

PALAR RIVER VALLEY: A BRIEF HISTORICAL STUDY

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In an ecotopically mutilated landscape, water becomes a scarce resource for irrigation, industry and domestics doubt, in the hoary past civilizations flourished on river basins. But Malthusian mode of swelling population, the failure of monsoons, the lack of scientific system of consecration and utilization coupled with politics and economic exploitation facilitated who neighbouring states such as Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka on war path far water. Sharing of water like shaving of power has become an ethnic political emotional issue. From the ryats to celluloid heroes and heroines twisted the issue as to safeguard their interest and prominence. A problem that could be solved by negotiation and conciliation between there states governments is brought to given political mileage.

The river Palar celebrated in literature, music and poetry and folklore. The remote sensing study has brought out into the information that the river Palar has flown during the present place before several thousand years.¹ Palar river is an important river in South India. It rises in the Nandi Hills in Chikkaballapura district of Karnataka state² and flows 93 kilometers in Karnataka, 33 Kilometers in Andhra Pradesh and 222 Kilometers in Tamil Nadu before reaching its confluence into the Bay of Bengal at Vayalur about 100 kilometers South of Chennai.³ It flows in an underground river for a long distance to emerge near Bethamangala town, from where, gathering water and speed, it flow eastward down the Deccan Plateau. The places of Ramanaickanpet, Vaniyambadi, Ambur, Melpatti, Gudiyatham, Pallikonda, Melmonavoor, Vellore, Melvisharam, Arcot, Ranipet, Walajah (Anaicut), Kanchipuram and Changelpattu are located on the banks of the Palar River. Of the seven tributaries, the Chief tributary is the Cheyyar river.

Palar river water from Palar Anaicut is diverted in to the Poondi reservoir located in the Kosasthalaiyar river basin and to Chembarambakkam Lake in the Adayar basin.⁴ These two reservoirs are major water supply points to Chennai City. After commissioner of the Telugu Ganga project to supply nearly 1000 million liters per day of Krishna river water to the Chennai city, the dependence on Palar river water has reduced drastically. The average rainfall in entire Palar basin is low. This river basin used to suffer from frequent droughts. There has been no fall scale flow for the past ten years, however, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

The river has mitigated frequent recurrence of droughts by developing innumerable minor and medium irrigation tanks. This has impressed the availability of water for surface as well as ground water irrigations. As per the wet land atlas of India, the manmade wet lands are covering extensive area in the districts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu covering Palar river basin, whereas the Palar river basin in Andhra Pradesh is not well covered by wetlands. The river water usage in Andhra Pradesh is not up to the mark compared to Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

In the year 1892 when the Palar waters agreement was made, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh were part of the Madras Presidency. The 1892 agreement on Palar River water sharing is applicable between Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh since the boundary line in Palar river basin between Madras Presidency and Mysore Kingdom is now part of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh states. This river is so important for irrigation in the north and South Arcot districts of Tamil Nadu, but it flows a meager distance of fifty kilometers in Andhra Pradesh, where the Palar river had been seen dry for almost 20 years. Palar has been home for mud robbery and other illegal activities.

In the State of Karnataka Palar river originates from the Nandi Hills. There are various reservoirs and check dams across the river to store the water. Among them two consecutive dams that are back to back within seven kilometers. The reservoir of Bethamangala and the Reservoir of the Ramasagara also called as Bukkasagara. The reservoir of Bethamangala has been the main source of drinking water to the Kolar Gold fields. While the second one and the largest of all reservoirs is the reservoir of Ramasagara which holds numerous temples at this spot.⁶ This reservoir is known for its fisheries till the year 2005, after which reservoir river god filled more than 40 percent of its capacity. The period from 2006 to 2017 the fate of the Palar river in this part was almost dry. The heavy rains in the hinterland and the basin of the Palar river has brought the Bethamangala reversion back to its past glory in 2017. It is noteworthy that few famous places like the Avani, Bangaru Tirupati, Vijayandra Swamy temple, Someshwara swamy temple lies in these regions within twenty kilometers of the epicenter Bethamangala. After passing through the states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh the Palar river enters the Vellore district of Tamil Nadu. After traversing for another 222 kms. in Vellore and Kanchiuram districts in Tamil Nadu, the river Palar finally discharges into Bay of Bengal near Kurathur. On its way, the river Palar receives two important tributaries i.e. the Ponnai on the left bank and the Cheyyar on the right bank. These two tributaries are together account for nearly 25 percent of the total catchment of the Palar River basin.

The Ponnai rises in the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh at an elevation of 1,050 meters and flows generally in the Easterly and South Easterly direction before joining the Palar on its left bank near Walajapet. The Cheyyar, another major tributary rises in the Javadhu Hills in the Chengam taluk of Tiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu and flows generally in the North – Easterly direction before confluence with the Palar near Tirumukkudal.

