalras – are undocumented or under-documented. Official records often overlook them, and modern infrastructure planning does not always recognise their relevance. By cataloguing their coordinates, dimensions, conditions, and local significance, this compendium fills an important information gap. It provides a foundation for conservation efforts, policy discussions, and community-based initiatives focused on urban water sustainability.

Bringing out local histories and memories

Every water body has a story, and these stories have been preserved most faithfully by the communities living closest to them. Through oral histories, remembered anecdotes, and generational knowledge, residents recall how these structures were once used, celebrated, protected, or feared. In many cases, community members are the only sources of information about the origin, construction, or historical uses of the water bodies. This compendium documents these memories with care so that they are not lost – stories of water scarcity, rituals, rules, social gatherings, and the daily routines that once revolved around these structures.



Understanding community–water relationships

The compendium places strong emphasis on people’s lived experiences. Instead of treating these water bodies as isolated structural artifacts, it explores how they have shaped and been shaped by community interaction. Residents speak of how they fetched water, bathed, washed clothes, performed rituals, or simply found solace at the steps of these baodis and jhalras. The narratives reveal shifting relationships – how the introduction of piped water reduced dependence, how fear of accidents led to restricted access, how neglect changed attitudes, and yet how emotional connections to these places persist.

Documenting the community’s vision for their water bodies

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of the compendium is the community’s vision for the future. People express desires for cleanliness, restoration, regular maintenance, safety measures, beautification, and renewed use – ideas that reflect both practicality and hope. Some imagine their baodi becoming a backup water source; others want it to be a clean, peaceful space for gatherings; many simply want it respected again. These visions are deeply significant, because sustainable water management must be grounded in the aspirations of those who live closest to the resource.

Highlighting the ecological and climate role of traditional water bodies

One of the major purposes of this compilation is to show how these stories collectively point to a larger truth: traditional water bodies are not relics of the past – they are climate infrastructure.

The water bodies:

- store rainwater, reducing dependency on external sources such as distant dams
- recharge groundwater, which is critical in a region suffering sharp declines
- prevent flooding by capturing runoff during heavy monsoons
- moderate temperature, creating cooling effects in dense urban areas
- support biodiversity, from fish to birds to plant life
- create shaded, cooler microclimates that reduce heat stress for nearby residents

When we look at these structures through a climate lens, they emerge as powerful tools for urban resilience. The local stories captured in this compendium show how communities intuitively understand this value, even if they use different words to describe it.

Alignment with AMRUT 2.0 Operational Guidelines

The Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2.0 operational guidelines underscore the importance of community participation in water management, with particular emphasis on the involvement of women’s self-help groups (SHGs) and youth. The guidelines also highlight the need for capacity building of citizens, including women and SHG members, to enable their active and informed engagement in planning, implementation, and monitoring of water-related initiatives.

In addition, the scheme mandates the preparation of City Water Action Plans (CWAPs), which serve as strategic frameworks for sustainable urban water management. Within CWAPs, the rejuvenation of water bodies and the development of green spaces are identified as priority sectors, recognising their critical role in enhancing water security, ecological resilience, and urban livability (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2021).

Methodology

The process of creating this compendium involved a participatory, community-centred research approach. Rather than relying solely on official data or technical surveys, it builds on the voices, experiences, and knowledge of the people who live around the water bodies.

1

Identification of public water bodies

Researchers mapped and identified public water bodies across Ajmer city through a combination of satellite imagery, municipal records, and field exploration. Priority was given to water bodies located within densely populated or historically important parts of the city, especially those whose community connections remained strong or whose histories were undocumented.

2

Training women from self-help groups

Local residents were placed at the centre of this initiative, recognising that meaningful documentation and conservation of water bodies must be rooted in community knowledge.

In this context, we worked closely with a group of women from local self-help groups in Ajmer. As residents of the city, these women brought with them a deep familiarity of neighbourhoods, social networks, and everyday water-related practices. Their presence helped build trust and credibility, enabling smoother and more open engagement with community members.

They acted as a vital bridge between the project team and the local community. They facilitated introductions, helped identify key knowledge holders, and created an enabling environment for conversations around water bodies. Their involvement ensured that community members felt heard and respected, rather than merely studied.

In addition to their role as community connectors, the women were trained in participatory research methods and tools. This included learning how to document oral histories, observe everyday interactions around water bodies and use participatory tools such as historical timelines and spatial resource mapping. Through this process, they actively contributed to gathering stories, memories, and locally held knowledge related to Ajmer's water systems. Rather than being passive participants, they emerged as co-researchers, shaping both the process and the insights generated. Their engagement strengthened the quality and depth of the documentation and built local capacity for future community-led research and conservation efforts.



3

Training Students

College students from various universities were engaged as an integral part of the research process and were trained in participatory tools and methods. The training focused on equipping them to engage respectfully and meaningfully with communities, using the principles of participatory research. Students were introduced to the concept of community as a living, dynamic entity, and to the importance and relevance of local knowledge in understanding water bodies and their histories.

The training also covered practical skills such as facilitating group discussions, conducting informal conversations, and documenting information in ways that capture both factual details and lived experiences. Emphasis was placed on listening, observation, and ethical engagement, helping students learn how to create spaces where community members could share their memories, concerns, and insights freely.

Through this process, students developed a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Ajmer's water bodies. Their learning went beyond technical or infrastructural aspects to include social histories, cultural practices, everyday interactions, and emotional relationships that communities have with these spaces. This shift in perspective enabled students to view water bodies not merely as physical structures, but as living systems shaped by people, practices, and collective memory.

4

Participatory fieldwork with communities

For each water body, extensive field visits were conducted. The team spent time speaking with local residents – elders, women, youth, shopkeepers, devotees at religious sites, and long-term neighbours – to gather information. Participation was voluntary and conversational, allowing community members to guide the narrative. This helped deepen understanding of not only the technical features of the structures but also their emotional and cultural meanings.

5

Use of participatory mapping tools

Participatory tools such as community mapping, historical timelines, and resource mapping were used. Residents sketched the history of the water body, changes over time, sources of water, patterns of use, and local landmarks. These visual tools made it easier to reconstruct forgotten details and capture the collective memory of the locality.

6

Compilation and interpretation

The collected information was organised into a uniform structure: introduction, history, physical features, present condition, cultural practices, ecological profile, community knowledge, and community vision. Photographs, local quotes, maps, and descriptive accounts were carefully integrated to provide a comprehensive picture of each water body.

Guide to the Compendium

Understanding Ajmer's traditional water bodies

This compendium brings together detailed profiles of a range of traditional public water bodies found across Ajmer. Water bodies that are privately owned or lie outside of the limits of the municipal corporation have not been covered. While each water body has its own unique history, form, and relationship with the surrounding community, they broadly fall into a few commonly found typologies that have evolved in response to Rajasthan's arid climate and water needs. This section serves as a guide to help readers understand these different kinds of water bodies and the terminology used throughout the compendium.

The compendium includes four types of traditional water structures:

KUAN

Kuan is a traditional well. Wells are deep structures, dug into the ground to access underground water. Traditionally water was drawn from the well manually, using a bucket or some other type of container.

BAODI

Baodi is a general term for stepwells in Rajasthan. While they are not as deep as traditional wells, they are designed to minimise evaporation, thus allowing them to hold water for a long time. The main source of their water is the subterranean seepage from lakes. Stepwells are typically composed of two main elements: a deep vertical well that holds the water, and a series of sloping underground corridors, chambers, and stepped pathways built around it to allow access.

JHALRA

These are stepwells that were often used for community bathing and religious rites. They usually have steps on three or four sides of the structure to access the water. Their major source of water is the rainwater runoff (Agarwal & Narain, 1997).

TALAAB

A talaab is a surface water body – basically a pond or large reservoir constructed in natural depressions or valleys (Agarwal & Narain, 1997). They were often constructed on community lands, using lime masonry walls on the sides and soil as the filling material between the walls. The water was mostly used for drinking as well as irrigation (C.P.R. Environmental Education Centre, 2024).

LAKE

A lake is a relatively large body of water that occupies an inland basin of considerable size. They are much bigger than ponds, with water that may move slowly or be standing. Geologically, they are temporary bodies of water (Britannica, 2025).

Each profile in the compendium documents key information about the water body, including its location, type, historical background, present condition, and relationship with the surrounding community. Wherever possible, physical details such as approximate size and depth have been recorded to provide a sense of scale and storage capacity. However, it is important to note that all depth measurements mentioned in this compendium are indicative and approximate, as no technical instruments or formal surveys were available during the documentation process. These measurements are based on community inputs and visual observations and should be read as estimates rather than precise figures.

Together, the profiles aim to offer not just a technical description of Ajmer's water bodies, but a holistic understanding of their cultural, social, and ecological significance. By reading them alongside this guide, we hope readers will be better equipped to appreciate both the diversity of water structures documented and the shared wisdom that underpins them.

Aam ka Talaab

Type of water body: Pond

Coordinates: 26.448705, 74.668839

Ward no: 56

Landmark: Gulab Bari



The Aam ka Talaab

Introduction and Geographical Context

Aam ka Talaab is located in the area known as Gulab Bari. Historically, this part of the city contained open land and water bodies that played a crucial role in rainwater harvesting and local water regulation. The pond lies in a low-lying area, which naturally allows rainwater runoff to collect here during the monsoon season.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

Community members recall that Aam ka Talaab was once much larger and visually prominent. People from nearby areas would visit the pond, especially because it was surrounded by mango trees, giving it the name Aam ka Talaab — literally, “the pond of mangoes.” Roses were also planted extensively in the area, which is reflected in the name Gulab Bari.

Historically, the talaab belonged to the Rawat community who sold it to the Mali community, after which it was taken over by the Garden Department.

Its primary purpose was rainwater harvesting, allowing monsoon runoff to collect and recharge the surrounding area. As one resident remarked:

**“हम राजस्थान में रहते हैं - पानी वैसे ही कम है।”
(We live in Rajasthan – water is already scarce)**

Over time, as people began settling around the pond, land near and within the talaab was gradually converted into residential plots. Community members describe a period during which plots were distributed or sold, even though the land was officially government-owned:

**“यह सरकारी जमीन है, लेकिन उस समय उन्होंने कहा था कि उन्होंने इसे प्लॉट में बदल दिया है। अब जिन्होंने इसके लिए कागज़ और पैसे दिए हैं, उनके लिए यह वैसे ही रहेगा।”
(It is government land, but at that time they said that they have made these into plots. Now for those who have given the papers and money for it, it would remain that way)**

Economic vulnerability also shaped how the community engaged with the pond. Many residents work as daily labourers or contractors, and survival needs often took precedence over environmental concerns.

Community members also recall that the soil around the pond was of good quality and was commonly used for making bricks, indicating the pond's earlier integration into local livelihoods.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
PERIMETER	Approx. 220 m.
AREA	Approx. 1365 sqm
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	3 m.

At present, the Aam ka Talaab is visible only in fragments. Portions of the pond have been encroached upon or built over, making it difficult to clearly identify its original boundaries. As a result, the measurements provided here are approximate estimates, based on visible extents and community inputs.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Currently, no standing water is visible in Aam ka Talaab for most of the year. Garbage dumping is common along its edges, and construction has taken place over significant portions of the original pond area. Small trees and wild vegetation have grown across much of the remaining open land, obscuring the pond's original form.

Although many plots have been allotted, not all have been built upon. Community members explain that water continues to accumulate here during the monsoon, discouraging construction in some sections. There are also discussions and plans by authorities to construct a road across the pond.



Garbage dumped in the pond

Residents report that during the monsoon season, water fills the low-lying area and overflows into nearby houses, sometimes remaining stagnant for days. This not only damages homes but also creates conditions conducive to mosquito breeding and disease.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

At present, the primary use of the land that once formed Aam ka Talaab is residential. Houses have been constructed on and around the pond area, significantly altering its original function as a water-harvesting structure. No specific cultural or ritual practices associated with the pond were reported during community interactions.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** egret, ibis, waterhen, pigeon
- **Vegetation:** mango, neem

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Community members note that encroachment on the Aam ka Talaab has been ongoing for nearly fifty years. While government officials occasionally visit the site, residents feel that no meaningful action has been taken:

“साहब आते है, देखके चले जाते है हर साल, बस।”

(Every year a sahab (government official) comes, looks at it and leaves, that’s all)

There is also some awareness within the community about the consequences of the talaab’s disappearance. Some residents pointed out that the pond once acted as a natural buffer, absorbing excess rainwater. Its decline, they believe, will increase the risk of flooding in Gulab Bari:

“एक बार जब यह (तालाब) खत्म हो जाएगा, तो गुलाब बारी में बाढ़ की संभावना बढ़ जाएगी।”

(Once this (pond) is gone, it will increase the chances of floods in Gulab Bari)

Community Vision

The community’s immediate concern is protection from flooding and damage to homes. Residents consistently emphasised the need for proper drainage infrastructure so that rainwater can flow out without entering houses.

Poor drainage, lack of roads, and repeated damage to houses remain pressing issues. While there is limited optimism about full restoration of the talaab, community members recognise its role in water management and express a desire for practical solutions that address both environmental and everyday living challenges.

Anasagar Lake

Type of water body: Lake

Coordinates: 26.469946, 74.624315

Ward no: 71

Landmark: Anasagar Chaupati



The Anasagar Lake

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Anasagar Lake is one of Ajmer's most prominent and historically significant water bodies, located at the heart of the city. Stretching across a vast area, the lake forms a defining feature of Ajmer's urban landscape, with dense residential neighbourhoods, commercial areas, heritage structures, and public promenades growing around its edges over centuries. The lake lies in a natural depression, strategically positioned to collect runoff from the surrounding hill ranges.

The setting of Anasagar is both ecological and social. On one side, it opens into landscaped gardens, ghats, and the Anasagar Chaupati, which attract residents and tourists alike. On the other, it is bordered by older settlements that have historically depended on the lake as a source of water and livelihood. Despite rapid urbanisation, the lake continues to influence the microclimate of the area, with many residents noting cooler temperatures and stronger breezes near its banks.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The Anasagar Lake dates back to the 12th century, when it was commissioned by Anaji Chauhan, the grandfather of Prithviraj Chauhan. Built originally as a famine-relief measure, the lake was designed to store rainwater and ensure water security for the growing settlement of Ajmer.

Over time, successive rulers recognised its importance and contributed to its expansion and maintenance.

During the Mughal period, Anasagar gained further prominence. Structures such as the Daulat Bagh (which is a garden) and the marble baradari (pavilion) were added along its banks, transforming the lake into a royal leisure and ceremonial space. Under British rule, the lake continued to be central to Ajmer’s civic life, though its role gradually shifted from water supply to recreation and aesthetics.

Community memory reflects this layered history. Older residents recall stories passed down by their elders – of times when the lake’s water was cleaner, when people bathed at its edges, and when it played a more direct role in everyday survival. Today, Anasagar stands as both a historical monument and a living waterbody, carrying the imprint of multiple eras.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
PERIMETER	8572 m.
AREA	3,132,777 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	4 m.



Satellite imagery of the lake in April 2025

The Anasagar Lake is expansive in scale, with gently sloping banks in some areas and reinforced embankments in others. Its vast surface area allows it to hold large volumes of water during the monsoon, acting as a key reservoir within Ajmer’s hydrological system.

The lake receives water through a combination of rainfall, hill runoff, and connecting drains, while excess water is released through controlled outlets. Its physical form today reflects continuous modification — desilting, embankment strengthening, landscaping, and beautification — carried out across different periods.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

At present, Anasagar Lake presents a mixed picture. While parts of its perimeter have been beautified with promenades, lighting, seating, and landscaped gardens, the community saus that the water quality has deteriorated in some sections. Polluted inflows, untreated drains, and feeding of fish have contributed to pollution and algal growth.

Visible changes include fluctuating water levels across seasons, reduced clarity of water, and sediment accumulation along the edges. Periodic desilting and cleaning drives are undertaken, but residents feel these efforts are often short-term and insufficient given the scale of the lake.

Despite these challenges, Anasagar remains visually iconic and continues to define Ajmer’s identity.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

Today, the Anasagar Lake is primarily used as a recreational, cultural, and tourism space rather than a direct water source. The lakefront attracts walkers, families, vendors, and tourists throughout the day. Boating activities are a major attraction, offering livelihoods to local operators and drawing visitors to the city.

Public gatherings, evening strolls, and informal social interactions have replaced the older utilitarian relationship people once had with the lake.

For many residents, Anasagar is no longer a source of water — but it remains a source of pride, identity, and daily engagement. A street vendor near the lake says:

“मैं लगभग दस साल से यहाँ अपना स्टॉल लगा रहा हूँ। यह जगह मेरे घर जैसी है।”
(I have been putting up my stall here for nearly ten years. This spot is like my home)

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** fish such as Rohu and Catla and some exotic Carps.
- **Bird species:** egrets, herons, ducks, crows, pigeons, migratory birds in winter
- **Vegetation:** neem, banyan

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Residents living around Anasagar Lake possess a nuanced understanding of its changing nature. They speak of how water from surrounding hills and connected waterbodies — including smaller baodis and talab systems — ultimately flows into Anasagar. Many believe that the lake acts as a final collecting basin in Ajmer’s traditional water network.

Local residents note changes in smell and colour of the water as well as the presence of mosquitoes, linking these directly to sewage inflow and stagnant water.

Older residents often compare the present condition unfavourably with the past, recalling greater biodiversity. There is also an understanding that the lake continues to perform an important climatic function – cooling the surrounding area and moderating extreme heat. A community member points out:

“लोग यहाँ ठंडी हवा के लिए आते हैं। गर्मी में यहाँ बहुत अच्छा लगता है।”
(People come here for the cool breeze. It's a great place to be in the summer)

Community Vision

Residents strongly advocate for the diversion and treatment of sewage before it enters the lake, regular desilting to restore depth, and stricter regulation of waste disposal.

Many hope for a balance between tourism and ecology — where boating and public access continue, but not at the cost of water quality and biodiversity. Suggestions include stronger enforcement against pollution and environmental awareness signage.

Anderkot Talaab

Type of water body: Pond

Coordinates: 26.45236, 74.62117

Ward no: 11

Landmark: Near Akbari Masjid



The Anderkot Talaab

Introduction and Geographical Context

The pond is located at the foothills of the Taragarh Hill and the hills of Boraj Khazipura, surrounded by both shops and homes. This positioning creates a natural basin where rainwater flowing down from both hills converges. The talaab lies in the heart of a bustling settlement, surrounded tightly by residential homes, small shops, and narrow internal roads.

Despite the dense urban fabric around it today, the talaab continues to function as an important catchment area. The slope of the land channels stormwater toward the pond during the monsoon, making it not only a traditional water reserve but also a natural flood-buffering system for the neighbourhood. The setting reflects a typical old-city water management pattern where ponds were strategically built to absorb overflowing water from the hills and protect human settlements.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

Oral histories suggest that the talaab and its surroundings were once lush with mango trees that created a shaded, orchard-like environment. Over time, these trees gradually disappeared — locals believe this may have happened because of inadequate irrigation, urban expansion, or declining groundwater.

In earlier decades, the pond played an important role. There used to be a dedicated dhobi ghat, where washermen washed clothes using the talaab's water. These dhobi ghats no longer exist. While the reason is unclear it is speculated that the water quality deteriorated over time, causing the dhobis to stop using the pond, and the ghat eventually vanished.

A major turning point came in 1975, when extremely heavy rains caused extensive damage across Ajmer. The small dam that existed at the site was unable to hold back stormwater effectively. Responding to this crisis, the community collectively decided to expand the dam and develop it into a larger pond to serve as a buffer for future floods. The reconstructed pond was formally inaugurated in 1977, marking the beginning of its modern hydrological role.

Today, the stories of the pre-1975 dam, the mango orchards, the dhobi ghat, and the reconstruction efforts form an important part of the community's shared memory of how Anderkot Talaab has evolved across generations.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
PERIMETER	175 m.
AREA	1723 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	3.5 m.



Satellite imagery of the Anderkot Talaab in April 2025

The pond has an irregular, organically formed shape that aligns with the natural contours of the land around it. It does not have a uniform embankment—one side is reinforced with masonry and structures, while the other slopes more gently, reflecting its original topography as a natural catchment. Over decades, silt carried from the hills has accumulated at the base, significantly reducing both the depth and water-holding capacity.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Local residents consistently report that the talaab remains dry for most of the year, holding water only during the monsoon months—typically for two to two-and-a-half months after rainfall. The rest of the year, it resembles an expansive muddy depression rather than a functioning waterbody.

Satellite imagery from 2010 onwards confirms this seasonal pattern. The images also reveal that the surface area of the pond has gradually reduced, which raises concerns about encroachment and shrinking storage capacity. The reduction in area is visible around the edges, where shops, houses, and informal structures have slowly expanded into the pond boundary.

During field visits, noticeable debris was found in the pond: plastic bags, wrappers, paper waste, straws, disposable cups, tetrapaks, and other forms of household and commercial trash. A few patches of water hyacinth suggest that eutrophication may be beginning, even in the limited wet months.

Community narratives, satellite evidence, and visible conditions all point to a steady transformation of the pond—from a once-green, active waterbody used for washing and irrigation to a largely dry, silted, encroached, and polluted urban depression.



Satellite imagery showing changes in the area of the pond



Debris in the pond

Current Use and Cultural Practices

Despite its decline, the pond continues to serve certain local needs. During the monsoon, children often use the water for swimming and bathing, continuing a long-standing tradition that many adults fondly remember from their own childhood.

The pond also provides water for construction work, occasional cleaning needs, and as a drinking source for animals such as cows and goats. Even in its degraded state, the pond remains a resource for households that cannot always access piped or stored water for non-potable uses.

These uses emphasise how ponds, even when diminished, remain embedded in community routines and informal water practices.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** pigeons, mynas, crows
- **Vegetation:** peepal, banyan

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Residents describe the pond as a key point in the region's natural drainage network. Rainwater from the Taragarh hills and the Boraj–Khazipura hills flows downhill and accumulates here. Drains from the surrounding locality also empty into the pond, further contributing to its water inflow during rains.

