Chapter - 1
Introduction

This is a study on “Politics of Access to Drinking Water in Urban Areas in India: State and Market Interventions – A Case Study of Hyderabad.” It is divided into seven chapters. The introductory chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents the current debates on the issue of access to water in India. The second section presents the outline of the study, review of existing literature on the topic, the gaps, the problem of the study, its main objectives, the major arguments and the method selected for pursuing the study. The chapter gives a perspective on water from the known past to the present; how water has been perceived differently at different times. From being a community managed property or a common property resource, water metamorphosed into a commodity to be bought and sold in the market and links to the present form of society where market plays a far greater role than earlier in the allocation and distribution of essential goods and services like water. Thus, the management of water has become a complex policy issue bringing into its fold State, market and civil society, which manage this vital resource.

Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration if one says that there is no other public good than water which has down the ages influenced human civilisation, sometimes to the extent of stirring human emotions, deeply and passionately. Water is a subject of a poet’s imagination, a scientist’s object of experimentation, and a necessary thing for the survival of human beings and also other living things; of late, it has been a politician’s promise to conquer elections, a business establishment’s vision to acquire more wealth and an environmentalist’s concern to conserve. Water has been subjected to various interpretations at different points in history. Water also has deep symbolic and spiritual significance in many cultures – for example, the holiness attributed to it in the context of the Indian rivers such as the Ganga, Godavari and Narmada rivers in India. Nevertheless, water serves as a metaphor in signifying the basic beliefs, values and norms governing the day-to-day actions of the members of a community in relation to the fulfilment of a very basic set of social and individual
needs. Thus, a diverse set of social relations and processes testify the centrality of water. However, of late, the policy line on water appears to have changed. Equitable distribution of water has become a key area for social and public policy and is acquiring growing importance in national and international development.

In this context it is important to mention that two of the vanguard international agencies, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) and the World Bank, recently issued two separate reports which speak of water stress around the world. While UNESCO’s *World Water Development Report 2009* articulated the role of water in development, it has also deliberated on the need to invest in this sector and it listed the benefits of such investments. The study by World Bank on *India’s water economy: Bracing for a turbulent future*, projected the emerging crisis India is likely to face in the near future. The document categorically stated that “the current water development and management system is not sustainable.” One common theme in these reports is the projection of water stress in parts of the world as also in India. It is further observed in these two reports that unless significant changes are made in the methods of management of this sector, there will be a major crisis which affects development in general.

1.1 Background

Distribution of water resources has always been the central theme of political discourse. With the rapid modernisation of human society, directed towards an unquenching thirst for development, distribution of water resources in society is increasingly becoming a complex issue. Not only has this become contentious, but has also led to several conflicts and fierce competition from different competing groups. In his analysis of *authoritative allocation of resources*, Easton pointed to this situation in society, when scarce resources are authoritatively allocated through State apparatus among diverse competing groups. When such an arrangement fails to deliver, there is unrest in the society, and in the polity. Consequently it is always, in Darwinian terms, the survival of the fittest, which is not the motive of the political organisation or the State. One of the most powerful rationales for the evolution and the existence of the State is the Social Contract Theory. If one goes by the basic principles of the social
contract theory, the question arises as to whether the State (the political society) fulfilled the requirements of the contract.

Protection of life of the associates in the State or the political society being the basic premise on which the social contract theory is built, it automatically becomes the prime responsibility of the State or the sovereign to protect and make available the conditions for a comfortable life of the associates. The assumption that organisations typically exist to further the common interests of groups of people is thus implicit in the literature on organisation. Laski for example, emphasised that associations exist to achieve purposes or interests which “a group of men have in common.”\(^5\) Aristotle had a similar notion when he argued that political associations are created and maintained because of the “general advantages” they bring.\(^6\) Mac Iver also made this point explicitly when he said that “every organisation presupposes an interest which its members share.”\(^7\) In this context, overemphasising the role of State, Mill suggested people are to be secure in each other’s company. And government as an external guarantor must restrain the behaviour of those selfish men.\(^8\) Therefore, the role of State in individual’s life as the supreme political association has been emphasised over time. In contemporary times, there is no dearth of literature that speaks about the prominent role the State plays or should play in the life of individuals. Significantly, the State in contemporary times has been seen as the primary organisation that fulfils the individual’s needs and necessities. Thus, Olson writes, “a State is first of all an organisation that provides public goods for its members, the citizens.”\(^9\)

On the other hand, the evolution of human society has inherently brought the competition for or scramble for the limited resources. In the early stages of development in human society, indigenous ways of life and collective management of resources by members led to a collective use of resources. This kind of approach towards managing resources where all shared the responsibility ensured the sustainable use of the resources leaving enough scope for renewability.

1.2 Water: a common property resource

Natural resources constitute an important aspect of environment. As part of the environment, water is a natural resource basic to the sustenance of human life. Natural resources have been controlled and used collectively by communities since time
immemorial. Many agree that it ensured a sustainable use of this important resource. They are primarily managed as commons or Common Property Resource (CPR). Common property is created when individual members in the community agree to limit their individual claims over a resource. They are often the result of deliberate, long-term collective action in which people gain a sense of identity and shared purpose through constant interactions over a period of time. Planning and development of water resources generally begins with the expression of a common need by the intended users. The process involves mutual discussions and arrivals at a consensus by the intended users (generally a single caste or contiguous castes), who are perceived to be similar enough to share a common water source in accordance with the caste norms.

Writing further on this theme, Singh wrote that the common pool resources or the commons is available for common use. The participation of local user groups in the management of natural resources like water can benefit both the users and the resource. Local users have an immediate knowledge of the local resource base and the needs of users, and as direct stakeholders, they are more likely to work for the protection of resources. Local user groups are more effective than outside agencies in monitoring and enforcing rules regarding use and maintenance. Thus, in the long run, failure to understand the local situations and context will lead to institutional failure. This happens because overgeneralisation of the context, consequently, undermines local identity of different groups as defined by social status, caste, class, etc. Often local user groups are defined by the State itself. In contrast, common property arrangements work because rights and responsibilities are established for all users and monitoring and accountability facilitated by individual contacts and social relations among the users. Indeed, a vast body of work has documented how people collectively act and use various institutional arrangements in managing their water supplies, often under conditions of water scarcity.

However, the vastness of CPR like water makes monitoring difficult and costly, and access as we as use usually cannot be sufficiently controlled by State agencies alone. Problems in the management of CPR arise when institutions have to cope with rapid changes or are artificially constructed by the State or other outside agencies. On the other hand, in the struggle over the commons, nomadic groups are
losing out. These groups often are excluded from representation at the community level and consequently their legitimate access over commons. Thus, proponents of CPR management often romanticize community and ignore the larger political context and administrative feasibility.  

This approach to resource management, in the face of rapid changes in the human society gave way to radical changes in the way resources are managed and controlled in the contemporary times. Thus Mehta, in an interesting work related to this topic, contests the idea that water is a common good. In fact she saw it as an area of huge contestation in a community. People saw water as an issue over which they compete and are divided and it appears there is little common or collective. Social stratification and power relations in society shape water use. Local management of natural resource can be a source of conflict. Members of the same community have very different access to and control over land and water resources. It is determined by factors such as feudal legacies, gender, class and caste. Water can no longer be perceived as a common good. In fact, it is a contested resource. What used to be a collectively managed common property resource where all had minimum access started becoming precarious for some. Thus, access to water is an issue in the contemporary policy discourse.

1.3 Discourse on access to water

Access is all about the possible means by which a person is able to draw easily from an existing reserve. It is the ability to tap it like getting material objects, power to control persons, influence institution and decision making. Various mechanisms, processes and social relations affect people’s ability to benefit from or access resources. Therefore, access relations are always changing, depending on the position and power of individuals and groups within various social relationships.

