

Towards Water War

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Abstract: Water Wars is basically a term used to recognize the trouble that the people, moreover our world, is facing when it comes to the water resources. Way back through history, conflicts dealing with water insufficiency have already been happening. It does not matter whether it is freshwater or saltwater, history before has already faced this issue of what we are experiencing now. Several countries are off on their seats trying to fight for their own respective rights towards certain water resources. At this point, no one is to be blamed as to how this has come about and why has this happened and is still happening. Particular countries will do everything they can with their power to provide their nation with enough water resources for survival. It is no longer a good sight to witness people surviving for their lives, more so, countries fighting each other for the sake of their own. The water issue is slowly taking over the place of the oil issue that has also caused a global threat and panic during the years before. Nonetheless, that the oil crisis is still an ongoing conflict, water scarcity has even created a more alarming danger posing the entire population at risk. China has now moved its focus on the rivers in Southern region. It has started diverting water from the rivers, which originate from the hills of Tibet and flow towards south through India, Bangladesh, Thailand and Myanmar. Tibet is called as the water roof of the world. Large rivers originate from Tibet and flow from hilly areas to the plains in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Some issues have to be considered while constructing dams on these rivers flowing from high to low riparian regions. The extensive scope of water conflicts makes it impossible to address. Local and international law, corporate or business interests, environmental concerns, and human rights activists make water conflicts complicated to solve.

Keywords: Water management, India, China, Water crisis

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I. INTRODUCTION

Climatic changes, degeneration of environment and excessive use of water may lead to acute potable water scarcity in the world in general and Asia continent in particular in future, says reports of several international organizations. China, which anticipated the problem much earlier, has started construction of big dams on Brahmaputra, Indus, Satlaj and Kosi rivers. Once completed, these projects will adversely hit the lower riparian states like India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar among others. This might also give rise to serious water conflicts (1).

Several international organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Green Peace, East Asia Report along with many other think tanks in their different studies have forecast an imminent danger. According to them, in future, if there erupts a war, it would be on water problems and that too the dispute would be for potable drinking water.

Renowned authors like Amitav Ghosh – a recipient of Jananpeeth Award, have underscored this fact in his recently publication book—d in any of economic, political or social platform (2).

Why water woes have become serious?:-

71 per cent of earth's surface is covered by water. Of which, 97 per cent of water is salty meaning it is in the sea, rest of 2 per cent in glaciers and remaining 1 per cent is consumable water. According to various reports published in the recent past, in future (by 2030) every three people among four will face drinking water problem in Asia. Thus, the fight on water is inevitable. In India, we have a very limited ground water available. Compared to China, India is far behind in conserving the ground water. India's ground water storage capacity is abysmally low. Because, compare to other countries, India has very few dams. Therefore, India is bound to face water scarcity on a large scale in days ahead (2).

Hence, it is necessary to make concentrated efforts to embolden our water storage facilities by implementing the required schemes/programmes from now. 21st century is the Asian century. Asia will be in helms of power. The Asian tiggers are rapidly marching on the path of development. However it is pertinent to note that the Availability of drinking water to per person in the Asian sub-continent is very less compared to other continents. Studies reveals that the continent has the lowest of 3920 cubic metres drinking water per person and hence it will face acute scarcity of drinking water in future. Balkan Lake in Russia is known to be the cleanest water body in the world. The water storage capacity of this lake is higher than the US. But Asia lacks this kind of lakes. Therefore, water scarcity problem will assume serious proportions (3).

China's preemptive water management:-

China, the economic and military super power of Asia is known for its several peculiar qualities. China has borders dispute with maximum number of countries of the world. Similarly, China has largest number of dams in the world numbering to 86,000. On the other hand, America has 5500 dams. However, the number of dams in India are even less than that. Of the total dams in China, 30,000 dams are of 15 metres height that come in the categories of large dams (4). These are called as the biggest dams. Through these dams, China has established control over the rivers flowing there. China has the highest water storage capacity in Asia and the country is using this water. The world wonders as to why China is storing water on such a large scale. China's population and geographical structural imperatives are the reasons behind this move (5, 6). The highest numbers of rivers in China are in its southern region while maximum population resides in Northern and Eastern parts. Thus, the Northern and Eastern parts have comparatively less water. There are total eight provinces in China's out of which in the northern region 40 per cent of the population resides. Moreover, around 38 per cent of farming of China is done in this region. Over 50 per cent of industries also concentrated in the same region. China's maximum population resides in the Eastern region, but the maximum water availability is in South. Therefore, China always face the challenge of the diverting the water from Southern region to the residential areas of North East.