During the heavy rains of 2025, the pond filled completely and overflowed onto nearby roads, submerging the road on one side entirely. As a result, only a single road remained in use for several days. Shopkeepers suffered serious losses as they had to shut their shops and their goods—sometimes stocked for festival periods—deteriorated in the stagnant water.

The community says that the problem of the pond overflowing has been more in the past 3-4 years. They say that the capacity of the pond to hold water has reduced due to the silt (that comes down from the nearby hills) accumulation at the bottom, which has reduced the depth, as well as the rampant encroachment, which has reduced the area.

A community member said-

“तालाब के आस पास जितने भी दुकान है, ज़्यादातर अतिक्रमण ही है। यहाँ पिछले दस सालों से अतिक्रमण होता जा रहा है।”

(Majority of the shops around the pond are encroachments. Encroachment has been happening here for the past ten years)

Further, the Naag Baodi, which used to be located close to the pond has become extinct. Hence, water that once used to collect in it also now comes to the Anderkot pond.

A community member also pointed out the hydrological connection of the pond to the other baodis, explaining that water from the Taragarh hills flows to Bhata Bao, from where it comes to the Anderkot Pond. From here the waterbodies on below get filled up — namely Kela Baodi, Bad Baodi, Phool Baodi, Katan Baodi and the Jhalra Sharif.

“यह पानी नीचे बैठ जाता है और सभी बावड़ियां भर जाती हैं।”
(This water settles down and all the baodis become full)

The community also acknowledges that the area near the pond is slightly cooler, probably due to the presence of water and more greenery.

“तालाब की तरफ मौसम ठंडा है। तालाब से लेकर भवाडा मंदिर तक बहुत ठंडक है। आबादी कम है और हरियाली ज़्यादा।”

(It is cool towards the pond. It is very cool from the pond till the Bhawada temple. Settlements are less and greenery is more)

These lived observations highlight how Anderkot Talaab still carries ecological, climatic, and hydrological significance in the urban landscape.

Some community elders talked about how they had learnt to swim in this pond. Even today, many children continue to swim and play in the pond. Hence both previous and current generations have fond memories and a personal connection to the pond.

Community Vision

The community members say that many people do not realise the importance the pond plays in controlling floods, which is why they encroach on it. One resident said:

“यह तालाब सुरक्षा के लिए है – ताकि बाढ़ का पानी शहर में न घुस जाए।”
(The pond is for safety – so that floodwaters do not rush into the city)

The community's vision for the future includes:

1. Increasing the depth of the pond- Residents insist that the pond has lost nearly 4 metres of depth over the years due to siltation. Removing this silt is a priority to restore its holding capacity.
2. Preventing encroachment- A boundary wall is needed to protect the pond from further shrinking.
3. Building public toilets- Since the area receives many tourists, residents believe a toilet facility is essential.
4. Providing access infrastructure- They suggest installing a water pipe so that people who depend on the pond for washing or cleaning can do so without damaging the edges.
5. Reviving Naag Baodi- Though unsure whether restoration is possible, the community feels strongly that reviving the extinct Naag Baodi could reduce excess water pressure on Anderkot Talaab.
6. Cleaning the banks- There is widespread agreement that the accumulated debris and garbage around the pond must be cleaned to restore its ecological and social value.

In their collective vision, Anderkot Talaab can once again function as Ajmer's protective waterbody—resilient, restored, and respected.

Bad Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.453191, 74.622839

Ward no: 12

Landmark: Badbao Masjid, Anderkot



The Bad Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Bad Baodi is located directly behind the Badbao Masjid in Anderkot, one of the oldest and densely settled neighbourhoods of the area. The baodi sits within a cluster of narrow lanes, surrounded by long-established homes and shops. Historically, this part of Anderkot was known for its large banyan trees, which played an important role in shaping the identity of the locality. Today, the baodi remains physically present within the urban fabric, but its function and visibility have diminished due to growing habitation and changing water use practices.

The Bad Baodi is located directly behind the Badbao Masjid in Anderkot- one of the oldest, most densely inhabited neighbourhoods in the inner city. Narrow streets, tightly packed homes, and long-standing commercial establishments characterise the area, reflecting centuries of continuous settlement. Tucked into this compact urban landscape, the baodi forms an integral yet now-muted part of Anderkot's built heritage.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory



The Badbao Masjid behind which the baodi is located

Historically, this locality was known for its abundance of 'Bad' or banyan trees, from which both the neighbourhood (Bad Bao) and the baodi derive their names. Although only a handful of these trees now remain, the baodi continues to serve as a quiet reminder of the area's ecological and cultural past.

Older residents recall an era when the locality was marked by spreading canopies of banyan trees that offered shade, supported community gatherings, and framed the baodi as a serene focal point.

As the neighbourhood expanded and new houses replaced open spaces, these trees diminished, drastically altering the natural ambience of the area.

In earlier decades, Bad Baodi served as a strictly maintained drinking-water source. Community norms prohibited bathing or washing clothes in the baodi to preserve water purity. The water was also used for wuzu (ablution rituals) at the Badbao Masjid. People remember the baodi as a revered, dependable resource that sustained daily life before piped water supply reached Anderkot.

“इसमें हम पानी पीते थे (बढ़ बावड़ी) उसमे हम नहाते थे (केला बावड़ी)।”

(We used to drink water from this (Bad Baodi) and bathe over there (Kela Baodi))

Stories shared by elders speak of a time when the baodi represented not only physical sustenance but also collective discipline, respect, and shared responsibility.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	9 x 14 m.
AREA	126 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	7 m.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Today, the condition of the baodi has deteriorated significantly. The water has turned green with algae, and the surface is strewn with plastic waste, including food wrappers, bottles, and other debris. Residents say that while the Ajmer Municipal Corporation occasionally adds anti-mosquito chemicals to the baodi, it does not carry out any cleaning to remove the accumulated garbage. However, during the month of Muharram some of the younger community members themselves clean the baodi.

The Ajmer Municipal Corporation has also constructed sturdy boundary walls around the baodi; earlier, the enclosure consisted only of temporary and makeshift materials.

The surrounding area has become congested with new houses and layered construction over many decades, limiting ventilation and sunlight to the baodi. This has accelerated stagnation and reduced water quality. What was once a clean, carefully maintained drinking water source has gradually transformed into an unused and neglected water body overshadowed by urban growth.

Current Use and Cultural Practices



Residents use the railing for drying clothes

At present, the baodi is not used for any purpose. Its water is no longer considered suitable for drinking. Community members shared that the shift away from using the baodi began with the arrival of piped water supply, after which its functional role steadily declined.

However, the baodi is still used to immerse replicas of the shrine of Imam Hussain (taaziya) at the time of Muharram, which is the first month of the Islamic Hijri calendar.

Since the gate to the baodi is kept locked, it is not accessible easily. The lack of cleaning, the growth of algae, and the presence of waste have collectively discouraged any regular use. Only the railings along the boundary of the baodi are used by the community to dry their clothes.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** pigeons, mynas, crows
- **Vegetation:** neem, peepul

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Local residents possess a strong sense of memory and attachment to the baodi, even if it is no longer active in their daily routines. Older community members recall the clear water and strict rules that once ensured its cleanliness. They also remember the presence of many banyan trees that gave the area its identity and provided shade and space for social interactions. People speak with nostalgia about a time when the baodi was an essential part of life—used responsibly and respected collectively. Several residents express disappointment that, despite living so close to the baodi, newer generations have not experienced its former importance or the community discipline that once kept it clean.

Community Vision

The community's primary wish is to see the baodi cleaned and restored to a respectable condition. Many believe that clearing the algae, removing the waste, and regulating its surroundings could help revive at least some of its former dignity. They believe that this can restore it to being a drinking-water source. Though the vision is modest, people hope that with proper attention, the baodi can once again become a clean and meaningful space within the neighbourhood.

Bada Jhalra

Type of water body: Jhalra (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.442538, 74.618591

Ward no: 12

Landmark: Taragarh Fort



The Bada Jhalra

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Bada Jhalra is situated towards the entrance of Taragarh Fort, one of Ajmer's most iconic and historically significant landmarks. Set against the rugged backdrop of the Aravalli hills, this Jhalra forms an integral part of the cultural and architectural landscape surrounding the fort. It is the first water body that a visitor sees, even before they reach the fort itself. Today it continues to serve as a visual reminder of Ajmer's long-standing relationship with traditional water-harvesting structures.

The surrounding terrain, with its natural slopes, channels rainwater toward the site, allowing the jhalra to fill during the monsoon and maintain water levels for much of the year.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

Positioned adjacent to the Roza-e-Imam Hussain Karbala, the Bada Jhalra is deeply embedded in the spiritual and cultural practices of the Muslim community. Locally, it is widely known as "Karballe ka Jhalra."

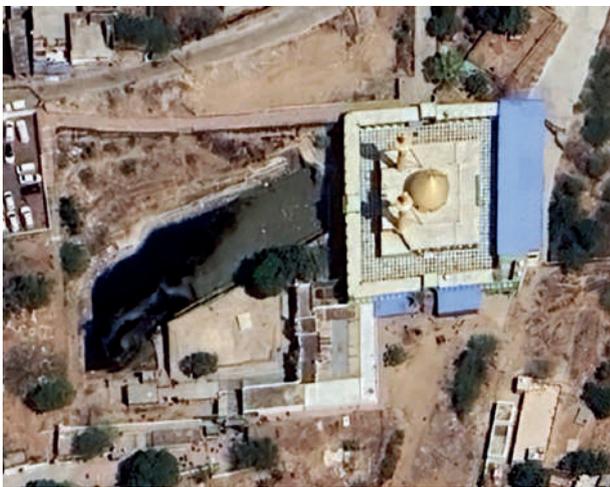
A karbala is a sacred space constructed to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain during the Battle of Karbala in Iraq. Such spaces often serve as symbolic replicas of the original site and become centres for mourning, reflection, and ritual practices, especially during Muharram. The Roza-e-Imam Hussain Karbala is designed to bear a striking resemblance to the original sanctum in Iraq. The proximity of the jhalra to this religious site enhances the sanctity of the location and likely influenced its construction.

Historically, the Bada Jhalra also played a utilitarian role. Community members recall that its water was once used for drinking, cooking, and other daily household needs. Over time, as piped water systems gradually replaced traditional water bodies, its use transformed from being a primary source of drinking water to a site with more ritualistic, cultural, and ecological relevance.

The name “Bada Jhalra” (meaning ‘large jhalra’) reflects its considerable scale. Among the many water structures in the Taragarh area, it is remembered as the largest in length.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
PERIMETER	160 m.
AREA	1183 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	6.5 m.



Satellite imagery of the jhalra in April 2025

There are three smaller reservoir compartments (known as kunds) within the larger Jhalra. While this cannot be seen unless the water dries up substantially, it hints at a thoughtful water-management strategy.

The steps leading into the Jhalra remain largely intact, showcasing the durability of the original stonework. These steps also reflect the architectural language of the region, where stepwells served both functional and communal purposes.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

At present, the Bada Jhalra remains comparatively clean, especially in its central water column. However, minor littering is visible along the edges, likely due to footfall from visitors and migrants who stay on the banks.

The structure has undergone multiple phases of cleaning: some led by local authorities and others initiated by the community. Despite these efforts, silt and organic waste accumulate over time due to runoff from the surrounding hillside and human activity near the waterbody.

The current condition reflects a landscape in transition—where traditional water structures face pressures from modern neglect, while still retaining their ecological importance and social relevance.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

A unique set of cultural practices continues to thrive around the Bada Jhalra. Migrants, many of whom are believed to be seeking spiritual healing, temporarily reside near the Karballa. Among them is a deep-seated belief that the water of the Jhalra carries the blessings of Imam Hussain and possesses the power to purify and liberate individuals from negative spirits or emotional distress. Their stay is often described as divinely guided- some recount dreams or signs prompting them to visit this site.

These individuals rely on the Jhalra's water for bathing and washing clothes as part of their cleansing rituals. While the water is no longer used for drinking, its symbolic and spiritual significance remains strong.

Additionally, a water motor installed at the site supports the irrigation of nearby trees and greenery, contributing to the micro-ecology of the area and keeping the surroundings cooler and more hospitable.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** fish
- **Bird species:** pigeons
- **Vegetation:** neem, banyan, gulmohar

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

One of the most significant community-led initiatives occurred during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown. With much of the water dried up due to limited rainfall, residents took advantage of the exposed bed and the time on their hands to undertake a comprehensive cleanup. Nearly one metre of silt, rubbish, and accumulated debris was removed- a testament to community stewardship.

Prior to this, the Ajmer Municipal Corporation had also carried out desilting and maintenance work, though residents note that such interventions are infrequent and the structure gradually becomes clogged again.

Overall, the Jhalra holds strong emotional and cultural value for the community, reinforced by shared memories of upkeep and reliance on this historic waterbody.

Community Vision

The community expresses a clear desire for regular cleaning, structured maintenance, and long-term conservation of the Bada Jhalra. They envision the Jhalra not only as a spiritual or symbolic site but also as a functional water resource that can be integrated into everyday life. With proper upkeep, they believe it could once again support local needs—whether through environmental benefits, improved microclimate, or community gathering spaces.

Residents also hope that the Jhalra will be acknowledged for its historical and cultural significance and protected as a heritage asset for future generations. Their vision is rooted in respect for their traditions, for the waterbody, and for the ecological balance it helps maintain.

Bhata Bao Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.455044, 74.620372

Ward no: 12

Landmark: Near Anderkot Talaab



The Bhata Bao Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Bhata Bao Baodi is one of Ajmer's enduring and historic stepwells, located near the Jharneshwar Mahadev temple within the Anderkot area. Two temples, the Satya Narayan Dev Temple and a Shiv Temple stand close to the baodi. The temples are dedicated to the gods Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

Renowned for its sweet, clear water that once quenched the thirst of the local community, the baodi is built of bhata stone, from which it derives its name. The bhata stone is a local stone of Ajmer, used widely in construction. The stone is taken from the surrounding hills for constructing this baodi.

According to local accounts, the stepwell was constructed under the direction of the legendary ruler Prithviraj Chauhan, with the noble intent of providing drinking water to the people. Since Prithviraj Chauhan is said to have reigned from 1177—1192 CE, this would make this baodi more than 830 years old. The execution of the project is attributed to Chandra Bardai, the celebrated poet and close companion of Prithviraj Chauhan- making the baodi a living testament to their friendship and shared vision.

This baodi was made to cater to the needs of holy men who lived and served in this area. For nearly seventy years, saint Guru Maharaj was taking care of the temple premises, including the baodi. After his passing, for the last 30 years saint Kuber ji Maharaj has been taking care of it.

As a resident pointed out:

‘आप कहीं भी हों, आपको पानी की ज़रूरत होती है, है ना? वैसे ही साधु-संतों को भी। राजा ने उनके लिए यह बावड़ी खुदवाई थी।

(Wherever you are you need water, right? So do the holy men and saints. The king had this baodi dug for them)

The community elders talk about how Ajmer had an issue of water scarcity earlier and how they used to go to great lengths to procure water. They also stressed how local rulers took cognisance of the issue and built baodis and jhalras so that people could have easy access to water.

“पानी की समस्या थी। हमारे बचपन में, हम खुद सौ सीढ़ियाँ चढ़कर ढाई दिन के झोपड़े (अजमेर की एक ऐतिहासिक मस्जिद) से पानी लाते थे।”

(There was a water problem. In our childhood, we ourselves fetched water from the Dhai Din ka Jhopda (a historic mosque in Ajmer), climbing a hundred steps up from there)

Water bodies used to be clean and well-maintained as everyone depended on it. There used to be far more trees in the city and many areas such as this one were forest. As more people started settling in the city, the tree cover decreased and urbanisation increased. This has resulted in higher temperatures, especially in the last five years.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	9 X 6.7 m.
AREA	60.3 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	11 m.



Satellite imagery of the Bhata Bao Baodi in April 2025

Present Conditions and Visible Transformations

At present, the structure remains in good condition, and its water is clean, except for some algae formation. The Municipal Corporation cleans the baodi about two to three times a year and a motor pump has been installed along with pipelines to draw the water for daily use. There is no other handpump or well that is functioning and can provide water.

The premises where the Bhata Bao baodi is located are a bit further from the core city area and hence there is more greenery here. This, along with the presence of the baodi creates a cooler and

more pleasant atmosphere here. The verdant environment also attracts a variety of birds, such as peacocks, pigeons, mynas and parakeets. The locals say that peacocks and pigeons have increased in number in the recent years.

Current Use and Cultural Practices



Entrance to the baodi premises

Water from the stepwell is used in the temples for various purposes, including drinking, cleaning, and watering plants. Every year on 8th December, the temple celebrates death anniversary of their teacher, Guru Maharaj. During this time, the premises come alive with a local fair and a bhandara (free community feast) that attracts both residents and tourists. As part of the celebration 2.5 quintal of kheer (a traditional creamy pudding) is prepared and distributed among visitors as prasad.

Currently, the temple premises remain closely guarded, and entry is restricted to select individuals. This measure was introduced a few years ago after a serious incident, an unfortunate murder in the vicinity which led the caretakers and local authorities to increase security and limit public access for safety reasons.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** pigeons, peafowl, mynas, parakeets
- **Vegetation:** mango, neem, jackfruit, black plum, custard apple, guava, wood apple, sacred fig, lemon.

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

The baodi's water source comes from rainwater and natural streams descending from the surrounding hills, ensuring that it holds water through most of the year, though the level tends to recede during the summer months.

Community Vision

The temple caretakers have expressed a desire to install a protective net over the baodi—not because it is unclean, but to maintain its present clarity and prevent leaves or debris from drifting in. They believe that adding this safeguard will help preserve the purity of the water and ensure that this historic and sacred stepwell remains well-kept and vibrant for generations to come.

Chand Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)
Coordinates: 26.448819, 74.633991
Ward no: 15
Landmark: Chandreshwar Mata Temple



The Chand Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Chand Baodi sits in the serene surroundings of the Chandresa Mata Temple. The approach to the baodi is through the temple premises, which has helped preserve its form and function over time.

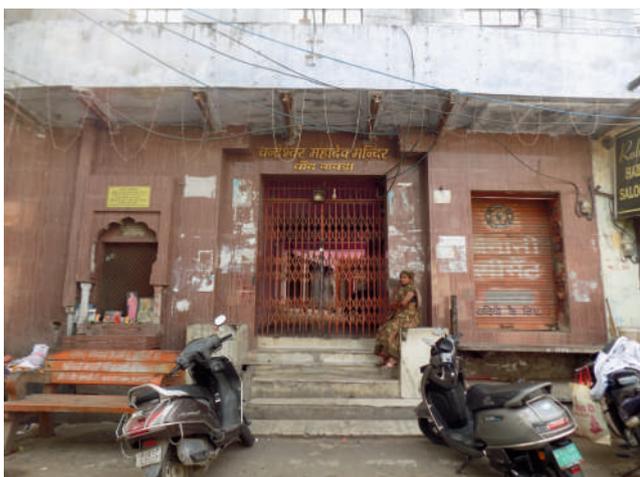
Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The story of the Chand Baodi is closely tied to the temple itself. Local oral histories speak of its name being linked to Chandravarai or Chandragupta, adding layers of legend and memory to the place. For generations, people here have seen this baodi not simply as a water structure but as a sacred presence woven into the spiritual life of the temple.

Historically, Chand Baodi served as the main drinking water source for nearby households. Families would draw water from it for their daily needs, and the same water was used in rituals, pujas, and for preparing prasad. It was a living part of both sustenance and devotion.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	8 X 8 m.
AREA	64 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	18 m.



The Chandreswar Mata Temple, within which the baodi is located

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

It is rock-based, and natural seepage keeps the water level steady. The water does not dry; in fact, at times it even overflows. The surroundings are well maintained, with gated access to prevent misuse and to protect the sanctity of the space.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

Even today, the baodi continues to hold ritual importance. The temple uses its water for offerings, and the community still describes the water as sweet and clean. Care is taken to maintain its purity, and the baodi has been protected thoughtfully over the years.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** fish
- **Bird species:** pigeons
- **Vegetation:** none

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Community members speak of Chand Baodi with a sense of quiet pride and emotional attachment. Many recall childhood memories of accompanying elders to fetch water for drinking, cooking, or temple rituals. They describe the water as “meetha” (sweet) and consistently cool — an indication of its natural seepage and underground connectivity. Several residents also remember times when the baodi overflowed during particularly strong monsoons, which reinforced their belief in the stepwell’s strength and natural recharge capacity.

Older residents share stories of how the baodi once served as a dependable water source even in harsh summers when nearby wells dried up. They emphasise that the water level rarely dipped low — a rarity in a region known for its arid climate and water scarcity. According to them, the rock-based construction helps stabilise water levels, making the baodi more resilient than other structures in the area.

The importance of the baodi in everyday temple life is also a recurring theme in community memories. People remember how water from the baodi was used for preparing prasad, cleaning the sanctum, and performing rituals. These practices created a sense of shared responsibility.

Families living around the temple ensured that no waste was thrown near the baodi, and visitors were reminded to maintain its sanctity.

Local residents also speak about the sense of trust they place in the baodi's water quality. Even though piped water has largely replaced its practical use, many still prefer the baodi water during festivals and rituals, believing it to be spiritually charged and naturally pure. This lived connection – cultural, emotional, and environmental — illustrates how the baodi remains more than a structure of stone, it continues to be a living part of community identity.

Community Vision

The community's hopes for Chand Baodi are gentle and thoughtful. They want its purity and heritage value to be respected and preserved. Some suggest connecting it as a supplementary water source that can be used whenever piped supply becomes scarce. A few improvements, like modest beautification and carefully regulated access, could help more people appreciate its significance without disturbing its sacred character.

Chand Baodi carries the quiet grace of a place that has always been close to both daily living and devotion. It stands as a reminder of how water, faith, and community once came together naturally, and how that bond can still be cared for today.