There are several factors that affect a person’s access to resources. Different political and economic circumstances of an individual change the terms of access and consequently, may change the specific individuals or groups who most benefit from a set of resources. There are different mechanisms such as rights-based and illicit mechanisms and structural and relational mechanisms by which individuals are enabled to gain, control and maintain access to resources. Rights-based (that which is
sanctioned by law, custom or convention or legal access) access imply involvement of a community, State or government that will enforce a claim whereas in illegal access – capital and social identity have greater influence on who has priority of access to resources. Privileged access to the individuals or institutions with the authority to make and implement laws can strongly influence who benefits from the resources in question. Resource access is also shaped by the power to produce categories of knowledge. In a larger sense, discourse and the ability to shape discursive terms deeply influence entire frameworks of resource access. Access to technology, capital markets, knowledge, authority, social identities and social relations can shape or influence access. For example, Access to tube wells, pumps and electricity can determine who can benefit from groundwater.

Access to water reflects power asymmetries, socio-economic inequalities and other distribution factors such as land ownership. As noted, these closely follow the caste-based social norms where users belonging to a particular caste share access to a common water source. Infringement of the caste norms with respect to water sharing is rare, not recorded in any of the villages studied. Access to sacred sources is more or less reserved for the upper castes. However, it is important to recognize that access to these basic services is not necessarily assured simply by a rise in per capita income. Therefore, everyone does not have the same and equal access to water.

### 1.3.1 Inequality and Conflict in the management and access of water resources

Water is not only indispensable, but also scarce in quantity or poor in quality and sometimes it is both. In addition, there also exists inequality in terms of access to public goods like water. Consequently, it gives rise to conflicts between the various actual and potential users. Social control over water use in indigenous systems had prevented both over-use and abuse of water, and avoided a conflict between the use of water for human consumption and its functions in the maintenance of ecological processes. However, water scarcity is becoming a source of serious social conflicts among those who are the victims of water resource destruction. Many of the conflicts emerge from development interventions, which are primarily aimed at commercial exploitation of natural resources. With the expansion of economic development in
India, the resource-intensive and socially partial development is leading to social instability and conflicts.\textsuperscript{30}

There are inter-sectoral conflicts on uses of water like it is for irrigation and drinking or industry or agriculture or domestic use. Since most urban centres depend on river flows, it is leading to conflicts as one can see between Delhi and Haryana; those between the drinking water needs of Chennai and irrigation compulsions of farmers of Andhra Pradesh; and those between Ahmadabad citizens’ drinking water needs and farmers on the banks of upstream Sabarmati River.\textsuperscript{31}

This leads to intra-sectoral conflict on the basis of conflicting interests between the rich and powerful on the one hand and the poor and the marginal, on the other. The domestic uses include the conflict between the poor rural peasants requiring a pot full of drinking water and the rich urban elite using large quantities of water for meeting the requirements of water-intensive sewage system, cooling, gardening, etc. Conflicts can also arise between the State and the people when government policies lead to changes in water use and utilisation pattern and therefore undermine peoples’ access to water.\textsuperscript{32}

State intervention in the groundwater sector led to the concentration decision on use of water in the hands of the rich thus generating new conflicts between rich and the poor. This has led to a gross over-exploitation of water resources. The problem is compounded by the lack of any effective institutional check on the volume of water. In the words of Garett Hardin, “uncontrolled access to a common natural resource (in this case ground water) leads inexorably to its degradation and thus it becomes the tragedy of the commons.”\textsuperscript{33} The tragedy in the management of commons like water resource is the prevalence of a kind of coercion to make individuals act in their common interest; rational self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interest. In other words, even if all of the individuals in a large group are rational and self-interested, and would gain if, as a group, they acted to achieve their common interest or objective, they will still not voluntarily act to achieve that common or group interest.
1.3.2 Conflict due to survival needs vis-à-vis the market

In the colonial period in India, the role of water as means of survival and ecology was transformed into a source of revenue and as input to commodity production for the generation of profits. The introduction of market forces in water resources of the country created new conflicts between the market forces and survival compulsions. The large scale diversion of water resources from survival needs to the demands of the market generated conflicts between commercial interests for production of profits and people’s survival. This has a very disturbing impact so far as the poor people’s access to water resources is concerned. The poor and marginalised groups suffered because the base for their survival needs eroded with the intervention of market forces. The lack of income and purchasing power prevents them from entering into the market. Thus, conflicts over natural resources can therefore be seen as conflicts over rights.

The present model of development made people to take a mechanistic view that natural resources are also a commodity. Forests, lakes and oceans are seen not as sources of survival of a community but the means to maximise profits for a few.

An Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report identifies three methods of settlement of water-related conflicts: (i) a legal settlement, which lays down constraints that are clear in principle, but often difficult to apply in practice; (ii) an economic settlement, which seeks the optimum compromise under the laws of water supply and demand (in both quantity and quality); and (iii) a comprehensive settlement, which is more persuasive, but not optimal, and uses joint participation machinery in programming for achieving joint objectives.

1.4 Water: from a common property to a private commodity

There is a major shift in the way CPR is perceived in the contemporary development discourse. At a political level, development involves privatisation of resources. Almost all development projects have private participation as pre-requisites at different stages. This transformation of commons into commodities deprives the politically weaker groups of their right to survival, which they had through access to commons. This development model also seriously undermines the
self-renewable capacity and the sustainability of the resource, by eliminating the social constraints on resource use that are the basis of common property management.

In India and other developing countries, the transformation of CPR to commodities has largely been mediated by the State and its institutions.\textsuperscript{41} Especially in India, the State (colonial and post-colonial) is held responsible for the destruction of CPR through commercial over-exploitation and the erosion of community systems.\textsuperscript{42} In the pre-colonial period, the general rule was that the rights over water were vested in the community rather than the individual. The practice was dynamic and subject to change with the change in local situations. Thus, rights were established through practices and customs than by title deeds that could be bought and sold in the market.\textsuperscript{43} However, this practice was dismantled and the right to property emerged during the colonial period in India, ignoring the pre-existing community rights in water.\textsuperscript{44} There was a complete departure from the system that existed in the pre-colonial period when laws and regulations treated water as a common property resource.\textsuperscript{45}

During the colonial period, CPR was converted into State property, weakening the authority of the communities, thereby transforming the commons into free access resources and placed the water systems in the hands of a centralised bureaucracy with modern engineering knowledge.\textsuperscript{46} In this context, there are two colonial legislations which need to be mentioned – first, the Indian Easements Act of 1882 and the Indian Forest Act of 1894. The former legislation stated that, a land owner has the right to appropriate water which is below the land and no action will be taken against the owner even if the owner intercepts and diverts water which remains under the land of another. This was followed by the Act of 1894 which gave the State the right to acquire forest lands and along with it the water resources beneath it. It systematically transformed the way natural resources are managed and maintained and in the process these resources ended up becoming commodity generating revenue and profits.\textsuperscript{47} The situation worsened in the post-independent India with the political leadership and the bureaucracy retaining much of the colonial mindset.\textsuperscript{48} Consequently, the most seriously affected people of such a transformation are the indigenous communities and according to Shiva the “politically weak and socially disorganised groups”,\textsuperscript{49} who primarily depend upon the natural resources for their livelihood.
The development activity initiated by the State does not necessarily focus on the collective public interest. It often becomes a powerful instrument of privatisation of resources. The transformation of CPR into private property rights simultaneously implies the exclusion of the right to survival for the poor and marginalised sections of the society. The role of international developmental and aid agencies in this regard is notable. The idea of aid and technology transfer in the name of development is central to the diversion of natural resources from survival needs to the market forces. While it serves the purpose of privatisation of CPR, in the long run it contributes to the globalisation of control over local resources. Thus local resources increasingly move out of control of local communities into the hands of state or national governments and sometimes the national government into the hands of international agencies.

1.5 Water in the international political-economic discourse

Water became a prominent issue during the 1970’s in the international political-economic discourse. The 1972 United Nations conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm, identified water as one of the natural resources that has to be safeguarded. Subsequently in 1977, the United Nations held the Mar del Plata Water Conference in Argentina which was devoted exclusively to discuss the emerging water resources problem. The Mar del Plata Action Plan was issued, which was designed to address those problems. Among the important issues raised, the Action Plan advocated the effective legislation by nation states to promote efficiency and equitable use in the protection of water and water-related ecosystems. It also stated, to promote efficiency and equitable use of water, pricing and other economic incentives should be used. However, by the late 1980s, the World Bank and other multilateral and bilateral institutions discovered the virtues of privatisation in the provisioning of public services such as water and with privatisation all of the attendant problems of setting tariffs and prices.

