

Rani Ki Vav-The UNESCO Heritage Site

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ABSTRACT

Rani-ki-vav (The Queen's Step well) on the banks of the Saraswati River was originally built as a royal monument in the 11th century. Step wells are a distinctive form of groundwater resource and storage system in the Indian subcontinent and have been in use since the 3rd millennium BC. They evolved over time from sandy pits into elaborate multi-story works of art and architecture. Rani-ki-Vav is built on the pinnacle of step well craftsmanship and the Maru Gurjara architectural style, reflecting this intricate mastery of engineering and the stunning beauty of detail and proportions. Conceived as an upside-down temple that emphasizes the sanctity of water, it is divided into his seven tiers with highly artistic carved panels. More than 500 major sculptures and more than 1,000 of his smaller sculptures combine religious, mythological and secular imagery and often refer to literary works. The fourth level is the deepest, descending into a rectangular tank measuring 9.5m x 9.4m at a depth of 23m.

Introduction

Rani Ki Vav is a step well positioned in the city of Patan in Gujarat, India. It is located on the banks of the Saraswati River. It was constructed by Rani Udaymati in memory of her husband, King Bhima 1, of the Chalukya or Solanki dynasty, which existed between 950 and 1300 CE. It was rediscovered in the 1940s and restored in the 1980s by the Archaeological Survey of India. It has been listed as one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India since 2014.

Structure of the Step well

The east-facing step well contains all four major components of this type of fully developed structure. Starting on the ground floor and leading to an under ground stone reservoir (kuṇḍa), the stepped corridor is divided at regular intervals by multi-storey columned pavilions. There is a well at the rear end and a large reservoir between the stepped passage and the well to collect excess water from the well. On the ground at the top of the monument was at or an a (ornamental arch), a free standing ceremonial gate common in the now-defunct state of Gujarat. The length of the step well is approximately 65 meters (213feet), measured at the height of the Torahontheother side of the well. Both the depth of over 28meters and the diameter of 10meters at the to pare impressive. Sculptures surround its inner perimeter, a unique feature of the step well. All step wells have rivers running through them. Ran-ki-Vav was fed by the Saraswati River, which flows about 500 meters north of it. The well shaft is divided into seven levels, three of which are tiered, decreasing india meter with increasing depth. Three channels on the bottom floor drain excess water from the wells into the reservoir.



The Sculptures

Four intervening pavilions that separate the stages along the descent increase in number, with the roof of the top floor of each pavilion reaching the first floor. This step well is designed as an upside-down temple that emphasizes the sacredness of water. Carved panels divide him into seven steps. These panels have over 500 primary sculptures and over 1,000 auxiliary sculptures that combine religious and symbolic imagery. The staircase decoration represents the entire universe inhabited by gods and goddesses. Creatures of heaven, men and women, monks, priests, and laity, animals, fish and birds, both visible and invisible not only plants and trees.

Each terrace was divided into his three horizontal zones, of which a wide central strip was reserved for large sculptures. These took the form of either protruding panels or sunken niches. The main sculpture is large and he has two types. One consists of niche deities and the other has figures such as apsaras and direction regents (dikpalas) carved on upright pillars. Both categories feature an equal number of engravings.

The monument has about 400 niches, more than any other carvings depicting the two deities Vishnu and Parvati. Vishnu as Narayana is closely associated in mythology with cosmic water. Wells, cisterns and reservoirs were once dedicated to him. The sculpture of Vishnu in Shesha, the mythical serpent, was set so that the surface of the reservoir became part of the theme, pointing to the primordial matter in which Vishnu rested at the beginning of creation. Also, in Ran-ki-vav, the Shenshashayana form of Vishnu Narayana plays a role in many key positions. Vishnu Narayana is also represented in other forms such as his avatar and his 24 forms. Another major deity depicted here is Parvati, due to the memorial nature of the monument.

At Ran-ki-Vav, large sculptures and countless smaller statues, originally thought to have numbered 800, adorn the cloisters and the fountain itself, each terrace divided into three horizontal zones of his A broad central strip was reserved for large sculptures. These took the form of either protruding panels or sunken niches. His first two steps of the cloister are badly damaged along with the pavilion. Therefore, it is only after entering the third stage that one can literally face the sculpture.

Architecture

The Queen's Step well is considered one of the finest and largest examples of step well architecture in Gujarat. Built at the pinnacle of Step well craftsmanship and the Mal Gurjara architectural style, it reflects this intricate mastery of technology and the beauty of detail and proportions. The

architecture and carvings are similar to the Vimalaba Sahi Temple on Mount Abu and the Sun Temple on Modhera.

It is classified as a Nanda step well. It is approximately 65 meters (213 feet) long, 20 meters (66 feet) wide and 28 meters (92 feet) deep. The fourth level is the deepest, leading to a rectangular tank measuring 9.5 meters (31 feet) by 9.4 meters (31 feet) at a depth of 23 meters (75 feet). The entrance is to the east and the well is the westernmost, consisting of a shaft 10 meters (33 ft) in diameter and 30 meters (98 ft) deep. The step well is divided into seven steps leading to a deep circular well. The stepped corridor is evenly divided by multi-storey columned pavilions. Walls, columns, columns, brackets and beams are decorated with carvings and scrollwork. The side wall niches are decorated with beautiful filigree figures and sculptures. The step well has 212 columns.

Universal Value

Rani-ki-Vav is an exceptional example of step well, characteristic groundwater architecture of the Indian subcontinent, located on the banks of the Saraswati River in Patan. Built as a monument in the 11th century, the step well was built as a religious and functional structure and was designed as an upside-down temple that emphasizes the sacredness of water. Rani-ki-Vav is a seven-level, one-component water management system with staircases and sculpted panels of artistic and aesthetic quality. It is oriented east-west and combines all the essential elements: a stepped corridor starting at ground level, a row of four pavilions increasing in number to the west, and a step well in the form of tanks and wells, tunnel shaft. More than 500 major sculptures and over 1,000 smaller sculptures combine religious, mythological and secular imagery, often associated with literary works. Rani-ki-Vav impresses not only with its architectural structure and technical achievements in water harvesting and structural stability, but especially with its sculptural decoration of true artistic mastery. Figurative motifs and carvings, and the relationship between filled and empty spaces, give the interior of the step well a unique aesthetic character. The setting enhances these attributes with the way the fountain suddenly descends from the flat plateau, enhancing the perception of this space.

It is said that some 60 years ago, medicinal ayurvedic plants were near the well. For this reason, well water also had healing powers to cure viral diseases, fevers, etc. A chamber was also built in Rani-ki-vav. This is where the royal family rested during the summer months. The water from the well acted as a natural air conditioner, reducing heat and cooling breezes. Archaeologists are considering excavations in nearby areas. It is believed that there must have been a palace or royal residence nearby that used the fountain as a medium for air cooling.

Conclusion

Despite being one of the 40 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, even this relatively well-preserved part of the monument has only about half of the original sculptures left. From the surviving carvings on the terrace above the Avatar, it appears that the terrace was dedicated to the form of a deity (goddess), two of whom survive, Kamunda and Gauri. The pavilion has her 292 columns, of which 226 remain, some completely intact, others only partially. Her first two levels and the pavilion are badly damaged, but visitors can observe the architectural details of the step well from her third level. On the third layer, walls containing apsaras and niche deities are well preserved.

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