Earlier, China had constructed dams on the rivers in Northern region. However, with the population crossing 150 crores, the need for water have become vital. This is the reason why China has embarked on rapid constructions of the large number of dams one after another (7,8).

How China's projects a cause of concern to India?:-

With the dams in Northern region proving insufficient, China has now moved its focus on the rivers in Southern region. It has started diverting water from the rivers, which originate from the hills of Tibet and flow towards south through India, Bangladesh, Thailand and Myanmar. With diverting this water, China is trying to fulfill the water needs of the eastern region. In fact, China has started this process in the decades of 1950. During the last 70 years, it has constructed a number of large canals. China has spent more than 100 billion dollars on of these canals. This canal link is known as South North Water Transport Canal. China started the construction work of this canal in 1952 and it was completed in 2014. But this canal has also not been able to solve the water problems in China. Hence it has now started construction of dams on the rivers in Southern region (9).

According to China's constitution, water issue lies in the jurisdiction of Central government and therefore, the Central government undertakes the dam construction work there. Moreover, due to existence authoritarian state with single party rule, there is no question of opposition to the dam constructions in the country. This is the reason, the work of huge dams in completed successfully in China in the regimented time frame. This is not the situation in India. In India, as per the constitutional division of subjects, water is the issue of State governments. Moreover, unlike China India has a democratic set up. Therefore, whenever the government undertakes construction of these kind of big projects, there is opposition on large scale. A number of agitations take place in addition to the opposition from NGOs on the pretext of threat to the environment. The Sardar Dam is a glaring example which could not be completed due to the Narmada Bachao Agitation. The dispute is still going on even after so many years. Such an opposition brings limitations on government to start and complete big projects in India. As a result, India has very little water storage capacity on the land. Thus, it is obvious, India will have to face bigger problems in future. Some of the international reports have made it clear that there would be tremendous water scarcity in India by 2030 (10,11 and 13).

In this backdrop, there is a need for proper management of river water in India. Rivers are the primary water resources in India. Brahmaputra, Sutluj, Indus and Kosi, all these four rivers come to India from Tibet via China. But China is making efforts to arrest this water (13).

Water management agreements and China's arbitrary policies:-

Surprisingly, China has not signed any agreement with any of the countries on water distribution. Perhaps, China has adopted an adamant stand. According to the 1997 resolution of United Nations proposes a

bilateral or multilateral agreements between two countries for water distribution when a rivers flow from one country to another. These agreements chalk out the water distribution policy. This includes, the height of a dam if any to be constructed, its storage capacity, its water level, etc. Normally there are two types of rivers. The one which flows from hilly areas to the planes and the other which flow through plane areas (14).

Tibet water roof of the world :-

Tibet is called as the water roof of the world. Large rivers originate from Tibet and flow from hilly areas to the planes in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Some issues have to be considered while constructing dams on these rivers flowing from high to low riparian regions. It is mandatory to a high riparian state to share water information of these rivers to the low riparian countries. But China is the only country which has not signed any agreement with other countries to share such information. India and Pakistan have signed Indus Water Treaty, which is being followed for the last 60 years despite of differences on several other issues. Similarly, there is an agreement between India and Bangladesh regarding Ganga River. A similar agreement exists between India and Nepal. But China has not only skipped India, it has also not signed any agreement with its friendly countries like Pakistan and Nepal. There is no agreement between China and Bangladesh and China has also not signed any pact with Nepal, which has a communist government at present. Hence, China has taken an adamant and arbitrary stand on water distribution issue.

In the recent past, China has started developing some islands in South Sea. On the similar lines, it has started construction of dams on a massive scale (15).