Such an approach towards water was echoed in the UN setting for the first time in 1992 at the Dublin Water Principles which claimed “water as an economic good.” This radical consensus emerged for managing water resources for delivering water supply on an efficient, equitable and sustainable basis. Thus, the guiding
principle that emerged from the 1992 Dublin conference is that water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognised as an economic good.52

1.6 Debates on right to water

The debate on the Right to Water is traced to the Mar del Plata Water Conference 1977. Resolution II on Community water supply declared for the first time that, “all peoples, whatever their stage of development and their social and economic conditions, have the right to have access to drinking water in quantities and of a quality equal to their basic needs.”53 This was further elaborated and discussed by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which issued the notable General Comment No 15 at its 29th session held in Geneva in November 2002 dealing with the right to water. General Comment No 15 of the Committee states that “the human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.” The Committee laid down three basic factors applicable in all circumstances to fulfil the right to water. They are availability, quality and accessibility. The Committee set standards for each of these factors. Availability refers to the idea that the water supply for each person must be sufficient and continuous for personal and domestic uses.

The second factor, quality, refers to the idea that the water required for each person’s for domestic uses must be safe and free from substances that constitute a threat to a person’s health. Lastly, accessibility refers to four things namely, physical accessibility, economic accessibility, non-discrimination and information accessibility. The Committee called upon the State parties to adopt effective measures to realise, without discrimination, the right to water as enunciated in the General Comment.54 Thus, the Committee through its General Comment No 15 has provided a solid basis for recognising a human right to water.

The General Comment presents three obligations on the part of the State parties, which are respect, protect and fulfil. In this context, respect refers to the obligation where State parties refrain from interfering directly or indirectly with the
enjoyment of the right to water. It requires that the State parties must not engage in any practice that denies or limits the equal access to adequate water, arbitrarily disturbs the established management and water allocation practices, water services or infrastructures and pollutes water. Protect, on the other hand, requires the State parties to prevent third parties from interfering in any way with the enjoyment of the right to water. The obligation thus, includes adopting necessary and effective legislative and other measures to restrain third parties from denying equal access to adequate water. Protection also requires prevention of third parties indulging in illegal activities which denies equal, affordable and physical access to sufficient and safe water. The last type of obligation is to fulfil, which refers to facilitate, promote and provide. It requires the State parties to take positive measures so that community members enjoy the right to water, there is appropriate education concerning the hygienic use of water, protection of water sources and methods to minimise water wastage. It also requires the State parties to adopt such necessary measures to full realisation of the right to water like, recognition of right to water within the national, political and legal system, adopting a national water strategy and ensuring water affordability to all.

On the other hand, right to water also contains both ‘freedoms and entitlements’. While freedoms include, the right to maintain access to existing water supplies necessary for the right to water, entitlements include the right to a system of water supply and management that provides equality of opportunity for the people to enjoy the right to water.

1.6.1 Water: right versus need

The current debates on water are guided by two opposing views. One is that water is an economic good that should be priced and would best be managed through markets or at least through market-based mechanisms, such as user fees and charges. The other view is that access to water is a human right. Thus, in the recent times, there has emerged a debate about how to treat water as a basic right or a basic need. The first world water forum in Marrakech, Morocco (1997) Declaration fell short of regarding drinking water as a right as it happened in the Mar del Plata, Dublin or the Rio conference on water. It merely recommended, “Action to recognise the basic
human needs to have access to clean water ....” Similar statements were included in the Ministerial Declaration of The Hague, which called for the recognition that, “access to safe and sufficient water and sanitation are basic human needs.” The difficulty in declaring water as a basic human need or a human right was further highlighted by the General Assembly on the United Nations.

In 1999, the General Assembly issued the resolution of the right to development and in its realisation it reaffirmed, “the rights to food and clean water are fundamental rights and their promotion constitutes a moral imperative both for national governments and for the international community.” All the conferences and forums that were held during the 1980s and 1990s issued declarations, resolutions and detailed action plans aimed at addressing the water problem. However, the resolutions, declarations and action plans are statements of policy that do not possess formal legal enforceability. Since they are not subject to signing and ratification, they do not create binding effects (though they may provide the impetus for later binding instruments and further the definition of policy and principle in a given area). The resolutions emanating from the various water conferences and forums could not clearly define the issue of access to water as a basic need or as a basic right. Except the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution on the right to development, other declarations and resolutions fell short of declaring safe drinking water as a basic human right. The difference between declaring water as a basic need and as a basic right gives two different approaches to look into water issue. A right conveys a sense of legal entitlement and if drinking water is declared a basic right, then the State is duty bound to protect and provide all its members. On the other hand, a basic need represents the recipients as passive beneficiaries. In this sense, it is not the sole responsibility of the State to protect and safeguard water for all its members; rather they themselves have to arrange for it.

1.7 Water and the United Nations millennium development goals (MDGs)

In September 2000, building upon a decade of major United Nations conferences and summits, world leaders came together at United Nations
Headquarters in New York to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration, committing their nations to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty and setting out a series of time-bound targets – with a deadline of 2015 – that have become known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs have become the guiding principles for the international development community. In the MDG, there are eight goals and 18 targets on which the signatory countries are supposed to act. Of a total of eight goals, one of the goals (goal-7) is to ensure environmental sustainability. Under this goal, target 10 states, “halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.” This makes the signatory States to act upon providing safe drinking water to their citizens and make necessary policies and programmes towards achieving that target. This was echoed in the National Water Policy (2002) in India which gave highest priority to provisioning of safe drinking water to the people. Thus, MDGs entered into the arena of country’s public policy through a rights perspective.

Further in 2000 The United Nations committee adopted a resolution on right to health which includes access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. According to Bharati, ensuring access to sufficient and safe water is part of the fulfilment of basic human right and entails the following:

- **Water as a Right:** Fresh water is a legal entitlement, rather than a commodity or service provided on a charitable basis.
- **Accessibility:** everyone must have safe and easy access to clean drinking water.
- **Attention to lower socio-economic classes:** The *least served* should be better targeted and therefore inequalities decreased.
- **Affordability:** for one and all.
- **Empowerment:** Communities and vulnerable groups should be empowered to take part in decision making.
- **Making adequate quantity available:** Adequate amount of water available at individual level increases the macro-income level & has its spill-over effects too.
1.8 The Indian context

On the eve of independence, in his speech to the Constituent Assembly on August 14, 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru, while reminding the country that independence from British rule is but only a step, observed that much remains to be done. The task ahead included among other things, in his words, has to be focussed on the ending of poverty and inequality of opportunity. His basic thrust was to overcome the inequality of access. However, despite his commitment as reflected in the policies pursued by his government and the successive governments, the promise remained unfulfilled which he placed in the pegging order. The unevenness in development is reflected in the widespread inequalities found in the economic, social and political spheres. It is now widely believed and viewed that there exist two India’s – one that has all luxuries of the first world and has the privilege of access to everything from influencing State authorities for their own needs. It is no exaggeration to say that the other India lives in abject poverty, having very limited access to or, more often, no access over the basic necessities of life. This segment includes large sections of the rural and urban poor. They have a formal status as citizens and who can exercise only their franchise as an instrument of political bargaining once in five years. They have no other organic relationship to organs of the State. Most governmental agencies do not treat them as citizens unlike their counterparts who fall in the middle and upper rungs of society. They make their claims on government, and in turn are governed, not within the framework of stable constitutionally defined rights and laws, but rather through temporary, contextual and unstable arrangements arrived at through direct political negotiations.

Therefore, the ambitious goals that Nehru had placed before the countrymen continue to remain largely unaccomplished. The unexpected political culture in India in the form of apathetic citizens, inactive civil society and a bureaucracy-centred administration is as well responsible as the dishonest political class for the mess up. Consequently there is still large scale poverty, illiteracy and level of deprivation often shrinking. Groups of population are deprived of their basic necessities and honourable living conditions and in some areas they constitute the majority. This provoked Sen to identify in his pioneering work, *Development as Freedom*, to say that part of the
world, “live in unprecedented opulence, yet we also live in a world with remarkable deprivation, destitution and oppression.”

