

The friendly water pond

Kuntes

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Every village in Karnataka has a kunte, the water, in which, serves several purposes. Situated in or very close to the village, these kuntes also help to maintain the ecological balance in the area around it. However kuntes are facing extinction today due to land encroachments.

Scene I: The harvest festival of Sankranti in the month of January. Everybody in the village has gathered around the village pond along with their cattle. They swim in the water astride their cattle, give them a good rub and are thoroughly enjoying themselves. By the time all the fun and frolicking ends, the water has turned muddy, but the people and cattle are clean!

Scene II: In the district of Mandya, prior to the commissioning of the K.R.S. Dam, one could spot a *kunte* formed in the shallow area of every field. In summer, these *kuntes* turned into patches of green vegetables.

Scene III: Around the villages of Haveri, two or three *kuntes* near every village are a common sight.

These scenes highlight the importance of *kuntes* which were once a common feature in Karnataka's rural life. *Arakere, volakere, devikere, katte, kola* and *kuntes* were also traditionally a part of the range of traditional water harvesting systems in the State. Since ancient times, *kuntes* have been present in almost every village. In north Karnataka, a *kunte* is called a *gundi* and it is also used for aqua culture. The word *kunte* is a derivative of *gunte*; a measure of land. Since every village had at least a *gunte* of land earmarked for water harvesting, this name was later changed to *kunte*.

What are kuntes?

A *kunte* is very similar to a pond. It is normally circular in shape and not very deep. It is structured in such a way that the rainwater directly flows into it and is collected in it. Some *kuntes* had a sluice and a natural waste weir, which helped in controlling the water outflow. It is a very simple technique and one that is very friendly to the environment and community.

In addition to the water being used for domestic purposes, these manmade water harvesting pools were also used as soak pits to increase the groundwater level. The water collected in the *kunte* were greatly beneficial in recharging the surrounding open wells. As a natural corollary, the vegetation around the pools



also increased and this in turn helped to maintained the ecological balance in the areas around it.

Water from the *kuntes* was also used for growing vegetables, millet and even for soaking paddy fields. Another use for this water is in the brick kiln constructions. The various uses of the *kunte* prove that it was a community asset, which mets community needs and generated livelihood.

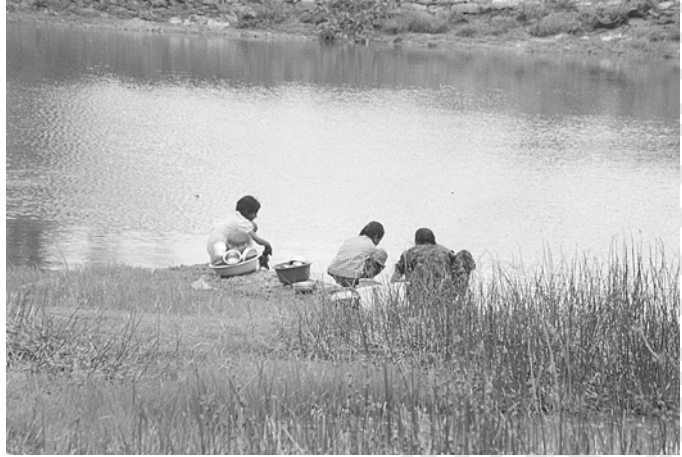
Some are of the opinion that *kuntes* and the cattle dikes are one and the same. But this may not be true, as the latter was meant only for animals and was constructed wherever the cattle grazed, whereas the *kunte* was within the village and was meant for human use.

Unfortunately, land encroachments and the ubiquitous borewell have proved to be the undoing for these traditional *kuntes*.

The *kuntes* in Kakola village

The village of Kakola in Doddaballapur Taluk, Bangalore Rural District, was founded in 1902. There are 300 families here and they cultivate millet, paddy, vegetables, oil seeds and pulses. Kakola had a *kunte*, though there was a cattle dike existing even prior to the founding of the village. As the community found it difficult to provide water for their cattle, they dug a pond in the dike, which was initially maintained by the community. One person from each family participated in the dredging and maintenance of the pond to ensure the flow of water into it. Presently, this is now the responsibility of the village Panchayat and is awarded as a contract to a single person.

There is another pond called Marakal-lamma *kunte* in the same village built by a local woman by the same name. She had a new *kunte* built as the earlier *kunte* was encroached upon and the volume of water in it decreased. She did this as a voluntary contribution to the people of the village. Although this



pond is very small, water is available throughout the year. In acknowledgement of her service, the people in the village named the *kunte* after her.

The people of Kakola have preserved their faith in the advantages of the traditional *kunties* and are still reaping the benefits. *Kunties* were, thus, an integral part of the rural life of Karnataka and it is hard to find a village without this water source. If this simple method of collection is revived, it will go a long way in reducing the drought conditions that have become an annual feature in the State.

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