

THE SHAPE OF WATER IN KASHMIR'S GUREZ VALLEY

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 Analysis

Previously, the concept of security was confined only to the traditional concept of it, which found expression in hard power and realism. But now with the advent of globalization, the contemporary concept of security has diversified beyond the traditional military and political paradigm. In this context Barry Buzan proposed five dimensions of security including Military, Political, Environmental, Economic and Societal.

South Asia is home to many such resource conflicts. The newly constructed Kishenganga Hydroelectric Project has affected the lives of residents with mostly negative consequences for them and has also destabilized the environment of the Gurez valley in Indian Administered Kashmir. The Kishenganga Hydroelectric project is being constructed by India on the Kishenganga River, a tributary of Jhelum, which

runs through the Gurez valley. The Jhelum River is one of the Western rivers allocated to Pakistan under the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), signed on September 19, 1960. The World Bank initiative aims to balance the interests of both parties by allocating the use of Western rivers. IWT aims at attaining the most complete and satisfactory utilization of the water of the Indus river system by balancing the interests of both parties through allocating the use of Western rivers (Jhelum, Indus and Chenab) to Pakistan and complete use of Eastern Rivers (Beas, Ravi and Sutlej) to India.

The construction of the 330 MW Hydroelectric Project in Gurez - built by the NHPC - in the Bandipora district of disputed Kashmir is almost complete. The project involves construction of a 37-meter high concrete dam. The dam will divert the Kishenganga River, a tributary of Jhelum,



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through a 29 Kilometer long tunnel into the Wular Lake, passing through an underground powerhouse along the way.

Known for its scenic beauty, Gurez is separated from the valley by the north Kashmir mountain range that runs west of the Zojila Pass. Until six months ago Gurez has been cut off from the rest of the world. Prior to the division of Jammu and Kashmir between India and Pakistan, Gurez had been a part of the Gilgit state. Taxes would be paid at Drass, which happens to be the only area on this side of the LoC that shares its language, culture and customs with Gurez.

Along with economical aspect of the project, the political results are also discussed. With land as a continuing source of tension between India and Pakistan, a new front in their conflict is developing over natural resource: water. The rivers that flow through Kashmir provide fresh water supply to a billion people in India and Pakistan. In India, the water supply flowing from the Himalayan glaciers provides vital irrigation for its agricultural sector while providing its rivers with water used in the country's religious ceremonies and practices. In Pakistan, the water helps maintain critically important farmland's irrigation in parts of the country, which are delicately balanced on the edge of extreme poverty and famine. India's increasing prominence as a harnesser of the water's potential is a cause for concern in Pakistan as its power-starved rival moves to secure its own supply, not only for agricultural purposes but also as a source of electricity.

The flow of water is vital to India's electricity need to power its industry and economy. Reports state that only 40 percent of the Indian populations are hooked up to the power grid. Despite signing up to the Indus Water Treaty, which is supposed to limit development on the three rivers flowing into Pakistan and ensuring more water for those downstream, India is currently pursuing 33 hydroelectric power projects on the Indus in an attempt to meet the country's demand. Pakistan claims that the projects affect river flows into

its territory while violating the treaty and the Pakistanis are becoming increasingly angry over what they see at India's control of their rivers and water supplies. There are also fears that India's control of the water supply could be used as a weapon, where supplies to Pakistan's agricultural heartland could be at the mercy of India's aggressive dam-building plans.

Pakistan's ability to grow its own food depends on its vast irrigation system derived from the rivers running through Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province and the heart of its agriculture industry. If India's plans to expand its hydroelectric capacity reached fruition, it would have the power to switch off the supply and plunge Pakistan into a famine-inducing drought. Experts say that if India built all its planned projects, it would have the capacity of withholding up to four weeks of river flow - and if timed to coincide with Pakistan's critical dry season, this would be enough to wreck an entire planting season.

The valley of Gurez is located 123 kilometers away from the capital city of Srinagar. Nestled within the mighty Himalayas, the valley is located near the Line of Control that divides the Indian-held Kashmir and Pakistan-held Kashmir. The Gurez valley is geographically isolated and inaccessible region of Kashmir. The Gurez valley was also an important spot in the ancient silk route that connected Kashmir valley to Gilgit en route to Kashghar.

According to the 2011 census of the Gurez Tehsi, the population of Gurez is 37,992, of which 22,978 are males and 15,014 are females. The population mainly comprise of ethnic Dards who speak Shina language. Commuting from Srinagar to Gurez involves complex process of seeking prior permissions from the local administration in Bandipora district and navigating multiple security checkpoints manned by Indian soldiers, owing to the heavy militarization of the area, being a border area between India and Pakistan. It is also a site of the most internationally disputed dam construction between India Pakistan, called

the Kishenganga Dam Project. The project has a potential to ignite direct military conflict between India and Pakistan since Pakistan sees it as a serious threat to its water security and breach of IWT of 1960.