The XI Five Year Plan (FYP) declares that the so-called rapid economic growth of the country “failed to be sufficiently inclusive.” Further it states “the poor do not have even minimum access and a select few have relatively better access to urban services.” Thus this assertion by the apex policy planning body of the Indian State articulates loudly its failure to be inclusive. However with each successive government and the change of political party in power, there is a new group of intellectuals put in place for the apex planning body, the Planning Commission of India. Their primary task is to find out lacunas in the previous plan document, criticise the previous government and then put their own ideas in the new plan. But at the end the same group of planners end up doing the same as their predecessors did. Successively this is the practice noticeable in the five year plan documents.

While it is always the endeavour of a democratic government to ensure that the policies pursued (both economic and social) lead to accelerated improvement of welfare of the common people, the Indian State appears to be exhibiting tendencies which contradicts it. This has been proved by some independent studies in divergent areas of State interventions in India. While in the short run, provisioning of the basic services such as health, education, clean drinking water, etc, impacts directly on welfare of the common people, in the long run, it determines their economic opportunities for the future. Thus, without access to these services or having limited access, equality of opportunity cannot be ensured.

1.9 Access to drinking water in urban areas: country level projections

Access to drinking water in India remained a challenge even after six decades of planning and development and despite massive outlays for drinking water. Available data indicates that in the urban areas, around 70 per cent of households are reported to have access to tap water and 21 per cent through tube well/hand pump. Further 66 per cent urban households seem to be having their principal source within their premises, while 32 per cent had it within 0.2 km. On the other hand, in rural
areas around 50 per cent of households were served by a tube well/hand pump, 26 per cent by a well, and only 19 per cent by a tap. Only about 31 per cent of rural households have own source of water within their premises, the rest had to go out to fetch their drinking water. Some of the main challenges the country is facing for the provisioning of drinking water are the following: population in the rural areas do not have assured sources of drinking water; there is urban deprivation among the urban population; the problem of water pollution and contamination are rampant; the problem of fluorosis; high level of salinity in water. Apart from this one more challenge in the form of private provisioning of drinking water is becoming the readily accepted answer to the Indian policy makers for failure of State provisioning of drinking water. Even though there are several sources of water like rainwater, rivers, springs, wells, ponds, tanks, and lakes, due to rapid industrialization and urbanization they are getting polluted and many are rapidly drying up. This has led to the scarcity of potable drinking water and has resulted in the commoditisation of water and is being treated as an economic good or cashable resource. This in turn has led to the intense privatization of water resources at the cost of disenfranchisement of local communities, indigenous people and the farmers.

Consequently, drinking water has become a politically contentious issue. This is so because it has become a major problem for the common man and the political leaders across their political affiliations try to attract attention by raising the issue of drinking water. The issue of drinking water evokes strong response in the electoral political discourse of the country where election promises have drinking water as the top priority.

Simultaneously, there has been an enormous increase in the plan outlay for this sector. The first five year plan allocated Rs. 43.00 crores which rose to Rs. 18624.00 crores in the ninth five year plan. Apart from this steady increase in the plan outlays, there are also several policies drafted at the national level to facilitate the State provisioning of drinking water. Besides several central interventions, there are programmes for augmenting drinking water supply. For example, the Technology Mission in 1986 and the National Water Policy 1987 led to the introduction of Sectoral Reforms for water in 2002, and a redrafted National Water Policy evolved in 2002. These major policy initiatives on water appeared to have boosted effort at
prioritising drinking water availability. However, water accessibility remains a challenge to policy planners. There appears to be a mismatch between State policies, plan outlays and people’s access to potable drinking water. This projects a serious governance deficit in this vital sector.

1.10 The Politics of access to water in India

The dynamics of politics in provisioning safe drinking water to all in India calls for an analysis. The first is the contradictions in policy and implementation. In the post-independence period, the top brass of Indian leaders were pre-occupied with the zeal and enthusiasm to see the people emerge from a deprived colonial life. Therefore, when the debates on planning and development of the country came before them, an important objective of Indian planning they perceived was to achieve economic development with equity and social justice. However, as discussed earlier and argued by Sen, these policies were less inclusive and at times could not include the lower strata of the population in the planning process. In the stage of policy formulation and conceptualisation, the role of stakeholders and the community members who are directly affected are ignored.

At one point, while seeking election to the legislatures, the leaders promise a host of facilities such as clean drinking water among others; once they are elected, their promises gets diluted in terms of priorities. Therefore as Kohli argued, access to State power in India is bitterly contested not only for the political ends of exercising power and influencing policy but also as a source of livelihood and rapid upward mobility. Thus, elections are fought more to assert their (the leaders) position in society and fulfilling the promises made during elections gets lower priority.

Second, in terms of resource allocation particularly to urban drinking water sector, over the years it increased phenomenally (though it is a meagre amount as compared to the total expenditure of the government and compared to spending in other sectors). However, the problem remains the same and times have increased in several areas. Considerable size of city population is not covered by the supply networks in cities and water supply is getting restricted. Therefore, collection of water, for many, is a stressful activity that encroaches on their time and space and thus gives rise to water
related tensions that were absent in the past. The public taps are sites where long queues are seen and sometimes involve bitter conflict for water. This is contrary to the government’s claim that all the people are provided with drinking water facilities.

On the other hand, when it comes to public spending, basic pro-poor services especially those that serve rural poor are often at the bottom of the list, after services that meet the needs of the more effectively organised groups such as the urban centres. However, in the urban areas also there is a lot of disparity in water distribution and the consequent access to water by the people. Areas in the cities where the wealthy and influential reside have easy access to water whereas those in the poorer areas tend to fight for it. Therefore, in heterogeneous user groups the resource is vulnerable to elite capture.

One of the major areas of concern is how the idea of coverage and access is conceived in the planning process. While planning for provisioning of drinking water, government agencies in India stress more on the coverage side, asking questions like, what is the percentage of people covered with drinking water facilities, which areas in the city are covered with supply of drinking water, etc.? However, the basic problem with such kind of approach towards providing safe drinking water is, it conceals the actual access to drinking water by the people. For example, in an area not covered with the piped supply of drinking water, generally the city level authorities install a public stand post (PSP) or a borewell or supply through tankers. However, this arrangement does not guarantee actual access to water.

There are several factors such as the population in the area and the number of people dependent on a particular water source and the distance of the water source from the place of residence; each of these plays an important role in the people’s access to drinking water. It is important to note however, that in an area where a hand-pump or a stand-post has been installed, the area is termed as covered with safe drinking water facility by the city level authorities. But nobody checks whether the installed facility is functioning or not, whether people in the area are utilizing water from that facility or the water quality is consumable at all. It must not be forgotten that physical coverage does not necessarily ensure functional coverage and access to water for the people.
Major river systems are supposedly intended to augment the availability of water. However, the runoff water of these rivers, it appears, is far greater than the tapped water. There appears to be policy gaps in this sector a situation in which we are unable to ensure water for the people in drought prone area while a large amount of water is wasted. The problem is further compounded by the misguided priorities. Many of the Indian cities are located on the banks of major rivers or large water tanks. As fallout of the rapid and unregulated urbanisation in these cities, the catchment areas of these water bodies are occupied by the land mafias and real estate developers while the government remains a mute spectator. Over time, with increase in the population of the city, the demand for water increases and in order to meet the increased demand the government searches for water sources in distant rivers and dams having destroyed the in house source. Such projects need huge investments which the government is unable to meet. Consequently, the government approaches the multilateral and bilateral donor agencies for funds which come with pre-conditions such as increase in water tariffs, private sector participation and privatisation. Thus, the failure of government to prioritise policy and inability to regulate the pace of urbanisation has led to deeper crisis and finally the burden is on the common people.

