Reviving water management practices

What is the issue?

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Amidst drought and looming water crisis, the need for practices like 'Kudimaramath' is increasingly felt.

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What is Kudimaramath?

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- In ancient India water was managed through **a system of patronage and community control** through village councils, particularly in South India.
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- In Tamil Nadu, during the Chola rule, parts of the Grand Anicut canal system which were maintained by the government were known as ‘sarkari’.
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- The lower parts maintained by farmers were known as ‘**Kudimaramath’** i.e. people’s maintenance by donation of labour.
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- Under ‘Kudimaramath’, the users were expected to contribute labour for the upkeep and repair of irrigation facilities from time to time.
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- Works on deepening of tanks, strengthening bunds, desilting supply channels and repairing sluices are taken up under 'Kudimaramath'.
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- The institution of ‘Kudimaramath’ witnessed a gradual decay with the advent of the British rule as the management of tanks shifted to a centralised channel namely PWD.
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- Post-Independence too, successive governments failed in their attempts to revive the ‘Kudimaramath’ works.
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What is significance of tank irrigation?

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- **Tanks** have been an **important source of irrigation** in southern India.
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- They are -\n
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1. less capital-intensive.
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2. capture the run-off resulting from the unpredictable monsoon rains.
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3. conserve water for multifarious uses like irrigated agriculture, drinking water for cattle and domestic uses.
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4. augment groundwater resources through sub-surface recharge.
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- Rapid urbanisation, dumping community resources into tanks, declining community maintenance, and encroachments have degraded the condition of tanks.
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- Reports suggest that out of 5.56 lakh tanks in the country, only 4.71 lakh tanks are in use leading to a **loss of** about one million hectares of **irrigation potential**.
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- Fewer rainy days with increased magnitude are predicted by climate experts in the days to come.
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- Restoring tanks and ponds will ensure adequate water supply even during drought.
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What should be done?

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- The cost-effective method of repairing, renovating and restoring the age-old tanks and other small water bodies should be given top priority.
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- It is more likely to succeed if panchayats play a pro-active role in the exercise as in Kudimaramath system.
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- Proper consultation with the stakeholders including the farmers and gram

sabhas is essential.
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- The responsibility, authority and control over the development of water bodies could be vested with the beneficiaries or the panchayats which can ensure accountability as well.
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Source: BusinessLine

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