River Palar is one of the 17 major rivers of Tamil Nadu. The Palar river basin covers Vellore, Tiruvannamalai and Kancipuram districts of Tamil Nadu. There is surface water flow only for a few days in a year in this river. But considerable ground water extraction from the river bed which is the main source of drinking water supply scheme for both rural and urban area of these three districts and even to Chennai Urban area. 62.6 Million gallons of groundwater per day is pumped from the river bed for the major water supply schemes besides number of minor water supply schemes. As there is no regular surface flow in this river, agriculture of the Vellore and Kanchipuram districts mainly depend upon the groundwater potential of the river bed. Water based industries like tanning, dying, sugar, industries; match factories are located on the banks of Palar River. This requirement is also fulfilled by Palar River. Hence, this river is the Primary source of water for industrial, agricultural and domestic sectors of the three districts.

The geochemical quality of drinking water is deteriorating in the river bed due to the discharge of industrial effluent into this river. In the entire Palar river, pollution is more prevalent, in upper Palar where tanneries are located in large number from Vaniyambadi to Walajahpet town. These tanning industries let the untreated or partially treated effluents in large volumes into the river system, thus polluting the cultivable soil and groundwater resources. Nearly 35,000 hectares of cultivable land have been affected. Sand mining is freely plundering the resources of Palar River. Sources in the public works department say Palar is the only riverbed in Asia that has around 90 feet of sand. This river was the lifeline for farmers cultivating 1.50 lakh hectares of farm land. Sand has been mined for 50 to 70 feet in several areas, particularly in Thiriparkadal and Pundi Villages near Walajahpet.⁸ It has been illegally mined in over 30 places in the district, particularly in Perumugai, Sathuvachari, Pillayarkuppam in Vellore and in and around Walajahpet and Arcot. The ground water has depleted drastically due to indiscriminate mining on the riverbed. It has had a negative impact on agriculture activities as the ground water level has gone down to over 1,000 feet along the riverbed.⁹

The rivers of peninsula are classified into two categories viz, the coastal river and the inland river. The coastal rivers drain into the sea and Palar is one such river. It is one of the largest medium basin rivers of India. It has a catchment of 17, 870 sq.km. It is also one of the heavily used rivers of India. The Palar River is called in Sanskrit as Kshiramadai, which means milk river. Ptolemy, the Roman historian of second century A.D. mentions the river as Palaura.

There are many legends connected with the origin of the river. One of the legends describes that God Siva being displeased with his riding bull, transformed that bull into the hill of Nandurg in Mysore, where from the Palar river rises. Then Nandi prayed to Vishnu who pleaded with Siva on behalf of Nandi and finally Ganga who was residing in Siva's head consented to bless the hill by pouring a stream of milk on it. Thus the Palar River originated and it is supposed to have the power of purifying human beings from their sins. The Palar has tributaries namely Cheyyar, Ponnai, Goddar, Koundanianadi and Korthaliyar and other minor tributaries. Thirumukkoodal is the important place in the history of Palar, where the tributary Cheyyar joins with the Palar.

The Palar basin around Vellore, owing to its fertility soil shows a high degree of Urbanization.¹⁶ This has led to a strong concentration of agricultural population between Tirupattur and Vellore.

The Vellore district has eight taluks, of which six taluks are benefited by the Palar River and in those taluks it runs through 121 villages and towns. Agriculture is the principal occupation of this district and net cropped area is 42% covering 2, 25,864 Hectares. The Palar River is always dry. Only when the rainfall is adequate in a north – east monsoon season, water flow in it can be seen. The annual rainfall of the district is 971.1. In general the climate can be termed as tropical hot and dry.

In this historical study the primary and secondary sources and relevant data and other information's which are available with Government and private parties have been collected meticulously. The Government records form the basic information for this study.

The thesis contains four chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. In the introduction a brief history of Palar and its tributary rivers has been narrated.

The first chapter deals with the special features of Vellore district and the history of Palar which has been described systematically.

The second chapters consist of the contribution of Palar River for the development of agriculture and to the upliftment of the people and the district. Similarly how river has been the main source for the drinking water to the people of Vellore district is discussed in a detail manner.

The third chapter deals with the Historical and Economical significance of the Palar River. In the chapter how historically the Palar River is famous for its stone implements, inscriptions, monuments and battle fields have been narrated.

The fourth chapter contains the pollution of Palar River which is a common resource for the benefit of the society. It also contains the various reasons for the pollution of Palar River and what kind of remedies should be taken has been discussed thoroughly in this chapter.

In the conclusion a comprehensive and consolidated assessment of the contribution of Palar River in Vellore district has been presented. It also educates some of the suggestions for the effective methods to avoid pollution in the Palar river and the steps should be taken by the Government has been mentioned.

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