



India – Bangladesh Water Disputes on River Teesta Issue: Negotiations and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

India and Bangladesh has an important bonding or friendly relationship with various similarities. There are 54 common Trans boundary river between India and Bangladesh. Among them Ganga Teesta etc. are important. Ganges water treaty was completed in 1996. But there are no accord on river teesta which is long time demanding issues from politician, stakeholders and general civilian of Bangladesh. Teesta river (414 km Length) originating from Zemu glacier of Eastern Himalaya. Water of Teesta is very precious to farmer of North Bengal and Northern Bangladesh. In 1983, there was temporary ad hoc arrangement between two countries on Teesta water. But not sustained. The negotiation became complex when India featured a dam on Gajoldoba and Bangladesh also constructed a dam in lalmonirhat district. In 2011 there was possibility to conclude this issue but not realize due to oppose of the Chief Minister of West Bengal. Teesta water is also important for livelihood farmers of North Bengal area. India- Bangladesh is continuously negotiating this issue during the last decades. China also interfere this issues by the help to Bangladesh for alternatives way that is not good for India and her security concern. India is a leader of South Asia and important competitor for China. Bangladesh has important role in India's Neighborhood First Policy and Act East policy. India has also important for Bangladesh. So, two countries have to solve this issue for mutual interest.

KEY WORDS

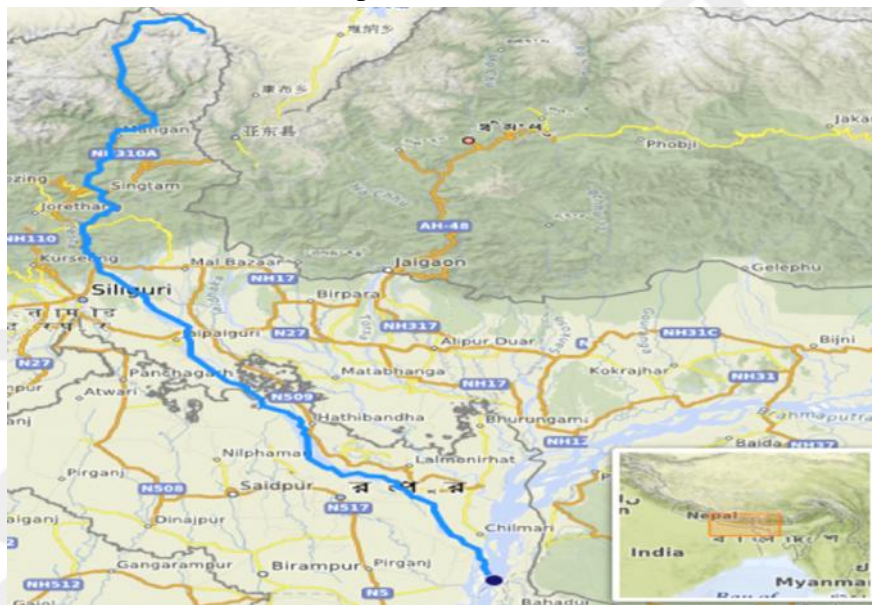
Trans Boundary River, Stakeholder, Sustained, Security, Neighborhood First Policy, Act East Policy.

INTRODUCTION

India and Bangladesh is neighboring country to each other's. Three side of Bangladesh surrounded by Indian Territory. Bangladesh emerged as a Country through a long struggle and assisted intensively by Indian Government .There was an iconic role of Indian leaders to creation of Bangladesh from East Pakistan. So, from 1972, India and Bangladesh is close friends to each other's. Indira- Mujib collaboration in 1972-1975 was a role model for whole world.India and Bangladesh relationship stated as "*Blood Neighbor*" by many expert, Academician and scholar of International relation, But as per rule of diplomatic relationship there is many area of cooperation and challenges of India- Bangladesh relationship. Negotiation on water between India and Bangladesh is the one of the major challenges of long bonding between India and Bangladesh. There are 54 Common River between India and Bangladesh. River is a backbone of Agricultural based country. India and Bangladesh has very much dependency on agricultural and allied activities. Bangladesh is situated on lower basin of Common River like River Teesta. So she has very much dependency on India for water. India is a vast country with diversities and dense population. India has also own limitation to give water as per demand of Bangladesh. Among the various river Ganga and Teesta are important bilateral river. Ganga water disputes have been solved by the Ganga water Treaty 1996 after long negotiation. But after a frequent meeting, discussion on River Teesta, no Treaty or MOU has been signed by the both countries. So, Indo-Bangladesh conflict on River Teesta is a major issue of bilateral relationship between two countries.

