

Arts of Asia Lecture Series Spring 2019  
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**Subterranean Ghosts: India's Vanishing Stepwells**

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**Dates:**

c. 300 – 600 CE: rock-cut precursors of stepwells

c. 600: first structural stepwells at Dhank, Gujarat

c. 800: Chand baori is constructed by Raja Chand in Abhaneri, Rajasthan. It remains the largest and deepest kund in India.

c. 1060: Rani ki vav is constructed by Rani Udayamiti in Patan, Gujarat. It is the most ornate of all stepwells and a UNESCO site.

1411: Muslim Sultan Ahmed Shah founds the city of Ahmedabad, declares it capital of Gujarat.

c. 1500: Hindu/Islamic style flourishes briefly as seen at Rudabai, Dada Harir, and Ambapur vavs

Apogee of stepwell construction is reached around 1750, after which they enter a decline. The fracturing of the Mughal empire, rise of the British Raj, and availability of more convenient water-delivery systems all contribute to the lack of use. After 1800, only a very few stepwells were built.

**TERMINOLOGY:**

In Gujarat, stepwells are referred to most commonly as “vav”.

In Rajasthan and most other states, stepwells are referred to as “baoli”, “bawadi”, “baori”, and occasionally “jhalra”.

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