

Krishna and Godavari: Rivers of discord between Telangana, Seemandhra? by Gautam Pingle - HYDERABAD

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Krishna and Godavari rivers rise in the Western Ghats and flow to the Bay of Bengal through the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Since the annicuts were built during the British rule a 100 years ago, they provided kharif irrigation to both the river deltas.

After Andhra Pradesh state was formed in 1956, the construction of Nagarjuna Sagar reservoir provided for rabi irrigation in the Krishna delta. Similarly, after the construction of Pochampad dam in 1969, the Godavari delta got rabi irrigation. The storage upstream also meant early irrigation for paddy seed beds etc for the deltas. The Bachawat Commission, appointed by the Government of India, issued an award in 1976. The Award gave 811 thousand million cubic feet (tmc) of Krishna river water to Andhra Pradesh and fixed Telangana's share of this at 298 tmc, Rayalaseema's at 145 tmc and Coastal Andhra's at 368 tmc. Coastal Andhra got a lion's share (despite the fact that the river flowed only a short distance in that region) in order to safeguard the delta. In the case of Godavari, Bachawat award set aside 1480 tmc for Andhra Pradesh, of which Telangana's share was 900 tmc. Out of the Coastal Andhra share of 580 tmc, the award allocated 260 tmc specifically for the delta. These awards clearly set out the legitimate share of the three regions of Andhra Pradesh.

Bachawat was very careful about Telangana's share as he knew that it got less than it would have got if it were a separate state or part of Hyderabad state. He wrote (Volume 2, p.178):

“The state of Andhra Pradesh, no doubt, has been allocated enough water for historical reasons, but still Telangana part of the state of Andhra Pradesh stands in need of irrigation. The area which we are considering for irrigation formed part of Hyderabad state, and had there been no division of that state there were better chances for the residents of this area to get irrigation facilities in Mahaboobnagar district. We are of the opinion that this area should not be deprived of the benefit of irrigation on account of the reorganisation of states.”

In this context, what are the problems after Telangana attains statehood? The problems seem to be: (1) Andhra Pradesh has not got a big enough allocation in the Brajesh Misra award of surplus waters, (2) Dams in Maharashtra and Karnataka are impounding waters in both rivers, reducing flows into Andhra Pradesh, (3) The state has made full use of the Krishna award though inter-regional shares seem to have been misallocated, and (4) The worst is that of the Jalayagnam scheme, 86 projects costing an estimated (at this time) Rs.1,86,000 crore, are a non-starter.

The Jalayagnam projects have no Central clearances, and worse still, neither has the state any legitimate allocation of water in the rivers. All this is well known to irrigation engineers, politicians and anyone interested in reading the C&AG report and the Legislative Assembly Public Account Committee's report etc.

Moreover, there are no funds for completion. There is also no power to energize the lift irrigation projects which need additional power of 206 million units a day when the existing average power consumption (2009-10) was 161 million units a day. Pranahita-Chevalla lift project is thus a non-starter. The whole Jalayagnam scheme is a disaster and it will be impossible to allocate water that is not available and power that does not exist. Only blame can be allocated as it exists in abundance!

Polavaram irrigation project is an ambitious project which, if completed, would entail an additional utilisation of 200 tmc. The project is a matter of dispute in the Supreme Court, with both Odisha and Chhattisgarh objecting to it. Nearly 276 tribal villages in Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Telangana will be submerged by it and this will displace 3,17,150 tribals. Once Telangana attains statehood, Polavaram will be restricted to the use of Coastal Andhra's existing 580 tmc of the Bachawat award.

Further, the project aims at diverting Godavari waters to the Krishna delta and it is not clear whose water is being diverted. Telangana's full use of its share will mean less water for the delta in lean season, though much of it will flow into the sea even then.

Releases from common projects on the Krishna have to be managed fairly and efficiently during in the scarce season. Rayalaseema will be at a disadvantage as its canal gravity offtakes from Srisailem require high reservoir levels, which cannot be sustained in scarcity. Power generation in summer and early kharif releases to Nagarjuna Sagar and Krishna Barrage canals will get priority. Pumping at Srisailem canal headworks maybe a solution

To sum up: (1) In the Krishna river, there is no unutilised water available and the shares of the three regions have been fixed 37 years ago; (2) Any excess 'surplus' water from Brajesh Misra award is also fixed for the whole state, of which Telangana will claim a major share on basin area criteria; (3) In the Godavari river, a large part of Telangana's unutilised share fixed by Bachawat is available to the new state for its projects; (4) There is no likelihood of Godavari water being available for Krishna delta through Polavaram; and (5) Rayalaseema's Srisailem summer offtake problem needs to be addressed.

Some of the problems can be addressed given goodwill from Telangana, but this is ebbing fast.

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DR GAUTAM PINGLE
13, PINGLE VENKATRAM BAGH
BEGUMPET
HYDERABAD 500016
INDIA

Telephones: +91-40-6456 0304; +91-40-4017 3050

Mob: +91-98496 39689

E-MAIL: gautam.pingle@gmail.com