



Steps to Water: The Ancient Stepwells of India

Morna Livingston, Milo Beach

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From the fifth to the nineteenth centuries, the people of western India built stone cisterns to collect the water of the monsoon rains and keep it accessible for the remaining dry months of the year. These magnificent structures-known as stepwells or stepped ponds-are much more than utilitarian reservoirs. Their lattice-like walls, carved columns, decorated towers, and intricate sculpture make them exceptional architecture., while their very presence tells much about the region's ecology and history. For these past 500 years, stepwells have been an integral part of western Indian communities as sites for drinking, washing, and bathing, as well as for colorful festivals and sacred rituals. Steps to Water traces the fascinating history of stepwells, from their Hindu origins, to their zenith during Muslim rule, and eventual decline under British occupation. It also reflects on their current use, preservation, and place in Indian communities. In stunning color and quadtone photographs and drawings, Steps to Water reveals the depth of the stepwells' beauty and their intricate details, and serves as a lens on these fascinating cultural and architectural monuments.

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