

No lines in water

Delivering its verdict on the Cauvery water dispute on Friday, the Supreme Court stressed that “The waters of an inter-state river cannot be said to be located in any one state.” The court modified the 2007 award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) it had constituted to decide the more than a century-old dispute between Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry. It increased the share of upstream Karnataka by 14.75 thousand million cubic feet (tmcf) per year. This increase is at the expense of Tamil Nadu, where political parties have been quick to denounce the verdict. The government in poll-bound Karnataka has welcomed it. However, governments and political parties in both states would do well to note the SC’s central message: “No state can claim exclusive ownership of such waters so as to deprive the other states of their equitable share.” More salient is the court’s directive that states constituting a river basin use “its water in a sustainable manner”.

The roots of the [Cauvery dispute](#) lie in a historical imbalance between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. From around the 10th century, rulers in what is today Tamil Nadu built reservoirs and check dams to tap the Cauvery’s waters for irrigation. About 16 lakh acres in the state was under irrigation by the river’s water in 1892, when the first Cauvery water-sharing agreement was signed between the princely state of Mysore (largely what constitutes the Cauvery basin in Karnataka today) and the Madras Presidency.

In contrast, less than 5 lakh acres was irrigated by the Cauvery in Karnataka, when dam-building endeavours began in the 1920s. This imbalance became an emotive issue following the reorganisation of states after Independence. Throughout the 1960s, Tamil Nadu objected to Karnataka building dams on the Cauvery. In 1974, Karnataka asserted that colonial-era agreements over river-sharing were skewed against it. Tamil Nadu contended any change in the established pattern would adversely affect farmers’ livelihoods. It was only in 1990 that the SC constituted the CWDT, which took another 17 years to deliver its verdict. The judgment, which allocated 419 tmcf to Tamil Nadu and 270 tmcf to Karnataka, was challenged by both states.

Friday’s verdict stipulates a Cauvery water board to administer water allocation. But a similar board constituted by the CWDT was ineffective in years of lean rainfall. In a normal monsoon year, the Cauvery takes care of the needs of both upstream and downstream states. But the mistrust between the two aggravates during a drought year, as in 2016. The SC’s call for a basin-centred approach holds salience in such times. Friday’s verdict should, therefore, be seen as a directive for collective solutions such as sharing data on reservoir storage. It’s a call to both states to shed their parochial approach.

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com