Intra state water disputes in Maharashtra

Seeds of bigger problems in future all over India?

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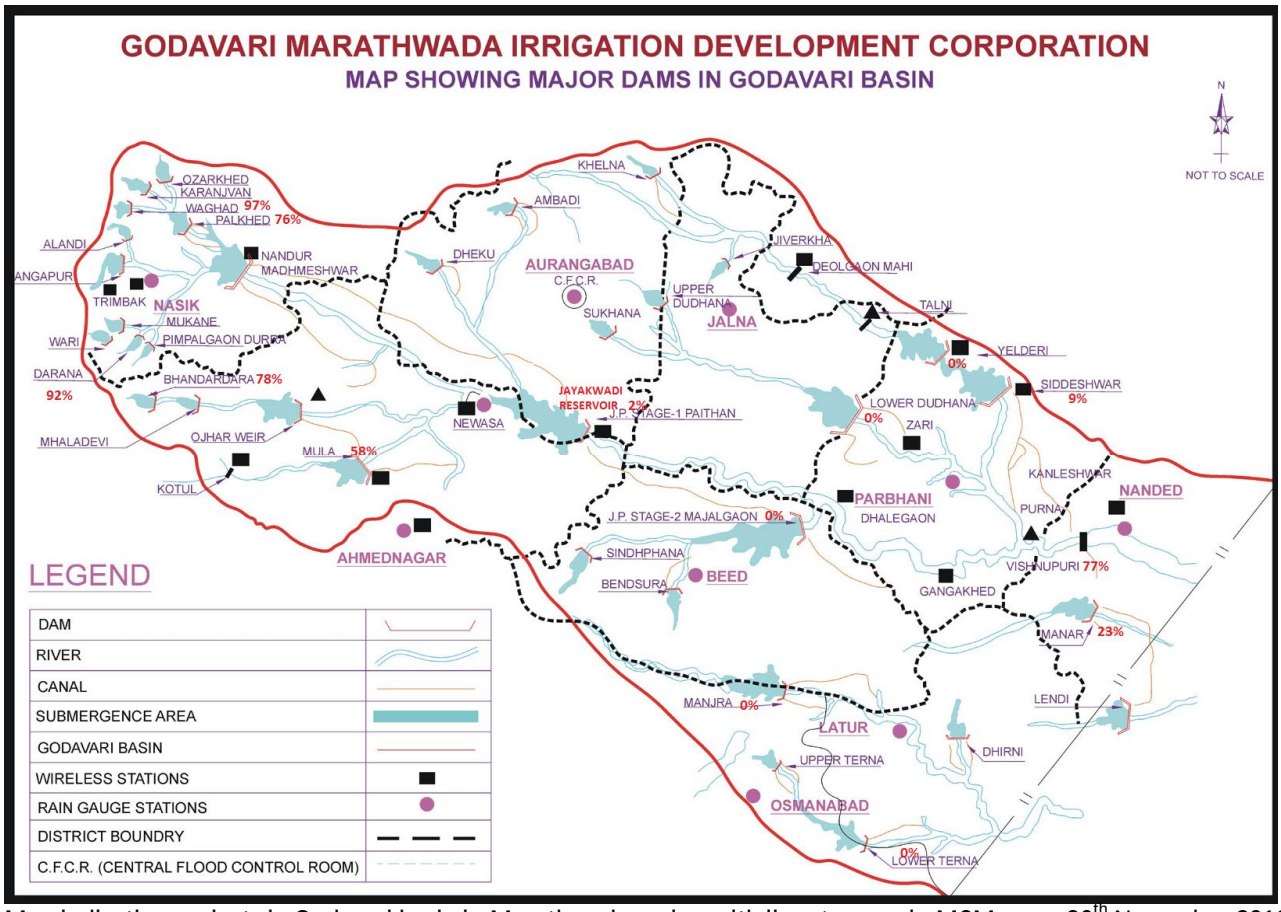
Reservoir storage levels in Marathwada region of Maharashtra, consisting of 8 districts, are scary. Of the 11 projects, 6 projects have a live storage capacity of 0. The huge Jayakwadi Dam on Godavari, which supplies drinking water to 4 Municipal Corporations and over 200 villages, has mere 2% live storage as on 26th November 2012. While weak monsoon and upstream dams in Nashik and Ahmednagar districts are to blame for this alarming situation, there is a bigger problem of management at the heart of the issue.

After Jayakwadi was completed in 1976, numerous medium and large dams came up in the upstream Godavari. Many dams on the Pravara and Mula Basins and Darna Dam cluster have been built after the Jayakwadi Project. These dams intercepted and diverted flows to Jayakwadi. All was well in surplus or normal years, but in the current year with deficit rainfall, Maharashtra is on the threshold of perhaps the worst intra state water protest that it has seen.



