PERENNIAL droughts in southern Telangana have made the ecosystem fragile. The age-old water bodies of different settlements sustained living and gave rise to traditional occupations such as cattle and sheep rearing along with that of drought resistant agriculture. The water intensive crops of the green revolution technology and monoculturisation of agriculture exerted pressure on traditional methods of water harvesting. The rapid increase of deep borewell technology coupled with power based pumping as against open wells have threatened the hydrological regime. In the absence of corresponding recharge initiatives against the rapid depletion of groundwater even the deep borewells are drying up. The impending desertification and consequent deterioration of life in the vicinity of two perennial rivers Krishna and Godavari with abundant waters has prompted several people’s initiatives.

Godavari and Krishna the two perennial rivers of peninsular India traverse Telangana, a constituent of Deccan Plateau. Some 79 per cent catchment of Godavari in Andhra Pradesh is located in northern Telangana and the remaining 21 percent is in coastal Andhra. Similarly 69 per cent of the catchment of Krishna in AP is in southern Telangana against the 18 per cent in Rayalaseema and 13 per cent in coastal Andhra. The river waters disputes tribunal allocated 1495 TMC ft of Godavari water and 800 TMC ft of Krishna water to AP. Although the allocated Krishna waters are exhausted because of the major irrigation potential in AP. (CA - 56 per-cent, Rayalaseema - 17 per-cent, Telangana - 27 per-cent) besides medium and minor irrigation. Coastal Andhra is a major beneficiary of Godavari waters. The frequent failures of monsoon gives rise to the variability in rainfall of southern Telangana which often pushes the region into drought conditions that occur on an average, once in two-and-a-half years. The two districts of Mahabubnagar and Nalgonda, form the drought core of Telangana and they are located entirely in Krishna river basin. In fact, the successive colonial and post-independent policy initiatives favoured downstream coastal region at the instance of the influential caste, class and regional leadership of coastal Andhra which is dominant in all parties, both ruling and opposition. Such powerful lobbies of coast have also succeeded in integrating Telangana with Andhra region by forming Visalandhra by eliminating its independent political existence. That had simply taken away the waters of two mighty rivers for the agricultural and industrial development of coastal region at the cost of drought-prone Telangana. The water movement of Telangana should be understood in this background. Since the water movement is largely located in Nalgonda district, a geo-economics would explain the context for drought articulation.

Nalgonda district with the geographical area of 35.13 lakh acres had 28.52 lakh population in 1991 of which 17.60 per cent belongs to SCs and 9.66 per cent to STs besides the numerically large presence of OBCs. The average rainfall is 742 mm with the least rainfall of 637 mm located in the western half of the district against the state’s average of 925 mm. The soils belong to Dumba (red soils with coarse grains) variety with strong presence of granite rocks. Nagarjunasagar irrigates the southeastern margins of the district in addition to the minor irrigation sources like Musi, Asifnahan, Dindi and Pendlipakala. The waters of Nagarjunasagar have also brought farmers from coastal Andhra and uprooted locals from land and life. The irrigation commands have gone into the grip of migrants and given rise to the new culture based on commercial relations which is totally alien to the region. The actual area irrigated under them is far from the potential developed and also these irrigation sources repeatedly dry up on account of drought. There are tanks in every village, which, however face the problem of siltation, breaching and maintenance.

Cropping is done by cultivating rice, jowar, bajra, redgram, greengram, groundnut and castor. Rice cultivation takes primacy in the economic sustenance of the farmer over other crops and covers the cropped area of 24.31 per cent. Nalgonda contributes 38 per cent of the state production of castor the remaining comes from the adjoining districts such as Mahabubnagar and Rangareddy [DES 1995]. Earlier the dry crops like jowar and bajra were grown in large areas which were basically subsistence food crops and they have lost out in competition with commercial crops. Chillies, cotton, sunflower are gaining importance along with that of orchards.

Most of the farmers have dug bore wells at varying depths, on an average 100 to 200 ft, and result in drying up as heavy pressure applied on groundwater as they go for water intensive commercial farming. The recurring drought in the absence of supplementing surface water leads farmers and wage earners into perpetual poverty and indebtedness. Labour often leaves for urban and irrigated areas for livelihood. Cattle and draught animals are driven to slaughter houses because of non-availability of fodder which often pushes farmers into a crisis. The district also has a predominant traditional occupation of sheep and goat rearing. Grazing lands suffer on account of drought and carry no grass cover for long durations. As a result, shepherds are forced to leave their families behind in search of new pastures for the flock. The heavy depletion of common property resources and conversion of grasslands into orchards and cultivable lands is posing a serious challenge to animal husbandry. The frequent failure of agriculture along with that of poverty compels farmers to sell trees like acacia, neem and tamarind from their lands. The hydrological regime is such that groundwater is not potable as it contains fluoride in excess of the permissible limits of 1 to 15 mg/litre.

