

USE OF RESERVIOR: LET NARMADA DIE WITH ITS TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOOD

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ABSTRACT

Morarji Desai setu on the Tapi river in Surat, Gujrat, India is a Weir – cum crossway, which connects Rander and Katargam neighborhoods was built in 1995 with an approx.. cost of rupees 35 crore. The main purpose of dam building is to save the each drop of sweet water to go into the sea as “running waste”. After storing the water in the dams, the government organizations decides about the most useful ways to utilize this water, typically in urban centres, land and water farming and industrial zones. But usually the people who are deciding on the fate of water forgets, that it’s the river that needs the water the most. It creates a situation of chasm between those who would actually harness it and those who live off the river. A neglected river will be home of dead organisms those habitat in it and death of many who live off it. The most affected community from Barwani district is the Bhilali Adivasi, this community survives solely on fishing. MedhaPatkar a spokesperson of NBA is pleading the case of a person from the same community named “Hazariabhai”. As irrespective of his professional requirement he has been allotted the compensated land around 100km away from the river. There are thousands of stories and Hazariabhai facing the same fate as most of the fishing route has now been submerged or restricted and with the constant vanishing of mangroves flow takes turn to dead water and eventually river runs dry.

As we know fisheries comprises of around 1.1% of the Total GDP and 5.15% of the agricultural GDP of the country with the sector employing around 14 million people with an average output of 10.07 metric tonnes. The protest of 14 million people are almost always unnoticed and putting the India’s 2nd rank in global fisheries to danger.

Members of SamastBhruchMachimar Samiti in Bharuch, under the banner of NBA, protested and represented 35,000 fishermen who would be affected by leading a march to the district collector’s office in the month of April with a big number of 4000 protestors. This was one of the many protest in which fishermen waved black flags at the Prime minister Mr. Narendra Modi on his visit against the

construction of the Bhadbuth weir- cum causeway at Kalpasar. The protestors could only filed their objection in November 2017, as they were never consulted regarding the raising of the barrage at Ambetha near Dahey 5.15 km downstream. The project is expected to start in early 2018 as it has already received its clearance from Coastal Regulation Zone(CRZ), the NGT did accepted the application from the protestors even after a month of objection period lapse on humanitarian ground as the livelihood of thousands of families were at stake.

As the government planning shows that the raising of barrage will form a wall between river and sea, saving the put flow of “sweet water” and it will be diverted towards the Kalpasar reservoir, which

has been endorsed as a sweet water lake to earn revenue from tourism also. But on the other hand fishermen feels that their barrage raising will only accumulate sewage and industrial effluents coming from the town downstream, carried in with sea water as its encroaches on the absent river's territory. A higher barrage will only be a wall, that will obstruct the filthy water out from the stilled river. The Narmada barely exists at the river bank.

The Director of NGO Paryavaran Mitra and environmentalist, Mahesh Pandya feels that the ingress of the sea is unstoppable, as the consistent water flow is required throughout the year from the SSD. We can't expect anything to grow here in the near future, meeting the same fate as Kutch as the both sides of the river bank have turned saline and accumulation of salt surface on the river bed is happening continuously.

The other biggest fear of fishermen is Narmada without Hilsa, because 70-80% of their livelihood is through Hilsa in a time span of 3 months in the entire year rest 30-20% they earn from the other fishes during rest of the time of the year. The government of Kalpasar project advocating the construction of a fish lock for the Hilsa to climb and survive but what they are ignoring is the fact unlike the Atlantic salmon, Hilsa need fresh water to survive and it can't climb or fly to reach the fish lock and will not be able to cross it. The biggest concern is the disappearance of the other 80% of the river species, which puts their basic bread and butter in trouble.

The other big problem in front of the people living in these areas is illegal sand mining. A member of the advisory board of United Nations climate technology center has explained that the livelihood of the fishermen and the life of the aquatic species are getting adversely affected by the minning of sand from the river beds. She says, "sand" stones and boulders are required to slow down the rate of the flow of any stream so that the river bank is recharged." As aquifer won't get time for recharging as a result of water flush away. This is going to seriously affect the life of fishes in the river,

if there is no ground water in the ground even after receiving the good rain in the raining season.

Another problem that sand mining brings in is, during the sand extraction process, miner throw away all the shrubs and the bushes and mountains of mud in the bank of the river which results in large amount of silt and mud in the river which damages the fishing net and effects the fish breeding in the river.

Although after filling of a petition by NBA, the Madhya Pradesh high court has banned the sand mining in the Narmada River Valley. The National Green Tribunal also banned illegal minning in the Narmada and adjoining areas in 2017. But there still illegal minning is rampant across the state of Madhya Pradesh.

In Between all the damages and destruction that happened as result of minning and damming, there are still some hopes for the locals here in 2017-18, there are 32 cooperative society that has been proposed to form a federation, covering the locals of around four district affected by SSD. They are hoping to get the fishing rights and management rights over the river. And the Narmada reservoir imitating the spirited struggle and wins over the Tawa and Bargi dams nearly 2 decades ago by the fellow fishermen.

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