In a broader understanding however, the politics of access to drinking water in India relates to the State-market-community dichotomy and the role played by each of them. According to Mosse, there are two major political and policy positions currently shape questions around water resources and their development in India. The first is an environmentalist critique of the modernising development strategies of the centralised State and second is a reformist policy for the devolution from State to the communities of users and a reduced role for the State. Though Mosse talked about in the irrigation sector the issues are identical in the area of drinking water provisioning.

1.10.1 Lack of access to democratic institutions leads to lack of access to natural resources

In the pre-colonial and colonial period in India, domination and access to resources rested on a hegemonic caste-based ideology. This form of control was
increasingly challenged in the post independent India as new assertions of equality were legitimised within a democratic polity.\textsuperscript{88} There has been a historic shift in the mode of domination and access to resources. The post-independent Indian State made special provisions for the socially weaker and deprived sections to assert their identity and access to resources through institutions. Constitutional provisions for equality and justice were made simultaneously creating several institutions to implement it, suddenly the deprived sections found themselves within the reach of institutions and thus access to resources. Therefore, access to the modern democratic institutions has furthered the cause for access to natural resources such as water which in the pre-colonial and colonial period was limited to the upper strata of the society. The influence of different groups and their political coalitions shifted considerably over time in the post-independence period and these changes influenced the allocation of public resources. Benefits of the expansion in public goods such as water were unevenly distributed among the disadvantaged groups corresponding to their influence in the system.

Within the deprived categories, one notices unequal access to benefits and resources. According to Banerjee and Somanathan there are important realignments in the influence of minority groups. Areas where Scheduled Castes (SCs) concentrations are more gained in terms of access to several facilities such as high schools, health centres and piped water, while those with Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Muslims remain disadvantaged in India. The increased assertiveness and political representation of the SCs have made their position stronger and access to resources easier.\textsuperscript{89} In contrast, the Scheduled Tribes remained, until the mid-1990s, largely invisible on the political landscape in India.

1.10.2 Lack of access and inequality in access; a result of crisis in governance

Governability in the contemporary discourse concerns with the State’s capacity to accommodate diverse interests and promote development.\textsuperscript{90} In contrast, the Indian State in many respects has limited success or has failed to do so. As it would be seen in the chapters that follow, there is enormous amount of inequality that exists in terms of access to resources and State provisioning of services. According to Kohli, crisis of governability refers to three types of problems: the absence of long-
term coalitions, policy ineffectiveness and incapacity to accommodate diverse political demands without violence. He further clarifies the matter stating that political parties in India rule without stable social support and as a result, the government is unable to accommodate demands from diverse social groups.

Consequently, in a democratic polity like India, political goals are increasingly pursued by violent means. These signs according to Kohli are the growing problems of governability. These features in Indian context are increasingly evident in the recent times. There is deprivation in terms of access to resources while certain sections have easy and greater access, whereas others do not have even the basic minimum. These can be further seen in the eleventh five year plan which states that the people residing in the poorer areas in cities do not even have minimum access to clean drinking water. Thus, lack of access and inequality in access stems from crisis of governance.

Lack of effective monitoring, ineffective rules and regulations and application of sanctions differently to different people those who violate government regulations and the bureaucratic nature of the system with rent-seeking behaviour on the part of officials had led to preferential treatment for those who can influence. The general distrust on the bureaucratic system resulting from such a situation makes cooperation in the management of State controlled resources less likely.

1.11 Crisis of governability and failure of State

Kohli in his pioneering work Democracy and Discontents argues “a crisis of governability is growing in India.” The contention here is that, successive governments in India which have been elected with large majorities which repeatedly failed to translate popular support and expectation into effective policies, and simultaneously the role of violence has been growing enormously. What makes this even more interesting is that the roots of the growing crisis of governability are more political rather than socio-economic. The factors are mainly located in India’s political structure. The intense political competition and the opportunities provided by a highly interventionist state helped many groups to mobilise and intensify their demands and activity. Consequently, there is growing uneasiness and difficulty
among the political parties to accommodate diverse demands and rule effectively. The growing incapacity of the State in India to accommodate the diverse demands is sometimes perceived as a manifestation of a crisis of governability.

The inefficiencies and inequities in access to water and water supply system primarily from top-down management by the State bureaucrats. While a study on cooperatives in rural India by Baviskar and Attwood reveals the above facts, the story of drinking water provisioning is nothing different. This approach of top-down management, planning and regulation by the technocrats and replicating certain successful cases in one location to others ignoring the local conditions has severely compromised the successful implementation of different programmes and policies.

In recent years, there has been a growing trend of major central government policy initiatives getting floundered and their support base declining sharply, further contributing to the cause of crisis in governance. As the issue of competing demands increases, the authority and support base of the leaders are fiercely challenged. Consequently, there is an increase in populism and establishing personal charisma ignoring the rules and institutions.

This process of establishing personal authority has undermined the possibility of establishing a system of authority based on the procedural rationality of democracy. The emphasis is not on impersonal procedures of accountability, more on politically legitimised ways of manipulating the network of patronage distribution. In addition, the economic scarcities and heterogeneous social structures in India have contributed to the weakening of political organisations and other democratic institutions. These institutions are crucial as they contribute to our freedoms and our “opportunities and prospects depend on what institutions exist and how they function.” However, the weak political institutions have encouraged unhealthy political competition, which has politicised all types of social divisions such as caste, class and ethnicity. Thus, the deinstitutionalisation of the Indian State has diminished the State’s capacity to make policy and manage conflict – that is, to govern wisely and well. The problem has further been compounded with no new institutional mechanisms emerging to meet the fast-changing politico-socio-economic contexts in India. Therefore, the emerging crisis out of such circumstances has increased the
problems of governability in India and thus failure of the State to meet the demands and expectations of its associates – the citizens.

1.12 Approach towards water in the post-reform period

The post-independence Indian State was at the centre of planning and development. The State was omnipresent in every sphere of the economy. During this period interventionist policies were highly successful across the world, firmly establishing the State as an important and often the leading actor in the functioning of the economy. However, towards the seventies, the state-centric model of development started to falter. What followed was a virulent attack on the State both at the theoretical and at the practical levels. This culminated in the dismantling of socialist central planning in 1989 and the attempt to establish capitalism in Eastern Europe and the erstwhile USSR. Although the rolling back of the State has not proved to be straightforward as many anti-interventionists had initially thought, this reversal of trend has had a significant impact on the theory and practice of State intervention.

Thus, in India and in other developing countries, there have been many radical neoliberal reforms since the 1980s. These reforms were implemented sometimes voluntarily but often under pressure from multilateral agencies such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO and other donor governments under the aegis of governance conditionalities.

In the post-reform period, the way people perceive things have changed drastically and it was never a spontaneous process. Rather it was, in the words of Chomsky, “manufactured consent” by a select group in order to perpetuate their own selfish interests. This group as one can call them neo-liberals subscribe to the new political economy or the government failure approach, which rejects the welfare economic view of the State as a benign and omnipotent social guardian which maximises social welfare. They argue that the State should be seen as an agent which serves the interests of the politically influential groups inside and outside the State apparatus (politicians, bureaucrats, interests groups), which means that State intervention is likely to create inefficiencies, red-tapism and rent-seeking rather than correct for market failures.
Thus, the neo-liberals started to see an opportunity for a large potential market in India which remains to be exploited. Following the adoption of reforms, in India the early 1990’s saw a significant liberalisation of the economy, as the earlier ideas of planning and State ownership came under intense domestic criticisms on grounds of being ineffective and corruption ridden. This also meant that, among other sector water sector also came under such liberal policies. Since the Dublin Declaration of 1992, water is increasingly seen as having economic value in all its competing uses and water as an economic good. With this, there was a major shift in the planning for water in India and for the first time in the eighth five year plan water was declared “to be managed as any other commodity.” This also advocated for private sector participation in the management and provisioning of drinking water to the people. The price signal is thus evoked as a way to solve water scarcity problems and due to liberalisation, there has been a push to recover costs in the water sector, especially for service delivery. Thus, water in the post-reform period has moved from being viewed as a public good to a private commodity. This change is partly due to the growing influence of powerful players such as the World Bank and transnational corporations that are paving the way for the privatisation of water services. Hence there is an unresolved struggle between efforts aimed at making water more private, in the interest of efficiency\textsuperscript{110} and making water public in the interest of equity.\textsuperscript{111} The struggle persists because of reluctance among powerful players to acknowledge water as a basic right and not just as a basic need. The next section takes a look at some of the significant works in the area.

