

## Water Distress: Cauvery's Muddied Waters

Cauvery has been a source of dispute from two centuries back itself. The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) was constituted by the government of India in 1990 to adjudicate the inter-state river water sharing issue. The Agreements were to be executed between the then Governments of Mysore and Madras and it will be executed in three States of Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and UT. of Pondicherry. The river Cauvery rises in western ghats in the Coorg district of Karnataka, passes through Kerala and then enter Tamil Nadu and flows out from Pondicherry into the Bay of Bengal.

Cauvery is thus an inter-state river with the unique characteristic of geography wherein its upper hilly catchment lies in the Karnataka and Kerala and is influenced by the dependable south-west monsoon while its lower part lies in the plains of the Tamil Nadu State served by the not so dependable north-east monsoon. With the variations in the flow of water resulting sometimes giving enormous while sometimes minuscule water has resulted in a tug of war between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Cauvery water disputes Tribunal, in 2007 has come up with a verdict to distribute 740 TMC ft. between the four states annually. After all hue and cry, verdict reads that the state of Karnataka will be allocated 270 TMC ft.; 419 TMC ft to Tamil Nadu; 30 TMC ft to Kerala and 7 TMC ft to Pondicherry and reserve 14 TMC ft. quantity of water for environmental protection.

How did the tribunal arrive at these figures? So let's try understanding from where this 740 TMC ft. is generated. Karnataka produces 270 TMC ft. + 192 TMC ft. (monthly deliveries during a normal year comprising of 182 TMC + 10 TMC of water allocated for environmental purposes to Tamil Nadu) sums up to 462 TMC ft. This is the quantum of water, which, according to the tribunal, is the yield from the river within Karnataka annually.

On the other hand, Tamil Nadu gets this 192 TMC ft. from Karnataka and generates 227 (419-192) TMC of water from its own catchment area within the state. Karnataka and Tamil Nadu's yield comes to 689 TMC ft (462+227), Kerala contributes 51 (740-689) TMC ft., of which it keeps 30 for its own utilisation and reserves 21 TMC ft for Puducherry. To sum up, while Karnataka contributes 462 TMC ft. it is allowed to use 270 TMC ft., Tamil Nadu which contributes 227 TMC ft. gets 419 TMC ft. and Kerala which contributes 51 TMC ft. is allowed to use 30 TMC ft. Clearly, there is unjust and inequitable apportionment to Karnataka.

According to Central Water commission as on September 8, 2016, the current storage status of Cauvery basin is in deficient as it is 34.15% compared to last 10 yrs. storage capacity of 63.92%.

So the conclusion from this is that both states are short of water with a "normal" monsoon making it difficult for Karnataka to release the quantum of water, which the tribunal has allocated. In fact, the entire dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu is mainly about what is to be done in a distress year. So what should the distress share formula? If the government can devise a sharing formula, then there won't be any fight for Cauvery every year.