

Learning from Cauvery

The long-awaited [judgment of the Supreme Court on the Cauvery dispute](#), delivered last week, by and large caused hardly any disruption to life in the river's principal basin-States, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. This situation is refreshingly different from what was witnessed during many judicial pronouncements since the 1990s, leading to strikes, farmers' agitations, vandalism and the loss of human life.

The judgment has, however, brought joy in Karnataka, and discomfiture in certain sections of Tamil Nadu. The reason is not far to seek. The overall allocation of Karnataka was increased by 14.75 thousand million cubic feet (tmc ft) at the cost of Tamil Nadu. The enhanced allocation includes 4.75 tmc ft exclusively for drinking water requirements of Bengaluru. The increase and decrease have been worked out, keeping the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal's final order of 2007 as the reference point. On the eve of the verdict, a senior Karnataka Minister said that his government was hopeful of getting 30-40 tmc ft more than what was awarded by the tribunal.

Why Cauvery management board is good news for Tamil Nadu

Except this modification, the verdict has essentially stuck to the final order. It neither disturbed the allocations for Kerala and Puducherry, the other constituents of the Cauvery basin, nor the basis for apportioning river water or the extent of irrigated areas for the two principal States. In fact, to the relief of Tamil Nadu, the court was unequivocal on the formulation of a scheme to implement the modified final order, and it asked the Centre to draft the scheme in six weeks. The scheme entails the creation of an implementation mechanism, called the Cauvery Management Board (CMB). Regardless of the Centre using the same nomenclature or not, what looks certain is the establishment of a mechanism.

Already, doubts have been expressed in Tamil Nadu on whether the Central government will see to it that the scheme is put in place within the given period as Karnataka goes to Assembly elections in a few months. This has been complemented with Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's reiterating his opposition to the idea of the CMB. On this count, other political parties in Karnataka are also echoing the stand of the Chief Minister. Meanwhile, even though there exists only a limited scope for serious objections to the court's judgment, the Tamil Nadu government, now devoid of a strong leader like Jayalalithaa, is being pulled up by its political adversaries for not having done enough to protect interests of the State.

Such reactions are not surprising as political leaders of both States are, unfortunately, under the impression that their position on the Cauvery dispute would determine their respective electoral fortunes. But, the reality is somewhat different. Otherwise, how would one explain the success of the Congress in the 2013 Karnataka Assembly elections despite facilitating the notification of the final order in the gazette of the Central government barely three months before the polls? The day before the publication of the order on February 19, 2013, the then Chief Minister of Karnataka, Jagadish Shettar of the Bharatiya Janata Party, led an all-party delegation and urged Manmohan Singh, who then headed the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government at the Centre, not to do so.

Earlier, in October 2002, S.M. Krishna, who was then Chief Minister of Karnataka and still in the Congress, adopted a confrontationist path by organising a nine-day march from Bengaluru to Mandya in the name of protecting farmers' interests. But, when the Assembly elections took place in May 2004, the Congress, which had won 132 seats in the 1999 elections, could win in just 65 constituencies.

Competitive politics on matters concerning water are not confined only to Karnataka or Tamil Nadu politicians. The situation is the same in other parts of the country. Sadly, these leaders do not realise that their strident position on water does not guarantee victory. In July 2004, when faced with a Supreme Court direction to the Centre to ensure completion of the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal, Amarinder Singh, then Punjab Chief Minister, got a bill passed by the State Assembly and cleared by Governor O.P. Verma at lightning speed, terminating all previous agreements and accords on the Ravi and Beas river waters. But, his act of unilateralism did not ensure the victory of his party – the Congress – in the 2007 Assembly polls in Punjab. Capt. Singh had to wait for 10 years to return to power.

It should be obvious to the political class that electoral outcomes are shaped by a combination of complex factors. It is time that water issues are de-politicised and political parties learn to see reason and respect the rule of law without getting carried away by electoral considerations. The BJP-led Central government has got a golden opportunity on Cauvery to set a new, healthy trend.

ramakrishnan.t@thehindu.co.in

Receive the best of The Hindu delivered to your inbox everyday!

Please enter a valid email address.

Positive developments are taking place with regard to female genital mutilation

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com