Chaurasiyawaas Talaab

Type of water body: Pond

Coordinates: 26.503793, 74.627587

Ward no: 78

Landmark: Near Chaurasiyawas Junction



The Chaurasiyawaas Talaab

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Chaurasiyawas Talaab lies at the foothills of the Aravalli hills, positioned between the Makerwali road and the Chaurasiyawas road. Geographically, the talaab sits in a natural low-lying basin, shaped over centuries by runoff from the surrounding hill slopes. These hills form an extended catchment spread across nearly six kilometres, channelling rainwater from different directions into this single reservoir. The area around the pond features a gentle gradient, allowing water to accumulate easily during the monsoon, making the talaab a natural storage bowl for seasonal flows.

Its landscape changes subtly across the year- lush and expansive during monsoon, then steadily shrinking as summer advances. Even today, the talaab remains a prominent visual landmark for travellers passing the Chaurasiyawas Junction, hinting at the area's long history of water management and the ways communities once built their lives around shared water sources.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The Chaurasiyawas Talaab, nestled in the settlement of Chaurasiyawas in Ajmer, carries about two centuries of history in its still waters. The land was once home to the Chechi or Banjara community, who had migrated here from Gujarat. But repeated flooding over time forced them to move to

Makarwali, leaving behind memories and traces of their presence. The families who live here today are descendants of those who settled after this migration. The pond itself existed in the form of a natural depression, but it is believed to have taken its current form during the British period, when it was reshaped and expanded.

In its earlier days, the talab played a very critical role in everyday life. It supported animal husbandry, irrigation, and farming activities in the surrounding fields. Drinking water for the settlement did not actually come from the talab but from three to four wells that once existed nearby. Over time, these wells dried up or became encroached upon, leaving the pond as the more visible reminder of the past water system.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
PERIMETER	2000 m.
AREA	135,583 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	5 m.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

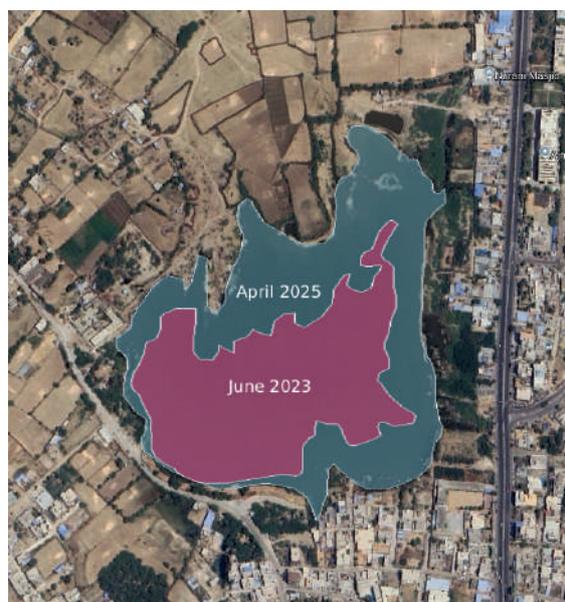
The water remains moderately clean, though seepage and small drains from surrounding areas have caused some contamination. A community member says:

“ये जो कॉलोनी बनी है - पंचशील नगर - उसके जो नाले बनाये है , उसका पानी यहाँ आता है।”
(This colony that has been made – Panchsheel Nagar – the drains that have been made for it – its water comes here)

Encroachment, thick vegetation, and siltation have reduced the pond’s size over time, making its boundaries feel less clear than they once were.



Satellite imagery of the lake in April 2025



Satellite imagery shows that the size of the pond has reduced by nearly half in the summer of 2023, whereas in the summer of 2025 it is full because of the intense rainfall received

Satellite imagery shows that the water in the pond reduces by nearly half in the summer months. In fact, satellite imagery shows that in June 2018 and July 2019 it seemed to be almost completely dry. This coincides with the community memory of the events:

“सूखता है - अकाल पड़ा था कुछ चार साल पहले — तब बिलकुल सूख गया था।”

(It dries up – a famine had come about four years back — at that time it dried up completely)

By October, the pond fills up again due to the monsoons. However, in April 2025, the pond is full, which is probably an indication of the high rainfall that year.

Community Vision Current Use and Cultural Practices

Today, the pond's use has shifted. Fish farming is carried out here through a formal tendering system managed by local authorities. People still bring their animals to drink from it or to cool off in the heat and it is used for irrigation to some extent, but for domestic needs, the pond is no longer used. The ritual life that once revolved around the talab has also faded. In earlier times, people gathered here during rain-invocation ceremonies, especially during the ritual known as '22 Tariq', praying collectively for good monsoon. For about 15 to 20 years now, such practices have slowly dissolved as these beliefs weakened.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** fish
- **Bird species:** pigeons, mynas
- **Vegetation:** neem

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

The pond collects runoff from hills spread across a catchment area of nearly six kilometres. The residents also talk about the changes they have seen in the area of the pond:

“इसका क्षेत्रफल पहले ज़्यादा था लेकिन अभी कम हो गया - आसपास में लोगों ने मकान बना लिए।”

(It's area was larger earlier but now it has decreased – people have made their houses nearby)

The responsibility of the pond lies chiefly with the Irrigation Department and the Ajmer Municipal Corporation, though the community notes that present monitoring is limited.

Community Vision

People in the area have a clear vision of what could be. The first point suggestion a community member makes is:

“इस तालाब की क्षमता कम है। क्षमता बढ़ाई जानी चाहिए – तभी पानी का इस्तेमाल किया जा सकता है या पंप लगाया जा सकता है।”

(The capacity of this pond is less. The capacity should be increased – that's when the water can be used or a pump installed)

They suggest desiltation to increase the capacity and that the area of the pond be increased by clearing the overgrowth of bushes at the banks, thus restoring the pond's original spread, They also suggest strengthening of the embankment to prevent any breaches.

They imagine a walking path around the periphery, seating areas, plantations, perhaps an open gym, and a green public space that welcomes gatherings again. They even see opportunities for livelihood — boating, small snack stalls, and jobs for local youth.

The Chaurasiyawas Talaab stands as a space where past and present meet. Though quieter now, it holds the potential to become once again a shared landmark, a place of community connection, ecology, and everyday life.

Diggi Talaab

Type of water body: Pond

Coordinates: 26.453651, 74.631384

Ward no: 16

Landmark: Near Shiv Mandir, Diggi Bazaar



The Diggi Talaab

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Diggi Talaab lies at the heart of the dense and historic Diggi Bazaar, one of Ajmer's oldest commercial neighbourhoods. Located close to the Shiv Mandir, the talaab sits within a tightly knit urban fabric characterised by narrow streets, bustling shops, and long-established residential clusters. Despite the rapid urbanisation around it, the talaab continues to function as a central open space in an otherwise crowded built environment.

Its position at the base of the Taragarh hill slopes historically allowed it to receive natural runoff, making it an important water-collecting structure for the locality. Today, Diggi Talaab stands not only as a geographical landmark but also as a cultural anchor for the communities living around it.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The Diggi pond is closely associated with the bustling Diggi market and is one of Ajmer's oldest water bodies. Its name comes from the locality that surrounds it, but its story stretches far deeper. Elders recall that Diggi Talaab was constructed during the time of Prithviraj Chauhan, anchoring it firmly in the early chapters of the city's history.



The Shiv mandir, located on the banks of the pond

Prithviraj Chauhan, who was also known as Rai Pithora, was a powerful and celebrated king of the Chauhan dynasty. He ruled in north-western India during the latter half of the 12th century. His capital was Ajmer, in present-day Rajasthan, and his kingdom also included the strategically important area of Delhi.

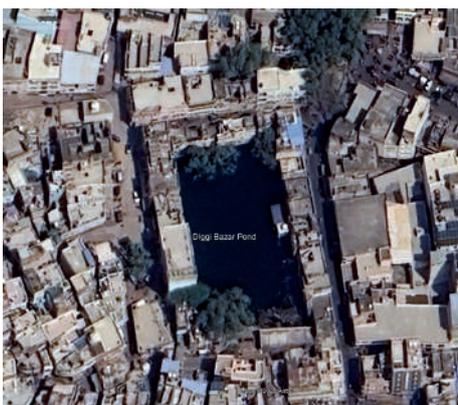
For centuries, this water was drunk, stored, worshipped, and cherished. Its taste was famous, its fish plentiful, and its surroundings carefully respected. Local traditions discouraged any sort of waste dumping, and community pride kept the talab clean. As one elder shared,

“आसपास के सभी इलाकों से लोग डिग्गी से पानी लेने आते थे। यहां तक कि यात्री भी इसको देखने के लिए के लिए यहां रुकते थे।”
(People from all nearby areas came to collect water from Diggi. Even travellers stopped here just to admire it.)

The talaab also held an important cultural place. From the Chauhan era through Mughal and Maratha periods, into British times and now into the present day, Diggi Talab has been woven into Ajmer’s spiritual and ritual life. Ceremonies like idol immersion and ‘mundan sanskaar’ continue around its banks. The ‘mundan sanskaar’, or tonsure ceremony, is a significant ritual in Hinduism that involves a child’s first haircut. This ritual is typically performed when the child is between one and three years old. These ceremonies connect generations to inherited customs. Yet these very practices, along with growth in population and changing habits, now contribute to the pollution the talab suffers. Still, residents speak with unmistakable pride about its historic and religious value, even as they worry about its condition.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	58 x 30 m.
AREA	1740 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	7.5 m.



Satellite imagery of the pond in April 2025

The talaab once had steps on all four sides, and a ‘Gaumukh’ (spout shaped like a cow’s mouth) that channelled a steady, natural flow of water from the Aravalli hills. The ‘Gaumukh’ is now below the surface of the water and is not visible.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Today, expansion of settlements and siltation have reduced this catchment drastically. The talaab remains perennial, though its water level falls in the summer. The inflow comes mainly from the Gaumukh and seasonal rainwater, while water exits through seepage and evaporation. The biodiversity, once full of fish and lush vegetation, has now reduced to a few fish and pigeons that linger around the site.

Currently, the talaab is owned by the Ajmer Municipal Corporation, but its condition reflects years of neglect. The water is polluted by plastics, sewage inflow, and worship materials. Idol immersions and household waste disposal continue to play a major role in its degradation. There is no active encroachment directly on the talab, but its natural catchment has been heavily disrupted by construction. Today, the talab is used mostly for rituals, rather than everyday needs.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

The Diggi Talaab continues to hold cultural significance for the neighbourhood, though its functional use has declined over time. Visitors to the nearby Shiv Mandir routinely come to the pond to feed the fish, offer flowers, and perform small rituals. Devotees place discarded religious articles—such as garlands, incense remains, and idol fragments along the pond's edges, believing it to be an appropriate resting place for sacred materials.

Ceremonial practices like idol immersion and other ritual activities also occur during festival seasons, reinforcing the talaab's spiritual role. However, these very practices, along with informal waste disposal, contribute to the gradual pollution of the water. Beyond religious use, the talaab no longer supports everyday domestic needs, reflecting a shift from a utilitarian water source to a ritual and symbolic one.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** fish
- **Bird species:** pigeons, mynas, crows
- **Vegetation:** neem, peepul

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Community members recall a time when Diggi Talab's catchment extended far into the Aravalli foothills, allowing clean rainwater and spring flow to naturally recharge it. Elders speak of this natural inflow system with a sense of loss, noting how urban construction has slowly choked these pathways over the decades.

“तालाब पहले की तरह नहीं भरता। अब चारों तरफ बस्तियाँ हो गई हैं, इसलिए तालाब में पानी कम आता है।”
(The talaab doesn't fill up like before. Now that there are settlements all around, the water that comes into the talaab is less)

Residents also emphasise that maintenance of the talaab happens only when they actively push for it—usually through collective requests made to the ward councillor or the municipal corporation. There is no established schedule for cleaning, desilting, or water testing. In fact, the last confirmed water quality test took place nearly fifteen years ago, with no formal documentation made available to the community since.

Many locals express concern about deteriorating water quality, reduced fish population, and the continuous dumping of ritual and household waste. Yet their recollections reveal a strong emotional and historical connection to the talaab, shaped by stories from previous generations and their own lived experiences of a time when the water was clean, plentiful, and respected.

Community Vision

Yet, in conversations around Diggi Talab, there is no dearth of hope. Community members have shared thoughtful ideas for bringing the talab back to life. They envision regular cleaning, desilting, and measures to reduce ritual pollution.

Fencing and tree plantation could protect and beautify the space. Seating areas, boating, murals, and artistic elements could make the talab an inviting public gathering place again. And importantly, people see value in preserving the talab as a reserve water source for emergencies.

The story of Diggi Talab is one of deep heritage, quiet decline, and strong community memory. And within that memory lies the possibility of renewal, a chance for the talab to once again become a place of water, beauty, and togetherness.

Foysagar Lake

Type of water body: Lake
Coordinates: 26.443451, 74.579687
Ward no: 09
Landmark: Foysagar Chauraha



The Foysagar Lake

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Foysagar lake- recently renamed 'Varunsagar', lies on the outskirts of Ajmer, framed by the gentle rise and fall of the surrounding Aravalli hills. Though today it is a peaceful retreat for walkers and weekend visitors, its origins are rooted in a time when water was scarce.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory



Inscription at Foysagar Lake

The lake was constructed in AD 1892, designed by Engineer Foy — an English engineer, who constructed the lake in as part of a famine relief project. The lake was originally named after him. It was built by the 'Ajmer Municipality' at a considerable cost of Rs. 1,00,000, a significant amount for the period. More than a civic project, it was a response to the pressing need for a clean, dependable drinking water source for the city.

Even though Anasagar Lake existed at the time, its water was not suitable for drinking, forcing the city to look elsewhere for safe consumption.

Thus emerged Foysagar- carefully engineered, deeply thought out, and strategically placed. Its greatest depth reaches 34 feet, and its total storage capacity was a remarkable 150 million cubic feet (4247.5 cubic metres). Rainfall from the surrounding villages — Ajaysar, Hathi Khera, Khare Khedi, and Khajipura form its natural catchment, feeding the lake during the monsoon and maintaining it through the seasons.

The geography of the lake is as intentional as its history. Spread across a natural depression at the base of the hills, it catches the monsoon runoff that flows down rocky slopes and through seasonal

streams. Even today, the water is exceptionally clean. No drain empties into the lake, and there are no visible signs of pollution. Before the advent of the Bisalpur Dam, the FoySagar Lake was one of Ajmer’s most reliable drinking-water sources.

Entire neighbourhoods depended on it, and during lean summers, the lake was often the only store of potable water for thousands.

The lake has now been renamed as ‘Varunsagar’ by the Rajasthan government in a bid to remove colonial-era legacies and promote India’s cultural and historical legacies. The new name puts the focus on Lord Varun, the Vedic deity of water.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
PERIMETER	7568 m.
AREA	1,176839 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	7.5 m.



Satellite imagery showing the shrunken lake in December 2018 as compared to a full lake in April 2025

While the lake always has water in it, satellite imagery shows a drastic decrease in the years of 2018 and 2019. This coincides with drying up of other water bodies in Ajmer during these years. However, due to the heavy rains of 2025, the lake is full again.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

Though its role as the central drinking-water reservoir declined after Bisalpur began supplying the city, Varunsagar has not lost its relevance.

In the last two years, some water from the lake has again been channelled for supply, reminding Ajmer of its long-standing utility.

But beyond this partial functional revival, the lake today thrives as a beloved tourist and recreational space. The Municipal Corporation has developed clean walking paths, comfortable seating spaces, and safe access points along the banks. On weekends, the area comes alive — families strolling, children playing, couples sitting quietly by the water.

**“वीकडे के दिनों में यहां ज्यादा लोग नहीं आते, लेकिन वीकेंड में यह जगह लोगों से भरी होती है।”
(On weekdays, there aren’t many visitors, but on weekends the place is full of people)**

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

The lake is well-maintained and there is no visible pollution in the water. Maintenance taken care of by the Ajmer Municipal Corporation, who outsources the work to a contractor. The locals reinforce the cleanliness of the lake saying:

अब आनासागर गंदा हो गया है - पहले यह अच्छा था। अब इसमें नालियाँ खुल गई हैं। लेकिन यह पानी (फॉयसागर झील) साफ है।

(Now the Anasagar is dirty- earlier it was good. Now drains have opened into it. But this water (Foyasagar lake) is clean)



Walkways and seating arrangements at the lake

The walkways and seating arrangements create a pleasant atmosphere for tourists. Since water is usually present throughout the year, tourists also come in all seasons, though there is a slight decline in monsoon.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** fish such as Rohu and Catla
- **Bird species:** egrets, herons, peafowl, pigeons. Occasional visitors such as geese and stilts.
- **Vegetation:** khejri, acacia and seasonal wildflowers

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

The people living around Foyasagar carry with them a deep memory of the lake- shaped by years of dependence, observation, and interaction. For many older residents, Foyasagar is not merely a scenic water body but a lifeline that once sustained their homes, farms, and daily routines. They recall a time when the lake's water was drawn for drinking, cooking, and livestock, and when its seasonal ebb and flow signalled the rhythm of the year.

Locals often speak of the lake with a sense of quiet pride:

“हम बचपन से इस झील को ऐसे ही देखते आए हैं—साफ, शांत।”
(We have seen this lake like this since childhood- clean, calm)

Their knowledge of the lake extends beyond memory and into an intuitive understanding of its ecological behaviour. Community members can recount how the water level rises after monsoon rain and how certain species of birds return each winter. They speak of years like 2018 and 2019, when the lake shrank dramatically, as well as the year of 2024 when the lake was almost overflowing due to the incessant rains. These experiences are etched into local consciousness as reminders of both vulnerability and resilience.

For many, Foyasagar is also a place of everyday routine—morning walks, gatherings with friends, quiet moments sitting by the water. Migrating birds, flowering shrubs, and the stillness of dawn have become familiar companions. Even those who do not use the water directly feel connected to the landscape through these everyday experiences.

Some residents also note how the lake's cleanliness today reflects deliberate care and vigilance. They say that it is still an important landmark in the city.

“बीसलपुर आने के बाद पानी की जरूरत कम हुई, पर इसका महत्व कम नहीं हुआ।”

(After Bisalpur water started coming, the need for this water reduced, but its importance has not)

Community Vision

Since the lake is well-maintained, the community did not have any specific complaints or suggestions. However, it is clear that the Foyasagar Lake is no longer just a reservoir built by necessity; it has grown into a landscape of memory, identity, and natural beauty. Its history honours the ingenuity of its maker, while its present celebrates the people who continue to gather along its banks. And as the water reflects the sky each evening, the lake remains, as it always has been, a quiet witness to the life of Ajmer.

Gol Jhalra

Type of water body: Jhalra (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.444433, 74.618387

Ward no: 12

Landmark: Taragarh Fort



The Gol Jhalra

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Gol Jhalra is located within the Taragarh Fort premises, near an old gate known as the Khidki Darwaza.

The Gol Jhalra is situated within the precincts of Taragarh Fort. Tucked close to the ancient Khidki Darwaza, this Jhalra occupies a quiet but significant corner of the fort complex. The fort's elevated terrain and thick stone walls create a dramatic backdrop for the waterbody, emphasising the strategic importance of water conservation structures in hill forts across India.

Historically, such reservoirs were essential for storing rainwater and ensuring water availability for the fort's residents, soldiers, and travellers, especially during sieges or periods of limited access to external resources.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The name “Gol Jhalra” refers to its circular form, though close observation reveals an octagonal structural design—an architectural feature often seen in stepwells and water reservoirs built to maximize stability and distribute structural load evenly. This blending of circular identity and octagonal geometry gives the Jhalra a distinct architectural character.

Local residents recall that the Jhalra once served as one of the primary water sources for people living in and around the fort. Older community members fondly share memories:

“हम वहाँ जाते थे, पानी भरते थे, घूमते थे।”
(We used to go there, draw water, wander around)

For many, the Jhalra was not only a functional waterbody but also a recreational and social space where children played, families gathered, and travellers rested.

While the exact date of its construction is not known, some community members speculate that it may have been built during the British period, possibly as part of upgrades made to the fort when colonial forces occupied the region. However, given the architectural style, it is also possible that the structure predates this period and was later repaired or reconfigured. The uncertainty itself reflects the long and layered history of Taragarh, where many elements have evolved through continuous use and adaptation.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
PERIMETER	108 m.
AREA	871 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	8 m.



*Satellite imagery of the Gol Jhalra
in April 2025*

The steep stone steps descend uniformly towards the base, where the water collects. The geometric precision of the structure combined with its considerable depth suggests that it was designed to harvest and retain water efficiently throughout the year.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

The Gol Jhalra retains a substantial amount of water, which appears reasonably clean in the central pool. However, visible litter has accumulated along the steps and edges, indicating sporadic neglect. Weathering of the stone surfaces, erosion of the steps, and growth of thorny vegetation around the perimeter reflect the impact of time and limited maintenance. Despite these signs of deterioration, the jhalra remains structurally stable and continues to attract tourists visiting Taragarh Fort. Its visual appeal, symmetry, and depth continue to intrigue visitors, even though its original functional role has diminished.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

Unlike several other waterbodies in Ajmer that continue to serve ritualistic or practical functions, the Gol Jhalra today is not used by the community for any domestic, agricultural, or spiritual purpose. Its role has shifted almost entirely toward tourism and many tourists can be seen taking photos around the waterbody. The surrounding area, though quiet, forms a scenic viewpoint for people exploring the fort's inner pathways and gates.

In essence, the jhalra has transitioned from a source of daily sustenance to a cultural landmark that helps tell the story of Taragarh's extensive water infrastructure.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** pigeons
- **Vegetation:** thorny desert bushes, giant milkweed

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

In conversations with local residents, the most consistent theme is water scarcity. Those living in the Taragarh area receive piped water only on alternate days, and even then the supply lasts for barely half an hour. This irregularity underscores the importance of traditional water structures like the Gol Jhalra, which historically helped buffer scarcity during dry seasons.

Households that can afford it purchase private water tankers, a costly necessity for many. A single tanker of approximately 4000 litres costs around ₹1500, placing a significant financial burden on families.