Map indicating projects in Godavari basin in Marathwada region with live storages in MCM as on 26th November 2012
Source: CADA, Aurangabad and Maharashtra Water Resource Department

Jayakwadi supplies drinking water to urban centres of Aurangabad, Paithan and Jalna, Beed, more than 200 villages and Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporations (MIDCs) including the 1130 MW Parali Thermal Power Plant. For the past few months, Aurangabad has been facing the worst water shortages, with water being supplied once in three days at times. Government Medical College and hospital had to postpone surgeries due to water scarcity. The Chief Minister (CM) has made it clear that sufficient water cannot be supplied to Parali TPP[1] and Maharashtra should brace itself to more power cuts.

[1] http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/industry-and-economy/economy/water-woes-plague-parli-power-plant-in-maharashtra/article4093497.ece

No	Dam	Basin	Live Storage Capacity, MCM	% Live Storage on 26 Nov '12
1.	Jayakwadi	Godavari	**2171**	2
2	Mazalgaon	Godavari	**312**	0
3	Manjara	Godavari	**177**	0
4	Purna Yeldari	Godavari	**809**	0
5	Lower Terna	Godavari	**91**	0
6	Seena Kolegaon	Bheema	**76**	0
7	Lower Dudhna	Godavari	**242**	0
8	Purna siddheshwar	Godavari	**81**	9
9	Manar	Godavari	138	23
10	Upper Penganga	Godavari	964	60
11	Vishnupuri	Lower Godavari	81	77%

Poor storage in Jayakwadi was not an overnight situation, nor is it a new situation. For the last decade, the dam has not been filled to its capacity due to scanty rains and upstream projects.[2] Marathwada region has received a poor rainfall and since September 2012[3], protests started with demands up for more water from the upstream dams[4]. But no water was released from the upstream regions.

However, things went from bad to worse after October as water cuts became more and more pronounced in Marathwada. There were increasing protests in Aurangabad in which all political parties participated, demanding more water releases from upstream dams. This was vehemently opposed by upstream Nashik and Ahmednagar regions. It was only after the Chief Minister intervened and ordered that 9 TMC water should be released to Jayakwadi from Darna group of Dams (Nashik Region), Bhandardara and Nilwande Dam (Ahmednagar region) and Mula Dam (Pravara River, Ahmednagar region) that water releases actually started. As expected, the announcement and subsequent releases faced stiff protests from political parties and farmers in the upstream. In case of Mula Dam on Pravara River in the drought prone Ahmednagar district, farmers groups did not allow water release for an entire day and actually stood in the river as water was released in the river channel, threatening Jal Samarpan[5]. The irrigation department then reluctantly conceded in making one irrigation rotation through the canals for this region. Interestingly, only 1.55 TMC was released from Darna Dam in Nashik region, which is 92% full as of 26th November 2012.

For water releases within the same state, tremendous security checks were put in place. Hundreds of police were deployed, gates of KT weirs were forced opened, canals and river banks were constantly patrolled to curb lifting and to top it all, the electricity of the region was cut off to stop electric pumps of the region from siphoning off water! Though some people believe this was needed, it is indeed shocking and saddening to see this. There were numerous protests at places. Water sharing within a state reached a new level of mistrust and hostility.

Water released to Jayakwadi till 3rd December 2012

Sr. no	Dam	Quantity (TMC)	Distance from Jayakwadi Dam (kms)
1.	**Mula**	**2.5**	**52**
2.	**Bhandardara**	**2**	**210**
3.	**Nilwande**	**2.5**	
4.	**Darna**	**1.55**	**170**

Whither MWRRA? Lest we forget, Maharashtra gets the distinction of being the first Indian state to have promulgated the Maharashtra Water Resources Regulatory Authority Act in 2005, following which the MWRRA Authority was formed. This was at the behest of World Bank under its Maharashtra Water Sector Improvement Project (MWSIP). The Authority was explicitly created in 2005 "to meet the pressing need for

[2] http://aurangabad.nic.in/htmldocs/District_Vision2020/C.%20Index.pdf
[3] http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-09-07/pune/33675858_1_major-dams-water-storage-release-water
[4] http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-09-07/pune/33675858_1_major-dams-water-storage-release-water
[5] http://www.afternoondc.in/city-news/marathwada-water-woes-threaten-to-divide-state/article_70151

an institutional mechanism to regulate the allocation, management and utilisation of the state's limited water resources through a participatory approach"[6] .

