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Kochi: Heavy rain, Climate changes

# Dams be damned

*Rivers should be allowed to run their natural course*

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Constructing humongous new dams is no more a trending fashion anywhere in the world. There are even countries that keep on demolishing dams to revive the natural flow of rivers. We shouldn't be blind to such developments. It's time for us to rethink about our management of dams.



Climate change alters the character of rains everywhere. It might be impossible to foretell whether there would be more rains in a particular season, but, it's certain that the rains, when it pours, would pour stronger than it used to be in the past. Either side of the dams would face flood. Loss of lives and property on either side would naturally follow.

Contrary to arguments we often come across, a dam need not get filled for authorities to release water from it. Such reconditions don't exist. Generally, the objective of a dam is to store maximum water by the end of rainy seasons. Based on the character of rains and the demand for water during a rainy season, it is possible to find out how far the water level in a dam would rise. It's possible through 'mod-

elling'. There is no need to keep the dams filled during the middle of a rainy season. When it rains heavily during a season, water can be drained moderately from dams before it nears the brim. It would not only avert the threat to the dam, it would also help pre-empt the perils to be caused by the sudden release of water downstream at a later stage.

I don't say this only in the background of the current situation in Kerala. Dams were the main villains behind the 2010 floods in Pakistan and 2011 floods in Thailand. They stored maximum water during the early months of the rainy season and released large volumes of water downstream by the end of the season, causing heavy floods.

The KSEB being the custodian of most major dams in Kerala, their priority would be to ensure maximum storage for power generation. But the cost of solar power is hitting new lows every passing year. By 2030, solar power would almost become a cost-free affair. There won't be any need for more new dams as we would then need only a few 'pump and store' dams to manage the peak load demand. Irrigation for agriculture is not effective even now. Most irrigation projects in the state are run for the sake of irrigation department than for agriculture purpose. There are several other options for irrigating agriculture land. Large dams are no more a must for that purpose.

There is nothing wrong in releasing water from all dams

at least for a couple of days every year. Fully drying up rivers from constructing dams is no more a good practice. The environmental flow of rivers should be ensured. Our dams are direly in need of modernisation, both in structure and its management. At least a routine annual release of water would help people to brush up their memories about the existence of the river.

If we could carefully conserve, nature would be the biggest asset for Kerala. Rivers with natural flow and the peaceful coexistence of water bodies and land would suit best for Kerala. Now, we challenge nature with engineering skill. Banking heavily on the might of the colossal structure, we build shopping malls, factories and resorts downstream where rivers used to flow. We naturally shudder when the same river comes back in search of its soil. Any amount of wealth that we make by taming and killing our rivers would not be enough for our children to cope with nature's fury. Posterity doesn't demand large dams. Future generations need a place where they can be at peace with nature. I do dream of a Kerala where there are no major dams across our rivers. Even if we manage to handle the present situation, we should not fail to develop a new plan for the management of our dams.

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