

River Water Disputes – Ugly Role of the Central Government

We find several river water disputes unsolved by the rulers for a long time. They make use of these disputes for their political ends and so provoke the people of both the sides to achieve their aim. All these years irrigation facilities were not improved. Even after 1947, no bourgeois ruling party had constructed adequate irrigation projects in India. Our country has been facing frequent droughts for a long time. The ruling classes left many parts of India as drought prone areas to exploit people and thus to get cheap labour from that area. Neglecting of agriculture is the policy of the British colonial rulers, which is now followed by the rulers of the so called independent India.

The feudal and imperialist forces do not have proper policies of developing agriculture. In India the available water is 110 million hectare meters. There is 143 million hectares of cultivable land. All over the country according to existing crop system, 2.2 feet of water is needed per a hectare of land. Thus these 110 million hecta meters of water can be supplied to more than 140 million hectares of land. Prominent engineers like Sri K.L.Rao proposed inter linking of the rivers from Ganga to Kaveri, from north to south of India. These proposals were dropped in the dust bin by the bourgeois rulers.

Inter-State River Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill-2019

For adjudications of the inter-state disputes in the country, our parliament enacted "The Inter-State River Water Disputes Act-1956" (28th August 1956). But the tribunals which are to give judgments have taken more than 30-20-10 years to settle a dispute. The rivers Ravi and Beas Water Disputes Tribunal has taken 33 years to settle a dispute and for a dispute on river Kaveri 29 years and others (Adjudicating the Krishna, Narmada and Godavari waters) close to a decade or more.

Ravi and Beas Water Disputes Tribunal was constituted to adjudicate the river water dispute among the states of Rajasthan, Punjab and Jammu-Kashmir. In the month of July 2021, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu state governments made correspondence on the dispute of Kaveri River water. Maharashtra and Karnataka held a meeting in the month of June 2021 to resolve the water related matters of Krishna and Bheema Rivers. Odisha refused to publish the decision on Vamsadhara Water Dispute Tribunal **by Andhra Pradesh in official gazette in the month of July 2021**. Goa, Maharashtra and Karnataka challenged the award given by the tribunal on Mahadayi River water dispute in October, 2020. Narmada River Water Tribunal

was constituted to solve the dispute between Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan.

The purpose of the Inter-State Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill-2019, introduced in Lok Sabha recently is to address the short comings by amending The Inter-State River Water Disputes Act of 1956.

The bill provides for a two-tier disputes resolution mechanism. Once a dispute arises, it would be referred to a Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) to be headed by a Secretary-Level Officer of the central government with experts from relevant fields. If the committee fails then the dispute will go to centralized (single standing) tribunal with multiple benches instead of the multiple tribunals, that exist now. With the setting up of tribunals, all existing tribunals would be dissolved and the pending cases would be transferred to it.

The decision of tribunal would be final and binding on states and have the "same force as an order of the Supreme Court". The decision of the tribunal can however be challenged before the Supreme Court through special leave petitions.

Some political parties, like the DMK in Tamil Nadu, the BJD in Odisha, have raised serious concern about the appropriation of more powers to the central government to decide water disputes between the states. So, do environmentalists. Instead of the Chief Justice of India nominating persons for appointments, it would now be Central Government making such appointments through Selection Committee. Environment Lawyer Shilpa Chowhan, who had a long association with the Narmada water disputes, sees this as a part of centralization of power and says that the central government wants more and more control over river waters.

Krishna Water Dispute between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana States

Both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Chief Ministers have written letters recently complaining on each other on Krishna river water dispute to the Prime Minister, Central Water Resource Minister, and River Board Authorities. Cases were filed in Supreme Court by both the State Governments against each other. In doing so both the CMs are pretending as though they have great concern in defending the interests of the people of their own states. Thus they try to provoke the emotions of the people of their states. The central government is waiting for this situation to make use of it, like a fox at burial ground. It is not even trying to take the responsibility of resolving the dispute according to the Constitution.

What is the Conflict and what is the Resolution?

Andhra Pradesh government has been complaining to the central government for the last seven years that Telangana is constructing illegal projects. But no steps were taken by the central government to stop those illegal projects. In October of last year in Apex Council, Telangana government requested the centre, to hand over the Krishna river water dispute to the new Tribunal of Brijesh Kumar according to Sec. 3 of Inter-State River Water Dispute Act of 1956.

Telangana Irrigation Department wrote a letter on 24-06-2021 to National Green Tribunal (NGT) to stop the construction of Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation

Scheme (RLIS). On 01-07-2021 AP CM Jagan urged in a letter to the Prime Minister of India to interfere in the Srisailem Project water issue as Telangana is unofficially drawing water of Srisailem Project and producing electricity. Moreover in the Nagarjuna Sagar, Pulichinthala Projects, Telangana is producing electricity outrageously. Soon after Telangana was formed CM KCR told that he would fight with anybody to any extent for the share in the Krishna water and water should be distributed at 50:50 ratio between Andhra and Telangana States. Telangana Cabinet was held on these issues. It rejected the ratio of 66:34 consumption of Krishna water that is being followed till now between Andhra and Telangana. Telangana ENC stated that Telangana is producing electricity at Srisailem left embankment by following all the norms of the tribunal.

