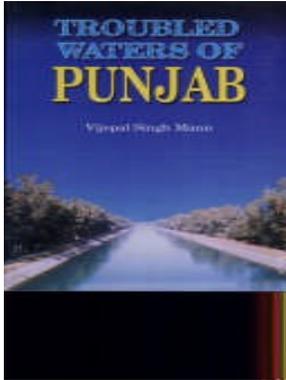


Troubled Waters of Punjab by Vijepal Singh Mann (2003)[112P] ISBN:81-7764-376-2

Book Review: Kavneet Singh



V.S.Mann a hydro engineer has written a very concise book on a vast and important subject of the Punjab economy.

Chapter 1.....

*No major changes occurred in the canal system up to partition. This directly resulted in the sharing of water being given two colors, one purely economic, and the other, purely political.....[Page 2]*

Right from partition the waters of Punjab were usurped and directly controlled by the Central government to the detriment of the poor farmers.

Chapter 2.....

*In the 70/71 census, the average land holding in Punjab was only 2.10 hectares or 5 acres.....[Page 7]*

With such tiny land holding farmers can barely eek out a living and given a further blow by taking away their rights to the normal water resources which lie within the state.

Chapter 3.....

*Punjab constitutes only 1.5% of the total area of the country. The total area of Punjab is 12,500,000. acres.....area under cultivation 10,500,000 acres (84%)....Almost 75% of the 2.42 Crore people in Punjab are living in rural areas.....the food grain production is 11-12% of the total food grain production of the country.....[Page 9-11]*

With 84% of all land under cultivation and 75% of the population involved in agriculture, the net income of Rs.30,000 annually works out to Rs.2,500 a month [\$50]. The minimum wage in India as of late 2008 is now Rs.100 per day. It is better to be a day laborer than a farmer killing yourself for nothing. No wonder there have been over 35,000 suicides by farmers 1997-2008 in Punjab while the media barely pays any attention.

Chapter 4.....

*This means that every cusec of water generates 33 lakh rupees of money every year. As income....What about the water that flows into other states at the cost of Punjab?...[Page 14]*

I wonder who is responsible for the wasted water and the cost of water flowing into the other states, which really are at the cost of Punjab's economy.

Chapter 5.....

*Although the water supply now continued as before partition, Pakistan was now genuinely worried.....what right did India have in stopping supply of water.....Could its own stand be justified in the eyes of the international community?....[Page 18]*

It is mind boggling that lawyers-judges could decide on riparian rights and water issues when they have zero expertise in hydro engineering or agricultural economics.

Chapter 6.....

*Now the biggest inconsistency in the tentative agreement of 1955 lies in the fact that the maximum water requirement is in the month of sowing kharif, in May-June and in November for Rabi. Thus, there is complete variance in the supply and demand of the irrigation water as per flows of the river.....[Page 26]*

It is amazing that the petty racist politics of the Center involving national leaders of India were directly responsible for the incredible subjugation of the People of Punjab.

Chapter 7.....

*The present areas of (now) Haryana were very dissatisfied. Since a major share out of the total water available to complete Punjab fell to share of Punjab areas, the farmers of other areas were up in arms.....under the chairmanship of Shri Madan Lal, Chief Engineer, Irrigation Works, Punjab.....Pandit Ram Sharma was the Chairman.....[page 30]*

It is interesting to note that the experts and chairs of both the committees just happen to be Brahmin Hindus in a state where the majority of the people and farmers are Sikhs. Could any justice be expected under the circumstances?

Chapter 8.....

*Political developments in Punjab upto July 1985 were tragic.....But in all probability the real root cause of the problem was economic.....It was ignited and then sustained by the pent up frustration of a young farm proletariat trying to meet the aspirations and social obligations from a standstill agricultural economy. Why was the rank and file from the impoverished peasantry?....[Page 36]*

Mann has candidly put the whole picture in perspective for the average person who is trying to understand the root of the Punjab 'problem'. Mostly logic and international law has been thrown out of the window; only power of the mighty Center with its communal politics at play with the ultimate vote bank in its sights and nothing else.

Chapter 9.....

*While the terms of reference of this Tribunal were very clear.....going into the whole exercise of water sharing, its legality, validity and legality.....a justification had to be made to reach a certain conclusion.....[Page 38]*

Seems like the Eradi Tribunal had to go through the motions of putting on an act while the ‘jugglers’ sitting at the Center had already predetermined the fate of Punjab.

Chapter 10.....

*On 3 August, 2001 the Central Government of India passed a voice vote, an amendment known as the Inter State Water Disputes (Amendment) Act, 2001. Under this dubious amendment, the Union Government has got a right to get water disputes settled within a stipulated period by setting up a tribunal.....The second part of this amendment, data plays a critical role. The powers to collect, analyze, and then assess the data had been fully vested with the Central government. It had total and absolute powers to interpret the data. In other words political color would decide the direction of the flow of the river waters.....[Page 40-41]*

As usual brahminical chicanery at its best, i.e., to usurp even water from the most productive farmers of India who feed and continue to do so, a large part of the country.

Chapter 11.....

*The areas of Bathinda, Mansa, Muktsar, Malout and Abohar will become desert again if canal water is taken away.....there at present approximately 827,000 electric tube-wells in the state.....[Page 51]*

With a third of Punjab having saline or brackish water; unfit for drinking or agriculture the limited (center) controlled water supply has a huge negative impact on the overall crop economy.

Chapter 12.....

*The established national norm for fixing the quantum of river water supply is that availability is taken at about 75% of “mean annual Supply”. In Punjab it is 100%. Is Punjab not in India?....[Page 53]*

Every law thwarted by the Center simply for the sole purpose of making the Sikh farmer of Punjab suffer due to the inherent racist mindset and communal policies in the name of national equity.

Chapter 13.....

*The demand for water directly affects the social fabric as is evident from the deep-rooted relation between canal water, prosperity and social obligations of our culture. As far as Punjab is concerned, with the land holding becoming smaller, the intensity of agriculture going up, the per acre investment of the farmers of Punjab are amongst the highest in the world.....Sadly the returns are almost the same as two decades ago.....[Page 56-57]*

Since the vast majority of the farms are hereditary ownership; therefore are owned free and clear. Even then the debt is gut wrenching due to expensive capital expenditure for the equipment, fertilizer, seeds and the cost of water.

Major economic issues affecting the farmers, the backbone of Punjab have never been addressed adequately. Even if an unbiased third party looks into it at all the problems of the past 60+ years the injustice meted out to the Sikh farmers has been horrendous. A patronizing attitude with a vicious ethno-religious hatred by the ruling Hindu majority

has made Punjab stuck in a ever cyclical slow death strangulation; vice like grip. UN reports in 2008 state that, based on the current situation by 2030 Punjab is going to become a desert. Between the theft and illegal distribution of river water by the Center to other states, the depletion of sweet usable underground water, water logging and salinity of the soil the ultimate economic ruin of the Punjab is ominously on the horizon.

A must read book by anyone interested in riparian rights, center-state relations, economics of Punjab and a gist of one of the most contentious issues of the Sikh-Punjab problem. In recent times the vast majority of the political leadership of Punjab has been co-opted, therefore all the major issues including the water issue has been silenced, except for an occasional protest which is either ignored or sternly put down by force.