1.13 Review of literature

Issues in water led to intense debate and research in the present context. The literature falling in the domain of water resource is too vast in terms of depth and richness. However, within the broad policy framework there are certain aspects where the literature is very old and rich like irrigation, basin management and regional development. Contrary to it, there are issues such as water supply and health, environmental implications and ecology, where literature is relatively young and fast growing. Further, as the research on water gets more intense there are several other issues like, water markets, private sector participation, health, gender, empowerment
and climate change, the literature on which are mostly of recent origin but are growing very fast. In addition, there are other areas of research in water sector such as recycling and reuse of water, seawater desalination and watershed development. However, the scope of the present research is limited to safe drinking water and its provisioning in the urban areas in India. Hence, the literature reviewed is confined to the issues around provisioning of safe drinking water.

1.13.1 Culture, civilisations and water

Since time immemorial, water has been associated with different cultures and civilisations were built along rivers and water bodies. In a micro setting, water enters the intimacies of domestic spaces (Mehta and Punja: 2007) and shapes relations between villagers of different castes and gender (Brara: 2007, Carney: 2007) while creating collaboration as well as conflicts (Baviskar: 2007). Yet control over water leads to control over people. It has been seen historically that struggles over water are simultaneously struggles for power over symbolic representations and material resources (Baviskar: 2007).

1.13.2 Water as a promoter of socio-economic development

Water supply is a necessary part of the infrastructure required for the fulfillment of socio-economic development. Access to safe drinking water is regarded as essential both as a direct component of well-being as well as an input into productive capability (Besley and Ghatak: 2004). The consumption of at least eight glasses of water per day is recommended by physicians for maintaining balance in fluids vital for the system to survive and prevent dehydration. Drinking safe water is essential to prevent fluorosis and other diseases, which eventually lead to decline in productivity. Therefore, securing access to safe drinking water is an essential component of overall human well-being. But, the water supply system in many developing countries including India is affected by two major problems. First, new consumers are connected to the existing supply system placing more strain on the already installed capacities and thereby rendering the system less efficient. Secondly, transmission loss owing to poor management, lots of water is lost before reaching the households (John: 1997). Water crisis is generally seen in terms of an increasing
imbalance between water supply and demand. Demand management is important especially in the context of scarce resources, as the supplies are limited. Demand management brings efficiency through pricing of water when compared to supply regulations like increasing the amount of supply (Reddy: 2003). Thus, it is argued that the emphasis of treating water as a free good and bureaucratic allocation and management are inconsistent with the present requirement and challenges (Saleth: 2002). Therefore managing water is going to be a critical challenge for future economic growth and ecological sustainability (Baviskar: 2007).

1.13.3 Growing demand for water

Rapid urbanisation, industrialisation and population growth have greatly increased the demand for safe drinking water in the urban areas (Lee: 2002). The close relationship between the pace of urbanisation and the availability and accessibility of safe drinking water to the urban people has commonly been accepted (Rao: 1985, Barai: 1993, Kundu: 1993, Sivaramkrishnan: 1998, Nunan & Satterthwaite: 2000, Reddy & Behera: 2003, Llorente & Zerah: 2003, Sivaramkrishnan, Kundu & Singh: 2005). Adequate provisioning of drinking water supply to all in urban areas remains a formidable challenge (Ruet, Sarvanan & Zerah: 2002) and water services tend to be provided to those sectors of population with developed country incomes (Lee 2002). Thus, the distribution of water resources is associated with political power and according to the power structure of the different groups within the local community water is distributed (Gilmartin: 1994, Mosse: 2007). Mosse (1997) argues that patterns of water control and distribution inherently involves caste relationships and caste identity is inseparable in such matters. He further argues, systems of water use tend to reflect authority structures, with lower castes and women being excluded from the exercise of controlling power.

1.13.4 Water as a fundamental right

On the other hand, safe drinking water is considered as a fundamental human right of all human beings putting emphasis on the State obligations to protect and fulfil this right (Iyer: 2003, Ramachandraiah: 2004). In December 2000 the Supreme Court of India gave a landmark judgment that, drinking water is a fundamental right
under the right to life (Article-21) of the Indian Constitution. On the other hand, in the
ternational political-economic discourse drinking water is perceived to have human
rights implications in order to meet the basic requirements and to attain equity in
access and to empower vulnerable groups. In this context, demand for water assumes
an ethical and social dimension (Saleth: 2002).

Another major issue is the rights over water or the ownership of the water. Who exactly owns water resources? In the ancient days, due to the uniqueness of
water to life, water was considered as a social asset (John: 1997, Petrella: 2001,
Shiva: 2002). It is further argued that, the original natural rights over water belong to
the people and not to the government or the State (Singh: 1992). Further, going a step
forward, Vandana Shiva (2002) argued that water is a natural right to any human
being, which can be used but not owned. Furthermore, the laws in India recognize
only the use rights and not ownership or proprietary rights over flowing water
(Milliman: 2002, Iyer: 2003). But in the case of ground water, the ownership of land
simultaneously carries the ownership of water (Singh: 1992).

1.13.5 Water and shift in development model: Implications

With a paradigm shift in the Indian economy from a state-centric model of
development to the free market economy and the process of globalisation, the control
of resources has shifted from local communities into the hands of private sectors and
slowly to the transnational global operators and multi-national companies (Prasad &
Ramachandaiah: 1999, Shiva: 2002). The neo-liberal prescriptions about water
management have not only encouraged privatisation, they have also refashioned the
State into the image of a corporation (Baviskar: 2007). There is huge market operating
for bottled water business in the name of free market economy. They are being
promoted as means of increasing economic efficiency in the use of water
(Frederiksen: 2002). There appears to be a sort of imperialism against water, where
the transnational corporations are making water as their private ownership (Alam:
2004).

A consensus has slowly been built that there is water scarcity and in the
interest of water use and efficiency, water needs to be both priced and traded (Lee:
The rationale behind this is, trading in water rights promotes water use efficiency as markets allocate water to the highest paying user (Dinar & Subramanian: 2002). According to Lee (1999) “Nor it is surprising that even today we find it difficult to treat water as a commodity, as an economic good, even when we recognize it as a scarce resource.” Thus, the scarcity of water is transformed by the multinational companies and donor agencies into a market opportunity for water corporations (Shiva: 2002).

On the other hand, the management, operations and financing the water supply, which is traditionally seen as a primary responsibility of the government, is termed as the old view. And consequently, a new view emerged, in the existing armoury of policies for water resource supply based on an efficient, equitable and sustainable basis, where water is primarily treated as having an economic value (Briscoe & Garn: 2002). Thus, in the contemporary policy discourse at the national level in India water is perceived increasingly as another raw material for commodity production in agriculture and industry (Shiva: 1991). One will not miss the trend of governments showing interest in ensuring minimum infrastructure for establishing industries.

1.13.6 Water and market: the emerging scenario

A market-based approach to the management of water resources has serious socio-economic implications. It is biased in favour of the rich and is highly energy, water and other non-reproducible resources intensive, and often does unacceptable violence to the environment (Bhaduri: 2008). The prime rationale behind the market-based approach is efficiency in water use. But even in achieving efficiency, the market mechanism sometimes may be less than effective, particularly in the presence of what are called public goods (Sen: 1999). Furthermore, such an approach towards an inevitable necessity of life has put a big question mark on the equity and sustainability of it. Issues of equity, social justice and sustainability are not necessarily the concerns of the market (Iyer: 2003). The depletion and deterioration of water resources has taken place with the rise in the power of transnational
corporations depriving the local communities and indigenous people over their share of water (Gleick: 2002). The unmindful implementation of reforms has resulted in increase of destitution and social conflict (Stieglitz: 2002). In the new traditionalist view (Shiva: 1988, Agarwal & Narain: 1997), colonialism, capitalism and the development projects of the post-colonial State destroyed the harmonious social relationships and the practice of ecologically sensitive resource use (Attwood: 2007).