The fact that the Gurez valley is a border area, militarization there is pervasive and sometimes violent. The local administration has outsourced many basic services to the army like provision of electricity to the area that has built a sense of “goodwill” towards the military.

Occasionally, cross-border shelling causes loss of life, severe injury and loss of property. Some locals raise the allegations leveled against the army and other government forces, that they have been involved in committing enforced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial executions in the Gurez Valley. The locals, including young people and school children living within a tight military structure, expressed concerns for their safety as well as some held pro-independence sentiments whereas some had reservations vis a vis the resistance movement against India.

Effects on Local People

The centrally run NHPC (National Hydroelectric Power Corporation) is using the local resources and pay less benefit to the local dependent population in the Gurez valley. The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of every corporation is responsible to give relief to the affected people in order to ensure Sustainable Development. As a part of CSR, relief and rehabilitation in terms of Health, Education, Economic benefits, and jobs are a prerequisite in order to dispense social responsibility towards society. The concept of Sustainable Development includes reconciling various dimensions of security with development.

Aside from its effects in the environment, another issue is the fact that the NHPC, a public corporation owned by Indian government, will divert away most of the electricity from the

host state to mainland India makes it almost an “imperial” venture. Of the 330 MW total capacity of this project, only 12% will be provided to the state. The rest of electricity will be diverted and sold by the NHPC to whomever it deems fit. The local Gurez valley has no electricity and communication facilities. There will be no share for local population of the Gurez Valley in the 330 MW electricity generated by the NHPC.

On the other hand, one of the major concerns revolving round this project is that due to the diversion of water in the Wular Lake, there is a high possibility of increase in water level and submersion of catchment areas that are heavily populated, namely the Bandipora and Baramulla districts. Forest areas had to be cleared to make way for the dam that has been erected in Gurez. However the Relief and Rehabilitation chief engineer of the NHPC said, “those trees have been replanted elsewhere at higher reaches around the dam area.” Initially, the Indian environment ministry tried to block this project altogether, expressing serious concerns over the environmental viability of this project. However, the Kishenganga project was finally granted clearances under intense political bickering. We found that the Dam also led to the submergence of prime agricultural land, cultivated by local communities in Gurez.

Mining and blasting has also caused destabilization of the local ecology and environment. The reservoir, leading to stagnated water, won't allow trout fish to breed in Kishenganga River. The currently insufficient water flowing downstream also causes the water to be more saline, making it less suitable for certain fish nurseries.

Following sustained protests by villagers in 2012, the hydrology department of National Institute of Technology (NIT) conducted tests in the area and said pollution had caused chemical disturbance in the water around the project site. The tests revealed high concentration of dissolved solids and unsafe alkaline levels in the water.

In 2012 an environmental impact assessment (EIA) carried out by Delhi University's Centre for Inter-Disciplinary Studies of Mountain and Hill Environment (CISMHE) warned that the dam, apart from causing heavy pollution in the area, would endanger several Himalayan plant and animal species. The EIA concluded that the heavy deployment of labor and construction activity was disturbing and fragmenting ecological habitats in the area.

The Rs3642.04-crore power project has led to the displacement of 362 families and consumed a total of 4280 kanals (535 acres) of land. The Centre and the NHPC's move to relocate the displaced families outside Gurez Valley were influenced by several factors. For instance, land in the mountainous valley is very limited. Some 27 revenue villages, inhabiting the region with a population of 37,992 (latest census) houses around 26,000 troops. The total land under Army occupation spreads around 2802 canals, out of which 918 canals are unauthorized. Out of the 1883 authorized occupied canals, the Army provides rent for 1140 of them. The LoC fencing has consumed 339 canals. Gurez local magistrate Mohammad Ashraf Hakak said that the only land that was available on the foothills of mountains was the ones prone to avalanches. Therefore, the Government, with the help of the NHPC, decided to shift the affected families to Mirgund, located around 16 km from Srinagar.

At the core of this rehabilitation exercise stands the Dard Shin tribe of Gurez. Speakers of the Shina language, the rare tribal will be cut off from their culture, livelihood and roots if moved to Srinagar. Many historians and anthropologists claim that the Dard Shin people are pure Aryans.

"Relocating people from Gurez is an attempt to divide and rule the people of Gurez," said the chairman of J&K Dard-Shin tribal minorities, Mir Hamidullah. Unhappy with the plan, he said that in order to preserve their culture and language, the people of Gurez should be provided with land and Gurez itself should be rehabilitated. "Shina is the mother language of Sanskrit. We are a people with our own history and relocating our people outside Gurez will hurt the community," said Hamidullah.

Apart from jeopardizing their cultural identity, the move to rehabilitate them will also risk the state of cultivable land in the area, which will be shrunk further by the dam. "This project will affect whatever little agricultural land that is left in our village," said Abdul Khaliq Ganie from Tarbal, the last village near LoC, about 20 kms from Gurez town. "We have been losing our cattle to the minefield areas every year, and now this project has added to our worries as this village remains cut off from the Kashmir Valley for most part of the year," he added.

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