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Water bodies being choked

Construction around them has blocked the water inlets to the ponds

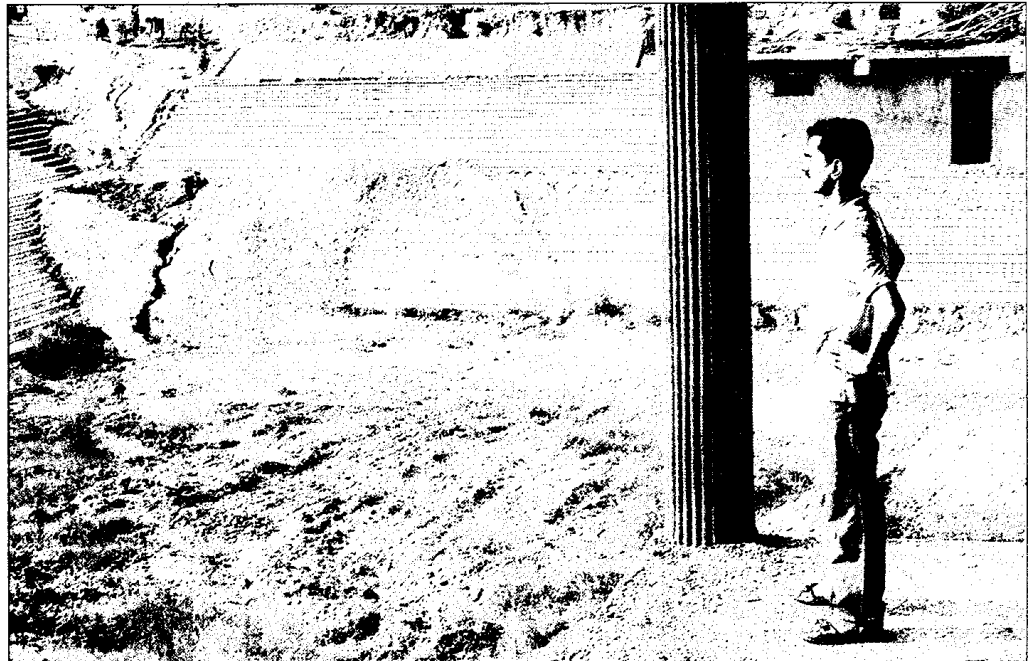
Asheesh Mangain

mangain01@gmail.com

The Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) has declared South West Delhi as a danger zone because the underground water table here has plunged to an abysmal level. But things are only getting worse. There are a number of villages here that have old water bodies (ponds or *johads*). These have acted as aquifers to quench the earth's thirst. But the authorities are choking them. Two such water bodies are in Village Poochanpur, near National Highway-8 and Indira Gandhi International Airport.

The village had a johad (used for cattle and irrigation) and a temple pond. Being in the lower parts of the village, both used to get an abundance of water every time it rained as water from all around flowed into these water bodies. But over the years constructions around them have blocked the inlets. Instead of reviving those water channels the authorities, in the name of improving them, have effectively blocked all the remaining inlets to these water bodies. After constructing a wall around the johad, the Delhi Development Authority is now creating a concrete walking path around it and some other concrete structure. The temple pond has been choked by the construction of deep running concrete steps into the pond from all sides by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi.

"The pond used to attract a lot of water birds and peacocks inhabited the area around which was very green. The peacocks can still be seen sometimes on these concrete steps looking for water and shade," says Rajeev Kumar, a resident of the village.



Above: Steps are being built into the pond. Right: A walking path is under construction at the johad. ANJALI SINHA / HT PHOTOS

Some villagers, conscious of the eroding natural wealth and depleting water table, have taken up the matter with the Lieutenant Governor (LG). Sunil Kumar, from the Poochanpur Gram Samiti, says, "The authorities never consulted us before initiating the concretisation of our water bodies."

Diwan Singh is an environmentalist who is trying to highlight the issue. He thinks these old aquifers were an effective water harvesting system. Their choking does nothing but fill up the pockets of the agencies and the people involved in the construction, he feels. "Initially they will draw out groundwater to fill these up and then they would lose interest. Using groundwater to fill up such water bodies is counter-productive. They are wasting public money and are unaware about the environmental dangers they are causing."



THE EARTH IS DRYING UP HERE

According to a CGWA report, South and South West Delhi are the worst affected areas, with more than twice the amount of water reaching the underground water table being extracted.

Most housing societies in Dwarka and the nearby vil-

lage have been drawing out brackish water, proof that not enough fresh water is seeping into the ground.

A reverse osmosis system that makes saline water drinkable cutting out the salt content (total dissolved salt) is a must in the region.