Thus the Indian State, both colonial and post-colonial played an important role in the decline of community management of water through its interventions and assertion of proprietary rights of common resources (CSE: 1985, Agarwal and Narain: 1997) which led to the emergence of market. That State control of water resources is not necessarily the best way to guarantee the most efficient use of water appears to be the emerging reality. In fact, the State largely is held as responsible for the tragedy of over-exploitation of water resources occurring today (Sick: 2007). Water delivery, it is further argued, has led to the inequality in access to safe water which has increased rather than decreased (Roowen: 2002). Thus, access to water is denied to many because of the policies pursued by the State itself (Prasad & Ramachandraiah: 1999). Therefore, in the long run, democracy cannot flourish as long as such exclusionary structures and policies are pursued by the State (Oommen: 2008). On the other hand, the sometimes the State functions outside formal institutions and people are more concerned with how to get their works done. As a result they obey more to the person in authoritative position than the established procedure (Reno: 1995).

1.13.7 Water and community participation

It may be noted that the community-based conservation and co-management regimes are also cited as solutions to the crisis in water management (Sick: 2007). Yet community level participation in water supply and management is often ignored by the international development community (Gleick: 2002) as the requirements of community are not generally taken into reckoning. Studies show projects with strong community input are the most successful in terms of reaching the greatest number of the poor with long term services (McGarry: 1987). Informal associations among the citizens rather than formal have worked successfully in solving their problems. At
times of need they come together and disperse as their problems are addressed. This has significant impact on their access to resources (Krishna: 2002). Therefore there appears to be a consensus on the need for public participation in policy related issues. This is thought of as necessary for efficiency and equity as private ownership and operation appears to be resulting in neglect of social goals (Howe & Dixon: 2002). Further, the politics of water discourse seem to be dominated by thinking of perceived and projected water scarcity. What follows is a discussion of a series of issues pertaining to practical implementation of accepted principles such as how to increase supply, what technology to use and to what extent (Jairath: 2003).

1.13.8 Access to water: inadequacies in governance approach

On the other hand, a study by Basu (1995) reveals how ineffective the urban system is in responding to a crisis which affects the poor and underprivileged. The urban institutions are dominated by the middle classes who lack social consciousness. They neither perceive the interdependence between themselves and the poor slum dwellers, nor fear a threat from below. Hence, they are not concerned about the problems of the urban poor and blame the low-status group for their miserable state. Thus the expanding State services in India still do no reach the poorest segments of urban and rural society.

1.13.9 Water governance: the contemporary approach

The new phenomenon that has emerged in the recent times is water governance to manage water. Due to the abundance in availability of water without any overuse, water was sufficiently available for all. However with the emergence of modern technology and water intensive way of living, water started to become a source of conflict which has been discussed earlier in page 6-8. Thus the management of those conflicts centred round water gave way for a new approach to look into water issue. In the new approach, the primacy of governance is noted. Water governance, thus, has became the new mantra of resolving water related conflicts and issues. The concept of water governance has wider meanings in wider contexts. According to Rogers and Hall (2003), “water governance refers to the range of political, social, economic and administrative systems that are in place to develop and manage water
resources, and the delivery of water services, at different levels of society.” Further it refers to efficiency and equity in distribution; delivery process, transparent, accountable, participatory and responsive; empowerment of citizens and delegation of powers to enhance their welfare. There is much stress on water governance in order to bring sustainability in water use. Sustainability in water use can only emerge from the democratic control over water resources. Therefore, water governance is required to make the equitable and sustainable use of the resource.

The above review of literature pertaining to the subject shows the trend and the gaps. There are several studies on water which touched upon several issues relating to water such as causes of growing demand for water, urbanisation and impact on water, role of water in socio-economic development, pricing of water, role of market in water allocation, role of community in water management and governance approach in water management, to mention a few. However, what is missing in all these studies is a study on access to water. In the current discourse of politics of policy making in drinking water, the dominant model is highly bureaucratic and technocratic in nature which places emphasis over infrastructure building. Studies show that in water management there is a perceptive engineering bias and the economic and managerial aspects only follow. Policy shift towards big projects like river linking are the manifestation of this shift. Consequently, issues of water are seen as techno-bureaucratic exercises and transforms democratic functioning into spatial management of populations. In the literature pertaining to drinking water management, discussion on how and in what way policy is formulated is missing. Further, the generally missing feature in the literature is the aspect of access and thus, the present study tries to make a modest attempt in that regard.

1.14 Policy options and implementation

Access to potable drinking water to all in India is a challenge despite sixty years of planning and development. Most studies show how inequitable access to water availability is. The National Commission on Urbanisation for instance observed how water supply system was unequal, unjust, and highly biased in favour of the rich. It stated how the wealthiest and often the most politically powerful member of the society had access to drinking water.
The country has through its plans and different policies tried to address the issue. The major policy interventions like Technology Mission, National Water Policy 1987 and 2002, and Sectoral Reforms for water 2002 are some policy initiatives at a macro level determining the access and distribution of water over time. However, government data shows the problem remains unattended despite policy pronouncements.

Access to water resources in rural areas is through rivers, lakes, tanks, etc. Although access through these sources was mediated by caste and social power structures, yet basic access to water is through these sources. However, potable rural water supply over a period of time assumed alarming position. The basic source of water for the urban population continues to be tap water and ground water sources processed in various stages. Access to water in the urban areas always encountered problems but now the scale and intensity appears to be a huge challenge.

Notable causes for this state include unplanned industrialization, urbanization, population growth, practices which promoted intensive agriculture through the use of pesticides and insecticides and so on. The impact of lack of adequate water supply often lead to conflicts among the villagers, among urbanites and the State institutions, reduced quality of life due to the ecological hazards and above all availability of water itself. This signifies that the water sector in India do not reflect the true status on the ground.

On the other hand, planning for water resource and its development in India is increasingly viewed as a techno-managerial and bureaucratic exercise. Water governing institutions are often headed by generalist bureaucrats or engineers. In such an arrangement, what follows is planning without social concern and mostly based on demand management such as fixing tariffs, full cost-recovery and so on. Moreover, this approach of water resource management is non-participatory and the role of stakeholders and community members are overlooked both in the implementation and decision-making process.

In the post-reform scenario, when the State is slowly abdicating from its welfare role, privatisation is seen as the only answer. When, market is controlling the resources, there is concern for quality, equity and social justice aspect and the sustainability of the resource use.
On the other hand, the role of market in addressing the equity problem in the society is questionable. There appears to be systematic attempt at depriving the common people of access to water and indirect encouragement of market players. Not only public taps at several places are dry there is an attempt to trade in public water supply/distribution. A lot of publicity is given in media to the polluted water supplied by State and big advertisements are issued assuring safe drinking water through markets. The situation is so distressing that a photo published in a vernacular daily showed official of the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (HMWS&SB) taking bottled water of a private agency. This only shows why common man should not consume ordinary water supplied by HMWS&SB.

There is also a debate on the scarcity of water. But, the problem is whether it is scarcity that is denying people drinking water or it is the State policies that have deprived the people of drinking water. When the State does not have enough water to provide its people for drinking, simultaneously it is leasing out water bodies like rivers, to the multinational companies to be exploited to their own ends.

1.15 Objectives of the Study

- To understand the changing role of the State in providing drinking water to its citizens in urban areas and the politics of market forces that cause deprivation and inequitable access to drinking water.
- To examine the politics of inter-relations between the State and the market that has led to the marketing of water as a private commodity versus the use of water as a public good.
- To analyse the State policies on water in order to assess whether they resulted in adequate distribution of drinking water.
- To discuss stages of private provisioning of drinking water.
- To explore the role of civil society organisations in people’s access to drinking water.
1.16 Main arguments

- The policies and programmes adopted by the government failed to provide adequate quantity and quality of drinking water to people in urban areas.
- The exclusion of poor and disadvantaged people from participation in water decision-making resulted in low level of access.
- Marketisation of water has led to inadequate and inequitable access to water for the people.