These conditions highlight how, despite falling out of use, structures like the Gol Jhalra symbolize a time when locally managed water systems provided dependable access to water. The contrast between the past and present reinforces community calls for restoration and functional revitalization of such heritage resources.

Community Vision

The community strongly desires that the Gol Jhalra be cleaned, maintained, and protected as a heritage waterbody. Their vision includes regular removal of silt, litter, and debris.

While they do not necessarily expect the jhalra to return to full functional use, they hope it can be safeguarded and showcased as an example of historical water wisdom that remains relevant in today's era of climate uncertainty and water stress.

Hussain Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.451335, 74.619689

Ward no: 12

Landmark: Near the Akbari Masjid, Anderkot



The Hussain Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Hussain Baodi is the first in the series of stepwells in the Anderkot region, named after Imam Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad. It is located next to a small karbala, dedicated to Imam Hussain and his mother Fathima. A karbala is a place of mourning for the martyrdom of Imam Hussain at the original Battle of Karbala. Here rituals such as the procession of taaziya (a replica of Imam Hussain's tomb) take place.

The baodi is also located near the Akbari Masjid, which can be seen behind the baodi. The mosque and baodi are what is known as an 'Ibadat Ghah' which is an Urdu term for a place of worship.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The Akbari Masjid is said to have been built by Emperor Akbar around the year 1570 AD. Local residents say that both the masjid and the baodi were built together, making the baodi around 450 years old.

The baodi is also called Aama Baodi, named after the several 'aam ke ped' or mango trees that were grown here. In fact, some people also refer to this area as Aama Bao. However, over a period, all these trees died. The reason for this is not clear, but it is likely that there was a lack of water for irrigating the trees. Elderly residents remember the days when this area was filled with these trees. Many of them say they got land here because they possessed these mango trees. The land in which their trees were located was handed to them.



The karbala next to the baodi

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	14 x 7.5 m.
AREA	105 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	12 m.

The premises of the karbala and the baodi are protected by a gate. However, the gate is not locked so that the faithful can visit at any time of the day. Steps are provided on one corner of the baodi allowing access. The baodi is surrounded by buildings on two sides and trees on one side. The front of the baodi has a railing to prevent any accidents.

Current Use and Cultural Practices



Incense sticks burning at the karbala

The place holds special significance on the day of Muharram, when Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain. On this day, the faithful come to put their offerings of flowers into the waters of the baodi. On other days a few people come to pray and offer agarbattis and flowers.

Water enters the baodi from underground aquifers. The water is still is used for all purposes including drinking, washing, cleaning and bathing. Some of the residences close to the baodi do not have a piped water supply and so they are dependent on the Hussain baodi. People also draw water from the baodi when the supply of piped water is inadequate- which happens often in the summer. Even in other seasons, there may be times when piped water is not available for three to four days.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

The water of Hussain baodi continues to be used for the purposes of drinking, cleaning and washing. Sometimes, algae form on the water. If people take the water for domestic purposes during this time, they ensure that they either take it from below the surface or else move the algae before taking the water.

The level of water in the baodi goes down during summer season, goes up in monsoon, and then slightly goes down again in winter. It had filled up almost completely in the heavy monsoon of 2025.

The baodi gets cleaned about once a year. In 2025, it was carried out in October by the Ajmer Municipal Corporation. The community members also clean it when required. A few years back, when the baodi's access to the aquifer had got blocked due to silt and rubbish deposits, community members cleaned it. Some people say that the quality of the water had gone down a few years back, but it is better now.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** fish, tortoise
- **Bird species:** pigeons, mynas, crows
- **Vegetation:** neem, gulmohar

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

The memories shared by community members offer a window into how deeply water bodies were once woven into everyday life. One elder recalls,

“मेरे बचपन में लोग यहाँ आकर बैठते थे और पानी भी लेकर जाते थे।”
(In my childhood, people used to come and sit here and also take water)

This simple yet powerful statement speaks to a time when the baodi was more than a source of water- it was a social space where people gathered, rested, and exchanged stories. The stepwell served not only practical needs but also helped build relationships, trust, and a sense of belonging within the neighbourhood.

These recollections stand in sharp contrast to the challenges faced today. As one resident shared,

“अभी पंद्रह दिन पहले सप्लाई का पानी नहीं आया था, चार-पांच दिनों के लिए।”
(Just fifteen days back we didn't have piped water supply for almost four to five days)

In fact, some of the residences located closest to the baodi do not even have access to piped water supply. Their experiences underline an important truth—despite modern infrastructure, water insecurity remains a persistent reality.

Together, these voices highlight a broader narrative—while the physical structures of stepwells may stand neglected, the lived experiences of the community remind us of their enduring relevance. The knowledge passed down through generations and the ongoing water-related hardships both point toward the urgent need to conserve these traditional water systems as part of building climate resilience today.

Community Vision

For the residents living around the baodi, the vision for its future is simple yet meaningful. Since the water remains usable and the structure is secured with a proper fence, people do not feel the need for major interventions or redesign. Instead, their hopes centre on one fundamental requirement—that the water stays clean, healthy, and well-maintained.

This modest vision reflects a deep understanding of the baodi's role in their lives. The community does not ask for beautification or new infrastructure, they ask for continuity. They want the baodi to keep doing what it has always done, provide dependable water in a landscape where scarcity is increasingly common. Their emphasis on maintaining water quality shows a quiet but clear awareness of how crucial such traditional sources are, especially in times when piped supply can be unreliable.

In essence, the community's vision is rooted in practicality and respect. They see the baodi not as a site that needs transformation, but as a living resource that must be cared for. By ensuring its water remains in good condition, they hope to protect a system that has supported them for generations and one that can continue to offer resilience in the face of a changing climate.

Ibrahim Shaheed Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.441071, 74.618908

Ward no: 12

Landmark: Taragarh Fort



The Ibrahim Shaheed Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Ibrahim Shaheed Baodi is situated near the southern boundary of Taragarh Fort, one of Ajmer's most historically layered hilltop complexes. The baodi lies in a relatively quiet stretch of the fort, away from the main tourist movement, surrounded by rocky slopes, sparse vegetation, and remnants of old pathways.

This positioning also indicates its original purpose, to collect and store rainwater flowing down from the natural catchment channels of the hillside.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The baodi takes its name from Ibrahim Sheikh, also affectionately known as Ibrahim Baba, a spiritual figure believed to have meditated and prayed in this region. His small shrine still stands nearby. Although not widely known on the tourist circuit, the shrine continues to attract a modest number of devotees who visit Taragarh for spiritual reasons.

Community members recall that the baodi once had practical importance. In earlier decades, residents and visitors used its water mainly for bathing and washing.

With time, as modern water supply systems expanded and footfall in this part of Taragarh decreased, the baodi slowly fell out of functional use. People still remember the days when its water was clear enough to be used, though such memories grow more distant with each generation.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
PERIMETER	52 m.
AREA	201 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	5 m.



Satellite imagery of the baodi in April 2025

As can be seen in the satellite imagery, the baodi is located very close to the main boundary wall of the Taragarh Fort.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

The current condition of the baodi reflects long-term neglect. Much of the water surface is covered by algae, indicating a combination of stagnation, lack of cleaning, and organic runoff from the surrounding slopes.

Residents note that the water level fluctuates with the seasons, reducing significantly during summer and rising again in the monsoon.

The structural walls remain intact but weathered, and some stones bear signs of erosion. Thorny shrubs and wild vegetation have begun to encroach upon the edges, further limiting access.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

The baodi is no longer in active use. Because the water remains consistently dirty and covered with algae, people avoid using it for any domestic purpose. Neither devotees visiting Ibrahim Baba's shrine nor locals from the nearby settlements rely on it today.

Instead, the baodi stands as a quiet, largely overlooked heritage structure, visited occasionally by those exploring Taragarh but not actively integrated into contemporary cultural or everyday practices.

Its spiritual association with Ibrahim Baba survives symbolically, but the waterbody's functional roles have faded over time.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** pigeons
- **Vegetation:** thorny desert bushes

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Local residents confirm that the baodi has not been used for a very long time. They frequently mention that the water has remained dirty for years and no formal cleaning or restoration effort has taken place recently. The baodi's decline reflects a broader neglect of traditional water structures around Taragarh.

Some older residents recall a time when people visited the baodi to collect water for utilitarian purposes. Younger generations, however, have never seen the baodi in functional condition. The baodi is therefore remembered more for its past utility than its present relevance.

Community Vision

The community expresses a desire for the baodi to be cleaned, restored, and maintained. Their hopes include the removal of algae and accumulated silt and regular maintenance to prevent water stagnation.

Though they do not expect the baodi to regain its historical domestic use, residents strongly believe that it should be preserved as an integral part of the fort's cultural and ecological landscape.

Jhaanu Naak Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.441759, 74.619924

Ward no: 12

Landmark: Taragarh Fort



The Jhaanu Naak Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Jhaanu Naak Baodi is positioned along the south-eastern outer boundary of Taragarh Fort, in a relatively secluded stretch of the hill. This section of the fort overlooks rugged terrain, with narrow stone paths and natural drainage lines converging downhill. Historically, such peripheral locations within forts were chosen for water structures to maximize rainwater catchment from the sloping ridges.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

According to local residents, the Jhaanu Naak Baodi was once used for bathing and washing. Its modest scale and accessible steps indicate that it was not a large communal reservoir but rather a functional, everyday waterbody for people living near this part of the fort.

However, unlike some other waterbodies in Taragarh, the baodi's history is remembered only faintly.

There are no well-known legends or religious associations tied to it, and older residents recall it as a simple utilitarian resource rather than a spiritual or ceremonial site. With time, as piped water became available in nearby settlements, the baodi gradually fell out of use. Eventually, it dried up completely, leading to generations of residents who have never seen water standing in it.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
PERIMETER	70 m.
AREA	370 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	5 m.



Satellite imagery of the baodi in April 2025

The stone-lined basin is rectangular to slightly tapered, with steps descending from one side. The depth suggests it was designed to collect a meaningful but not massive volume of water, likely sufficient for daily washing and bathing needs of local families.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

At present, the baodi contains no standing water. The floor of the structure has accumulated soil and organic matter over the years, allowing hardy plants to sprout at the bottom. Their presence indicates that small amounts of rainwater do collect briefly during monsoon showers, but the water does not remain for long.

The steps show signs of erosion, and the walls bear patches of weathering. Wind-blown debris and thorny vegetation have also gathered along the edges.

Overall, the baodi appears abandoned, even though its core structure remains restorable with appropriate care.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

The Jhaanu Naak Baodi is not used for any purpose today. Its dry condition and assumed leakage have rendered it functionally obsolete. Neither residents nor visitors engage with it, and it is rarely discussed except when conversations arise about heritage decline or water scarcity in the Taragarh region.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** pigeons
- **Vegetation:** thorny desert bushes

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Community members widely express that they have never seen the baodi hold water for more than a few days. Even during good monsoons, the water tends to disappear quickly, usually within three to four days, strengthening the belief that the structure suffers from leakage.

Older residents recall stories passed down through their families suggesting that the baodi was once functional, but within living memory, it has remained mostly dry. This has led to a common assumption that the baodi either developed cracks over time or its foundational stone lining has deteriorated, allowing water to seep directly into the ground.

While people express curiosity about the structure's past, they equally express concern that without intervention, the baodi may continue to deteriorate beyond repair.

Community Vision

The community hopes that Jhaanu Naak Baodi will be examined for structural leakage, repaired carefully, cleaned, and revived. Their vision includes inspecting the base and walls for cracks, re-lining or repairing the stonework where necessary and clearing vegetation, debris, and accumulated soil.

Residents believe that reviving the baodi would not only honour Taragarh's traditional water heritage but also help address contemporary concerns around water scarcity and ecological decline.

Jhadi Shah Baba Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.413238, 74.654012

Ward no: 38

Landmark: Jhadi Shah Baba (Kalandari) Masjid



The Jhadi Shah Baba Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

This baodi does not actually have a name and is simply known as the baodi near the Jhadi Shah Baba masjid (mosque). The mosque, also known as Kalandari Masjid takes its name from Hazrat Rabbani Shah Qadri, a revered Sufi saint from Sandila in Hardoi district of Uttar Pradesh.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The baodi is believed to have been constructed during the Mughal period, a time when stepwells formed an important part of the region's water-harvesting and survival systems. Its structure- about 10 metres deep—was built to capture and store water from the rainfall and its natural flow from the surrounding hills. For generations, it served as a dependable reserve especially in years or seasons when water scarcity gripped the area.



The Jhadi Shah Baba masjid

As one enters the area where the community around the baodi live, they are greeted by hens, dogs and geese. These livestock are an integral part of the community's life. The community elders recall a time when the baodi was used for drinking, bathing, and washing, particularly during months when piped or well water was insufficient. Before modern water supply lines reached the locality, this stepwell formed a vital part of daily life. People visited it early in the mornings, filling water, washing clothes, or simply cooling themselves at the edge of the stone steps.

But with the arrival of piped water, the role of the baodi slowly diminished. As dependence on household taps increased, the number of visitors to the stepwell declined until eventually, over the past 2–4 years, the baodi became almost entirely defunct.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	8 x 10 m.
AREA	80 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	10 m.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

Today, the baodi is not actively used for any daily purpose. Community members shared that until a few years ago, people occasionally washed clothes or fetched water during months of scarcity, but these practices have now stopped completely. The main reason is safety: the soil around the baodi has become soft and unstable, making it risky to approach the edge. Parents are especially cautious, fearing children or livestock might slip into the water.

Because the baodi lies close to the Jhadi Shah Baba Masjid, elders remember that the water was once considered useful for small domestic tasks such as washing hands, cooling off in summer, or rinsing vessels. However, with piped water reaching most homes and with the baodi becoming visibly dirty, its cultural presence has faded.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

The current state of the baodi is not ideal. Though it belongs to the Ajmer Municipal Corporation and the Udhyan Shaka (Garden Department of AMC), the authorities have not cleaned it, and the responsibility has often fallen on the community. The last cleaning was about three years ago, carried out by residents who used to organise occasional upkeep whenever possible.

“साफ़ सफाई हमने ही की है ”
(We have done the cleaning)

Now, however, the land around the baodi has become soft and slippery, raising concerns that someone may fall into the water. Because of this, community-led cleaning has stopped.

The water today is dirty, but the neighbourhood explains that this is not due to deliberate dumping. Instead, various objects like children's balls, toys, and household items—accidentally fall into the stepwell, and without proper tools or safe access, people are unable to retrieve them. Over time, these objects have contributed to the baodi's neglected appearance.

Interestingly, the baodi has seen striking changes in its water levels. It used to remain dry for many years, especially before the recent increase in rainfall. Only in the last 3–4 years has it begun filling again, and this year—after a gap of nearly 18–20 years—the baodi is almost full, owing to unusually heavy monsoon rains.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** pigeons
- **Vegetation:** neem, thorny desert bushes

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Residents living around the baodi carry a strong sense of memory and emotional connection to it, even though it is no longer part of their day-to-day routines.

Community members also speak about the dramatic changes in water levels over time. For nearly two decades, the baodi remained dry, gathering only dust and fallen debris. It is only recently that residents have seen water returning, a change they associate with heavier rainfall and better monsoons. This revival has sparked renewed interest and hope among the people.

“यहाँ (बावड़ी में) पानी कम है। सिर्फ़ तीन-चार साल पहले ही पानी भरना शुरू हुआ है।”

(Water is less here (in the baodi). Only three to four years back the water has started filling up)

At the same time, residents express concern about its present neglected state. They note that the water appears dirty not because people deliberately pollute it, but because toys, balls, and household objects accidentally fall in and cannot be retrieved due to the dangerous, slippery soil. Those who once took pride in cleaning the baodi say they feel helpless now because accessing it safely has become difficult.

“यह तो पूरी तरह से एक तरफ़ से गिर रहा है — अगर सिर्फ़ यहाँ पैर रखने से ही कोई अंदर गिर जाए — तो फिर कोई सफ़ाई कैसे हो सकती है?”

(This is falling completely from the side — If just by putting one’s foot here, the person falls inside — then how can any cleaning take place?)

Despite these challenges, the community believes the baodi has potential. Their lived experience tells them that if it were cleaned and made safe to approach, it could once again provide water—at least for washing, especially on days when the piped supply is irregular. This mix of nostalgia, practical understanding, and cautious optimism shapes how residents remember and imagine the future of the Jhadi Shah Baba Baodi.

Community Vision

There is no handpump nearby, so the community is dependent on piped water. Yet the community strongly believes that if the baodi were to be properly cleaned, the water could once again be used—at least for washing and cleaning. They point out that even now, the piped water supply is sometimes insufficient, and a functional baodi would be a valuable supplementary source.

“यह काम आ सकता है। आजकल नल में पानी भी कम आता है – इसलिए हम पंप लगाकर पानी इस्तेमाल कर सकते हैं।”

(It can come in use. Nowadays the water from the tap is also less – so we can put a pump and use the water)

Today, the Jhadi Shah Baba Baodi stands as a reminder of a time when water structures were built with precision, respect for nature, and an understanding of local needs. Though neglected now, there is hope to revive it as the community is interested in having a clean and safe baodi that can serve their utilitarian needs as well.

Jhalra Shareef

Type of water body: Jhalra (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.455754, 74.627564

Ward no: 18

Landmark: At the Dargah Shareef, Anderkot



The Jhalra Shareef

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Jhalra Shareef is located deep within the sacred complex of Ajmer's Dargah Shareef in Anderkot, Ajmer. The Dargah Shareef is the tomb of the revered Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, a sacred and prominent Muslim shrine that draws millions of pilgrims of all faiths annually. Built during the Mughal Empire, it is a significant spiritual and historical landmark featuring notable architecture, including the Akbari Mosque, the Buland Darwaza, and the Nizam Gate.

The region where the dargah is located used to be mountainous earlier. As more settlements started coming up, some parts of the mountains were broken down. Even today, its water comes directly from natural sources — mountain streams and underground channels that seep quietly into the reservoir. The water is said to be sweet and the community members say that many years ago, when water samples were lab-tested, it was found to be among the best-quality water in the region.

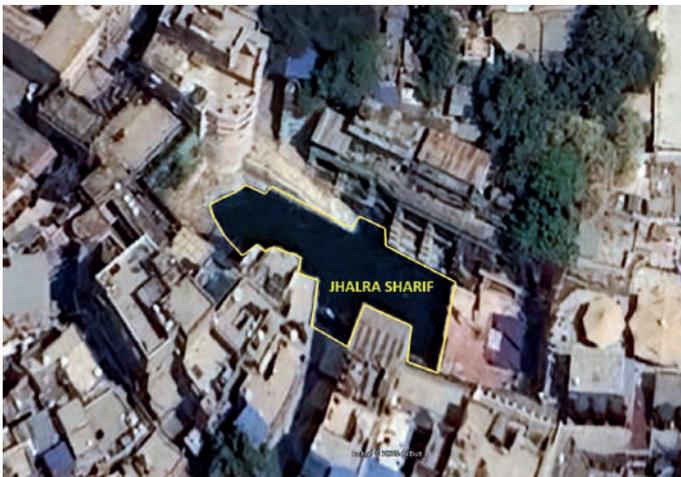
Historical Evolution & Community Memory

According to local history, the Jhalra Shareef has been here since the time of Khwaja Garib Nawaz. According to legend, the saint himself once performed 'wazu' at this very spot, and from that moment onward, the water never dried up. 'Wazu' is the Islamic ritual of purification involving the washing of specific body parts to achieve ritual purity before prayer. This process is a prerequisite for formal prayer and involves washing the face, hands, arms, and feet, along with wiping the head and ears. It is also performed before touching or reading the Qur'an.

Through centuries of changing seasons, through years of abundance and years of drought, the Jhalra remained steady. In one such drought many decades ago, when much of Rajasthan's water bodies had turned dry, people from all over Ajmer came to the Jhalra Shareef to collect water and take it home. The Jhalra Shareef, is said to be 'as deep as seven wells', and as ancient as the spiritual history that surrounds it.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
PERIMETER	131 m.
AREA	489 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	30 m.



Satellite imagery of the jhalra in April 2025

The Jhalra has steps on two opposite sides. It is surrounded by built structures, with the dargah on one side and residential structures on the other sides. A pillar stands in the centre of the jhalra, rising from a set of submerged steps.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

The Jhalra is not just a water body; it is the lifeline of the Dargah. All the water used within the sacred complex flows from here. The Dargah relies on no municipal supply—every drop for drinking, cooking, washing, wazu, and cleaning comes from this deep, ancient reservoir. Before it is used, the water passes through a three-stage filtration plant, ensuring purity for the lakhs of visitors who pass through the Dargah each month.

Every day, nearly 1 lakh litres of water is used in the daily activities of the dargah. However, this quantity rises up to nearly 3 lakh litres during the annual Urs festival. The Urs festival at Ajmer Sharif Dargah is an annual six-day event in the seventh month of the Islamic lunar calendar that commemorates the death anniversary of the Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti. It attracts millions of devotees from all faiths for prayer, ritualistic traditions, and cultural activities like Sufi songs and qawwali performances.

The Jhalra is a space where devotion takes physical form. People visiting the dargah throw flowers into its waters, believing their prayers will find a voice here. The flowers offered at the shrine of Khwaja Garib Nawaz are collected and carefully placed under a shaded structure built over the water. A pillar stands in the centre of the Jhalra, rising from a set of submerged steps, adding to its ancient, mystical aura. At the top of the pillar is a symbol of a crescent moon and the palm of the hand.

On 'Chatti Sharif', the monthly celebration held on the sixth day of every Islamic lunar month, the Jhalra glows with countless diyas lit around its edges. Flags flutter all around it, transforming the entire space into a vibrant, sacred arena of remembrance and devotion. On these nights, the soft fragrance of agarbattis drifts over the water, mingling with the sound of prayers.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Despite its age — over 810 years old — the Jhalra Shareef is maintained with unwavering dedication by the Dargah Committee. Every single day, the water surface is cleaned with nets to remove flowers, leaves, and offerings. Once a week, bleaching powder is added to maintain hygiene. Fish swim beneath the surface, adding life to the ancient waterbody.