POLITUICS OF CANAL BUILDING

Although the region is repeatedly exposed to a drought environment successive governments have not bothered to plan river waters. Nagarjuna Sagar is located in Nalgonda across river Krishna at an altitude of about 100 to 150 m at the south-eastern border. Therefore the small portions of low lands in the south-east margin get water leaving large areas of high elevation dry. In fact if it were to be constructed a few kilometres upstream the waters from the project could have been made use of for not only large tracts of Nalgonda but also for a few more semi-arid districts like Warangal, Karimnagar and Khammam of Telangana. In fact the coastal politicians and engineering bureaucracy have conspired and denied water to the drought district of Telangana.

The Srisailam reservoir is constructed in the upper reaches across river Krishna in the close vicinity of Nalgonda. The government of AP proposed an irrigation scheme to the tune of 150 TMC ft before the Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal in 1969 to irrigate the districts of Nalgonda, Warangal and Khammam. As the allocated share of 800
TMC ft was already committed towards existing commands and projects under construction for the irrigation of coastal Andhra no water is left for the required allocation but the tribunal allocated 33 TMC ft towards evaporation in Srisailam and about 17.84 TMC ft for Jurala project in Mahabubnagar. Therefore, Srisailam is used as carryover reservoir to supplement water needs of the delta during the lean season. Not a drop of water is allowed for irrigation in Telangana although it is located in Telangana, submerging numerous villages and rich biodiversity causing displacement and human misery. In 1979 the state government ordered a study of the feasibility of a high level canal as well as lift canal from the foreshores of Nagarjunasagar.

A committee was constituted to assess the surplus flows available in Krishna river by the TDP government in 1985 as a response to an agitation launched by Rayalaseema leadership for water during early 1980s. The committee identified 200 to 300 TMC ft as surplus water and allocated 30 TMC ft to Srisailam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) besides earmarking water to Srisailam Right Branch Canal (SRBC) and Telugu Ganga Project (TCP). SLBC was proposed as a gravity canal by digging tunnels 300-400 m below ground level in two stretches of 43.5 km and the other 7.25 km with a nine metre diameter to lead into a canal length of 130 km which will terminate in Musi river. It is proposed to irrigate 218 villages with an extension of three lakh acres of which 2.1 lakh acres under wet and 0.99 lakh acres dry land.

The governments of the Congress and Telugu Desam vacillated in spite of promising to go for the tunnel on one occasion and flouting it by taking a position on different occasions to lift water from Nagarjunasagar. The government argued that the tunnel works disturb the Srisailam Tiger Reserve in Nallamalai hills of eastern ghats. The ecological and environmental impact assessment committee felt that “the impact on ecological and environmental aspects may be negligible and on the whole the project proposals now recommended by the committee are environmental friendly and pre therefore recommended for approval and clearance” [Rao 1992]. Further the committee observed that “the upland areas of Nalgonda district of AP are in chronically drought-prone belt and are in dire need of water for drinking and for irrigation. As large areas in this district are in the grip of fluorosis (shattering disease caused by high fluoride content in water) there is an urgent need for provision of wholesome drinking water. The only source of water to which the people of the area look to is the Krishna river…” The report of the animal husbandry department says that the fluorinated water causes health problems to animals and suffer from growth.

The committee rejected the proposal for lift irrigation as it involves heavy maintenance, Rs 30 crore/annum besides there is no reliability of power supply to operate the five pumping units of 60,000 hp each. However, the government decided to go for lift irrigation which is estimated to cost Rs 801 crore (including canal) at Peddagummadam project from the foreshores of Nagarjunasagar (Hindu). According to Nandikonda joint project report in 1954 one lakh acres (70,000 through gravity flow and 30,000 by lift) were supposed to be irrigated in Nalgonda from Nagarjunasagar left bank canal.

The SLBC foundation was laid in 1981 and after a few years SRBC/TGP were taken up. So far the state government has spent Rs 125 crore on SLBC against the expenditure of Rs 1.500 crore on SRBC/TGP to give irrigated water to Rayalaseema and 15 TMC ft of drinking water to Chennai by canal over a distance of 410 km by denying the needs of immediate territories of Telangana. About Rs 93 crore are spent on 77 km length of canal against 130 km length. The government also announced that World Bank has sanctioned Rs 573 crore to SRSP. However SLBC does not figure in these as it does not have the Central Water Commission’s approval. The state government states that it will complete SLBC by the year 2000 by installing six pumpsets (two are standby) each with a capacity to pump 6,000 cusees to irrigate 2.78 lakh acres which requires 158 mu of power for which the government has no

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**JANANI OFFERS TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO NGOs**

**JANANI** IS AN INDIAN NGO CURRENTLY implementing a reproductive health care programme covering the entire state of Bihar. Janani follows a social marketing approach, and is managed by a team of highly qualified and experienced professionals specialising in planning, programme administration, IEC, financial controls and field logistics.

Janani has been receiving requests from a number of NGOs for technical assistance and so far this was provided on an ad hoc basis. In order to streamline our technical assistance in an organised way, Janani has now decided to set aside 5% of its management time for help to other needy NGOs. It must, however, be noted that Janani CANNOT extend financial assistance.

The objective of this offer is only to structure and streamline management systems that could lead to optimum utilisation of resources. Preference will be given to NGOs working in the area of reproductive health in the eastern and north-eastern states.

