Deccan Chronicle 05-March-2021

ANNUAL | EVENT **Sanghameswara temple remains under water for 222 days**

Temple in Kurnool resurfaces

D. SIVA RAMI REDDI | DC
KURNOOL, MARCH 4

The Sanghameswara temple at the confluence of seven rivers in Kurnool district is becoming visible as the water in the Krishna river and Srisailam dam recedes.

The temple remains under water for about 222 days every year when the Krishna river is in full flow. Devotees can enter the temple and offer prayers to the Shivalinga only for about four months in a year.

Temple priest Telakapalli Raghunatha Sarma said that water needs to recede by another eight feet before people can enter the temple. "I am hopeful we can enter the temple in the 10 days. The sludge will have to be cleaned up," he said.

Sanghameswara temple at the confluence of seven rivers in Kurnool district.

Right now, only the gopuram of the temple is visible.

The temple began getting submerged after the construction of the Srisailam dam in 1980. It was not relocated like many other temples in the area. It remained hidden under water for more than 20 years and resurfaced in 2003.

The temple priest said that the Linga, made of neem wood, was installed by the Pandavas after they visited the Srisailam Mallikarjuna temple. The Shivalinga is said to have been brought from Kashi and consecrated at the confluence of the Krishna and Tungabhadra and other five tributaries. The idol was named Sangameshwaram after the Sangama or confluence of rivers.

New Indian Express 05-March-2021

All hands on deck to ready Mallanna Sagar Project

P KRISHNA @ Siddipet

THE Sri Komaravelli Mallanna Sagar Project will be a reality in three-four months, after which the Godavari waters are expected to gush into the reservoir from a surge pool constructed near it, irrigating 20 lakh acres in phases.

According to officials, work on the 50-tmcft project, which is coming up in 20,000 acres at Togita mandal in Siddipet district, is being carried out on a war footing. In fact, 80 per cent of the project has nearly been completed. It is learned that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao is being updated of its progress regularly.

Also, senior IAS officer Smita Sabharwal and several other top officials have been visiting the project to inspect the works and ensure that it is ready by June.

Rao, at several review meetings, had announced that he would provide water for irrigation from the Mallanna Sagar project this kharif season. "In addition to filling the Mallanna Sagar project, arrangements are also being made to take water to the Basavapuram project, which is being constructed near Yadadri with a capacity of 13 tmcft," S Venkateswara Rao, Deputy Engineer in the Irrigation Department, said.

The Godavari waters are being taken from the Ananthagiri reservoir to the Ranganayaka Sagar project on the outskirts of Siddipet and to the Mallanna Sagar surge pool in Dubbaka mandal. From here, the waters are lifted to the Kondapochamma reservoir. By June, the surge pool would also pump inflows into the Mallanna Sagar project.

Officials said once this happens, the waters will be sent to the Nizamsagar in erstwhile Nizamabad district, the Basavapuram project in Yadadri district and the Singur project in Sangareddy district.

However, an official said the Sangareddy canal is yet to be completed and the waters are unlikely to reach here in June.

In addition to filling the Mallanna Sagar project, arrangements are being made to take water to the Basavapuram project, which is being constructed near Yadadri with a capacity of 13 tmcft

S Venkateswara Rao, Deputy Engineer, Irrigation Department

The Statesman 05-March-2021

Fragile Himalayas deserve respect

APARAJITA MUKHERJEE AND DEBAPRIYA MUKHERJEE

On 7 February, a sudden and massive flood devastated a Himalayan valley in the state of Uttarakhand, tearing through two hydroelectric dams, killing more than 100 people. As a result of the flood, there has been massive flooding in Chamoli district - the Rishiganga river, the Dhauliganga river, and in turn the Alaknanda. Several bridges, roads, homes and hundreds of grazing sheep, cattle and goats were also swept away in the deluge. A surge of water, thought to be triggered when a glacier broke off from Nanda Devi mountain in the state of Uttarakhand, left a trail of devastation. Millions worldwide watching the tragedy unfold on their television screens and realizing the humanitarian cost of the disaster were obviously in search of the causes of frequent disasters because this flooding forced people to recall the 2013 floods that devastated the state, when 1000 people died.