The watershed basin of the Teesta River is eighty-three percent of Indian Territory and seventeen per cent in Bangladesh territory. The River Teesta connected with livelihood of both Nations. The Teesta River Conflict is now one of the greatest hurdles to the amicable ties between India and Bangladesh.

Map- Flow of Teesta



(Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/70/Teesta.png>)

Review of Related Literature

Sardar, Sanjib, (January, 2021): PhD Research Scholar ,published a journal in New Horizon (ISSN NO. 2277-5218) on Teesta River Dispute and bilateral Negotiation between India and Bangladesh. The learned Scholar wisely analyzed Basin morphology of River Teesta, origin, flow and general characteristics of River. He was showed importance of Teesta River and for the livelihood of millions of peoples of both countries. Conflict on Teesta River between India and Bangladesh .In last paragraph, the author suggested some recommendation regarding Teesta issue and India-Bangladesh relationship¹.

Ishlam, Shariful (2021): 50 years of Bangladesh India relations issues challenges and possibilities, is a wide spectrum book published by Pentagon press LLP, where the author widely discussed water sharing disputes between India and Bangladesh. Historical background of Teesta conflict between India and Bangladesh has been discussed. The learned author shows historical background of Teesta disputes and various negotiations between two countries. He also analyzed the reasons behind the problems of Teesta and its impact on regional politics and livelihood of both countries².

Bhattacharjee, Joyeeta, (2020): In “Migration, River Management, and Radicalization: What does the Future Hold for India Bangladesh Relation? Has Analyzed River Management project in Indo-Bangladesh relation. Migration especially illegal migration is burning problems between India and Bangladesh which is analyzed by the Author. Role of Bangladesh in India’s Neighborhood First and Act East policies has been analyzed. Radicalization is the one of the major issues of security for India. Growing Radicalization in Bangladesh and activities of JMB, HUJI, in Bangladesh has been analyzed³.

Mirchandi, Maya,(2016), ORF Special Report: The Teesta Water dispute: Geopolitics, Myths and Economics, ORF Special report elaborately analyzed Teesta issues and bilateral relationship between India and Bangladesh. The author very wisely summarized the Ganga water treaty, 1996 and its positive domain as a background of his discussion. Actually we find that the author analyzed brief summaries of River Teesta negotiation and major area of contradiction to realize this treaty between India and Bangladesh⁴.

Sultana, Syeda Tanzia, and Shahab Uddin, Shanjida (2017): Bangladesh-India Water Negotiations: Challenges and Way Forward, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic studies, is an article where authors are very wisely discussed about the water negotiation between India and Bangladesh including River Teesta negotiation. Before the Teesta negotiation Authors are highlighted several measures which has been taken by the Both Government to settlement different water disputes including joint River commission (JRC), Ganga water treaty (1996) etc. After that origin, flow of Teesta, history of negotiations on Teesta River by two neighboring countries has been discussed. Besides these India’s various river linking project and its possible impact in Bangladesh analyzed in this paper⁵.

Research Method and Methodology

The present Research Study is qualitative Research in nature. The method that was employed to create this research paper or Research study is a mixture of descriptive and historical Research. The whole research study is analyzed by background of neoliberal theoretical background. The various data sources are gathered from secondary sources alongside various Government and non-Government reports, gadgets notifications. The main type of data analysis is content analysis. Views of important stakeholder of India-Bangladesh diplomatic relation is used for analyzed the said topic.

Objective of the Study

The research paper based on following objectives:

- a. To know role of Teesta in livelihood of people of India-Bangladesh.
- b. To examine historical background of Teesta issues with various phases of negotiation.
- c. To analyze Chinese interference in this issue and security concern for India.