Because of this meticulous routine, the water is mostly clean. The water level follows the rhythm of the seasons — rising in winter and falling in the summer. However, in the summer, the scorching heat causes more water to evaporate.



The pillar with hand and moon symbol located in the middle of the jhalra

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** small fish
- **Bird species:** pigeons, mynas, crows
- **Vegetation:** small shrubs growing on the walls of the jhalra, peepul saplings

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

The community's relationship with the jhalra is shaped by generations of close observation and lived experience. Residents often speak with pride about its remarkable resilience, noting:

“आज तक किसी ने भी यहाँ का पानी सूखते हुए नहीं देखा है ”
(Till today nobody has seen the water here drying up)

This enduring presence has made the water body not just a natural feature, but a reliable factor in the everyday life of the settlement.

Local knowledge also traces the water's journey across the landscape. The conversations with the community also revealed an understanding of older hydrological linkages between traditional stepwells and natural depressions. These connections, remembered and shared across generations, speak to a time when water systems were deeply integrated with the rhythms of community life.

“काटन बावड़ी का पानी यहाँ आता है।”
“The water from Katan Baodi comes here.”

Changes in the physical landscape are equally embedded in collective memory. Elders remember a time when the area surrounding the water body looked very different:

“ये पहले पुरे पहाड़ थे। सिर्फ नीचे घर थे, ऊपर पूरा पहाड़ था। ये ऊपर जो घर दिख रहे हैं, वो पहाड़ पे बने हैं।”
(Earlier there used to be only mountains here. There were houses only below. The houses that you now see on top have been built on the mountains)

This shift from sparsely inhabited slopes to densely built-up hillsides reflect broader transformations in settlement patterns, pressures of urban growth, and the community’s adaptive relationship with its terrain.

Together, these memories form a layered understanding of the water body- not just as a physical feature, but as a living part of community history. The stories carried by residents illuminate how water, landscape, and people have shaped one another over time.

Community Vision

The Jhalra Shareef is more than a reservoir — it is a living witness to eight centuries of faith, continuity, and ritual practice. For generations, it has sustained the spiritual life of the Dargah, ensuring that ceremonies and daily routines remain uninterrupted throughout the year.

Because the jhalra has long been cared for with diligence, the community’s aspirations are simple yet profound, they want this tradition of upkeep to continue well into the future. Residents express a deep desire to keep using the water within the Dargah premises, seeing it as integral to both worship and identity. At the same time, they reaffirm their commitment to the jhalra’s wellbeing, willing to continue contributing their own labour and stewardship so that the water body remains protected for generations to come.

Jharneshwar Mahadev Mandir Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.450175, 74.623499

Ward no: 13

Landmark: Jharneshwar Mandir



The Jharneshwar Mahadev Mandir Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Jharneshwar Mahadev Mandir Baodi is located on the lower slopes of the Taragarh mountain range, positioned nearly 400 feet above the surrounding plains of Ajmer. The temple and its stepwell sit within a rugged terrain shaped by natural rock formations and seasonal water flows. The geography of the area plays a crucial role in the baodi's hydrology—streams descending from the upper hill regions channel water through the porous mountain rock, eventually feeding the baodi throughout the year.

The site is somewhat secluded, accessed through a single set of steps that wind upward toward the temple complex. As one approaches, the landscape shifts from urban bustle to a quieter, greener environment. This natural setting contributes not only to the spiritual ambience of the temple but also to the unique ecological conditions that allow the baodi to retain water even during dry periods.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

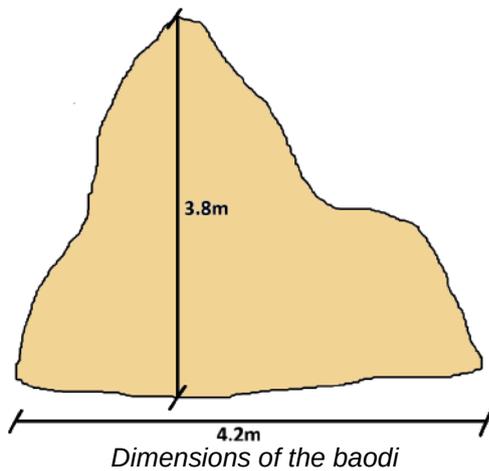
Local memory places the origins of the Jharneshwar Mahadev temple and its baodi in the period of Maratha influence in Ajmer, around the 17th century CE. The temple gets its name from the waterfall or 'jharna' that descends down the hill as well as the deity to whom the temple is dedicated- Lord Shiva. Oral traditions from long-time residents suggest that the temple was considered miraculous from the beginning, drawing worshippers who believed the constantly flowing water was a blessing from Lord Shiva.

Over time, the temple complex has grown around the baodi. What was once a smaller shrine has gradually evolved into a more elaborate sacred space. The baodi has been integral to the temple since its establishment. Over generations, its water has been regarded as sacred, used for rituals, daily worship, and even for drinking.

Local folklore also speaks of a tunnel located deep within the baodi, believed to stretch nearly 100 metres into the hillside. While few have attempted to explore it due to the constant water, it forms an important part of community storytelling.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	3.8 x 4.2 m.
AREA	approx. 8 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	5 m.



Unlike the typical rectangular stepwells found in the rest of Ajmer, the Jharneshwar baodi has a distinctive triangular shape. This unusual structure is shaped naturally by the sloping hillside.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Today, the baodi remains in exceptionally good condition. The water appears clean and clear, supported by a net covering that prevents falling leaves and debris from contaminating the surface. Temple caretakers regularly monitor the structure, ensuring cleanliness and preventing unwanted access.



Net installed over the baodi

Coins are sometimes thrown into the water as offerings, although this practice is minimal. Due to the steady inflow and outflow of water, any small objects that fall in tend to wash out or settle harmlessly without affecting water quality. The continuous movement of water naturally freshens the baodi, making it self-cleansing in many respects.

A motorised pump has been installed to draw water for drinking and for temple rituals. The water's freshness, combined with its spiritual significance, makes it the preferred choice for puja preparations—while tubewell water is reserved mainly for general use such as bathing and washing.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

The baodi continues to play an active role in the temple's everyday functions. Devotees and temple caretakers draw water for drinking, describing its taste as naturally 'sweet' and remarkably light.

“कहा जाता है कि यह पानी शुरू से ही मीठा है। इस पानी का स्वाद सबसे अलग है।”

(This water is said to always be sweet, from the beginning itself. The water has a distinctive taste)

Seasonal festivals bring additional significance to the waterbody. Since the temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva, Shivratri is one of the major festivals celebrated here. Shivratri is a Hindu festival dedicated to Lord Shiva, celebrated annually on the 14th night of the lunar month of Phalgun (Twelfth and final month of the Hindu lunar calendar, falling around February-March). During Shivratri, the temple becomes a centre of activity, with crowds of Shiva devotees gathering throughout the day and night. Special decorations adorn the temple, and a grand aarti is performed. Around 2000 litres of thandaai (a flavorful, spiced milk often prepared during Indian festivals like Holi and Mahashivratri) is prepared and distributed, much of it made using the baodi's water- further cementing its ritual importance.

For the community, the baodi is not just an old stepwell, it is a living part of their spiritual traditions, continuing to support daily religious practices and festivals alike.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** tortoise
- **Bird species:** pigeons, mynas, crows
- **Vegetation:** neem, peepul

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

The base of the baodi is fed by natural streams filtering through the mountain layers, ensuring a continuous supply of clean water.

Local residents and temple caretakers emphasise that the baodi has never dried up, not even during the harshest summers. Its water level rises dramatically in the monsoon, sometimes overflowing during intense rains and submerging the shrine located within it, but settles back to normal within hours. This behaviour confirms the strong underground water channels feeding it from the upper Taragarh mountain.

Communities clearly distinguish between the baodi water and borewell water, describing the former as more beneficial for health. Unlike the heavier tubewell water which many say feels weighty in the stomach, the baodi water is considered pure, refreshing, and easy to digest.

“बोरवेल का पानी उतना अच्छा नहीं है। यह भारी लगता है। पीने के बाद पेट में भारीपन महसूस होता है।”

(The borewell water is not that good. It feels heavy. After drinking, it feels like a weight in the stomach)

For residents, the baodi is both a practical water source and a form of inherited knowledge passed down through stories of its origins and its mysterious tunnel. These lived experiences shape the community's emotional connection to the baodi and reinforce its continued importance.

Community Vision

Community members express a strong desire to protect and maintain the baodi as it has been for centuries. For temple caretakers, the baodi is at the heart of their daily rituals and spiritual responsibilities. They envision a future where the water remains clean, the structure remains intact, and the natural flows from the mountain continue undisturbed.

They hope that authorities and devotees alike will recognise the baodi's heritage value and ensure that it is preserved, not only as a source of water but as a sacred and historical asset for future generations.

Kamla Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.464137, 74.628681

Ward no: 8

Landmark: Police Station, Ganj, Ajmer



The Kamla Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Kamla Baodi is located in the heart of Ganj, one of Ajmer's oldest and busiest neighbourhoods. Positioned close to the Police Station, it lies within a dense urban fabric marked by narrow lanes, closely built homes, and a constant buzz of local activity. The baodi sits quietly between residential and religious structures, almost hidden from plain sight.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The Kamla Baodi, is an enduring water structure believed to be around 100 to 150 years old. It used to be known as 'Kalma Baodi' till 1962 ('Kalma' is an Urdu word, referring to faith), after which the name was changed to Kamla Baodi. It is estimated that the baodi was built during the time of Prithviraj Chauhan's reign. Now it stands under the care of the Ajmer Municipal Corporation. The baodi has steps around its interior walls leading down to the water, reflecting the classic stepwell design that allowed people to reach the water even as levels changed with the seasons.

A small temple stands in front of the baodi, built in memory of a saint named Kishan Das who once lived in a hut here. Earlier, the baodi's water was central to daily living. People drank from it, bathed in it, and used it freely for household needs. Animals, especially buffaloes and goats, were given water from here throughout the day. So much water was drawn that the levels often dipped by night — only to refill naturally by morning.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	3 x 3 m.
AREA	9 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	10 m.

Residents say that steps are provided around the sides of the baodi, similar to steps provided in a well, but cannot be seen now due to the level of water.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Today, the baodi looks very different from how it used to be. With piped water reaching homes, the baodi is no longer relied upon the way it once was. Occasionally, water may still be taken for washing clothes, cleaning, or even construction work, but these are infrequent. A motor has been installed and water connections provided to some houses, yet residents rarely use it now. Even so, it is said that fish continue to swim in its waters. In summers, the water level goes down and increases again in the monsoons.

There are mixed accounts when it comes to maintenance. Some say the community cleans it from time to time, others say the Municipal Corporation does. One person recalled it being cleaned three years ago, another said it was done just seven months back. But everyone agrees on one thing — no matter when it is cleaned, it becomes dirty again within weeks.

“वो कचरा हटाते हैं – वे सतह से काई और सब कुछ हटा देते हैं, पंद्रह-बीस दिनों में यह फिर से गंदा हो जाता है।”
(They remove the garbage – they remove the algae and all from the surface, within fifteen-twenty days it becomes dirty again)

The water is now clouded with algae, garbage, and even religious waste, leaving the baodi in a deeply neglected state. Sometimes, the water even rises and overflows, seeping into nearby homes and causing dampness.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

Today, Kamla Baodi's functional role in daily life has drastically reduced. With piped water supply available in most homes, people no longer depend on the baodi for drinking or household use. Instead, its primary use has become ritualistic — particularly as a site where religious waste is often disposed of. Flowers, idols, incense remains, and offerings from nearby temples and households are thrown into the baodi, contributing to the pollution and algae growth that now fill its waters.

Occasionally, some residents still take water from the baodi for washing or for small-scale construction activities, especially during shortages. Growing neglect and unmanaged waste have made the area less frequented than before. Despite its decline, the baodi retains a symbolic role in local religious life, especially because of the small temple located nearby, which draws visitors who often pay their respects before moving on.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** possible that small fish are present, but due to the algae it cannot be confirmed.
- **Bird species:** pigeons, crows
- **Vegetation:** neem, peepul saplings

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

For long-time residents, the Kamla Baodi is not just a water structure but a part of their shared memory and evolving neighbourhood identity. Elders recall how the baodi once sustained daily life — how the water remained sweet and clear, how animals were provided with water throughout the day, and how the place bustled with activity. They speak of a time when trees surrounded the area, creating a shaded, cooler spot even in scorching summers. The removal of these trees, they say, has changed the microclimate around the baodi.

People also share their understanding of its hydrology. According to them, the baodi receives water not only from rainfall but also from natural underground flows connected to the larger Anasagar Lake, which explains why the baodi rarely dries up, even in years of lower rainfall.

Residents also narrate the challenges they face — the rising water level that sometimes floods nearby homes, the strong smell from accumulated waste, and the repeated need for cleaning.

“कई बार पानी ओवरफ्लो हो जाता है। और फिर वह गेट से बाहर निकलकर आस-पास की इमारतों में घुस जाता है, जिससे उनमें सीलन आ जाती है।”

(Many times the water overflows. And then it comes out of the gate and seeps into the buildings nearby, causing dampness in them)

Despite these issues, the community still views the baodi with a sense of attachment, recalling its past importance and recognising its continued presence as part of their lived landscape.

Community Vision

The community's vision for the Kamla Baodi is rooted in their desire to restore dignity, cleanliness, and safety to the structure. They hope that with the right interventions, the baodi can once again become a clean, usable, and respected space. The first and most urgent request is the installation of a protective net or grill over the opening, which would prevent garbage, plastic waste, religious offerings, and leaves from falling directly into the water. Residents believe this single step will significantly improve the baodi's condition.

“अगर नेट लगा दिया जाए, तो कोई भी उसमें कचरा नहीं फेंक पाएगा। अभी आस-पास की पाँच-छह इमारतों से कोई भी उसमें कचरा फेंक देता है।”

(If a net is installed, no one will be able to throw garbage into it. Currently anyone from the five-six buildings nearby will throw garbage into it)

They also wish for regular maintenance — specifically, an annual or bi-annual cleaning schedule coordinated either by the Municipal Corporation or in collaboration with the local community. Strengthening the gate and boundary walls is another priority, both for safety and to deter misuse of the site.

More than anything, the community envisions a baodi that is restored as a heritage asset rather than a neglected pit. They express hope that with proper care, signage, and attention, Kamla Baodi could become a small but meaningful cultural landmark - a reminder of Ajmer's historic water systems and a place where memories, stories, and traditions continue to flow.

Katan Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.454617, 74.624784

Ward no: 12

Landmark: Dhai Din ka Jhopda, Anderkot



The Katan Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Katan Baodi is a beautiful stepwell, nestled within the premises of the 'Haji Kudrat Ullah ki Dargah'. Dargah refers to the tomb or shrine of a Muslim saint, in this case that of Mohammad Kudrat Ullah who was known for teaching and leading many in the faith. The dargah is located near the Dhai Din ka Jhopda, which is a historic mosque in Ajmer, originally a Sanskrit college, later converted into a mosque by Qutbuddin Aibak in 1199 AD. Its name comes from a legend that the mosque was built in two and a half days.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The name Katan Baodi is believed to have originated from the term 'sooth katna', meaning the spinning of thread. In earlier times, this area was known for its thread-spinning activity, and the stepwell derived its name from this traditional craft once practised in this area. Once a lively source of water and daily activity, the baodi now stands as a silent witness to the passage of time. The stepwell dates to the era of Prithviraj Chauhan and reflects the architectural wisdom and community-oriented spirit of that period.

Built to serve the people's everyday needs, it once provided clean water for drinking, washing, and for wuzu- which is the Islamic ritual of ablution.



The gate that has been put up on one side of the baodi for safety reasons

Some community members also say that the water from the baodi was used for the construction of the Dhai Din ka Jhopda. Till around eighty years ago, women used to come from areas such as Naya Bazar, Purani Mandi, Lakhaan Kotdi, Diggi Bazaar, Silawat Mohalla to fill their pots with water. The water was very good and sweet.

With the introduction of handpumps and piped water supply, the dependence on the baodi reduced and for the past thirty years it has not been used much. Another reason for people to move away from the using the baodi was safety. Since the baodi used to be open, without any firm boundary, both people and animals used to accidentally fall into it and drown. Later the community put together funds to install a gate to ensure safety.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	5 x 5 m.
AREA	25 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	7 m.

The baodi is not perfectly rectangular but rectangular with one slanted edge. It is surrounded on three sides by the walls of the dargah and has a gate on one side. One side is a half wall, allowing access to the baodi from within the dargah.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

The Katan baodi's relevance has not been lost completely. The water is still used for wuzu in the dargah. The water is also supplied to three nearby mosques one of which is the Dhai Din ka Jhopda. It is also connected to a public tank from which anyone can use the water. This is especially useful to informal city dwellers who have no other access to water.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

The water is relatively clean. The visible debris in the water includes twigs and leaves, along with some algae. While the water quality has not been tested, community members say the water is fine for washing and cleaning purposes. The main source of water in the baodi is the underground aquifer. Throughout the year, the stepwell retains water, though its levels vary with the seasons — dipping low in the dry heat of summer and rising generously during the monsoons.

While the baodi comes under the ownership of the Ajmer Municipal Corporation, it is the community who maintains the baodi. Once a year, during autumn, a few capable swimmers from the neighbourhood enter the baodi with baskets to clear up the debris in it. The debris mostly consists only of leaves and twigs- not plastic or garbage.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** small fish but not present throughout the year. Tortoises are also present.
- **Bird species:** pigeons, crows
- **Vegetation:** A banyan and neem tree are within the premises of the dargah. Both grew naturally and now provide shade in the dargah premises.

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Long ago, this area was dense jungle, and people came to Anderkot mainly to collect wood. After India's independence in 1947, the landscape began to change as settlements gradually expanded. What began as scattered homes eventually grew into a tightly packed neighbourhood.

The residents displayed a good understanding of the hydrology of the Anderkot area and the rest of the city. They explained that water from the Katan baodi flows into the Dargah Jhalra, from where it continues to the Diggi Talaab.

The baodi continues to be at the heart of community life, sustained not only by its ancient structure but also by the collective labour and care of local residents. Every year, when it is time to clean the stepwell, the community turns to the strongest swimmers — usually young boys — who take on the task with enthusiasm. As one resident shared,

“हम उन्हें टोकरियाँ वगैरह देते हैं, और उनसे कहते हैं, 'बच्चों, इसे साफ़ करो।' वे बहुत उत्साहित होते हैं, उन्हें मज़ा आता है क्योंकि उन्हें नहाने को मिलता है।”

(We give them baskets and all, and tell them, 'Clean it up, children' They are very enthusiastic, they have fun because they get to bathe)

What might seem like a demanding chore becomes a moment of joy, pride, and playful responsibility for the younger generation.

Residents recall that in those early days the area was still heavily wooded, and winters were so cold that water kept in earthen pots would freeze overnight. Summers, by contrast, were intensely hot, and people relied on simple methods- like draping themselves with a wet cloth- to stay cool. Much of daily life unfolded around the baodi, where people gathered to escape the heat. They chatted for hours over bidees and cups of tea, and when fatigue set in, they simply stretched out and slept in the cool shade of the stepwell.

People often speak of the baodi not just as a water source, but as a source of comfort- especially in the harsh summer months. Sitting near its edges, one community member pointed out the noticeable drop in temperature, saying,

“यह ठंडी हवा बावड़ी की वजह से है। क्या आप इसे महसूस कर सकते हैं?”
(This cool temperature is because of the baodi. Can you feel it?)

For many, this natural cooling is an everyday miracle, a reminder of how deeply water shapes the microclimate and offers relief to all who pass by.

Yet, the community's relationship with water also reflects the challenges of scarcity. Piped supply is irregular, and people have learned to rely on their own systems of storage.

As one resident explained,

“अगर कोई पाइपलाइन टूट जाती है, तो हमें दो-तीन दिन तक नल में पानी नहीं मिलेगा। इसलिए, हम ये ड्रम रखते हैं और उनमें पानी भरकर रखते हैं। यह इमरजेंसी के समय काम आता है।”

(If some pipeline breaks, then we may not get water in the tap for two three days. So, we keep these drums and fill water in it. It comes in use during an emergency)

These stored reserves act as a buffer, allowing families to cope when the municipal supply falters. The baodi, connected to a public tank, further extends its generosity beyond the neighbourhood's homes. Its water is available to anyone who needs it — residents, visitors, or those living with the most precarious means.

“जो लोग गरीब हैं, जो फुटपाथ पर सोते हैं, वे यहाँ नहा-धो सकते हैं। और आस-पड़ोस के लोग भी ज़रूरत पड़ने पर इसका इस्तेमाल कर सकते हैं।”

(Those who are poor, those who sleep on the footpath- they can wash and bathe. And the residents of the neighbourhood can also use it whenever they need)

In this way, the baodi becomes not only a functional resource but a symbol of shared dignity and care. For many elders, memories of the area are tinged with deep affection and nostalgia. One person recalled with pride,

“हिंदुस्तान को ‘सोने की चिड़ियाँ’ कहलाता था। हम कहते हैं की हमारा मोहल्ला ‘महा सोने की चिड़ियाँ’ था।”
(Hindustan used to be called ‘a golden bird’. I say that our neighbourhood was a ‘great golden bird’)

The phrase conveys a longing for a time when the environment was richer, cleaner, and more abundant- when natural resources were cherished rather than strained. This reverence for nature was once woven into everyday values. Describing earlier attitudes, a resident reflected on the neem and banyan trees within the dargah premises, which had sprung up on their own,

“यह भगवान का दिया हुआ तोहफ़ा है। यह भगवान की एक छवि भी है। हरे पेड़ को काटना अच्छा नहीं है- यह एक पाप है।”

(This is a gift from God. This is also an image of God. It is a sin- it is not good to cut a green tree)

Such sentiments reveal a worldview in which water, trees, and the broader environment were seen as sacred- something to be respected rather than exploited.

