

Indus Water Treaty and Kashmir

The shortage of hydro electric power in Jammu and Kashmir in general and valley of Kashmir in particular has been a perennial problem for the people. Facing long chilly winter months with electricity not available for days together has resulted in anger and frustration among the people. In a broader perspective, the problem of the generation of hydro-electricity in the state is restricted by the Indus-water Treaty between India and Pakistan. In view of the problems of the people of the state, there is an urgency to review the treaty. These voices have been intermittently raised in Kashmir. The following excerpts from the editorial of a popular daily of Kashmir, the Srinagar Times, reflects the same concern. It may be noted that a conflict may manifest itself in one form, its roots always are varied. (Ed.)

Dr. Farooq Abdullah's demand in a recent statement that the treaty on the distribution of water between India and Pakistan needs to be reconsidered afresh is not new. Such a demand was made even before the phase of militancy in Kashmir.

The treaty on distribution of water between India and Pakistan popularly called Indus Water Treaty was signed in the year 1962. This treaty envisaged India's control over Sutlej, Beas and Ravi rivers, and gave Pakistan the control over Chenab, Jhelum and Sindh. The three rivers i.e., Chenab, Jhelum and Sindh flow through Kashmir to reach Pakistan. At the time of signing the treaty, India and Pakistan had only their respective interests in mind; while the interests of Kashmiri people were completely ignored.

According to Indus Water Treaty, Pakistan's consent is a pre-requisite in drawing up any project of irrigation or power generation from Chenab, Jhelum or Sindh. In sixties, the construction work on Salal project was stopped for nearly seven years because Pakistan had serious objections on the design of the project. Pakistan proposed some changes and ultimately the changes suggested by Pakistani experts were incorporated and hence the design of the *Salal Dam* was altered to a great extent.

The objective of another project called *Wullar Barrage* by the J&K government in 1980's was to raise the level of water in Wullar lake. This project would have augmented the water transport on river Jhelum, which would have in turn reduced the road traffic on Baramullah-Islamabad (Anantnag) route. In winters, the water falls to a considerably low level in river Jhelum, resulting in the lowering of power-generating capacity from 105 megawatts to a mere 35 megawatts. The construction of *Wullar Barrage* would have provided required flow of water to lower Jhelum and ensured the maintaining of the power generating capacity during the winters also. However, Pakistan had serious reservations on the construction of this barrage also.

In the year 1991, Wullar Barrage Construction did figure in the secretary level talks between India and Pakistan, however, nothing came out of it. Thus, unless the two countries reach an agreement on the issue, which leaves Kashmir in darkness throughout the winter months, situation will not

improve. Similarly, on Uri project, built on river Jhelum, Pakistan's consent was sought. The project design did not include construction of any Dam; instead a tunnel has been built.

In J&K state, a vast portion of land lies unirrigated, and therefore it is a waste. To make irrigation possible on this land lift irrigation project could be built. However, the required quantity of water as laid down in the treaty is so small that lift irrigation schemes are just not possible to be built.

There are many water disputes in the sub continent. Recently decades' old water dispute was resolved between India and Bangladesh. There is a tribunal to sort out the water distribution between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. It is an irony that people of Kashmir have absolutely no rights over the rivers that flow through the state and reach Pakistan. This very right was overlooked in the treaty of 1962 between India and Pakistan and needs to be looked into afresh on humanitarian grounds.

[Courtesy, Srinagar Times]