

### *Pulichintala: the test case*

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Pulichintala is symptomatic of the attitude that the Separate Telangana movement has been complaining about. The issue involved is not merely that much more than half of the submergence will be in Nalgonda district whereas the benefit will go to Krishna district. That is bad enough, considering the economic disparity between the two districts. But the real issue is the brazenness with which the meager allocable water left in the Krishna river (if there is indeed any, which is doubtful) is being harnessed for the benefit of an area that has already benefited disproportionately from that river.

Andhra Pradesh was allotted 800 tmc.ft of water from the Krishna river by the Bachawat Tribunal, as against 695 to Karnataka and 565 to Maharashtra. Of the 800 tmc.ft allotted to the State, projects located in Coastal Andhra were reserved 377.44 tmc.ft of water, those in Telangana 266.86 tmc.ft and those in Rayalaseema 122.70 tmc.ft. The disproportionate quota that Andhra Pradesh got was in fact due to the disproportionate quota that the Coastal districts of the State got. And yet it is that area which has the highest rainfall precipitation and best groundwater levels in the entire basin of the river Krishna, from its origin in the Western ghats to its delta abutting the Bay of Bengal.

Small wonder then that not only the States of Karnataka and Maharashtra but the people of Telangana and Rayalaseema as well have always nursed a fully justified grievance about the distribution of the Krishna river waters. And even though there is no allocable water left in the Krishna river in terms of the Bachawat award, proposals aimed at watering the parched lands of Nalgonda, Mahbubnagar, Kurnool, Cuddapah and Anantapur districts have been put forward in abundance. And the State government too, at various points of time – if only at election time in most cases - has promised execution each of these proposals. Not counting the minor proposals, the major ones alone would need about 200 tmc.ft of water: 40 each for the Srisailam Left Bank Canal (Nalgonda district), Bheema, Nettempadu, Kalwakurthi & other lift irrigation schemes (Mahbubnagar district), Galeru-Nagari and Handri-Neeva (for the four Rayalaseema districts), and Veligonda (the uplands of Markapuram division of Prakasam district). The profusion of the demands reflects the stark reality of heart-breaking drought in these areas.

While not one cubic foot of water has been allotted to any of these schemes, though foundation stones have been profusely laid for each of them, often more than once, as Chief Ministers come and go, the State government has thought it fit to go ahead with the Pulichintala project, and that too right in the midst of the vociferous protests emanating from the Telangana Rashtra Samiti. Brazen is the only word one can think of for describing this attitude. But then brazen is the political culture that rules Andhra Pradesh.

According to a note circulated by the Irrigation department in the year 1998, the Pulichintala project is slated to use 982 million cubic meters of water from the Krishna river, which comes to about 13 tmc.ft. One tmc.ft of water is sufficient to irrigate six thousand to ten thousand acres, depending on whether it is used for wet cultivation or 'irrigated dry' cultivation. Taking the latter, these 13 tmc.ft of water would irrigate 1.3 lakh acres of land. How happy would any of the above districts from Nalgonda to Anantapur be to get at least this much irrigation water, though it is nothing compared to the 20 lakh acres that would be irrigated by all the projects all of them taken together have been dreaming of for decades now!

And what use is this project going to be put to? Not even to irrigate 1.3 lakh acres of as yet unirrigated land in Krishna district, but to ensure that transplantation of paddy in the Krishna delta under the old canal system takes place in June-July. Almatti in Karnataka and increased ayacut under Nagarjunasagar in upland Guntur and Nalgonda districts are said to have slowed down the arrival of water into the Prakasam barrage in the early monsoon weeks, thereby rendering transplantation of paddy in the months of June and July uncertain, and therefore 13 tmc.ft of water will be stored in the balancing reservoir at Pulichintala to be sent down to the Prakasam barrage at the appointed time so that the schedule of transplantation that the delta farmers are accustomed to is not upset. What solicitude!

Pulichintala is in fact a test case for those who have been asserting that justice is possible for Telangana and other neglected regions within a united State. Can they get the project dropped? And get the water proposed to be used through Pulichintala, which is said to be assured water (though Karnataka disputes this, and probably rightly), reallocated to some drought area project, such as for instance the Srisailem Left Bank Canal, so that the SLBC will have at least this much of assured water? Will they take up this challenge?

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