

## MEGA DAMS: A CRITICAL STUDY OF NORTH EAST INDIA SPECIALLY IN ASSAM

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Big dams occupied a pivotal position in the North East India. It has been said that with the help of these dams government produce electricity for the people. But here a question arises, that are these dams safety for common people? In this regard, it is a very important question in the present situation in Assam. As a matter of fact, it is a controversy among different intellectualist, literatures and journalists. They argued that the decision on mega dams in Arunachal Pradesh with enormous downstream impacts on Assam.*

*The Central Government had taken decision about 900 (Nine hundred) project in the North East India specially very small river dams by the sanctioned of Central Electricity Authority (CEA). But, we look that all dams are not small, so it is very necessary to discuss about its implementation. Already central has given green signal to 135 river dams in Arunachal Pradesh. But the implementation of these dams have not been carefully considered before giving sanctions. Therefore, present time, all man are to understand about its problems. So an expert group constituted with the expert from Gauhati University, Dibrugarh University and IIT, Guwahati following a decision at a tripartite meeting held by the state government with the representatives of others organization of Assam. This paper focus the impacts of these dams and human safety of entire North East Region specially in Assam.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Multipurpose Dams, Mega Dams, Human Safety, Ecological Equilibrium*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Big dams occupied a pivotal position in the Northeast India. It has been said that with the help of these dams, government produces electricity for the people, but here there is a query as regards the safety of common people. In this regard, it is a very important question in the present situation in Assam. As a matter of fact, it is a controversy among different intellectualists, litterateurs and journalists, including Dr. Hiren Gohain and Dr. Mamani Raisom Goswami. They argued that the decision on mega dams in Arunachal Pradesh with enormous downstream impact would affect Assam adversely.

The Central Government had taken decisions regarding 900 (nine hundred) projects in the Northeast India, especially very small river dams with the Central Electricity Authority's (CEA) sanction, but we observe that not all dams are small, so it is of utmost importance to discuss about its implementation. Already, Central government has given the green signal to 135 river dams in Arunachal Pradesh, but the implementation of these dams have not been carefully considered before giving sanctions. Therefore, at the present time, all men are to understand about its problems. So, an expert group constituted with experts from Guwahati University, Dibrugarh University and IIT, Guwahati, following a decision at a tripartite meeting held by the state government with the representatives of the NHPC and the AASU on December 8/2006.

It is to be pointed out that the mega dam projects like the Ranganadi and Kopili in Northeast Region and even a smaller dam Kurichu, located in the neighboring country, Bhutan has damaged hesitations in the Assam district of Barpeta, Nalbari, Baksa, Kamrup, Morigaon, Nagaon and Lakhimpur. So, all these dams were given clearance by the Union Government without considering their adverse downstream impact on the respective areas. In this regard, we may mention here that the construction of Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project should be demolished and an independent commission be engaged to study the impact of the existing hydel power projects of the region. This is why the committee should comprise experts from Assam as well as foreign countries. It is noteworthy that at last good sense has prevailed in New Delhi in respect of the construction of large dams in the geotectonic zones, for this part of the country, that are prone to earthquakes. So off-late, there have been considerations in opposition to the lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project, where a large dam is being constructed and the Centre has already spent about Rs 4000 crores, but here is a major query regarding the need of the ministerial sanction for all such Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric projects and the 35 river dams in Arunachal Pradesh, given without proper evaluation of the downstream effect?

The concept of the mega dams proposed by Dr K. L. Rao in 1962 to check floods and erosions, the multipurpose dams proposed by the Brahmaputra Board in the year 1980 for checking floods and erosions, to irrigate the tillable fields and to generate power were abandoned by the Indian rules at the instance of the power lobby.

It needs to be pointed out that the voluntary organization, Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti along with 25 other indigenous groups have decided to intensify the joint movement against the big dams in the region throughout the state. Among them, if you observe carefully, then we shall see that the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti is to be bestowed with all the powers to save the Assamese people from this tyranny and to stop this grandiose plan of mega dams in this part of the country. The lawyers, intellectuals, artists voice protest to lead the Central Govt. to know the sentiments of the people of Assam on this life and death issue.