Together, these voices form a tapestry of lived experience: pride, struggle, stewardship, and a profound emotional bond with the baodi and the landscape around it. They illuminate not only the community's past but also its ongoing commitment to preserving the water body as a shared, life-giving heritage.

Community Vision

The community's hopes for the future are simple yet deeply meaningful. The caretakers of the dargah desire that the baodi be cleaned regularly by the Municipal Corporation and that its water be used by the community in their day-to-day activities. Sustaining the baodi is, for them, not just an act of maintenance but an act of honouring their shared past. Today, the Katan Baodi remains an enduring mark of Ajmer's heritage, holding within its depths both history and memory- a living reminder of the people who have cared for it, relied on it, and shaped their lives around its presence for generations.

Kela Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.453009, 74.622158

Ward no: 12

Landmark: Near Chishtiya Cemetery, Anderkot



The Kela Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Kela baodi was built during the time of Prithviraj Chauhan's reign. Some of the oldest homes in the Anderkot area are around the Kela baodi.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The Kela Baodi gets its name from 'kela' or banana, referring to the banana cultivation that used to be in this area.

The baodi gets its water both from the underground aquifers as well as from the rain. Community members say that in earlier times, this baodi was reserved for bathing and washing and people would not use it for drinking unless it was a dire necessity. This was because the other baodis were used for drinking purposes and so people were told not to directly enter these water bodies for bathing or cleaning clothes or utensils. Instead they could take the water to their homes and use it for these purposes.

The baodi is used the most in summer, for bathing, especially by children. However, it is also a community gathering spot in the winter as people sit around it to soak in the sun.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	47 x 14 m.
PERIMETER	137 sqm.
AREA	772 m.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	7 m.



Satellite imagery of the baodi in April 2025



Satellite imagery of the baodi in June 2018

The baodi is surrounded by buildings on three sides and is only accessible from one side. Steps are provided here to enter the baodi. In the summer of 2018 and 2019, the baodi had seen a drastic decrease in water. However, the abundant rains of 2025 have revived the water levels.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

Following the rules set in earlier times, even today the baodi is used only for purposes of bathing and washing and not for drinking. Bathing has led to accidents sometimes, with people venturing to the deepest parts of the baodi and drowning there.

Mostly washing of clothes and cleaning of vessels is carried out at the steps of the baodi, where the water is not deep.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

While the water is not extremely dirty, it does have some visible garbage within it. This includes plastic material such as bottles, food wrappers and bags. Another concern is the construction debris around the baodi, which can gradually enter the water and block the seepage from underground.

The water recedes in the summer and increases in the monsoon. During the intense monsoon of 2025, the baodi had become full and water came up to its first step.

The community members say the Ajmer Municipal Corporation cleans the baodi once or twice a year. However, the people say that sometimes the Municipal Corporation does not take the waste away and simply leaves it there, in a heap.

A resident pointed to a heap of rubbish just outside the baodi and said:

“सफाई के बाद, वे कचरा वहीं ढेर कर देते हैं। अगर हवा चलती है या बकरियां उस तरफ से गुज़रती हैं, तो कचरा यहीं (बावड़ी के अंदर) आ जाता है।”

(After cleaning, they pile up the garbage there only. If the wind blows or goats pass that way, the garbage ends up here (inside the baodi) only)



Litter in the water

Though a municipal garbage collection vehicle does rounds in the area, people still tend to throw rubbish into the water. They say that it is not possible to stop people from this habit. A woman said:

**“हम किसे बताएं? इतने लोग हैं, हम किस-किस को रोके ?Who should we tell?”
(There are so many people, who can we stop?)**

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** pigeons, mynas, crows
- **Vegetation:** gulmohar, neem, peepul saplings

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Elderly women from the community recall sitting for long periods of time around the baodi, watching their children swim, having conversations with neighbours or oiling each other's hair. Some young boys say that they learnt to swim in this baodi.

For many, these memories capture a time when the baodi served not just as a water source but as a lively social space- a place where daily routines blended with leisure, where friendships were built, and where generations grew up under its quiet watch. Even today, people speak of the coolness that radiates from the water, the comfort it offers in summer, and the sense of familiarity it provides. The baodi is remembered not only for its utility, but for the everyday moments of connection, care, and community that unfolded along its steps.

Community Vision

The community majorly desires regular cleaning of the baodi to be carried out by the Ajmer Municipal Corporation. They believe that systematic upkeep would not only preserve the structure but also ensure that its water remains usable for everyday needs. Residents express that the baodi should remain open and accessible to all- serving as a source of water during shortages, a place of comfort in the summer months, and a living reminder of their shared heritage. Many also hope that improved maintenance would encourage younger generations to value the baodi as deeply as their elders do, keeping it vibrant, clean, and integrated into community life for years to come.

Lakhaa Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.462477, 74.626340

Ward no: 8

Landmark: Near Longia Road



The Lakhaa Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Lakhaa Baodi is located in the Longiya neighbourhood — also known locally as Longiya Basti — an old and tightly knit settlement in Ajmer. The baodi sits within a densely inhabited part of the locality, bordered closely by homes, shops, and small commercial workshops that have grown around it over the decades. Longiya Basti itself has evolved significantly, with newer generations relying mainly on piped water and handpumps for their domestic needs. In contrast, the baodi stands as a historical marker to the practices of water storage, community use, and environmental conditions that prevailed nearly a century ago.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

This baodi is said to be named after Lakhaa Bheel, a man from the Bheel community. The Bheel community is one of Rajasthan's largest tribal groups and they are known for their archery skills. They used to move from one place to another and used to halt here to take rest. The Bheels had built this baodi for their utilitarian purposes, such as drinking, washing and bathing. In those days the baodi was more open and accessible.

Nearly 100 years old and reaching to the depth of fifteen metres, it was originally a private property before being handed over to the Municipal Corporation. The owner handed it over as he did not want to worry about taking responsibility of someone falling or drowning in the baodi.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	5.4 x 5.1 m.
AREA	27.54 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	15 m.

Now that it is not in use, a walls has been built around it to prevent any accidents. The baodi is bordered by residential and commercial structures.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

The baodi's water is no longer fit for consumption. It is filled with waste and covered in algae. The water quality had deteriorated years ago, and it became foul-smelling. Locals ceased using it nearly thirty years ago. In fact, if the water is used for bathing or washing clothes, it causes itching. One of the most common reasons for this pollution is the disposal of religious waste into the baodi. This practice has been going on for almost twenty years.

While the flow of water to within the four walls of the baodi has been obstructed due to the accumulation of waste, water can still be seen underground, just outside these walls. A grill has been installed to allow access to the baodi's water and through this grill, both water and waste are visible. It was originally constructed to facilitate the immersion of idols. Although the grill is quite heavy and the gaps between the bars are narrow, people still manage to lift it to dump religious waste or squeeze other garbage through the openings.

The baodi is in a polluted condition as locals throw garbage and religious waste into the baodi. The mechanic has a close connection with the baodi as both is home, and his workplace are near the baodi.

Because of this, he takes efforts to clean it now and then, but he is unable to keep up with the pace at which it becomes dirty. Sometimes people also throw food into the baodi to feed the fish and tortoise that live within the baodi.



The grill fixed in the ground to access the baodi's water



Garbage within the grilled area

Current Use and Cultural Practices

The area around the baodi is mostly used for parking vehicles. It is also used by a mechanic whose house and workshop are right next to the baodi. The vehicles he works on are parked here and he has set up a pipe connection to draw water from the baodi when required.

Residents receive water in their homes through the piped water supply and in case required, handpumps are also available close by. Therefore, they do not feel the need to use the water from this baodi. The mechanic uses the water to wash his equipment and the vehicles he services. He says that at one time the water was so bad that his pipe's nozzle used to turn black. However, now the water quality has improved a bit, probably because of the heavy rains.

There is a handpump located just a couple of meters from the baodi. The water from the handpump is said to be of good quality and hence it does not seem like the water from the baodi is connected to the source of the groundwater.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** fish and tortoise
- **Bird species:** pigeons
- **Vegetation:** peepul tree

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Community members living around the Lakhaa Baodi carry fragmented yet meaningful memories of the stepwell. Elders recall hearing stories from their parents and grandparents about the time when the baodi was the primary source of drinking water for the Bheel community. Though most of today's residents have never used its water personally, they have grown up seeing the baodi as part of their surroundings — sometimes clean, sometimes neglected, but always present.

Some residents remember when the water began to deteriorate nearly three decades ago, turning foul-smelling and unusable. Residents note that the practice of disposing religious waste – flowers, idols, and ritual offerings — has contributed heavily to its decline. Several people shared that the baodi fills up with garbage faster than anyone can clean it, making it difficult for individual efforts, such as those of the nearby mechanic who tries to maintain it, to make a lasting difference.

Interestingly, the community has observed that the water quality improves somewhat during years with good rainfall, suggesting that rainwater still plays a role in replenishing the baodi. They also emphasise that despite the presence of fish and even a tortoise in the water, the baodi cannot be used because of the volume of trash and algae. While most residents no longer rely on it for water, they continue to see it as a neglected heritage site – something they grew up with, but which newer generations barely recognise as valuable.

Community Vision

The community's vision for the Lakhaa Baodi is simple yet earnest, they want it to be cleaned, restored, and protected. Many residents feel that if the accumulated waste and algae were removed and the source of pollution controlled, the baodi could once again become a clean and respectable water body, even if not used for drinking. A key demand is the installation of a strong metal net or cover over the baodi. They believe this would prevent the dumping of garbage and religious waste.

Some residents hope to see the baodi developed as a cleaner and greener space — perhaps with proper boundary and better supervision or monitoring. They also point out that if the baodi were restored, it could potentially serve as a supplementary water source in times of shortage.

Overall, the community sees the Lakhaa Baodi not only as a water structure but as a part of their neighbourhood's identity – worth preserving, worth caring for, and worth handing over to future generations in better shape than it stands today.

Malusar Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.447040, 74.629617

Ward no: 18 & 19

Landmark: Near the Shitla Mata Mandir, Malusar



The Malusar Baodi (big)

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Malusar Baodi lies near the Shitla Mata Mandir. It takes its name from the Malusar locality, and its cultural identity stretches across both temple and dargah traditions. The Malusar Baodi can be divided into two parts – a big baodi and a small one. They are interconnected but separated by a road that passes in between the two. Here, we will be referring to both these baodis together as Malusar Baodi.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The Malusar Baodi is also remembered by many as 'Peer Baba ki Baodi'. In earlier years, this baodi was the main source of drinking water and household supply for the neighbourhoods. Built to collect rainwater and allow natural percolation, it not only provided water for daily needs but also helped recharge the groundwater. Elders recall how the baodi once pulsed with life.

One elderly woman shared,

“यह बावड़ी हमारे मोहल्ले की शान थी। लोग मिट्टी के घड़ों में पानी भरते थे, बच्चे पास में खेलते थे, और शाम को पड़ोसी इसकी सीढ़ियों पर साथ बैठते थे। आज यह वीरान और भूली-बिसरी पड़ी है।”

(This Baodi was the pride of our mohalla. People fetched water in earthen pots, children played nearby, and neighbors sat together on its steps in the evenings. Today it lies abandoned and forgotten)

The community once maintained it collectively, cleaning it regularly and discouraging waste. However, once piped water connections became common, people no longer relied on it, and slowly the baodi slipped into neglect.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

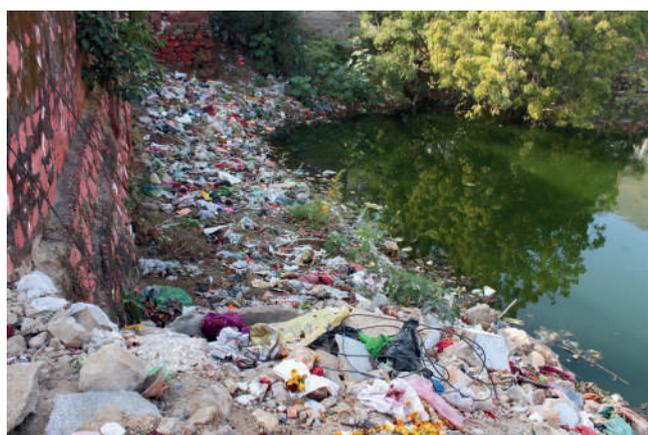
FEATURE	DETAILS	
	BIG BAODI	SMALL BAODI
DIMENSIONS	32 x 36 m.	14 x 11 m.
AREA	1152 sqm.	199 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	15 m.	9 m.



Satellite imagery of the baodi in April 2025

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

In physical terms, the baodi is large and impressive. It was once connected to a much broader catchment, but urban expansion and construction have greatly reduced natural recharge. Yet, elders say the baodi never truly dried. Its water arrives through seasonal runoff and natural seepage from the groundwater. Overflow paths and spillways once helped release excess water during rains. Earlier, there were trees and aquatic plants here, but today biodiversity is almost absent.



Garbage dumped around the Malusar Baodi (big)

At present, the baodi is under the ownership of the Ajmer Municipal Corporation, but it remains largely neglected. The steps are covered in dirt, and the water is polluted with solid waste, religious offerings, and idols. Some washermen still use the baodi to wash clothes, which adds to contamination. With the catchment encroached by houses and no maintenance in place, the baodi now stands as a quiet, forgotten reservoir caught between memory and neglect.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

Culturally, Malusar Baodi carries quiet but deep significance. Its location beside the Shitla Mata Temple and its association with Peer Baba made it a shared space for people of multiple faiths. Residents speak of it as a sacred site where spiritual belief and everyday life once met. Even now, though the baodi is not actively used, some still visit during temple times, and there are lingering beliefs that its water once helped with certain skin ailments. The memory of the baodi remains emotional, tied to a time when people gathered, shared space, and recognized the baodi as part of their identity.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** pigeons, mynas
- **Vegetation:** neem, peepul saplings

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Local residents carry rich memories and deep emotional ties to the Malusar Baodi. Many elders recall a time when the baodi was not merely a water source but a shared social space woven into daily life. They speak of evenings when families sat along its broad steps, children played at the edges, and neighbours exchanged stories while waiting for their turn to fill earthen pots. Several community members still remember how the sound of women drawing water or the laughter of children echoed around the structure, giving the baodi a sense of warmth and vitality.

People also possess a clear understanding of how the baodi once functioned ecologically. Older residents explain how rainwater flowed naturally into the baodi through open catchments and how the surrounding soil allowed steady percolation, keeping groundwater levels stable. They recall that even in drier years, the baodi rarely went completely dry — an indication of its strong connection with the local aquifer.

There is also collective memory about community-led management. Residents speak of how the mohalla once took pride in maintaining the baodi. Families volunteered to remove silt or clear the steps, and children were discouraged from throwing anything inside. According to several elders, this sense of shared responsibility ensured the baodi remained clean and usable for decades. One resident commented that earlier,

“अगर कागज का एक छोटा सा टुकड़ा भी अंदर गिर जाता था, तो कोई न कोई उसे निकाल लेता था। लोगों का यही सम्मान था।”

(If even a small piece of paper fell inside, someone would pick it out. That was the respect people had)

Alongside nostalgia, there is also a sense of loss. Community members point to the encroachment of houses over the natural catchment, the decline in vegetation, and the sudden shift in dependence once piped water arrived. They describe how the baodi slowly slipped out of everyday life, becoming a place people walked past rather than visited. The introduction of religious waste and idols marked another turning point, transforming the baodi from a living water body into a neglected reservoir.

Despite this decline, people still speak with affection about the baodi. For many, it remains a landmark tied to childhood, festivals, community stories, and a time when life was slower and more interconnected. Their lived experiences capture a blend of longing, disappointment, and a quiet hope that the baodi might once again reclaim some of its earlier significance.

Community Vision

Despite its present condition, the community has not lost hope for the revival of Malusar Baodi. Residents imagine a future where the baodi is restored both as an ecological asset and as a shared cultural space. Their vision begins with essential steps like, regular cleaning, desilting, and installing protective fencing to prevent people from throwing waste or idols into the water. Many believe that once the baodi is cleaned and secured, it could again collect rainwater and contribute meaningfully to groundwater recharge, just as it did in the past.

People also express a desire to see the surroundings transformed into a more welcoming and dignified space. They envision planting trees around the baodi to bring back shade, cooler temperatures, and some of the greenery the area once had. Simple seating areas, improved pathways, and restored steps could make the baodi a peaceful gathering spot for the neighbourhood – something that feels both functional and respectful of its history.

Some residents even hope that, with proper maintenance, the baodi could serve as an emergency water source during times of scarcity, especially in summers when piped water becomes irregular. For others, the dream is more emotional, they wish to see the baodi regain its lost recognition as the pride of their settlement, a place where people from different faiths once shared space, belief, and everyday routines.

In essence, the community's vision is not only about restoring a water structure but about reviving a sense of belonging, stewardship, and connection that has faded over time.

"यदि इसे फिर से अच्छा कर दिया जाए, तो ये ऐसा स्थान बन सकता है जहां परिवार आये, बच्चे खेले, और लोग फिर से जुड़ें।"

(If brought back to life, the Baodi could again become a place where families gather, children play, and people reconnect)

Mir Shah Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.478297, 74.659061

Ward no: 62

Landmark: Inside TT College Campus (Old Vidhan Sabha Building)



The Mir Shah Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Mir Shah Ali Baodi is located within the lush grounds of T.T. College—formerly the Old Vidhan Sabha campus of Ajmer. Hidden inside a secure institutional boundary, the baodi sits at the edge of a gently sloping landscape that once formed a natural catchment for rainwater flowing down from the nearby settlements. Its position in a quiet corner of the campus lends it an atmosphere of stillness, offering a rare glimpse into Ajmer's layered history of traditional water architecture.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The baodi is named after Mir Shah Ali Akbar, a revered spiritual figure believed to have frequented this site. Local accounts recall that he often drank water from this baodi, and over time the place came to be associated with his presence and blessings.

Estimated to have been built around 1941 during the British period, the baodi played a transformative role in the life of the surrounding neighbourhoods. Before its construction, residents had to walk 5–6 kilometres to fetch water from distant sources—often making multiple trips a day.

Its creation drastically eased this burden, becoming the primary drinking-water source for nearly four decades.

Community elders describe the baodi's water as sweet, cool, and exceptionally pure. Families would draw water for drinking, cooking, and for significant cultural and religious ceremonies. Rituals such as household purification, festival preparations, and auspicious events involved water collected from this baodi, reinforcing its cultural value across generations.

The arrival of the piped water supply from Bisalpur, 35–40 years ago gradually changed everyday practices, reducing dependence on the baodi. Yet memories of its centrality remain vivid among older residents.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	6 x 9 m.
AREA	54 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	10 m.



Satellite imagery of the baodi in April 2025

The baodi is rectangular in shape, constructed with stone masonry. A gate provides access to the baodi while also providing safety.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Over time, as piped water systems replaced traditional sources, the baodi began to lose its central role. Today, it falls under the jurisdiction of the Ajmer Municipal Corporation, which oversees its upkeep. While the baodi continues to retain water throughout the year, it now shows signs of neglect.

Fallen leaves, twigs, and occasional offerings such as flowers or small religious items settle on the water surface. Without regular cleaning, these materials gradually detract from the baodi's aesthetic and ecological quality.

Nevertheless, compared to many other historical water bodies, the Meer Shah Baodi remains structurally intact and still functions as a naturally recharged water reservoir.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

The baodi's most consistent present-day use comes from the college campus, which draws its water to irrigate trees and plants within the premises. Access for the surrounding community has become limited—not due to lack of interest, but because the baodi lies inside a gated educational institution.

Parents in the nearby neighbourhoods often express hesitation about allowing children near the structure, given its depth and the absence of safety railings. As a result, the baodi no longer serves as a shared community gathering space. Once a site where neighbours met, exchanged stories, and performed everyday tasks, it is now a quieter, almost forgotten corner within the college.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** pigeons, mynas, peafowl, parrots, drongos, coucals, lapwings, egrets
- **Vegetation:** neem, peepul saplings, planted saplings

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Despite its reduced visibility, the baodi continues to be remembered fondly by long-time residents. They describe it as a 'living' baodi—fed year-round through natural seepage from underground rock layers as well as runoff from a 1.5 km catchment area during the rains. Unlike many stepwells and baodis across Rajasthan that have dried up, this one still holds water throughout the year.

Many residents still believe the water is sweet and of usable quality, though no scientific testing has been conducted to verify this in recent years. A few years ago, the structure underwent cleaning as part of a city-wide renovation effort. Workers removed idols, debris, silt, and accumulated waste, restoring the baodi's appearance and reaffirming its cultural significance.

For the community, the baodi is more than infrastructure—it is a symbol of resilience, memory, and traditional wisdom.

Community Vision

Residents and members of the college envision a transformed and meaningful future for the baodi.

Their ideas include:

- Regular cleaning and desilting to maintain water quality
- Testing the water to explore its potential as a supplementary or emergency water source
- Developing the surroundings—lighting, seating, pathways, railing, and informative signage
- Creating a small park, children's play area, or open gym to increase positive use of the space
- Hosting heritage awareness programs to reconnect younger generations with Ajmer's water heritage
- Ensuring better safety measures, such as barriers or grills

Together, these aspirations reflect a strong desire to revive the baodi's presence—not only as a functional water source, but as a heritage asset and community space.

Nana ka Jhalra

Type of water body: Jhalra (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.445034, 74.619836

Ward no: 12

Landmark: Taragarh Fort



The Nana ka Jhalra

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Nana ka Jhalra is located just outside the boundary wall of Taragarh Fort, positioned along the historic access route that passes through the Khidki Darwaza, an old gateway marking one of the lesser-used entrances to the fort. From this gate, an impressively long flight of stone steps, stretching nearly 170 metres downward, leads towards the jhalra.

While the Gol Jhalra sits above the gate, higher on the slope, Nana ka Jhalra occupies the lower position, making it ideally placed to receive and store rainwater flowing downhill. The positioning forms a natural water-collection corridor, with rainwater channeled through the stone pathways and ridges into the jhalra.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The jhalra is named after Nana Rao Maratha, also known as Shivaji Nana, who served as the Maratha governor of Ajmer in the late 18th century. According to community accounts, Nana Rao observed the natural slope of the hill and recognized its potential as a catchment area.

