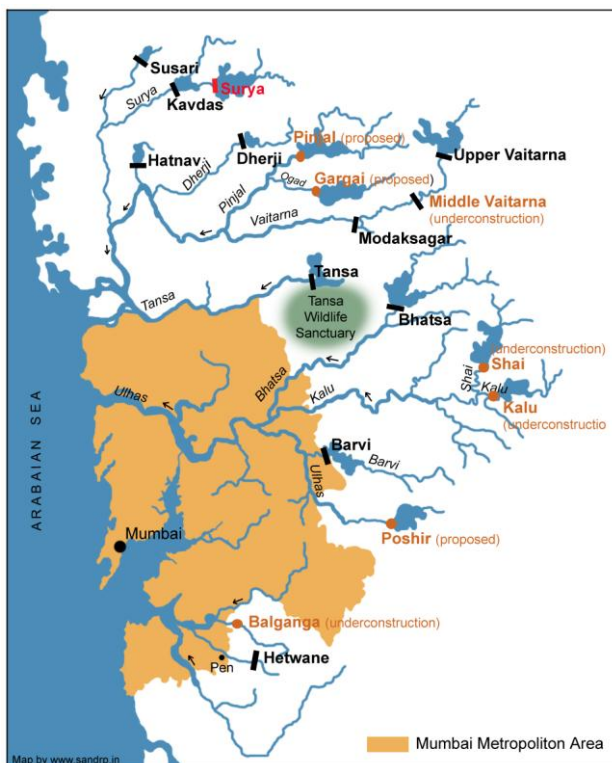


Large Dams in Maharashtra: Temples of Corrupt India?

Maharashtra has the largest number of dams in India (more than 1800) though one of the lowest percentages of areas irrigated by dams (17.7% (including majority groundwater irrigation) against national average of 44.6%). Though our Irrigation Departments and large dam projects have always ran into problems of some or the other kind, Maharashtra has been one of the National leaders when it comes to adopting measures for ensuring some transparency in water management like Irrigation audits, benchmarking, publishing dam storage data etc.

However, looking at the current impunity with which our Irrigation Departments, supported by the politician-bureaucrat-contractor nexus have been breaking multiple laws of the land to build more than 10 large dams in the ecologically sensitive, tribal belt in the Western Ghats, it seems Maharashtra is racing towards being a corrupt state with no regard for environmental or social justice.



Ecological destruction of a Global Biodiversity Hotspot:

More than 10 large dams are suddenly mushrooming in the Western Ghats around Mumbai, supposedly for supplying drinking water to the megapolis and its suburbs. Much of this section of Western Ghats falls in Ecologically Sensitive Zone I or II, global biodiversity hotspot. The WGEEP report has recommended that no new infrastructure projects should come up in ESZI or II. More than 7000 Hectares of prime Western Ghats forest land will be submerged for these dams. And they are not confirming to even the most basic

environmental procedures like Environment Impact Assessment, Public Hearing, Environmental Clearance or Forest Clearance. Kalu Dam has been stayed by the Bombay High Court only after a very scathing report by the Chief Conservator of Forests, which said that the **proponent (Konkan Irrigation Department, Government of Maharashtra) has no respect for the laws of the**

land. No Cumulative impact Assessment Study or even a seismic study is being done, though dams like Kalu fall directly on a major fault line.

100 kms from the State capital: thousands of miles from justice

Nearly all of this area comes under the Tribal SubPlan, with primarily tribal population heavily dependent on the river and forests for survival. The dams coming up like Kalu, Shai and Balganga have blatantly flouted all laws (PESA, Forest Rights Act) aimed at protecting this vulnerable population which has always paid the price for someone else's development. Resolutions after resolutions against land acquisition and dams are being passed by villages and sent to concerned authorities, trusting the laws of the land. If all these dams come up, **they will displace more than 30000 people, majority tribals. For dams like Kalu and Shai, no R and R , EIA, EMP, SIA are in place.**

Contractor Raaj: Blatant illegalities and huge corruption

RTI queries have proved a shocking fact that apart from flouting environmental and social obligations, the dams involve corruption on a massive scale. And it is feared that this is just a tip of the iceberg.

- Dams are first shown as minor irrigation projects and cabinet approval is taken, the height of the same is increased on flimsy reason and cost is increased 6 to 8 times. (height increased from 36 meters to 71 meters and Price from 56 Crores to 328 Crores within a month AFTER tendering was done, in case of Kondhane dam)
- Tendering process shows gross irregularities, tender contract is awarded to the same contractor for more than 6 sites, though tender documents clearly state that same contractor cannot be given work again.
- Like in the Lavasa case, permissions which generally take months are given in lightening speed, within 24 hours for Kondhane project. Technical Sanction has been given in a day!
- These dams are exploiting loophole in the EIA notification 2006 which has erroneously excluded Dams for Industrial use and drinking water supply from the EIA ambit (which the MoEF claims to be a 'slip of pen'!!). While these dams are being justified under the guise of sacrosanct DRINKING water for Mumbai, in reality, most of the water will be going to SEZs and industrial complexes (more than 40% water from Balganga is reserved for Navi Mumbai SEZ)
- No permissions are sought from any other concerned authority like Forest Department, railways, Archeological survey of India etc. Balganga Dam is nearly complete, without most permissions in place.
- Land acquisition process not done. Even the first notice is not served and work continues if there is no tomorrow. Dam Engineers are open enough to claim that "some signals have to be broken to drive fast"

This is just an indicative list, actual irregularities and extent of corruption goes much deeper..

Communities and groups which are fighting this issue have been pressurised in a number of ways from lures to threats.

It is high time that we come together, understand and discuss the environmental, social and financial dimensions of the issue and think of a collective way forward.

Knowing your expertise and involvement in this issue, we request you to kindly be a part of a brainstorming program on the 4th May 2012

Venue: Karnataka Sangh Hall, Vishweshwaraya Smarak Mandir, Moghul lane, Station Road, Matunga West, Mumbai -400016.(Very close to the Matunga railway Station)

We invite suggestions, additions / deletions. Please feel free to send the same on

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