Analysis, Discussion and Major Finding

Total length of river Teesta is 414 km Out of which 151 km are in Sikkim, 142 km travel through West Bengal and along the Sikkim-West Bengal border, while 121 km cross into Bangladesh⁶ Before flowing into Bangladesh, the Teesta River, a tributary of the Brahmaputra (Jamuna in Bangladesh), rises from the Teesta khangtse glacier (Himalyan range, Near Chunthang, North Sikkim, India). Zemu glacier at Sikkim (India) also marked as a source of Teesta River. After origin it passes through the Indian provinces of Sikkim and West Bengal. Teesta passes through out Gangtok, Mangan, paykong district(03District) in Sikkim and Kalingpong,

Darjelling, Jalpiguri, Coochbehar District(04 Districts) in West Bengal. After crossing of West Bengal-Bangladesh border at Coochbehar district in West Bengal, Teesta falls into Bangladesh. River Teesta is following in Bangladesh through Lalmonirhat, Rangpur, Kurigram, Gaibandha Districts (04 districts). After Draining Bangladesh finally Teesta falls into Bay of Bengal. The River Teesta is very much flood prone River especially in rainy monsoon Season and known as a “*Thraser Nadi*” (In Bengali language) in North Bengal area.

After the partition of India, the catchment area of river Teesta was given to India in 1947 when Bangladesh known as an East Pakistan. So, the conflicts between India and Pakistan on the issue of River Teesta were begun since 1947, just after the partition. Conflict on water sharing between two countries (India and Bangladesh) initiated from time of emerged of Bangladesh. There are 54 Common River between India and Bangladesh. As a being geographically lower riparian state Bangladesh has no control over the water of common river. A Joint River Commission (JRC) has been formed by bilateral initiative between to nation to solved bilateral water problems in 1972.

The primary point of dispute between India and Bangladesh is the lean season flow of the river Teesta's water River into Bangladesh. Government of India constructed a dam on River Teesta at Gajoldoba in 1975. The Gazaldoba barrage/Dam in West Bengal, roughly thirty kilometers upwards of Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal, has played a role in Bangladesh's downfall as a down riparian state⁷. The catchment area up to the barrage site is eight thousand square kilometers, stretching from the highlands of Sikkim to the flat land of Jalpaiguri (District) in Gazaldoba, where the Teesta Barrage project is situated. The goal was to deliver irrigation water to 6 North Bengal districts of West Bengal. Bangladesh also set up a dam on River Dalia at Lalmonirhat to irrigate crop area, but this project would be run successfully if India as upper riparian state releases adequate water from its Gagoldoba barrage. In 1983, India and Bangladesh decided to share Teesta waters on an ad hoc basis. During the twenty- fifth conference of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) in Dhaka, Bangladesh in July 1983, India and Bangladesh struck a deal on the ad hoc distribution of the River Teesta Water. According to these ad hoc agreements, Bangladesh would receive thirty-six percent of the flows, India will receive thirty-nine percent and the other twenty-five percent will remain not allocated. The ad hoc shares and not allocated a fraction will be reallocated after the research investigations are finished.

India –Bangladesh relation has been improved from 2009, under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina. Sheikh Hasina and Awami league massive victory in 2008 election and came into power in 2009, has a game changer of India –Bangladesh relation. We know that, there are great legacy Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman and India. So when Mujibur rahaman's daughter Sheikh hasina became prime minister of Bangladesh in her 2nd term there were very much hope to peaceful settlement of Teesta water. As per expectation of all expert, India agreed to share Bangladesh 37.5% of the total Teesta water in September 2011 and would keep 42.5 portions of them during the dry period, which was decided to runs from the month of December to March⁹. But it was not realize due to opposition of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Mamta Banerjee, the chief minister of West Bengal, threw a fuss and complained that she hadn't been consulted. She refused to sign the treaty, because she believed it or according to him, it would not be in the farmers' most beneficial interests in the state of West Bengal. According to River Expert of West Bengal it's would be harmful for the large numbers of farmers of North Bengal area. Uncertainty regarding the agreed-upon percentage of water to be shared between India and Bangladesh is one of the reasons Banerjee is refusing to approve the new Teesta agreement¹⁰. Government of West Bengal also made a Survey on Teesta basin by the renewed River expert of Bengal Kalyan Rudra. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee offered to Bangladesh alternative source of water. She offered River Torsha's water instead Tessta water. River Torsha also a another important River of Northern part of West Bengal. But Bangladesh not accepted Chief Minister Banerjee's proposal. Beside West Bengal Sikkim would also affect by future Teesta agreement by both countries. Due to federal subject central Government of India cannot take any unique decision without consent of federal state of West Bengal.

