



## Dr. Ambedkar's Contribution to Water Resource Development in India

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### ABSTRACT

Recognising the important contribution of Dr B. R. Ambedkar to the water resources development in India Union Minister for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation Sushri Uma Bharti has recently announced in a seminar on Dec. 06, 2016 that his birthday April 14 would be celebrated as 'Water Day'. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi also called Dr. Ambedkar the architect of the water and river navigation policy in India during his inaugural speech at the Maritime Investment Summit 2016 in Mumbai. Dr. Ambedkar had greatly contributed to the water resource development in India as a member of Central Cabinet in-charge of the Department of Irrigation and Electric Power during 1942-46. Though he made a substantial contribution to the nation's development in this position, surprisingly, this aspect of his life has hardly been studied. The objective of present paper is to highlight the great contribution of Dr. Ambedkar to the water resource development in India which is hardly studied by the researchers. The study is descriptive in nature. Secondary sources like books, research journals, magazines, newspapers were thoroughly studied and analysed to meet the objectives of the study. Paper concludes that Dr. Ambedkar played a great role in the establishment of Damodar Valley Corporation, Hirakund Dam, Sone and Kosi River project. He contributed a lot in constitution of a central authority for the water issues in India. Today's Central Water Commission is also due the efforts made by him as a Member of Viceroy's Executive Council. Paper also discusses about the relevance of his ideas related to water resources in present era of water crisis.

**KEYWORDS :** Water, Waterways, Irrigation, River, Dam, Flood.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Ambedkar is well known as the main architect of India's Constitution and leader of the oppressed. However, what is less known is his contribution in the development of water resources in India? "Ambedkar was a pioneer in the field of developing multi-purpose projects for independent India. He had, in fact, been the moving spirit behind the Damodar Valley, Hirakud and other projects", said the Central Water Commission (CWC) in its research paper which was brought out on the occasion of the Ambedkar's 125th birth anniversary on April 14, 2016.

The research paper - Ambedkar's contribution to water resources development - also recalled how he had helped in evolving "a new water and power policy during 1942-46 to utilise the water resources of the country to the best advantage of everybody". (TOI, Dec. 7, 2016 and urban news digest).

**Prime Minister Narendra Modi** heaped praises on the father of the Constitution Dr BR Ambedkar and called him the architect of the water and river navigation policy in India. Modi was speaking at the inauguration of the Maritime Investment Summit 2016 in Mumbai. "Many of us may not know that Babasaheb created two powerful institutions related to water, navigation and power. They were: The Central Waterways, Irrigation and Navigation Commission and The Central Technical Power Board. Dr Ambedkar is also the architect of the water and river navigation policy in India," said Modi (news18).

During Dr. Ambedkar memorial lecture in 2014 at Vigyan Bhawan **Shri Pranab Mukharjee, President of India** says that Ambedkar was almost single handedly responsible for establishing the Central Technical Power Board, the National Power Grid System and the Central Water Irrigation and Navigation Commission. Dr. Ambedkar played an important role in the establishment of the Damodar Valley project, Hirakud project and Sone river project.

In the light of above background this present paper is an attempt to highlight the great contribution of Dr Ambedkar to the water resource development in India which is unknown to the students, teachers, researchers and general public. Paper focuses his role in the establishment of Damodar Valley Corporation, Hirakund Dam, Sone and Kosi River project. Paper also discusses about the relevance of his ideas related to water resources in present era of water crisis.

### II. Ambedkar's Pre-Independence Contribution to India's Water Policy

Dr. Ambedkar was the Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council from 1942-46 and had power like a cabinet minister. He was a member of Reconstruction Committee of the Council (RCC), President of the

Policy Committee on Irrigation and Electric Power and with his close association with the Official Committee in the Labour Department. It was during these years (1942-46) that, for the first time, the Labour Department formulated a policy for planned development of irrigation and electric power resources in the country on a comprehensive all-India scale and against an all-India background as a part of its post-war plan of economic development (**Ambiraj, 1999**). On both fronts namely, irrigation and electric power, the achievements realised in the short time of four years (1942-46) were truly remarkable. Dr. Ambedkar thus laid the foundation of what Jawaharlal Nehru later described as "temples of modern India" (**Thorat, 1998**).

As a member of **Reconstruction Committee of the Council (RCC)**, President of the Policy Committee on Irrigation and Electric Power and with his close association with the Official

Committee in the Labour Department, Ambedkar contributed in a significant measure to the making of policy on water resources and power, on which the policy of present day India is based (Thorat, S.K., 1998).

A significant achievement of Ambedkar and his team in the Labour Department was the constitution of the Central Waterways, Irrigation and Navigation Commission (CWINC) and the Central Technical Power Board, which were precursors respectively of the present-day Central Water Commission and the Central Electricity Authority. CWINC was set up on April 5, 1945 to act as a strong technical organisation to secure planned utilisation of water resources of the country. It was to be a central fact finding, planning and coordinating organisation with authority to undertake construction work. As an apex engineering organisation in the field of water resource development during the past five decades, CWC has developed considerable expertise in planning, investigation, design and management of various aspects of water resource development such as irrigation, hydropower generation, flood control and water management. It goes to the credit of Ambedkar and his Department that they not only mooted the concept and argued for the necessity of having such a technical body at the Centre but also laid down its objective, organisational structure and programme.