Some relevant provisions of the MWRRA Act (2005) include:

Section 11: Power, functions and duties of the Authority states:

- ***to determine the priority of equitable distribution of water available at the water resource project, sub-basin and river basin levels during periods of scarcity;***

Section 12: General Policies of the Authority states:

"***in order to share the distress in the river basin or sub-basin equitably, the water stored in the reservoirs in the basin or sub-basin, as the case may be, shall be controlled by the end of October every year in such way that, the percentage of utilizable water, including kharif use, shall, for all reservoirs approximately be the same". (Emphasis added.)***

This has been completely violated in the Godavari basin this year. The MWRRA has entirely failed in meeting its explicitly mandate and most important social role in this regard. Even now, it is not taking any proactive steps to try and put things in order, to give some semblance of 'integrated river basin management'.

Ironically, when there were strong protests in Aurangabad over water releases, MWRRA was in Aurangabad holding meetings on water tariff proposals, not on this pressing issue! This is the same institution that is being put forth as an example to be followed throughout the country. The State Water Authority formed under the MWRRA has not had a single meeting since the formation of the authority! This only goes on to prove the inability of imposed from outside, strait jacketed institutional structures, working with a top down and unaccountable manner and with no perspective to take any equitable, participatory and useful decisions.

The limited water releases that have happened till now in Godavari basin from dams upstream of Jayakwadi have happened because of Chief Minister's orders and not the MWRRA or the Godavari Marathwada Irrigation Development Corporation (which was supposed to have a water allocation plan for the Godavari basin). This is indeed a very serious issue with far reaching implications. Water scarcity will intensify in the coming months and unless basin authorities take timely and proactive steps, it will not take much time for a protest to become a movement. For decisions to be backed by upstream or downstream communities, the composition, the mandate and functioning of such an authority would have to be participatory, transparent and accountable. Unfortunately, this is not what the MWRRA ever aimed to be.

In Krishna basin, similar situation is emerging, where Ujani dam on Bhima River, the third largest reservoir of Maharashtra and lifeline for Solapur city and numerous villages, has only 7% water in live storage as on Nov 26, 2012. Similar to the situation in Jayakwadi, upstream dams in Pune region like Temghar, Panshet, Warasgaon and Pawana have storages ranging from 95% to 81%. Here too, there has been a strong opposition from the upstream to release water for downstream users and here too MWRRA has been unacceptably silent. What makes the situation more alarming in Ujani is the extremely poor water quality of the water due to untreated sewage from upstream Pune. It seems, in near future, this situation will get more volatile as here the competing users are politically influential urban areas of Pune and Pimpri Chichwad in the upstream and an equally strong and politician-backed sugarcane lobby near the dam. Solapur city and the Tail Enders of Ujani have been suffering historically.

In case of both Ujani and Jayakwadi, the dams have huge dead storages, and some experts, including senior officials of MWRRA, have argued that the dead storage can be used for drinking water supply. But there is no policy or mechanisms to achieve that. Aurangabad Municipal Corporation has been contemplating installing common head works at Jayakwadi Dam, to utilise the dead storage from the dam for drinking

[6] www.mwrra.org

water and industrial purposes.[7] According to Aurangabad Vision 2020 Document, "In Jayakwadi reservoir, the quantity of water available between Dam sill level and level 4 M below sill is 232.53 mm3. It is proposed to have a common head work for lifting water from the dead storage of Jayakwadi to ensure all time water availability for drinking water." Maharashtra Jeevan Pradhikaran has estimated the cost of this to be around 106 Crores, the scheme is yet to take off. Options like these may have to be explored in the current situation.

Here it may also be noted that Godavari Basin is supposed to be a surplus basin as per the National Water Development Agency's calculations. Andhra Pradesh is building huge projects to transfer water from Godavari to Krishna basin. The question is, how such projects are sanctioned when the upstream of the same basin is in such dire straits. It is high time such projects are shelved. Else, in climate change scenario, they will provide fresh battle grounds for interstate and intra state conflicts. Same goes to water allocations to over 71 Thermal Power Plants in the Vidarbha region of Godavari Basin. Ironically, MWRRA has been instrumental in changing water allocations of irrigation projects from farmers to Power Plants in this case. This and the contested water tariff seem to the only contributions of MWRRA so far.

It is now time to show that the state can and will take strong steps to work towards equity and deficit sharing. MWRRA has proved its inability in dealing with this and it is time for a truly participatory process to emerge. Let us not forget that India's massive water infrastructure, the biggest in the world, has been put up at a huge social, economic and ecological cost. Jayakwadi Dam submerged 118 villages and displaced 70000 people when it was completed in 1976. It is time to review and reconsider the existence, dimensions, functioning and usefulness of such dams. And make functioning of those existing structures that are found necessary, more responsive, efficient and equitable.

(An edited version of this was published on www.indiatogether.com)

[7] http://www.aurangabad.nic.in/