Research Paper Geography

Management of Traditional Water Bodies Under National Programme and Policies: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The present study brings out an analysis of National Programme and Policies in regard to management of water bodies in general and traditional water bodies in particular. For this purpose National Water Policies, 1987, 2002 and 2012, Environment Act 1986, Wetland Rules 2008 and National Project for Repair, Renovation and Restoration (RRR) of Water Bodies have been analysed in deep and found that there is not much emphasis given on the protection and conservation of these water bodies. On a positive note National Water Policy 2012 emphasised the need of revival of traditional water structures and water bodies as a strategy to adapt climate change. Although water policies talk about protection of water bodies but there is still need of proper policies and strict laws with strict enforcement for protection of water bodies.

KEYWORDS Traditional Water Bodies, National Water Policy, Wetland, Repair, Renovation and Restoration (RRR)

1. Introduction

Neglect over the years and anthropogenic pressures are posing a serious threat to the survival of precious traditional water bodies. The most important threat arising from anthropogenic pressure is indiscriminate conversion of water bodies for purposes other than water bodies, inflow of waste water into them, encroachment and loss of biodiversity. In order to stem and ultimately reverse current pressures on this traditional water system, a proper conservation and management strategy to preserve and promote the sustained use of this resource needs to be developed and implemented. Finding the appropriate solutions to the myriad problems would involve arresting the basic causes responsible for their depletion and degradation, review of past policies and adoption of a holistic and ecosystem approach in the formulation of new management strategies for the sustainable development of this dying wisdom of past.

2. National Programme and Policies on Management of Traditional Water Bodies

In the face of growing number of environmental issues and scarcity of water in India, the need of comprehensive policy on water and environment was felt badly. Therefore various policies on management of water and protection of environment has been framed and revised time to time.

2.1 National Water Policy, 1987

In 1987, the newly formed National Water Resources Council adopted the National Water Policy dealing with water resources issues ranging from drought and flood management to drinking water provision. National Water Policy 1987 stated "Water as a resource is one and indivisible rainfall, river waters, surface ponds and lakes and ground water are all part of one system; water is a part of a larger ecological system".

A review of this policy brings out that although this consider surface water bodies ponds and lakes part of a larger ecological system but it is silent about the role of traditional water bodies in the water system of India. It has overlooked their values and potential role in the augmentation of water resource and as a recharge zone to ground water. Traditional water bodies, which sustained the lives in the past, were unlucky enough to find any mention in this very first National Water Policy.

2.2 National Water Policy, 2002

In 2002, a revised National Water Policy was framed and it identified water as one of the most crucial elements in developmental planning. This necessitates an integrated and multi disciplinary approach to the planning, formulation, clearance and implementation of project including catchment area treatment and management, environmental and ecological aspects, the rehabilitation of affected people and command area development.

Traditional water bodies were little successful in making their place in this policy as instruments for rainwater harvesting and this is highlighted in the policy under water resource planning stating that, "Non-conventional methods for utilization of water such as through inter-basin transfers, artificial recharge of ground water and desalination of brackish or sea water as well as traditional water conservation practices like rainwater harvesting, need to be practiced to further increase the utilisable water resources. Promotion of frontier research and development, in a focused manner, for these techniques is necessary".

This policy highlights the importance of participatory approach to water resource management by involving not only the various governmental agencies but also the users and other stakeholders in an effective and decisive manner, in various aspects of planning design, development and management of the water resources schemes.

Although traditional water bodies find very little mention in the policy as traditional water conservation practices under the domain of water resource planning still the due care and regard for these water bodies is missing in the National Water Policy in the wake of ongoing serious abuse of traditional water system across the country.

2.3 National Water Policy, 2012

Finally, traditional water bodies got their much awaited recognition in National Water Policy, 2012. The policy explicitly says that to combat climate change there is need to increase the availability of water and for this purpose there is immense need to increase the water storage capacity of various water storage structures .This includes revival of traditional water harvesting structures and water bodies.

2.4 The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986

In this act standards for the quality of environment in its various aspects has laid down and standards were established for discharge of environmental pollutants from various sources and no person shall discharge any pollutant in excess of such standards.

2.5 National Environment Policy, 2006
One of the principal objectives of National Environment Policy (NEP) is "protection and conservation of critical ecological system and resources and invaluable natural and man-made heritage.

In this way, NEP highlights the importance of conserving and protecting natural and man-made heritage which are critical to maintain the ecological balance.

2.6 Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2008
Wetlands Conservation and Management Rules, 2008 prohibited conversion of wetland to non-wetland use, reclamation of wetlands and solid waste dumping and discharge of untreated effluents. These are the prohibited activities in and around the wetlands.

This rule also focuses on those activities which should be regulated like withdrawal of water, diversion or interruption of sources, discharge of treated effluent into the wetland, plying of motorized boats, dredging, constructions of permanent nature within 50m and those activities which interfere with the normal run-off and related ecological processes should be away up to 200m from the wetland.

In addition to the above laws, India is a signatory to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, 1971 and Convention of Biological Diversity, 2002. According to these formulations India is expected to conserve the ecological character of these ecosystems along with the biodiversity of the flora and fauna associated with these ecosystems. Despite these, there is no significant development towards sustaining these ecosystems due to lack of awareness of the values and roles of these ecosystems among the policymakers, implementation agencies and the community.

Although wetlands have got recognition in the national policies but till now traditional water wisdom of past has not got their proper mention and regard in the national policies and their preservation and conservation has taken for granted.

2.7 National Project for Repair, Renovation and Restoration (RRR) of Water Bodies
The Government of India sanctioned a pilot scheme in January, 2005 for "National Project for Repair, Renovation and Restoration (RRR) of Water bodies" which directly linked to agriculture with an estimated cost of Rs. 300 crore to be shared by centre and state in the ratio of 3:1. The objectives of the scheme were to restore and augment storage capacities of water bodies, and also to recover and extend their lost irrigation potential. The water bodies having cultivable command area of more than 40 hectares and upto 2000 hectares were included under the pilot scheme. After the revival the bodies will be handed over to the users associations and panchayati raj institutions.

In the past 20 years about 1.75 million hectares of irrigated land has lost due to disuse of traditional water bodies. The pilot project is to revive about 1000 water bodies. At the national level however, there are about half a million water bodies that need revival. This scheme has an important contribution towards increasing irrigation potential under the overall context of Bharat Nirman Programme, which is a flagship initiative of the government to improve rural infrastructure of which irrigation in an important sector.

Finally, Government took cognizance of traditional water bodies through this project. It is a positive sign for the future of traditional water bodies but it has its own limitations too, like it is only applicable to those water bodies which are important for irrigation purposes. The scheme leaves out water bodies with agriculture command area of less than 40 hectares, which is presently taken care of by the panchayats. Water bodies that cover more than 2,000 hectares come under medium and large irrigation schemes and are also not a part of this project.

Any how this project can be seen as a ray of hope for protection of these traditional water structures from further degradation.

3. Conclusion
Analysis of National Water Policies brings out that there is not much emphasis given on the protection and conservation of these traditional water bodies. Although water policies talk about protection of water bodies, there is no clear frame work for this. The construction boom in cities of our country continues without any policy of recharging ground water level. In fact, traditional water bodies were never been in the agenda of the planners. In the absence of any recognition in the policies and non-sensitization of urban planners towards the values and roles of these water bodies leads to intentional filling and destruction of water bodies. So it is the need of hour that there should be proper plan and policies for sustainable development of this traditional system.

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