

Killing the River Baitarani

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FOLLOWING IS A QUOTE FROM a confidential Memo of Lawrence Summers, World Bank's Chief Economist, sent to his colleagues in Dec 91, published in the journal "Economist" in 1992 under the title "LET THEM EAT POLLUTION", and it began thus,

"Shouldn't World Bank be encouraging more migration of the Dirty Industries to the LDCs...The measurement of the costs of 'Health-impairing Pollution' depends on the foregone earning from the increased morbidity and mortality. From this point of view, a given amount of Health Impairing pollution should be done in the countries with lowest costs, which will be the countries with the lowest wages. I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the 'Lowest wage' countries is impeccable, and we should face up to that." It is self-revealing what the World Bank wants to do. And they find it easy to do in one of India's backward states-Odisha.

This macabre philosophy of World Bank, now after two decades, is visible everywhere in Kendujhar region of Odisha in its 108 mines covering 290 sq km lease area spread all over out of which 180 sq km is forest land; 24 sponge iron units and over 250 ore crushers spread wide and deep into the rural interiors. The massive solid waste generated has to be left here in Kendujhar. The Ores have to be washed Clean before dispatch to Steel Centres and ports. That is where the equally massive need of water has been created, both for beneficiation and transportation.

Baitarani is the only robust source of the district, providing 95% of drainage of the district, and is the life line of the people, land and its ecology. Conflict was the natural outcome when the new stake holder, called 'Industry' came into the fold. That is when the Asian Development Bank has been ushered in, to help the Govt to help the 'Special Interest'. It could as well be 'World Bank' for all that one knows. ADB-IWRM report was put in the web 3 months ago, seeking the opinion of Civil Society and all stakeholders. People were all there with Odisha Water Forum (OWF) today to consider and consolidate their views from different basins.

Unfortunately for Kendujhar, the Govt has now up-staged this IWRM recommendation to officially "Launch" the first Baitarani River Basin Organisation, the only one, as recommended by ADB in their final report on reformation.

Here are some of the current needs of water of Baitarani basin. Briefly, these are as follows:-

- a. Kanupur Major Irrigation Project, scheduled for completion in March 2013, needs water for irrigation of 48,000 acres of land in upper Baitarani basin.
- b. Anandpur Irrigation Barrage will irrigate 150,000 acres of land in the lower basin, in the entire north Orissa coastal plane, including Bhadrak, Jajpur, Balasore and Kendujhar district.

- c. Minor irrigation projects numbering 79 and Lift irrigation points numbering 155 existing and 140 proposed for a total of about 55,000 acres in Kendujhar district alone.
- d. Domestic water supplies to 8 urban complexes and a host of riparian settlements in its 350 km journey.
- e. Thankfully the proposed hydro power project at Bhimkund will not consume any water.
- f. Water for Industry:
 - i. Slurry transportation and ore beneficiation are the two major users of water, totally depending on the Baitarani River. Former will use water (3:1 by volume) for piped transportation of ore fines to far off Paradip, Kalinga Nagar, Angul etc. For example, only 3 units have been approved to draw about 4300 KL of water per hour ie. over 100 MLD (million litres per day), or, 1.2 Cumec.
 - ii. The proposed 30 Million tons per yr steel production in Kendujhar (Arcelor Mittal, Sterlite, and Uttam Galva alone total about 26 MT/y), will also need water of unspecified quantity. If they bring current technology, they will need substantially less water because it will be restricted to only loss due to evaporation. Balance will probably be recycled.
 - iii. Since most of the steel industries will have their Captive Power Generation, and up-stream and down-stream industries, the need of water may be substantial.

Someone has to do the arithmetic of distribution to allay the serious anxiety of the people of Kendujhar. Will this distribution be fair on priority as laid down in the "State Water Policy", namely, domestic, ecology, irrigation, and industry? Anyway the people have some idea about the dynamics of the River when her water is surplus during the 4 months of rains, and far too lean during deficient seasons. There is far too little effort to hold the post monsoon run off in the upper basin of Baitarani, and thus enrich the raw water source. There is a lot of wisdom in this, which the industry must understand before the attempt to redistribute the scarce resource. It takes a dangerous turn when water is treated as a raw material and merges with the input cost.

Citizens' Forum has written 9 letters to Odisha Govt during last 6 months, mostly to CM, seeking a conclave of all stake-holders to discuss not only the peaceful and equitable distribution of water of Baitarani, but also ways and means to supplement the source by scientific methods. But the Forum has never received any reply whatsoever, except a few kind audience granted by the Director of Hydrology and Water Planning.

Now, everybody finds, the main and only recommendation of ADB, the creation of Baitarani RBO has been upstaged, launched even before the much publicised deliberation of OWF. In other words the entire exercise of ADB-IWRM was to push an agenda of the "Special Interest". It has left a bitter taste in the mouth, and a feeling that even the Govt plays intrigues with the people in order to keep the 'Super Class' happy. People have to swallow the bitter bill, because after all it is the democratic Govt. elected by them. □□□