At the BIMSTEC Summit in March 2014, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh voiced optimism for the Teesta water agreement's speedy conclusion. While the federal Government of West Bengal has voiced extreme dissatisfaction at having to share the already reduced water flow, which would further impede the current hydro deficit situation in its northern region of the state. The Government of Bangladesh has expressed concern over the sharp decline in the waters in last decade¹¹. Following the 2014 Indian parliamentary elections, Dhaka indicated increased optimism for an accord to Teesta water, particularly before Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi's trip and Land Boundary Agreement in the month of June 2015. But this expectation was not realized. However, to it was shock for Bangladesh, no such deal could be reached.

Though, The Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) held its 38th meeting on August 25, 2022 in New Delhi, following a 12-year hiatus, to talk about the water-sharing agreements for the some bilateral rivers like rivers *Muhuri, Gumti, Khowai, Dudhkumar, Monu, Dharla, and Feni*, which are passes through the neighboring nations India- Bangladesh. The conversation mostly focused on cross-border issues like exchanging flood information as well as mitigating the threat of river contamination. The two the prime ministers are rumored to finish the water-sharing agreements in accordance with the JRC's suggestions¹². But no discussion on *River Teesta* issue has taken place.

Bangladesh has been frustrated with India's persistent refusal to handle the Teesta water problem. The Joint River Commission (JRC), a body that the two nations shareholder, has not yet seen India and Bangladesh discussion the river water concerns (particularly the Teesta issue), as The Dhaka Tribune recently wrote with concern¹³. According to senior Bangladeshi officials and media report, the Teesta accord is the single main point of contention between the two nations, India and Bangladesh. Dhaka and Delhi's failure to sign the deal and guarantee its execution has resulted in frustration for Bangladesh¹⁴. The issue arose during Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi's March 26-27, 2022 visit to Dhaka, Bangladesh during which he attended the centenary festivities of 'Bangabandhu' Sheikh Mujibur Rahman¹⁵.

In the year 2016, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Bangladesh, and the two countries' relationship was raised to that of strategic allies. Bangladesh received two Ming class submarines from China in 2017. Bangladesh got Chinese support for a one-billion-dollar science and technology initiative on the Teesta River after failing to execute a water-sharing agreement treaty with India⁶. The Chinese proposal comes after the country (Bangladesh) utilized nearly ten years attempting to finalize a Teesta water-sharing agreement with India¹⁷. According to some commentators, China's involvement in the project may exacerbate the India-Bangladesh conflict over the key shared river Teesta. Li Jiming, the Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh, believes that work on the river restoration may begin "within a very short time frame."¹⁸ India also protest from their own end due to environmental and sustainability issues. So after discussion of almost all the point we can say that, all of my hypotheses are proved.

CONCLUSION

India-Bangladesh relation has historical legacy from the first date of diplomatic relationship. Teesta issue creating a little bit mistrust between India-Bangladesh. We know that Bangladesh has very important role in India's Neighborhood First Policy and Act East policy. Bangladesh has important trade partner of India and sharing various common platform of Regional cooperation in South Asia. After a long waiting for water Bangladesh opting alternative plan such as digging of River's channel by the help of China. India have to combat Chinese interference in this bilateral water issue due to security concern. As per report India has always been resisting this project given its security issues. Effective and broad-based collaboration between India and Bangladesh needs the goodwill of their respective peoples. Given Bangladesh's strategic significance and its role as a responsible upstream riparian country, India must take aggressive efforts to complete the River Teesta accord as soon as possible. Two countries have to realize it. The India-Bangladesh partnership is likely to be at its peak. This issue will be troubled to the successful stories of diplomatic relation between two nations.

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