He commissioned the construction of the jhalra so that rainwater flowing down from the fort's upper ridges could be harvested and made available for the people living closer to the Dargah and the lower settlements.

Residents recall that the Jhalra was once used for drinking, washing, and bathing, though strict rules were followed. People respected the sanctity and cleanliness of the water. They never bathed directly in the Jhalra. Instead, they carried the water away and washed at a distance.

“वहाँ कोई नहाता नहीं था। वे पानी भरकर बाहर नहाते थे।”
(Nobody would bathe there. They would fill water and bathe outside)

These memories reflect a longstanding water ethic where traditional water bodies were managed with care and shared responsibility.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
PERIMETER	100 m.
AREA	743 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	9 m.

Special Filter System

A unique feature of the Jhalra is a rectangular, stone-lined filtration chamber (approximately 5 m × 5 m) built to capture silt, stones, and debris carried by rainwater. This filter functioned as a primary sedimentation tank, ensuring that only cleaner water entered the main jhalra.

After the monsoon season, the community would gather to remove accumulated mud and stones from this chamber, keeping the system functional year after year.



The filter



The religious structure

Religious Structure

Another interesting element is the partial remains of a small religious space located along the jhalra's boundary. The green colour, architectural niche, and styling strongly indicate an Islamic structure, likely a small shrine or resting place that was once associated with the water body.

Even today, the niche contains fresh flowers, suggesting that local people continue to acknowledge its sacredness.

Such combinations of water and spirituality were traditionally common — reflecting the belief that water bodies were not only practical resources, but also places of sanctity and blessing.



Satellite imagery of the baodi in April 2025

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Currently, the jhalra faces several issues. The water contains heavy algae growth, signalling stagnation and poor maintenance. Further, visitors throw plastic bottles, wrappers, and other litter into the water.

The filtration chamber now receives coins thrown by tourists who mistake it for a wishing well, not realising its original technical purpose. The steps and surrounding masonry show signs of erosion, and cracks have begun to appear in some areas.

Despite these issues, the structure remains largely intact and is eminently restorable with appropriate conservation efforts.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

Nana ka Jhalra holds significant cultural importance during Chaand Raat, the sighting of the new moon that marks the beginning of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar and a mourning period for Muslims.

On this day, community members gather at the Jhalra and Alams (religious banners symbolising the standard carried by Imam Hussain's forces at Karbala) are decorated. These alams are then carried to the Imambargah (congregational hall), accompanied by recitations from sacred texts.

This procession has been practiced for generations and continues to serve as a moment of collective remembrance and spiritual expression.

Even though the Jhalra is no longer used for daily water needs, its role in Muharram traditions gives it enduring cultural relevance.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** pigeons
- **Vegetation:** neem, thorny desert bushes

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Conversations with local residents reveal several perspectives. People remember the Jhalra as a reliable water source in earlier times. Some recall helping clean the filtration chamber after monsoon each year, describing it as a communal activity. They note that once piped water became available, the Jhalra gradually fell out of active use.

Residents express concern about the growing litter, algae, and misuse of the filter chamber. Elders emphasise that the Jhalra served both practical and cultural roles, and its current condition represents a loss of heritage.

These lived experiences reflect a deep recognition of the Jhalra's importance and a shared desire to revive it.

Community Vision

The community hopes to see the Nana ka Jhalra cleaned regularly, protected from littering and restored structurally, including the filtration chamber.

Some residents also express hope that the Jhalra could once again function as a rainwater-harvesting structure, easing the region's recurring water shortages.

Naya Jhalra

Type of water body: Jhalra (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.439500, 74.615163

Ward no: 12

Landmark: Taragarh Fort



The Naya Jhalra

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Naya Jhalra is located near the entrance of Taragarh Fort, approximately 50 metres downhill from the gateway. Positioned on the approach route leading toward the fort, the Jhalra lies in a natural depression where runoff from the hillside converges during the monsoon. Its geographical setting makes it easily accessible to both residents and visitors, and its proximity to the entrance suggests that it once served as a convenient and strategically placed water source for people travelling up and down the fort.

Surrounded by rocky terrain, sparse vegetation, and old pathways, the Naya Jhalra forms part of the network of historic water structures that sustained life on the steep slopes of Taragarh Hill.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

As the name suggests, Naya Jhalra—meaning “new Jhalra”—was the most recently constructed stepwell in the Taragarh region. Residents say that when it was first built, its plaster looked new, bright, and distinct from the older structures, which earned it the title ‘naya.’

Local memory suggests that the jhalra was likely constructed during British rule, making it younger than the other water structures surrounding Taragarh Fort. Earlier, the jhalra served as an essential water source for nearby households. People used its water for drinking, washing, and bathing, and it was especially beloved by children who learned to swim there.

When the first monsoon rains flowed into the jhalra, the water would bring silt and organic debris with it. Children often swam in the jhalra at this stage, enjoying the coolness of the newly collected water even if it was not perfectly clean.

As the monsoon progressed and water replenished through clearer runoff, the water became much cleaner. At that stage, people followed strict rules to ensure the jhalra remained hygienic, no one was allowed to bathe or wash directly inside it. Instead, they would draw the water and carry it a short distance away for personal use.

These memories reflect a community culture where water sources were treated with care and shared responsibility.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	25 x 25 m.
AREA	625 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	6 m.



Satellite imagery of the jhalra in April 2025

The structural design indicates a thoughtful approach to water storage. The two-tier step system — first a set of 27 steps leading to the main basin and then 10 steps to the deeper inner stairway — suggests that even during low-water months, water could be accessed from the deepest layer.

The stone lining and plastering, now worn with age, once gave the jhalra a neat and polished appearance, distinguishing it from older water structures nearby.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Today, the Naya Jhalra remains dry for most of the year. During the monsoon, water collects in the structure for about ten days, after which it gradually disappears. Residents attribute this rapid drying to leakages in the base or lower lining of the Jhalra. They explain that the bottom layer was never solidified properly, and over time the structural gaps allowed water to seep away quickly.

Some residents believe the jhalra falls under the jurisdiction of the Forest Department, which may contribute to the uncertainty around maintenance responsibilities.

The steps and internal walls show signs of erosion and exposure. There is occasional growth of wild vegetation, debris accumulation, and the natural wear of an unmaintained historic structure.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

Because the Jhalra remains dry for most of the year and does not hold water consistently, it is currently not used for any domestic or cultural purpose.

Visitors to Taragarh Fort sometimes pause near the jhalra as part of their exploration, but its primary role today is visual rather than functional.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** pigeons
- **Vegetation:** sparse wild bushes

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Residents describe the Naya Jhalra as a structure that has gradually transformed from a vibrant community resource into a mostly tourist-facing monument. While locals no longer use it for water, they maintain a clear memory of its past value.

The community even had the jhalra surveyed by a technical expert, hoping to understand whether its leakage could be repaired. They shared the belief that with proper restoration, the Jhalra could again become a vital water source for the area.

Local voices emphasise that the structure is not beyond repair, in fact, with targeted intervention, it could play a significant role in meeting the water needs of Taragarh residents.

Community Vision

The community expresses a clear and practical vision for restoring the Naya Jhalra. Repair leakage in the base and internal lining so that the Jhalra can hold water for long durations. Install a motor to pump water from the Jhalra up to the fort settlements. Cover the Jhalra with a steel net to prevent theft of equipment, avoid contamination, and ensure safety.

They would like to use the Jhalra as a supplementary water source, especially during seasons of low rainfall. Pump water from Ajmer city to the Jhalra during shortages, since it is located outside the fort and requires far less energy to supply compared to pumping water all the way up to the top of Taragarh.

While the community has made their own efforts to appeal this to the local government, it has not yielded any results. One community member said that they had spoken to a government official in this regard:

“हमने उससे इसका सर्वे करवाया और उसे यह बताया कि यह एक बावड़ी है, अगर इसकी अच्छे से मरम्मत करके इस पर कवर लगा दिया जाए — वैसे भी इसमें बारिश का पानी आता है — अगर आप इसमें एक पंप लगा दें, तो इससे हमारे घरों में पूरे साल पानी मिलेगा।”

(We had him survey it and we told him this – that this is one baodi, if it can be repaired well and a cover installed on it — anyway the rainwater is coming into it — if you can install a pump in this, it will provide our houses with water throughout the year)

Their vision is grounded in practicality and shaped by the pressing need for reliable water sources in the Taragarh region. They hope that their voice will be heard at least this time and the jhalra will be revived.

Neeli Kuan

Type of water body: Well

Coordinates: 26.454091, 74.623966

Ward no: 12

Landmark: Near Muhammad Dudh Diary, Anderkot



The Neeli Kuan

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Neeli Kuan is a well located in the Anderkot region, surrounded by a cluster of shops and houses on the Anderkot Road.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

While it is a bit unsure how the Neeli Kuan got its name, some community members say that it is because flowers that were discarded in the well used to turn blue in colour. It was built during the time when kings ruled, with community estimating it to be nearly 500 years old. The water was generally used for drinking, washing and cleaning purposes.

The premises of the well used to be a kabristhan or cemetery for Muslims. This was the first location where flowers and religious articles from the Khwaja Garib Nawaz Dargah used to be discarded. When this well became full, these items started to get discarded in the Phool Baodi.

“वो कहते हैं कि जब यहाँ ज़्यादा फूल आने लगे, तो वे उन्हें वहाँ (फूल बावड़ी में) डालने लगे।”
 (They say that when more flowers started coming here, then they started putting it there (in Phool Baodi)

Especially on the day of Muharram (when Muslims observe the martyrdom of Imam Hussain), the faithful used to discard replicas of the Imam’s mausoleum, known as taaziya into this well. One community member recalls the great depth of the well, saying:

“यह बहुत गहरा था। मैंने उसे देखा है। मुझे आज भी उसके सपने आते हैं। ये बाओड़ी हमारी बचपन की यादों का हिस्सा है। हम उसे एक बार देखने जाते हैं और वह तस्वीर हमारे दिमाग में बस जाती है।”
 (It was very deep. That I’ve seen. I still get dreams about it. These baodis are a part of our childhood memories. We go see it once and that image sits in our mind)

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	2 x 2 m.
AREA	4 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	30–45 m.

There is only one step outside the well, which people sometimes use when they want to throw articles into the well.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Currently the well has no water and is filled with all kinds of waste, including flowers and religious items. The cemetery near the well has now become a makeshift location for keeping construction material and goods.

Earlier, there weren’t many homes around the well. The entire area was regarded as a cemetery. However, over the years people have built their homes and shops over the cemetery as well.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

Today, the Neeli Kuan is no longer used as a source of water. Its primary function has shifted entirely to being a site where religious waste - such as flowers, garlands, and idols – is discarded. Community members shared that over the years, the natural inlet that once fed water into the well has become blocked due to construction, waste accumulation, and lack of maintenance. With the gradual decline in its utilitarian purpose and the arrival of piped water, the practice of discarding ritual articles into the well became normalized. What was once a functioning and respected water source is now treated mainly as a dumping point for religious materials associated with nearby religious sites.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** pigeons
- **Vegetation:** wild grasses

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Community members carry a deep emotional memory of the well and the surrounding area, even though its physical condition has deteriorated. Older residents recall the time when the region was largely open and recognised as a cemetery, with the well within it.

There is also shared knowledge about how practices have changed over time. Earlier, religious offerings from the dargah and nearby homes were minimal and carefully placed, but as the population grew and settlements expanded over the former cemetery land, the volume of waste increased. The well gradually became a convenient place for discarding ritual material, especially during large religious occasions like Muharram and Urs. Residents speak of these changes with a mix of nostalgia and resignation, acknowledging how shifting cultural habits and expanding habitation have altered the well's role in community life.

Community Vision

The community holds little hope for the rejuvenation of the Neeli Kuan. Most residents believe that the source of its water has been permanently blocked and that the extensive waste accumulated inside would be extremely difficult to remove. Given the dense construction around the well and its long-standing use as a dumping site, people feel that reviving it as a functional water body is unrealistic. While some express sentimental attachment to the memories associated with it, the general consensus is that the well cannot be restored to its former state, and thus, there is no active vision or demand for its conservation.

Paal Bichala Talaab

Type of water body: Pond

Coordinates: 26.453911, 74.644260

Ward no: 57

Landmark: Near Pal Bichala Road



The Paal Bichala Talaab

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Pal Bichala Talaab is located almost in the centre of Ajmer city, between the mountains of Madarpura and Taragarh. The surrounding area is also named after the pond, as Paal Bichala.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The Pal Bichala Talaab, once known by the older name 'Paal Bisala', has long been part of the local memory. It was created on a 'paal', or bund, a traditional embankment used to control and hold water. This bund was said to have been constructed under the direction of Bisal Dev Raja. In earlier times, the talab was full throughout the year, and its waters were clear and inviting. People came to bathe, wash clothes, and spend time by the banks. It was a regular part of daily life and community bonding.

The talaab was once surrounded by four temples, each placed on its side, creating a serene and sacred environment. Beside the pond lay an open 'madaan', a spacious ground where children played freely. However, over time, rising water levels during monsoon have made this ground inaccessible.

A 'naala' or drain runs close to the pond. Elders remember when even the naala carried clean flowing water, filled with lotuses, where locals bathed. But today, this same naala is broken in many places. The water flowing through it is dirty, and because the structure is damaged, its water often mixes with that of the talab, affecting its quality.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
PERIMETER	approx. 753 m.
AREA	approx. 20,662 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	5 m.



The naala that drains into the pond

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Now, although the pond often still holds water, the water is no longer used for any purpose. People do not bathe or wash here anymore, and the quality of the water is considered poor. The fish that live in the pond are said to have come from the naala over time. The pond dries up when rainfall is scarce, and when the water in the naala becomes low, the talab water drains into it.

With the nearby playground submerged and the surroundings neglected, children no longer have the open space they once enjoyed. Despite several requests to the ward councillor, cleaning and repairs are rarely taken up.

Yet, amid neglect, the talab has not lost all its life. The area is known to be an ecological hub. Waterhens, herons, and other birds still visit, and on some occasions, foreign tourists have come to observe them. However, urban pressure around the pond has increased over the years.

Some of the land around it belongs to the Nagar Nigam, while other portions belong to members of the Maali community, who traditionally used the land for agriculture. Over the years, many of the Maalis sold their land, and new houses were built. Today, settlements have grown dense around the pond, far more than what existed earlier.

Satellite imagery also suggests that the area of the pond may have decreased in the past few years. It is unsure whether this is due to natural causes or encroachment of the area.



Satellite imagery of the pond in April 2023 and April 2025

Current Use and Cultural Practices

No cultural practices as such.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** fish present seasonally
- **Bird species:** pigeons, cormorants, egrets, waterhens, herons, pigeons, crows
- **Vegetation:** neem, thorny desert bushes

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Community members have a deep understanding of how the talab and its connected naala function as one system. They explain how water from the naala once flowed cleanly, and how the talaab retained water even through the summer. Today, however, they express concern that the broken naala, clogged with waste and sewage, mixes with the talab's water and threatens the area's health. Many worry that mosquitoes, foul smells, and contamination could spread illness if repairs are not made soon.

Their lived experiences reflect frustration but also attachment. Parents speak emotionally about how their children have lost access to the playground that once served as a community playground. One mother shared how she misses the sound of cricket matches, saying,

“हमारे बच्चे यहाँ मैदान में मैच खेलते थे। लेकिन अब यहाँ बारिश का पानी भर गया है।”

(Our children used to play matches in the ground here. But now the rainwater has filled up here)

There is also a sense of dependence on government action. Residents repeatedly emphasise that only the authorities can repair the broken drain and restore the talab's health. As one person noted,

“हम नाले को ठीक नहीं कर सकते। यह काम सरकार को करना होगा।”

(We cannot fix the naala. The government has to do that)

At the same time, there is cautious optimism, as many have heard that plans exist for improvement.

“सरकार बोल रहा है की वो इस तालाब को फिर से ठीक कर देंगे।”

(The government is saying that they will make this talaab proper again)

Community Vision

The community voices a clear wish for the future — the naala should be repaired, the surroundings cleaned, a boundary constructed, and a park developed so that the place may again become a shared space of beauty and belonging. The story of Pal Bichala Talaab is one of memory and possibility, of a place cherished, altered, and yet still alive with the hope of revival.

Phool Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi

Coordinates: 26.453829, 74.623997

Ward no: 12

Landmark: Anderkot



The Phool Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Phool Baodi is located in the Anderkot region. While the baodi does not hold any water currently, it is said that it is connected to the Bad Baodi.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

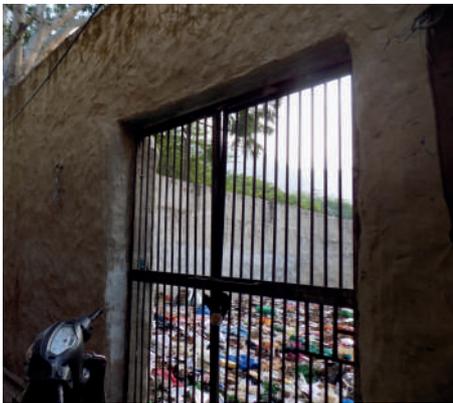
The Phool baodi gets its name from the 'phool' or flowers that are discarded here. These flowers come from the Khwaja Garib Nawaz Dargah. While a large quantity of flowers are also disposed in the Dargah itself, it does not have the capacity to take in all the flowers, especially at the time of festivals. Hence a lot of the extra flowers, finds its way to the Phool Baodi. Since the flowers are considered holy, they are usually discarded in water bodies and not anywhere else. The baodi is also known as the Sheikh baodi as there used to be a cemetery here where Sheikhs (revered elders or religious leaders) were laid to rest.

The baodi has been around since the time of Prithviraj Chauhan's reign. In earlier times its water was used for all purposes including drinking, washing and cleaning. There was water in the baodi till about thirty years back. The water was said to be sweet and of good quality.

“पानी भरा रहता था इसमें। मीठा पानी था।”
(It was always filled with water. It was sweet water)

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	23 x 6.5 m.
AREA	149 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	20 m.



The gate of the baodi

The baodi is kept locked by a gate, the key is with the representative of the Dargah. It is said that there are steps on all four sides of the baodi, but these cannot be seen currently.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

Since the year 2000, the baodi has mostly been used only as a dumping space for religious waste from the Dargah. Previously, flowers used to be discarded in the Neeli ka Kuan, which is a well located nearby. When the Neeli ka Kuan got filled up, flowers started getting discarded in the Phool Baodi.

As mud and rubbish began filling up inside the baodi, the access to the aquifer got blocked and water stopped entering it. Slowly the heap of rubbish started mounting and today it stands level with the ground, with no sign of water.

Community members say that in earlier times such huge amounts of flowers did not come to the dargah. However, gradually the settlement in this area grew, as did also the popularity of the dargah. Large numbers of tourists began coming to visit the dargah and many shops sprung up to cater to their needs. Another factor that restricted the amount of flowers that got discarded was the making of gulkhand. Gulkhand is a sweet preserve made from rose petals and sugar and prized in Ayurveda for its cooling properties. Earlier, most of the flowers would get used up in the preparation of gulkhand. However, gradually the preparation of gulkhand stopped and there was no other purpose for the flowers anymore. It is unclear why this happened. One possibility is that gulkhand factories were set up in other localities and the amount of flowers available for the local manufacturers reduced. Another possibility is that the demand for gulkhand reduced and the makers did not find it a profitable business anymore.

Along with the flowers, many people also discard all kinds of religious items as well as offerings such as gold and silver coins, rings or other precious items. Several elderly community members nostalgically remember that they used to visit this baodi to collect coins and other treasures. This practice continues today as children scale the wall and jump into the baodi to collect such items.

**“जब ये बच्चे (बावड़ी में) जाते हैं तो उन्हें सोना और चांदी मिलता है।”
(When these children go (to the baodi) they get gold and silver)**

However today it is also a safety concern for the residents as migrant workers come here to search for valuables. Parents are also concerned about their children spending their time foraging in the dirt and dust.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Currently the baodi has no water and is completely filled up with flowers and religious waste. The baodi is currently kept locked and opened only when flowers need to be discarded into it. Once a year, during the holy month of Ramzaan, some of these flowers and other religious articles are taken out of the baodi and discarded in the Kayad village.

**“जब यह फूलों से भर जाता है, तो वे इसे हटाने के लिए मजदूरों को बुलाते हैं।”
(When it gets filled up with flowers, they call labourers to remove it)**

However, only about 3 – 6m. of the waste within the baodi is taken out and the rest is left as it is. Earlier, there was more open space around the baodi and it was easily accessible. Now, however, buildings have come up on three sides, and it is only accessible from the main gate.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** pigeons
- **Vegetation:** neem

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

Older residents recall a time when the baodi held clear, sweet water throughout the year. Many remember fetching drinking water from it or watching elders perform daily chores around its steps. For them, the baodi was not just a utility — it was part of the neighbourhood's identity.

Today, the lived experience surrounding the baodi is defined by two realities: water scarcity and the complete loss of the baodi's water-holding capacity. Residents repeatedly emphasise that their piped supply arrives only once in two days, and sometimes for very short durations. This irregular water supply heightens their awareness of how critical traditional water structures once were — and could still be.

**“पानी की कमी है। नल में पानी दो दिन में एक बार आता है।”
(There is a shortage of water. The tap water comes once in two days)**

Because the baodi has been filled with decades of floral and religious waste, most community members have never seen water in it. Younger residents know it only as a dumping pit. Many are unaware that it once held sweet, usable water. Elders often speak with sadness about how the baodi's natural recharge has been blocked; their understanding is shaped not by technical reports but by lived observation over decades.

Despite the degradation, the community holds a surprising amount of technical and ecological insight. They understand that restoration will not be easy or superficial, it requires deep excavation, clearing decades of accumulated waste, and allowing the aquifer to breathe again. Their observations reflect a long-term and intuitive understanding of how stepwells function — knowledge passed down across generations.