In a crucial meeting, KCR directed the officials to prevent the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme (RLIS) taken up by AP on Krishna River. He said that it will damage the interests of the farmers of Telangana. He also stated that if AP wants to take surplus water of Krishna to RLIS, it should be constructed at the water level of 885 feet of Srisailem but AP conspires by proposing RLIS construction below the water level of 797 feet.

AP CM said that after bifurcation of the state into Telangana and AP, the Central government signed in the joint agreement relating to allocation of Krishna river water. According to the agreement, out of total of 811 TMCs, for Rayalaseema 146 TMCs, for coastal area 367 TMCs, and for Telangana 298 TMCs was allotted. But the Telangana Ministers are not heeding to this agreement. He also argued that if Telangana used below 800 feet water of Srisailem, what is wrong if AP uses below 800 feet of Srisailem project water for RLIS, from water allotted to AP.

Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) which is constituted by Central government is looking silently at all these developments without taking any action. It is waiting for an opportunity to bring these two state governments under the control of BJP. AP filed a petition in the Supreme Court to give an order that the joint projects of the two states should be under the control of the centre. Telangana CM urged PM to intervene personally.

The Central Water Resources Department issued a gazette notification on 16-07-2021 that "a total of 107 projects of Krishna and Godavari rivers are taken into the control of the Centre". It means that total management of these projects will be under the control of Krishna and Godavari River Boards. But Telangana CM KCR did not agree to this notification. AP CM Jagan welcomed it with some corrections of defects. The effect of this conflict can be understood by any one.

According to gazette notification, rather than 107 projects – assets, vehicles, staff of irrigation department fall under the purview of the boards. If board releases the water according to indent, there is not even consuming freedom to the states. Centre without focusing on disputed projects took under its purview all undisputed projects including new projects. These steps frightened all. And is it the method to

maintain Centre-State relations? This issue proves that the Central government is working as if it is a unilateral state but not as a federal republic.

Modi's government came to power for the second time in 2019. It sped up to implement its hidden agenda. Like one country-one language, one citizenship etc slogans, river water, irrigation and drinking water, electricity are also being centralized. Centre is grabbing the rights of the states. It wants to destroy the federal structure of the country.

AP and Telangana state governments collide with each other on these projects. They created the dispute, politicized it and made it a complex one, instead of solving through bilateral discussions depending on the alternative solutions suggested by experts and pro-people organizations.

Thousands of TMCs of the Godavari and Krishna water is flowing into the sea every year. They may be channeled for proper production plans. People should fight for pro-people policies.

Polavaram Project and Attitude of the Central Government

The construction of Polavaram project has been facing many obstacles for the last 15 years. The contradictions between political parties and between state and central government had slowed down the construction of the project. The contractors are going on increasing the estimation of expenditure of construction. Polavaram is the "Varam" (a boon) to the contractors and political parties. Governments are not allocating funds properly, even though it was declared as a national project.

Compensation and rehabilitation activities were not taken up properly. There are 370 submerging (Mumpu) villages of Polavaram project. Government has to vacate 2 lakh people from their habitations, cultivable lands and nature.

Recently in the Parliament the Jal Shakti Minister Shekavat answering to a question referred to 2013-14 estimated cost of Polavaram project as 20,398.31 crores only. He did not mention the final revised estimated cost of rupees 55,656.87 crores or the revised second estimated cost of 47,725.74 crores by the centre. In the past Centre used to declare that only construction cost will be paid by it and the responsibility of land acquisition, compensation, and rehabilitation are to be taken up by the state government.

Till now compensation and rehabilitation was implemented to 3,601 families only. Still 17,267 families are waiting for compensation and rehabilitation. Tribals and non-Tribals are fighting for the implementation of compensation and rehabilitation. On the other hand government is filing false cases on tribals. It is crushing the rights of the people and the movement of the tribals. Recently tribals had complained to the ST Commission that government is trying to shift them without paying compensation. Recently people of the submerging (Mumpu) villages of Odisha and Chhattisgarh have started protest agitations demanding the Andhra Pradesh government for the immediate compensation and rehabilitation.

In the beginning days of Polavaram project (that is in 2005), the present CPI (ML) General Secretary used to say that the political, financial crisis of the ruling classes, conflicts in the border states would delay the construction of Polavaram project. So he advised the people not to worry as their habitations or lands will not be submerged immediately and it may take a period of fifteen to twenty years for the construction of the project. At present the financial position of the state, may not allow the government to complete this project to its full capacity.i.e. to the extent of 196 TMCs up to 45.72 meters contour may be limited to 115 TMCs – contour of 41.15 meters, rather multi-purpose project may be changed to lift irrigation or reservoir? Now these are the questions from the experts.

If the rulers of any bourgeoisie party have integrity to develop the irrigation facilities and agriculture, there would not be any disputes. But these politicians have no political will to improve the lives of the people. At present they are anti-people and pro-MNCs and pro-imperialists. To camouflage their failures and crises, to divert the people from their real problems disputes over river water etc. are raised by them. They try to provoke the people of different states on one another which results in burning of properties, bandhs, protests and attacks on one another. They provoke malice among them. They put forth wrong solutions. Their conspiracies are many. The river water disputes are one among them. People unitedly should fight against the anti-people policies of the ruling classes.