The demand for a mega dam and the liability legislation was raised forcefully by renowned engineer and former UNICEF officer Dr. Binoy Kumar Das during the consultation held by the former Union Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF) Jairam Ramamesh on the mega dam issue. He stated that from their experience, people living by the riverside can estimate how much water they will get each month of the year and plan their crops accordingly in different seasons, but as the entire yearly flow of the river would change after the dam construction; people downstream would have to abandon their traditional pattern of agriculture and livelihood activities. So, it will be very difficult for many people to live in Assam.

The under construction and the proposal of 168 dams along the Assam–Arunachal border and the hydroelectric project may pose a serious threat to the geographical condition and along with it may bring large scale calamity to the people.

The dams in Lower Subansiri and Kamenghydel project and ongoing dam in Jia Bharali River, although may cause major problem for the North East Assam, the issue is yet to draw attention of the Centre and the NHPC authority as well as various nationalized organizations, even after repeated appeals.

It is noteworthy that the 494-page report submitted clearly the vulnerable threat could be created due to the proposed drains posing a threat to the area like Nameri and Pokey National Park, which are full of biodiversity. On the other hand, it is a matter of fact that the people of Bordikorai, located along the Assam–Arunachal border, who became

homeless due to the floods of 2004, are yet to be rehabilitated.

It had been stated that the immense hydroelectric power potential of Arunachal Pradesh finally caught the imagination of New Delhi to initiate the construction of as many as 168 mega dam projects for generation of well over 50,000 MW of hydel power with a view to giving a boost to development in mainland India.

Construction of some of the dams are already underway in Arunachal Pradesh despite the expert committee report to the Central, especially highlighting the zoological and logical sensitivity of the region and the possible dangers latent behind such mega dams construction. Therefore, expert committees have expressed serious concern if the region would be able to sustain the impact of such dams.

It is to be pointed out that human safety and preservation of ecological equilibrium are definitely of paramount importance and have been recognized as a necessity of any development project. The Government of Arunachal Pradesh has been following up with the issue with concern with the Central ministers regularly. Arunachal Govt. in its letters to the Govt. of India is trying to give a picture that the construction of the hydropower project would benefit the entire North East region, but the main issue is that the Govt. of Assam has not been able to follow up the issue with the Central ministers. Indeed, the Assam Govt. had demanded a comprehensive downstream study on the environment impact of the hydropower project sought to be constructed in Arunachal Pradesh.

Sources have revealed that of the 132 power projects proposed in Arunachal Pradesh, 23 are mega projects, which has capacity generated of at least 500 MW of power. As per the proposals, the 23 mega projects generate 31580 MW of power.

It is to be mentioned here that the Siang project would be the biggest with a capacity to generate 11,000 MW power, but this project is sought to be constructed in phases. The other major proposed projects include Nyamjang Chhu project with a capacity to generate 788 MW of power. Tawang (i) project with 600 MW capacity. Tawang (ii) project with the capacity to generate 800 MW of power project with 210 MW capacity and Tao Power Project with 170 MW capacity.

The Arunachal Pradesh government tried to deal with the apprehension expressed by the different organizations of Assam and claimed that different organizations carried out basin studies for the projects. Arunachal government stated that the project would benefit their tradition in the days to come, and the claim that 6000 people are directly or indirectly the employees who are involved in generating 100 MW of power and power projects in Arunachal Pradesh. These projects would generate employment opportunities for at least 34200 people. The Arunachal government further claimed that all apprehensions about the safety of the dams were taken care of, of which re-signing the project would be the run of the river project. As a result, at least 50 of the Arunachal Pradesh hydroelectric projects have been granted first-stage environmental clearance called "Scoping Clearance". Again, seven large hydroelectric power projects in that state, including the 1750 MD Dem we Lower projects were granted final environmental clearance till now.

The Assam Government and Arunachal Pradesh Government are very much active these days to get all the projects cleared by the Central Government, but these dams are very much involved in controversy with the general public of the Northeast India, especially Assam.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this way, Arunachal Pradesh Government further claimed that all apprehensions about the safety of the dams will be taken care of, with re-signing of the project, which would be run of the river projects. As a result, the Government of India is yet to take the final decision regarding granting of environmental clearance for the proposed hydropower project in Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore, it is a very big problem for the entire Northeast India, especially Assam.

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