### III. DAMODAR VALLEY PROJECT

The water policy which had evolved under Ambedkar's direction as part of the post-war economic plan was on all accounts, a far-seeing framework and a multidimensional achievement. To begin with, it led to the creation of an administrative and technical organisation at the Centre, namely the Central Waterways, Irrigation and Navigation Commission and the Central Technical Power Board. At the same time, it was accepted on all hands that the best way of developing inter-State rivers was the adoption of the concepts of multipurpose reservoirs and

River Valley Authority. The present chapter deals with a third achievement of the Labour Department under Ambedkar, and that is the beginning of some of the important present-day river valley projects in the country. The river valley projects which were under the active consideration of the Labour Department during 1944-46 were the **Damodar River** Valley projects, the **Sone River** Valley projects, the projects on Orissa rivers including the Mahanadi and the Kosi and others on rivers Chambal and rivers of the Deccan. These projects were conceived essentially for multipurpose development with flood control, irrigation, navigation, domestic water supply, hydro power and other purposes. The Labour Department was also required to assist the States in their small storage or retardation dams in the States in their small storage or retardation dams in the States of Baroda, Jaipur, Kathiawar, Cutch, Nawanagar, Bundi, Aundh, and Morvi for conservation and control of flood water.

The CWINC in cooperation with CTPB was required to make special reconnaissance surveys for possibilities of irrigation and other purposes in the various regions to decide on which schemes should come first on the basis of productivity, quick results or protective value and then take up detailed investigations of schemes which it proposed to implement. The multipurpose projects which were initiated during 1943-46 were the Damodar, the Mahanadi, the Sone and Kosi. While substantial work relating to the Damodar River Valley project was completed during 1943-47, a beginning was made with others and progress in various magnitudes achieved. Ambedkar was instrumental in ushering in the coordinated development of the Damodar basin by the Central Government. As a member in the pre independence Cabinet he pursued vigorously the development proposal for Damodar Valley (**Jadhav, 1991**). He directed that its development should be on the lines of Tennessee Valley Authority and supervised a great deal of the preliminary work, with this kind of ground work, the Damodar Valley scheme became the first river valley development scheme in post independence India, with the Damodar Valley Corporation getting established by an Act of Parliament.

#### IV. Ambedkar's Post-Independence Contribution to India's Water Policy

When the draft Constitution was submitted on February 21, 1948 it was obvious that it had benefited from the influence of Ambedkar, who was Chairman of its Drafting Committee, especially as regards independent India's water policy. The draft Constitution included articles 239-242 corresponding closely to Sections 130-134 of the Government of India Act, 1935, as adapted in 1947. These articles used the earlier phrase "water from any natural source of supply." List 1 of the Seventh Schedule (viz. Union List) to the draft Constitution, however, made a major departure from the 1935 Act and placed the development of "inter-State waterways" under the Union List, the relevant item being: *74. The development of inter-State waterways for purposes of flood control, irrigation, navigation and hydro-electric power."*

On September 1, 1949, Ambedkar moved an amendment to Entry 74 in the Constituent Assembly as follows: *74. The regulation and development of inter-state rivers and river-valleys to the extent to which such regulation or development under the control of the Union is declared by Parliament by law to be expedient in the public interest.*

On September 9, 1949, Ambedkar moved another amendment to insert draft article 242 A as follows, in place of draft articles 239-242: "Adjudication of disputes relating to waters of inter - State rivers or river valleys". 242 A (1) Parliament may by law provide for the adjudication of any dispute or complaint with respect to the use, distribution or control of the water of, or in any inter-State river or river valley.

In proposing this amendment, he referred to various Corporations being created (like the Damodar Valley Corporation set up by Act No. XIV of 1948) and the need, therefore of a body to deal with such disputes as might arise from the activities of such corporations. He said that *the original draft or proposal was too hide-bound or too stereotyped to allow any elastic action that may be necessary .... Consequently I am now proposing this new article which leaves it to Parliament to make laws for the settlement of these disputes.* This draft article came to be adopted as Article 262. In accordance with this provision, Parliament enacted the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956 and the River Boards Act, 1956.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Planning on the part of Dr. Ambedkar and his team in the Labour Department led to some basic developments which laid the foundation of India's water policy. It resulted in the establishment of a high level technical organisation at the Centre, namely the Central Waterways, Irrigation, Navigation Commission (the present day Central Water Commission), introduction of the concept of regional and multipurpose development of water resource, and adoption of the concept of River Valley Authority or Corporation for the first time to manage the affairs of projects on inter-State rivers. Above all, it set in motion two of India's big multipurpose river valley projects, namely the Damodar and Hirakud and also made a beginning on the projects on the rivers Sone and Kosi. During the drafting of the constitution Dr. Ambedkar made it very clear that river water disputes must be solved by the central govt. Earlier it was the part of state policy as per the India Act 1935. Ambedkar listed the water in the union list on which Central Water Commission is doing its work in present days.

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