Interested NGOs may write in strict confidence to the Programme Director enclosing a Brief write-up of the organisation and its activities, and the areas where technical support may be needed. A senior member of the NGO may have to visit Patna for finalising the plan following which Janani’s managers can visit the NGOs in their project area.

A token amount of Rs. 1/- will be charged by Janani as consultancy fee for these inputs.

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answer as the state suffers from a power deficiency. The lift from Puttangi
di reservoir has to pump 90 m height which
may mean the shelving of the gravity flow
from tunnel of Srisailam reservoir. The delays
in execution in SLBC coupled with fluorosis
and drought have catapulted the people's
initiative at grass roots and took birth to
Jalasadhana Samithi, a people's movement
for water.

JALASADHANA SAMITHI

Jalasadhana Samithi (JSS) constituting
villagers is headed by Dussarla
Satyanarayana, a rural development officer
of a bank, who is reported to have been
terminated from the service for spearheading
the movement. There was unrest among the
people as the government was delaying the
execution of canal from Srisailam reservoir
to serve the drinking and irrigational needs
of the people. This culminated with the issue
of a GO in 1990 by M Chennai Reddy to
close down some of the divisions and circle
offices of SLBC. This has given rise to the
birth of Jalasadhana Samithi in 1990. People
with political affiliations ranging from the
right to the left participated in the activities
of JSS. The activists were motivated to take
loans from banks and district rural
development agencies for buying equipment
and bicycles; paddy, tamarind and mirchi
were collected from farmers during
harvesting time and stocked to feed the
activists during agitational times. The
activists wrote songs and gave performances
besides audio cassettes about drinking and
irrigational needs of the people, the health
consequences from fluorosis, the impact of
drought on environment and people, the
execution of canal works, supply of water
to Chennai city, indifference of public
representatives and the government, etc.

Non-violence as a method of mobilisation
formed the thrust of JSS. A series of meetings
were conducted in the villages and mandal
headquarters to bring in awareness about
environmental implications among the
masses. During 1992 a padayatra was orga-
nised from Nalgonda to Hyderabad to demon-
strate and encircle state offices. Similarly
padayatra was also organised from Nalgonda
to Srisailam for seven days to highlight and
draw attention of the people. Bullock carts
were brought to the town to organise Vastha
roko’. Students boycotted classes while
organising bandhs. During 1991 six lakh
signatures were collected (excluding males
belonging to the age group 18-55 years) and
sent to the president of India. JSS feels that
the males of the excluded age group were
responsible for the backwardness. About one
lakh postcards were sent by school children
to the prime minister to not allow the closure
of SLBC. The students organised ‘human
chain - water chain’ in 1993 for seven
kilometres from Panagal reservoir to SLBC
camp office to highlight their subhuman
living conditions to the visiting national
environmental committee. During the same
years 67-day relay hunger strike was
organised exclusively by women and
children. This was followed by 24-day
indefinite hunger strike by Dussarla Laxmi
against the transfer of 27 engineers without
giving substitutes. The hunger strike
succeeded in cancelling the transfers. Further
they also got the environmental and forest
clearances. Alternate alignment of four km
inside the dam was also approved. In 1994
school children organised ‘Save Money -
Send Money’ programme. Each student spent
two rupees to pay one rupee towards money
order charges and one rupee for prime
minister. Thus they expressed symbolically
that the expenditure for SLBC can be met
by themselves. A gram campaign was also
undertaken by students to the prime
minister and the president of India to focus
on the drinking and irrigational needs of
the people. Demonstrations were organised
repeatedly in Delhi, demanding the interven-
tion by the government of India and the
parliament. The JSS activists threatened to
organise self-immolation day against the
transfer of its convenor to Visakhapatnam
in September 1994. During the same time
chief minister went to Kodandapuram to lay
foundation stone for lifting waterfrom SLBC
to Hyderabad. While the agitators tried to
disrupt the meeting police resorted to firing
in which Prabulingadevara, a sub-inspector in
Civilian clothes, died as he was hit by bullets.

The Nalgonda parliamentary constituency
hit the national news during the 1996 Lok
Sabha elections on account of the large-scale
nominations as a mark of protest against the
indifference of the governments towards
fluorosis affected people. As many as 470
nominations were filed from people's
movement which is an unprecedented event
in the history of Lok Sabha elections in
India.

The voluntary initiative of grass roots
mobilisation through JSS does not escape
the dominant socio-political and economic
situation of the district. The mainstream
mobilisation, be it party or institutional,
for caste or religion, is invariably hegemonised
by one social group, the reddys. These forces
operate the levers of power and control the
ideologies of all parties from right to the left.
In fact in electoral politics party relegates
the issue alive by way of conducting seminars,
and discussions in social gatherings. The
new mobilisation, on the issue of regional
backwardness of Telangana, is also an
irrigation a central issue. In fact, the rich
and enterprising kamma of the coast have a
greater say over parties belonging to ruling
and opposition and any demand for river
water by drought-prone Telangana is
construed as a threat to their assured irrigation.
Thus the backwardness of the region is
attributable to manmade causes and not
natural mishaps.