Brahmaputra: Lifeline to 10 crore Indian people :-

Currently, China has undertaken dam construction work on two rivers. One of them is Brahmaputra River. This river originates from the hills of Tibet and enters to India from Arunachal Pradesh after crossing Tibet. It further goes to Bangladesh through Assam and finally immerse into Bay of Bengal. A large number of farmers in North-East India and Bangladesh are dependent on the Brahmaputra river water. Livelihood of 10 crore people are dependent on Brahmaputra river. The tea gardens in Assam are grown on Brahmaputra water while the jute farming in Bangladesh is also done on the same water. Despite knowing these facts ,China has already constructed eight dams on Brahmaputra and now initiating work of 12 more dams. Thus, China intends to construct total 20 dams on the river. Once completed, these dams will have adverse effect on the water supply in India and Bangladesh and ultimately hit the agriculture sector. It will pose serious threat to the tea gardens in Asam and thereby the employment dependent on tea industry (16, 17 and 18).

Effect of China's arbitrary attitude on India:-

In fact, according to an agreement with India, China had agreed to share the water content figures of Brahmaputra in rainy season. But in a bid to settle scores with India on the latter's firm stand on the Doklam dispute that erupted in 2017, China did not furnish this information on time. Based on this information, if there is a possibility of flood in Brahmaputra, India can take preventive measures, but with an intention to harass India, China did not give the water content information of the river to India in 2017. As a result, there were heavy floods in Assam where hundreds of people had to lose their lives for which China was solely responsible (19).

China has started constructing a similar dam on Mekong River also . This river flows from China to Thailand via Myanmar. People of Myanmar and Thailand are dependent on Mekang River's water, but China has started construction of dams on this river too. The actual number of dams in China could be more than the figures that have come up. The reason being that these dams are situated in valleys and mountainous regions and their actual number is never known. China too, never makes the figure public (20).

Looking at the proposed and the ongoing dam projects undertaken by China, it is clear that the entire South Asia will have to face serious consequences in future. Nepal too, has raised its concern on the issue. If there is a serious water problem in South Asia, it may lead to a war (21).

China against rule-based management:-

Normally, there is a maritime boundary for every country. There are UN agreements for the judicious management of maritime borders .There are international agreements for every issue. Every state wants that the agreements should be based on the rules.

However, China seems to have aversions on rule based resolutions of conflicts. China has floated its own rules irrespective of the international laws and follows arbitrary and authoritarian ways to resolve it. This has been exemplified by the increasing Chinese claims on various islands in South China Sea (22).China is intimidating the other nations in the region by using high handed policies. China is developing a number of islands in this region and creating its naval bases . It is showing its dominance on a number of islands and claiming its ownership on a number of vital sea routes. It has also claimed its right on land of a number of

countries. In the past, China had even wars with India and Vietnam. The US and India are pursuing for a rule-based management in South China Sea to which China is strongly opposed to (23).

Why water storage on a large scale:-

Today, America is well aware that world's oil reserves will come down after 2050. Therefore, America is protecting its oil reserves. Similarly, it is America's plot to exploit the oil in West Asia first and use it. When these oil reserves will get exhausted, America would be the only country to have the largest oil reserves in the world. In such a situation, it desires to dominate the entire world (24). China aims to do a similar exercise in case of potable water. China wants to establish its dominance on the world regarding water. China is well aware that by 2050, there would be severe water problems in the Asia. That would be the time when China would have largest number of drinking water reserves in the world. Therefore, it has started its journey in this direction to dominate and become the super power in the world. But India and Nepal will have to face the negative consequences of this desire and India will have to take necessary steps to prevent itself from this (25).

How to bring China on a right path?:-

To stop China's nefarious intents, the friendly countries and those would be facing water scarcity should come together and mount pressure on China with the help of United Nations. Similarly, India should raise these issues at various multilateral platforms where both India and China are members like BRICS, SCO, APEC and G20. Even today, why India is not raising the issue is a question (26).

Recipient of Jananpeeth Award Amitav Ghosh in his book has raised a question as to why the world is so negligent and insensitive about water problem. He has raised a question as to when there is a possibility of world war and bloodshed owing to water problems, why water cannot be a part of international agreements. His concern is very genuine (27).

India raised the various innovative issues at the G20 summits in recent past like the issue of black money and also suggested a collective mechanism to resolve it. In the recently concluded 2018 G20 summit, it advocated for action against the people engaged in economic frauds, scams and running away to other countries. Now it's a high time that India should raise the issue of water problems causing due to arbitrary construction of big dams on international rivers in the coming G-20 summits. Looking at the dictatorial attitude of China in drinking water issue and it is constructing dam, China should be pressurized to reduce the height of dams, get into water distribution agreements with other countries and provide water content information. If this is not done, time is not far when a desert like situation will emerge in South Asia (28).

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