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## DEVELOPMENT OF IRRIGATION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON FORESTS IN HYDERABAD STATE

Shaikh Abdul Thaha  
Hyderabad

The Nizam's Dominions or popularly called as the Hyderabad State lying in the sub-tropical area in the Deccan region was always subjected to scarcity of rainfall and famine conditions. The rulers of the Deccan, realising the importance of conservation, control and utilisation of water, constructed many types of water harvesting structures and tanks are the most popular ones among them. In fact tank irrigation had become by far the most predominant in the Hyderabad State, particularly in the Telangana region, where the rivers were not perennial and the country had to depend for its water almost entirely upon the rainfall which was generally scanty and confined to the few monsoon months of the year. Though normal rainfall was sufficient to raise the crop, the monsoon was so precarious that without storing water for irrigation, there could be no assurance to the cultivation of both food-grains and commercial crops.<sup>1</sup>

The heavy sand content in the soils of the Telangana region also prompted the peasants to depend on this source of irrigation. In the trap region like Marathwada where soil was deep and porous was not found suitable for irrigation. Out of nearly 3000 sq miles of the irrigated area in the State, more than 70 percent was in Telangana, where, the soil being well suited for wet cultivation, irrigation had developed most extensively from ancient times. The 18,000 tanks of the State were almost entirely within this area and nearly every suitable site was occupied by a tank.<sup>2</sup> The Warangal district had the most notable examples of the ancient work of irrigation and the lakes of Pakhal, Ramappa and Laknavaram were constructed in the 12th and 13th centuries which were household names in the Telangana region.<sup>3</sup>

**Background:** Till the first half of the 19th century the maintenance and supervision of the tanks and wells, which were the main source of irrigation, was the responsibility of Talukdars.<sup>4</sup> In 1861, the Prime Minister, Salarjung I took some measures to develop irrigation and set up an Irrigation Board under the Revenue Department in 1866. He established Public Works Department (PWD) in 1868 and created a separate Irrigation Branch in 1869. The PWD developed gradually and in 1880 a separate department for irrigation was created under the jurisdiction of the chief engineer. The most important step in the PWD during the year 1884 was reorganisation of the department and kept under the supervision of Chief Engineer.<sup>5</sup> The severity and distress of

due to late rainfall gave an impetus to the irrigation activities.<sup>6</sup> The threat of repeated failure of rainfall and the attended scarcity and famine resulted in taking initial measures by the Nizam VI, Mir Mahabub Ali Khan, in the field of irrigational development.<sup>7</sup>

Initially, the Irrigation Department was involved in the repairs, maintenance and extension of older works, in addition to the collection of statistics of the water resources in the State. But after the visit of Irrigation Commission in 1902-03, the Department took up an extensive investigation works of major and minor projects under the guidance of Ali Nawaz Jung, chief engineer, who was considered as the pioneer of modern irrigation in the State. The unprecedented flood of September 1908 which devastated considerable parts of Hyderabad was said to have been instrumental in ushering in what it was called as an 'Era of reservoirs' in the history of the Hyderabad State. The immediate sequel to the flood was the institution of an enquiry into its causes and the methods of prevention, which was carried out by M. Visveswaraya and Ali Nawaz Jung.<sup>8</sup>

The acceleration in the development of irrigation systems began during the rule of the seventh Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan (1911-1948). He laid the foundation for the major, medium and minor irrigation projects in the State. Tanks and wells were treated as the minor irrigation works. An irrigation project with command area of 2000 to 10,000 hectares for cultivation was categorised as medium irrigation project and when it exceeds the limit of 10,000 hectares considered as major irrigation project. An irrigation development plan was drawn up on this basis, envisaging long, mid and short term programmes to be completed in one, three and five years respectively.<sup>9</sup>

**Irrigation Projects: Minor Irrigation:** The minor irrigation facilities such as tanks, puddles and wells formed the backbone of the irrigation system in the State. Tank irrigation was an old established practice and constituted the most important minor irrigation system that used surface water in the State. Realising the importance of well irrigation, the State government had opened a separate Well Sinking Department.<sup>10</sup> By 1944, in Hyderabad state there were 25,451 serviceable and 6,793 unserviceable tanks and the number of serviceable and unserviceable wells was being 2,11,529 and 60,025 respectively.<sup>11</sup>

**Medium and Major Irrigation:** After the establishment of separate irrigation department, the government gave importance to the development of all types of irrigation projects in the State. It wanted to utilise the river water for more useful purposes and projects were designed to develop agriculture to feed growing population and combat the occurrence of famines.<sup>12</sup>

By 1928, Irrigation Department had repaired and constructed minor and medium irrigation works and had brought a total area of about 8 lakhs of acres under irrigation. Irrigation in the State was mostly confined to Telangana as 80% of the area under irrigation in the State lies in this tract.<sup>13</sup>