Community Vision

The community's vision for the baodi is shaped by a daily reality of water scarcity. With piped supply arriving only on alternate days, residents recognise how valuable an additional source of water could be. Yet their hopes are tempered by scepticism. Many wonder whether the baodi can truly be revived and, more importantly, whether any authority will take responsibility for such a demanding task.

**“नहीं, मुझे नहीं लगता की इसमें पानी आएगा। बहुत साल हो गए है।”
(No, I don't think water will come in this. It's been so many years)**

Community members understand that restoration would require more than a surface-level cleanup. They explain that the entire layer of accumulated waste has to be dug out until the baodi reconnects with its aquifer- only then can water begin to recharge naturally. This understanding reflects both their practical knowledge of the stepwell and their concern that partial or cosmetic repairs would change nothing.

**“अगर आप इसे कम से कम पचास फीट तक खोदेंगे, तभी आपको कुछ दिखाई देगा।”
(Only if you dig this for at least fifty feet will you be able to see something)**

A significant part of their vision also involves shifting current practices. Residents point out that the Dargah must find an alternative system for managing and disposing of its religious waste, as years of dumping have contributed to the baodi's degradation. Without a commitment to stopping this inflow at the source, they fear any revival efforts will be short-lived. They suggest that the flowers can be directly sent to the Kayad village as it ends up there anyway.

The community also hopes for a protective net to be installed over the baodi to prevent people from climbing inside in search of valuables. They believe this measure would make the area safer and discourage outsiders from entering the stepwell for such activities.

**“मैंने दरगाह वालों को हज़ार बार कहा है कि ऊपर जाली लगा दो। और किसी को भी अंदर जाने की इजाज़त मत दो।”
(I have told the Dargah a thousand times to put a net on top. And don't allow anyone to go inside)**

Despite their doubts, the community's aspirations are clear, they want the baodi restored not as a monument, but as a functional water asset. Their vision combines ecological awareness, cultural sensitivity, and a strong desire for long-term water security- something they believe is possible only with sustained effort, accountability, and a willingness to rethink everyday practices.

Regaron ki Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi

Coordinates: 26.487985, 74.672938

Ward no: 69

Landmark: Kali Maatha Mandir premises, Jaipur Road



The Regaron ki Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The baodi is located within the premises of the Kaali Mata ki Mandir, on the side of the Jaipur road. The baodi is flanked by hills on either side- the hills of Kakkardiyan village and the hills of Madarpura.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

The baodi takes its name from the 'Regar' community. The Regar community in Rajasthan are a group historically associated with leatherwork and now often involved in agriculture. The community primarily practices Hinduism, observes various festivals, and has faced historical challenges, including the impact of British policies on their traditional livelihood.



The Balaji Mandir behind which the baodi sits

The Kaali Mata ki Mandir is a temple built by the Regar community. The main temple of the Regar community in Ajmer is in Diggi Bazaar and is dedicated to Lord Vishnu. However, the Kaali Mata Temple is even older and was probably built around the 1900s. It was the temple that was first built and the baodi followed a little later. There is also a small Balaji temple in the premises and the baodi is built right next to it. The baodi was constructed through the process of Shramdhan- which is a voluntary contribution of physical labour for community welfare.

People from the Regar community come to visit the temple from the core city area as well as from areas such as Rasalpura, Bhunabai, Kardiya, Ghagwan and Ghudol.

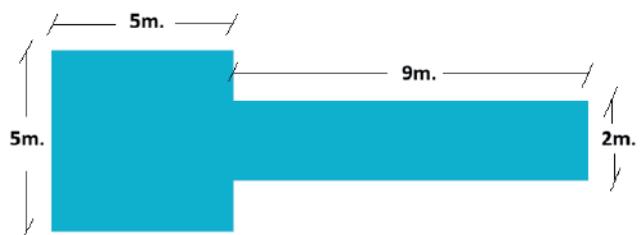
In earlier times, people from nearby areas used to draw water from this baodi and take it to their homes. The water was used for all purposes, such as drinking, washing, bathing and cleaning. The Kaali Mata ki Mandir is a temple built by the Regar community. The main temple of the Regar community in Ajmer is in Diggi Bazaar and is dedicated to Lord Vishnu. However, the Kaali Mata Temple is even older and was probably built around the 1900s. It was the temple that was first built and the baodi followed a little later. There is also a small Balaji temple in the premises and the baodi is built right next to it. The baodi was constructed through the process of Shramdhan- which is a voluntary contribution of physical labour for community welfare. People from the Regar community come to visit the temple from the core city area as well as from areas such as Rasalpura, Bhunabai, Kardiya, Ghagwan and Ghudol.

In earlier times, people from nearby areas used to draw water from this baodi and take it to their homes. The water was used for all purposes, such as drinking, washing, bathing and cleaning.

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	Rectangular portion: 2 x 9 m. Square portion: 5 x 5 m.
AREA	43 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	8 m.

The baodi is almost like an extension of the Balaji temple itself. It is divided into two parts- a long rectangular portion and a square portion. The rectangular portion has stairs that lead down to the baodi. Since the water level is currently high, the steps are completely covered by water and cannot be seen.



Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Today a lot of garbage can now be seen in the water, including plastic bags, religious waste and other items. There are no fish or other creatures inhabiting it and it is just the echo of what it used to be. The water is not used regularly now.

The source of water is the underground aquifer. The water level rises and falls with the seasons. It rises in the summer season and becomes less in winter. However, the water has never dried up completely.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

The baodi becomes meaningful again during Navarathri- a Hindu festival that lasts for nine nights, dedicated to worshipping the goddess Durga and celebrating the triumph of good over evil. During Navarathri, idols are immersed into the baodi's water- a ritual known as 'visarjan'. Visarjan is associated with the conclusion of Hindu festivals and the ritual symbolises the end of a cycle, detachment from the material world, and the removal of obstacles. During Navarathri, a 'bhandara' or feast is also organised at the temple.

The temple also holds its own *mela* (fair) in June, on the first Sunday of the month of *Jheth* in the Hindu calendar. In this celebration, they carry the statue of Kaali Maa from the temple in Diggi Bazaar to this temple on foot. During this time, the water from the baodi is used for washing hands and feet. However, for drinking purposes, separate arrangements are made. In fact, the baodi's water has not been used for drinking purposes for the last 10 years.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** none
- **Bird species:** babblers, parrots, mynas, crows, pigeons
- **Vegetation:** khair, peepul, neem, sheesham, banyan, gulmohar

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

In earlier times, the flowers offered to the temple deity were never thrown into the baodi. Instead, they were discarded just outside the temple, a practice that helped keep the stepwell clean and well-maintained. The population in the area was also much smaller then, which meant fewer offerings at the temple. Since many devotees lived far away, they typically disposed of their flowers and idols near their own homes rather than bringing them to the baodi.

However, as the local population grew, more people began living close to the temple, and over time they started bringing their religious waste - especially idols - to the temple premises. With the arrival of piped water and the baodi's decline as an everyday water source, residents gradually began discarding their religious waste directly into the baodi. This shift in both population density and water-use practices contributed to the deterioration of the baodi's cleanliness.

The last in-depth cleaning was carried out about 30 years back. The community spent nearly Rs.12,000 for the entire process. Usually every year before Navarathri, the baodi is cleaned to some extent. This process mostly focuses on removing the waste that floats on the water, and not on the waste that has settled below.

The community recognises the importance of having a baodi in the premises. One member pointed out:

“बावड़ी होने के बहुत सारे फायदे हैं — इसमें पानी जमा होता है और अगर नियमित रूप से सफाई की जाए, तो यह लोगों के काम भी आता है।”

(There are a lot of benefits to having a baodi — water gets stored and if regular cleaning is done, it comes in use for people also)

While the temple committee has tried bringing the bad condition of the baodi to the attention of the Ajmer Municipal Corporation, this has not yielded any results.

Even today, people come and sit near the baodi, spending time talking with each other. This is more common on Sunday evenings, when people are free from their commitments to work and have time for relaxation. People also come in the summer because the shade from the trees and the water in the baodi makes the space pleasant and cool.

Community members also speak about the persistent water scarcity in the region. Their primary source of water is the Bisalpur dam, but the supply is irregular, especially during the summer months. Around five years ago, the groundwater levels in this area had dropped significantly, adding to the stress on households. The heavy rains in 2024 and 2025, however, have helped replenish the groundwater to some extent, offering temporary relief.

“अजमेर में सिर्फ़ बीसलपुर डैम से ही पानी आता है। अगर बीसलपुर से पानी की सप्लाई कम हो जाती है या पाँच दिन बाद आती है, तो हम उस समय इस पानी का इस्तेमाल करते हैं। जो भी मंदिर में आता है, वे इसे भरकर ले जाते हैं — पीने, नहाने और धोने के लिए।”

(In Ajmer, it is only Bisalpur that provides water. If the supply from Bisalpur gets reduced or comes after five days, then we use this water at that time. Whoever comes to the temple, they fill it and take it — for drinking, for bathing and washing)

Community Vision

The community's foremost vision for this baodi is to see it fully cleaned and restored. Residents feel that it needs a thorough, deep cleaning that includes removing the layers of silt that have settled over the years, clearing out accumulated garbage, and repairing any damaged sections. They believe that once the baodi is cleaned, a net should be put up over it to prevent it from getting dirty again. A motor should also be installed to lift the water, allowing it to be used for a variety of daily needs. For many community members, this revival is not just about improving the baodi's condition, but about bringing it back into active use as a reliable source of water for the neighbourhood.

Topdhara School Baodi

Type of water body: Baodi (Stepwell)

Coordinates: 26.460435, 74.643440

Ward no: 58

Landmark: Topdhara Government Senior Secondary School



The Topdhara School Baodi

Introduction and Geographical Context

The Topdhara Baodi rests quietly within the grounds of the Topdhara Government Senior Secondary School, a stepwell that has lived alongside the daily rhythms of students for many decades.

Historical Evolution & Community Memory

It is believed to have been constructed during the British period, and over time it came to be known as the Topdhara School Baodi, taking its name from the institution that surrounds it. The school premises also contain two old wells. One has been closed, while the other is still used for drinking water.

The baodi once had a small mandir nearby, and in those days, the school's entrance was from that side. Students would pass by the shrine each morning, pausing to pay their respects before stepping into their classrooms..

Physical and Structural Characteristics

FEATURE	DETAILS
DIMENSIONS	4 x 7 m.
AREA	28 sqm.
APPROXIMATE DEPTH	15 – 20 m.

Present Condition and Visible Transformations

Today, the baodi is managed and maintained with care. A member of the school committee takes responsibility for its cleaning, ensuring it is cleared before the monsoon every year. The first time this effort was undertaken, the Municipal Corporation assisted, but since then, the committee member has continued the work himself. He arranges for local workers to carry out the cleaning and is often assisted by members of his family.

The baodi remains largely protected from misuse — there is no encroachment, and barring a few leaves, twigs and some plastic, it is not very dirty. A gate was installed many years ago after an incident when it was feared that someone had fallen in. The stepwell was emptied to search for the person, and though it was later found that no one had fallen, the gate remains in place to ensure the safety of students.

Two motors have been installed in the baodi. In recent years, the Ajmer Municipal Corporation connected the stepwell's water supply to the nearby 'dhobi ghat'. Dhobi ghat refers to an open-air area where washer folk wash and dry their laundry.

Current Use and Cultural Practices

It is no longer used for drinking, but serves the school for watering plants, cleaning, and offering water to animals and birds.

Around 40 to 70 dhobis (washers) depend on it for their daily work. For two hours each day, the motor is run to provide water for washing — a small but essential service that supports many livelihoods.

Ecological Profile and Natural Life

- **Aquatic life:** fish
- **Bird species:** pigeons, mynas, parrots
- **Vegetation:** neem, peepul

Community Knowledge & Lived Experiences

The baodi is deep—nearly 50 to 70 feet and holds water throughout the year, though the levels drop during the summer. The water is mostly rain-fed and, while somewhat dirty with bits of debris, it is still put to meaningful use.

Some describe the taste of the water as sweet, others as simply normal, but all agree that it is not hard, unlike the water from some of the handpumps in the area.

Community Vision

The community's vision for the Topdhara Baodi centres not on dramatic transformation, but on strengthening the careful maintenance practices that already keep it functional and protected. Residents, school staff, and dhobi ghat users believe that the baodi can continue serving the neighbourhood effectively if its upkeep remains consistent and well supported.

There is also growing interest in introducing basic signboards explaining the baodi's heritage, rules for use, and safety guidelines. Small, practical changes like adding a mesh over the mouth of the baodi to prevent litter, or planting more shade-giving trees around it, are viewed as enhancements that would protect the structure while keeping the area welcoming.

In essence, the community does not demand major redevelopment. Instead, they envision the Topdhara Baodi continuing exactly as it is, clean, functional, respected, and safe through a shared commitment to routine maintenance and mindful use.

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Annexure-1

TEMPLATE FOR MAPPING BY COMMUNITY/ SHG WOMEN

The following table provides a list of details to be captured about a water body. The goal is not only to gather essential data but also to inspire community engagement and foster a deeper connection with the water body. By understanding the value and significance of their water body, the community is more likely to take an active role in its rejuvenation and long-term care.

S. No.	Information	Sources/ Method	Details on gathering information	Participatory Methodology/ Tools	Purpose
1	Name of water body	Community	Ask the community members what the WB is called	Begin with Transect walk then Community discussion	Identification
2	Type (lake, pond, baoli etc.)	Community/ Govt.	Specify the type.	Community discussion	Identification and scope
3	Ward no. and landmark	Community	Specify the ward and a nearby landmark	Community discussion	Identification
4	Reason for name of the water body	Community	Ask community members why it is called so. Is there a meaning or significance to the name?	Community discussion	To know whether the name gives information about the history or significance of the WB.
5	History of the water body	Community	<p>These questions can be targeted at community elders:</p> <p>In case of man-made WB, ask who (person/ community) built the WB, when it was built, any reason why it was built there.</p> <p>Who used to use the WB? For what purposes?</p> <p>Was anyone not allowed to use it?</p> <p>How did it look when it was in use?</p> <p>Was there any flora or fauna in and around the water body that has greatly decreased or is not seen now?</p> <p>Since when did the WB stop being used?</p> <p>What has changed about the WB? Size, land use, flora, fauna, water quality...</p> <p>Ask them to explain how they used to take care of the WB. What rules, practices or traditions were followed?</p>	<p>Historical timeline in consultation with community elders</p> <p>Draw on paper and then Community discussion</p>	<p>Knowing the historical importance of the WB can instill a sense of pride in the community.</p> <p>Understanding the how the WB was used, and its benefits can motivate the current generation to value it and work towards maintaining it.</p>
			<p>In case of natural WB, ask:</p> <p>Who used to use the WB? For what purposes?</p> <p>Was anyone not allowed to use it?</p> <p>How did it look when it was in use?</p> <p>Was there any flora or fauna in and around the water body that has greatly decreased or is not seen now?</p> <p>Since when did the WB stop being used?</p> <p>What has changed about the WB? Size, land use, flora, fauna, water quality...</p> <p>Ask them to explain how they used to take care of the WB. What rules, practices or traditions were followed?</p>	<p>Community discussion and FGDs</p>	

S. No.	Information	Sources/ Method	Details on gathering information	Participatory Methodology/ Tools	Purpose
6	Cultural significance of the WB	Community	Ask if the WB is/was known for a particular reason. Are any festivals or events held around the WB?	Community discussion and FGDs	Same as previous
7	Approximate area	Community/ Govt.	Ask community members. Check if the government has data on this.	Community discussion	Useful for planning purposes. Along with the depth, it also gives an idea about the volume of water
8	Approximate depth	Community/ Govt.	Ask community members. Check if the government has data on this.	Community discussion	Along with area, it gives an idea of the volume of water. Also useful in case de-siltation needs to be done.
9	Current ownership	Community/ Govt.	Check government records or ask community members.	Community discussion	To know the stakeholders and the scope of intervention.
10	General condition of the water body in terms of cleanliness	Community	Ask community members to rate the WB as clean, slightly dirty or very dirty. What seems to be the major pollutant (algae, plastic, religious waste etc.)?	Community discussion and FGDs	To understand factors that are leading to deterioration of the WB.
11	What are the major reasons for the WB being dirty?	Observation / Community	Observe if there is any direct input of pollutants into the WB. Is there any sewage pipe or drain pipe eliminating waste water into the WB? Are people throwing waste into the WB? Are there any industries discarding waste into the WB? Is there algae on the surface of the water? Also ask community members if they know the reasons why the WB is dirty. Ask community members to draw a rough map of the WB and mark the sources of pollution.	Community discussion, FGDs, Transect Walks, Resource Mapping	To understand factors leading to the deterioration of the WB.
12	Status of catchment area	Community	Ask community members the extent of the catchment area of the WB. Is there is any pollution or hinderance in the area that affects the WB?	Transect Walks followed by Community discussion	"
13	Seasonal trend	Community	Ask community members at what parts of the year the WB has water and what parts of the year it dries up.	Community discussion, FGDs, Seasonal Mapping	To understand seasonal effect
14	Status of encroachment	Observation / Community	Observe if there is encroachment on the WB or in its catchment area. This could be buildings, agricultural activities or dumping of waste. Ask community members since when the encroachment has been present.	Community discussion, FGDs, Transect Walks and self-observation.	To understand factors that are leading to deterioration of the WB.
15	Existing operation and maintenance practices	Community/ Govt.	Ask community members if any people or authorities carry out any cleaning/maintenance of the water body? If yes, who does it? What do they do?	Community discussion and FGDs	Opportunity to collaborate with any existing practices of WB maintenance.

S. No.	Information	Sources/ Method	Details on gathering information	Participatory Methodology/ Tools	Purpose
16	Presence of inlets or outlets to the water body.	Community	Ask community members where does water flow into the WB from? Is it only rainwater or does a river or stream flow into it? Does the water from the WB then flow into another WB?	Community discussion, FGDs, Transect Walks	Understanding of the sources of water is required to ensure that these sources are not hindered or polluted.
17	Connection of WB to groundwater	Community	Ask community members if they have observed changes in groundwater quality coinciding with change in the quality of the water in the WB.	Community discussion, FGDs	Since groundwater is commonly used for household purposes, a link to the groundwater can motivate community to take care of the WB.
18	Biodiversity in and around the water body.	Community/ Observation	Ask community members about the kinds of plants in and around the water body. Are they present throughout the year or do they grow in particular seasons? Are any of them edible? Ask community members what animals, amphibians, birds and reptiles live in and around the water body? What varieties are present? What are their local names? Are there birds or butterflies that come in a particular season?	Community discussion, FGDs, Transect Walks	To understand the flora and fauna that thrives in the microclimate created by the WB
19	Current users of water body	Community	Ask who uses the water or visits the WB?	Community discussion and FGDs	To understand the community stakeholders of the WB and their relationship with the WB
20	Current use of water body	Community	Ask if the water used for any purpose? What are the purposes? Do people visit the WB for any reason?	Community discussion and FGDs	To know the uses it serves to the community and assess whether these uses will be in favour of WB rejuvenation or not.
21	Vision	Community	Ask community members to draw a picture of how they would want their WB to look and what they would do with a rejuvenated WB. What would they add to the WB space? More trees? Seating spaces? Fencing? Walking track?	Community discussion, FGDs	To know the needs/desires of community members and to instil in them a desire for WB rejuvenation.

Annexure-2

TEMPLATE FOR MAPPING BY STUDENTS

The following table provides a list of details to be captured about a water body. This list consists of data that requires some technical capacities.

S.No.	Information	Sources/ Method	Details on gathering information	Purpose
1	GPS coordinates	GPS Camera/ Google Map	Using GPS Camera: 1. Download the GPS Camera app on your phone. 2. Open the GPS Camera app and click a photo. The coordinates will be displayed. Using Google Maps (useful for large WBs): 1. Locate the WB on Google Maps. 2. Click a point on the WB and the coordinates will be displayed.	To locate the WB on map and on ground.
2	Dimensions/ Perimeter	Measuring tape/ Laser measuring device/ Google Earth Pro	Using a laser measuring device (useful for small water bodies): - Standing at the starting point of measurement, point your laser device at a surface that is the end measurement. The laser beam should hit this surface to get the measurement. Using Google Earth Pro: 1. Insert the coordinates to zoom to the water body. 2. Use the Add Polygon feature to draw around the water body. 3. The area and perimeter of the WB will be displayed in Measurements.	Useful when work needs to be carried out on the water body.
3	Changes over time period	Google Earth Pro	1. Click the 'Historical Imagery' tab at the top of the screen. Use the slider to go to the desired year. Changes in area, land use and drying trends can be observed.	To check seasonal changes and changes in and around the water body over the years.

About the Report

This compendium is the outcome of a systematic process of identifying and mapping public traditional water bodies in the city of Ajmer. It brings together oral histories and lived experiences of local residents residing in the vicinity of these water bodies, capturing their knowledge, memories, and interpretations of these shared resources. Through these narratives, the compendium documents how communities have historically interacted with, depended upon, and cared for these water bodies, offering valuable insights into their social, cultural, and ecological significance.

This work was undertaken under the 'Community-Led Water Body Rejuvenation and Green Space Development' project, supported by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). The project aims to enhance climate resilience in the cities of Ajmer and Jodhpur by preparing plans for rejuvenating traditional water bodies and developing green spaces through community-led participatory planning. Leveraging the SECURE framework and AMRUT 2.0 guidelines, it endeavours to build the capacities of community in general and women SHGs in particular as climate champions for sustainable water governance and ecosystem restoration

About PRIA

Established in 1982, PRIA is a global centre for participatory research and training. Our mission is to build capacities of citizens, communities and institutions, to enable vibrant, gender-equal societies. For over four decades our efforts have been focused towards empowering citizens through information and mobilisation, and at the same time, sensitising government agencies towards citizens' needs. We work towards creating a bridge between the two to ensure that the right kind of government efforts reach the right people, at the right time



This project is implemented by PRIA



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