While many speculate the flooding was caused by the outburst of a glacier, many others are attributing the disaster to the ecological impact of climate change and extensive construction and human activities in the highest mountain region in the world, the Himalayas. The Himalayas being structurally unstable and young is still geologically active, fragile and vulnerable to both natural and man-made processes. An avalanche or cloud burst may be natural, but the impact of this disaster is local and man-made. It was highly unusual for a glacier to break off during the winter months. The possible reason is that with increasing global warming, the upper reaches of the Himalayas are warming faster, leading to more rapid melting of the glaciers. Researchers have already warned global heating would become a huge problem for the region in the next few years. A survey from 2019 found that glaciers in the Himalayas have been melting at double the speed since 2000, losing nearly a vertical 50 cm of ice each year.

In the era of globalization and in pursuit of industrialisation and so-called modernisation, successive governments practically overlooked the natural ecosystems and carrying capacity of the Himalayas, besides the traditional beliefs and norms of nature conservation despite grievances voiced by environmentalists and public about development which is dangerous and unsustainable. This type of development in this fragile region clearly reveals that science is being operated without an iota of conscience. It is evident that top level managerial personnel, engineers and scientists supported by politicians and the corporate brigade are carrying out their job without accountability and responsibility.

Over years, the numbers of pilgrims have increased exponentially at major pilgrim centers across the Himalayas. This expansion of tourism has created a variety of social vulnerabilities in the entire region, which are ultimately responsible for turning a regional extreme weather event into a national disaster. Uttarakhand is one such centre of pilgrim activity in the Himalaya as it has four major Hindu and one Sikh shrines – Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri and Hemkund. In order to fulfill the needs of such huge numbers of pilgrims, an intricate network of roads, hotels, lodges and related support systems has been built into the remote mountainous areas of the Himalaya. Around 50,000 trees have been felled under the Chardham road project to connect the pilgrim spots in Uttarakhand. The project is a 900-km long road, which is being constructed at a cost of Rs 12,000 crore. The 900-km stretch project had been broken into 53 contracted road projects.

This approach is in practice simply to escape from the requirement of environment impact assessment (EIA) report before the start of the project. Regulatory authorities in environment sector framed the procedures and processes of EIA in such a manner that destruction of this fragile ecosystem in the name of development cannot be resisted. The broadening of roads means the mountains have been vertically sliced. Reconstruction of roads and other infrastructure hurriedly for tourism after the disaster further aggravate existing vulnerabilities and create new vulnerabilities that might lay the cornerstone for disasters to come in the region. Despite knowing the history of landslides, the government has not conducted any environmental assessment before implementing such projects. It seems that policy-makers who approve these schemes either do not understand the scientific evidence or choose to ignore it.

Uttarakhand is now known as the 'energy state' of India due to more than 500 large and medium sized hydro-projects commissioned there. Several projects are being built on its major and minor rivers. Though the mega hydro-projects are blamed as an environmental menace, other medium and small projects are also a major component of the economy of the state. Therefore, almost all rivers are being dammed to use the valuable water resource for electricity generation without taking into account future consequences. These require stream diversion, large-scale excavation of rock by blasting, tunnelling and dumping loose rock debris/soil, creating unstable land forms prone to slope instability.

In addition to the above activities, construction of multi-storied buildings and domestic houses in such a high-risk earthquake zone is also a matter of concern. Earlier the houses in the mountains were mostly built of mud, wood, rock-slab, and other biomaterials which could withstand the tremor of earthquakes. However, due to a ban on timber for house construction, easy availability of building materials and impact of market forces, people are constructing semi-concrete, concrete, and other not so shake-proof structures. Therefore, a medium level earthquake results in much larger damage in the region. The kind of construction that is actually taking place for developmental activities is not sustainable, and is dangerous.

This was a man-made disaster and to prevent similar calamities, the government should implement development projects in a scientific manner. Environmental assessments should be done before the implementation of development projects in ecologically sensitive areas. Policy-makers must actively engage with scientists and experts possessing adequate knowledge on the problems facing the Himalayas and their people to make sustainable development work. Global warming can grab the headlines, but many of the other pressures on the fragile mountain region are more mundane. The population is increasing fast in the Himalayas, and so is the speed of the landscape changes needed to support it. Cattle grazing and rampant deforestation — on current trends, one-third of the total Indian Himalayan forest cover could be gone by 2100 — will drive nearly one-quarter of endemic species to extinction and disrupt the natural flow of water. Scientists and engineers must make the case more forcefully that rampant construction cannot be permitted by any means on riverbanks or flood plains that are constantly swept by monsoon floods.

If the people of the Himalayas were more aware of the geological vulnerability and ecological fragility of their mountain home, they would surely force more compliance of laws and regulations to protect it.

The writers are, respectively, a post-doctoral Fellow of the Chemistry department of Jadavpur University and a former Senior Scientist, Central Pollution Control Board.