1.17 Method

To pursue the objectives listed for the study, the researcher put to use both primary and secondary sources for obtaining data. Under primary sources, an attempt was to analyse the government policies, orders and records to understand the functioning and objectives of the institutions created. Further, a survey was conducted in a selected area under the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply & Sewerage Board (HMWS&SB) in Hyderabad.

The choice of Hyderabad for the study was not a random exercise. Intense thought went into the choice of Hyderabad as the study area. The primary issue that struck to the researcher’s mind is the institutional arrangements for provisioning drinking water to the people of Hyderabad. Presently a board, the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (HMWS&SB), created by the Andhra Pradesh State Legislative Assembly, is responsible for the planning, implementation and maintenance of drinking water facilities to Hyderabad. The issue assumes importance on the face of a greater demand for decentralisation and people’s participation at the city level across the country in accordance with the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act in India. Contrary to it, a parastatal agency such as the HMWS&SB is responsible for drinking water provisioning in Hyderabad which is dominated by engineers and bureaucrats with no public participation.

However, the other major criterion for selecting the city of Hyderabad as a case study was the fact that the city represents the same inherent water governance issues at the city level typical to any other Indian city. There is demand for increase in water tariffs, the challenging issue of ever-increasing population, a high level of
wastage of drinking water while transmission and illegal water supplies, to mention a few. On the other hand, being a land-locked city in the Deccan plateau with arid climate, Hyderabad presents more or less the same problems and issues on drinking water as other Indian cities such as dependence on long distance sources such as Krishna and Godavari rivers for drinking water needs on the face of exhausted reservoirs in the city’s vicinity. The researcher’s own experience of six years of living in the city of Hyderabad has also played its own part in selecting the city for the present study.

The survey was conducted through an interview schedule (see Annexure - 1) at the household level. The primary objective of the survey was to elicit information from the ground to check the level of user satisfaction, access to drinking water of the residents in the area and the level of service delivery to the citizens in order to ascertain and examine the implementation of different policies and programmes and its impact on the people’s access to drinking water. The area selected was Adikmet Sub Zone – 1 of Adikmet Water Supply Zone, (O&M Division no: 5 of HMWS&SB). The area is located in the eastern part of the Hyderabad city and is surrounded by Osmania University in the north and the northeast, Ramanthapur Main road in the south, Shivam main road in the west. The area was selected based on purposive sampling. The problems and issues of water supply in the area are identical to that of other parts in the city. It represents a complex housing pattern consisting of independent houses and slums having individual house service connection, and slum without individual connection.

Adikmet consists of about 5000 odd households which can be divided into independent houses, apartments, slums and makeshift slum dwellings. With regard to water supply, there are two kinds of user households; one, household and slum dwellings with individual house service connection and two, households particularly slum dwellings with no piped water provision. Therefore, the sample for the study consists of households and slum dwellings with individual water connection and households without individual house connection.

The researcher has chosen stratified sampling method. The target groups are divided into three categories, i.e. independent households, slum households with individual water connection and slum dwellings without individual water connection.
The sample for the first two categories is 5 per cent of the total number of households consisting of 250 households chosen for the study. The 250 sample in this category consists of independent flats as well as slum dwellings that have individual water service connection. Once the total number of sample is fixed, it was proportionally divided according to the percentage of each category of habitations. Thus, 136 independent households and 78 slum dwellings are chosen comprising of 64 percent and 36 percent of households respectively with water connection in Adikmet.

On the other hand, there are about 400 houses which do not have individual house service connection, all in the slum dwellings. Initially 5 percent of sample consisting of 20 slum dwellings was taken for this category. However, since most of the people are rag pickers and many of them daily wage labourers, it was difficult to find and interact with them even after repeated visits to the chosen dwellings. Due to their non-availability, the sample size was increased to 10 percent consisting of 40 dwellings for a wider coverage.

Before selecting the exact sample systematic sampling is applied. Listing of all households is done in Adikmet. In the category of houses having piped water connection, after listing of households every 50th household is chosen as the sample. Though the estimated sample is 250, the actual sample is 214. The sample 250 is without replacement sample so there is non-coverage of about 36 houses. This is because the houses were found locked and several visits to the house did not yield any result.

On the other hand, the same procedure was followed in the slum dwellings without individual water connections and every 10th dwelling is chosen as the sample. Though the estimated sample is 40 in this category, the actual sample is 32. It is without replacement sample and there is non-coverage of about 8 dwellings which resulted due to the non-availability of the people even after several visits. Therefore, the total number of estimated sample for the study is 290. But the actual sample studied is 246.

Besides, there are three Focussed Group Discussions (FGDs) organised with selected respondents in the area to supplement the information and for covering the uncovered aspects. Another aspect of the survey was the discussions and interviews conducted with the HMWS&SB officials, a close observation of their way of
functioning to deliver water to the residents and observation method is used especially at times when water gets released. The secondary includes books, articles in relevant journals, newspaper cuttings and the electronic sources includes internet.

1.18 Organization of the thesis

This study is divided into seven chapters. Chapter-I, is an Introduction to the study in which theoretical understanding and the background for the present research is figuring. Chapter-II, titled Urbanization and Challenges of Water Provisioning, deals with the process of urbanisation in India and its impact on water service delivery to the citizens. The chapter also states the present situation of urban water service delivery in India.

Under Chapter-III, Indian State and Provisioning for Drinking Water, attempts to deal with the institutional mechanisms put in place, which deal with the provisioning of water supply and distribution. It would also include the State policies for provisioning of drinking water and the changing role that the State plays, in the process of providing adequate drinking water to its citizens. In addition, the chapter also deals with the constitutional as well as the legal provisions that govern people’s access to drinking water.

Chapter-IV entitled Provisioning for Drinking Water- Involvement of Private Sector and Civil Society Organizations: Some Cases, attempts to analyse in detail the politics of market in issues related to drinking water. How has the market intervened in the process of State provisioning for drinking water to its citizens and the politics of inter-relations between them, and consequently the community access to drinking water is analysed. The agenda of governance reforms, the role of CSOs are also taken up for discussion.

Chapter-V entitled Provisioning Drinking Water in Hyderabad, presents a case study of access to drinking water at the city level. When the State, in order to provide drinking water to all in Hyderabad, reorganised water delivery institutions, one curious consequence was that it facilitated the intervention of market in water delivery. It has to be stated that this interrelation between the State and market has different ramifications for different strata of the society. While one section is more
privileged in terms of access to drinking water both through State and market mechanisms, it’s a daily struggle for the rest. The civil society organizations in fact are acting as a pressure group on behalf of the common people to facilitate easier access to drinking water.

Chapter-VI, is a discussion of the case study under the title Provisioning for Drinking Water: A Case Study. It deals with household survey that was conducted during the study, with reference to supply, availability, adequacy and community access to drinking water.

Chapter-VII, presents as Summary and Conclusion of the study and discuss the major findings.

1.19 Limitations of the study

Empirical studies have their own limitations. This study is no exception. The researcher has chosen a manageable sample which is representative in all its forms/categories. However, given the size of the area (55,000 people live in this area) it is difficult for the individual researcher to cover more owing to logistical limitations. There are also people of different temperaments and dealing with each one of them is an arduous job. At times, the survey also involved some argument with the locals as in certain sections they are completely dissatisfied with the water supply. They could not get a chance to redress their grievances hence the researcher was mistaken as an official of the HMWS&SB and have some harrowing experiences.

Issues like water are highly contested. The researcher found it extremely difficult to keep the interviews focussed. Further the researcher could contact limited number of male respondents as a majority leave for work quite early. That is why the researcher has to be content with the dominant representation from women. But it is also a thing of blessing in disguise as women are known for their forthright views and it is they who are at a disadvantage position in the event of either erratic supply or stoppage or other hindrance as far as water is concerned.

Getting access to crucial documents relating to financial position is another limitation of the study. The researcher did not succeed in this regard. As usual, the
officials of the HMWS&SB maintain secrecy in revealing information which makes the progress more difficult.

In addition communicating with the people was particularly difficult due to language barrier. Moreover, some of the respondents were indifferent. Their contention is that whether they give interview or not is not going to change their access to water. So many of them were not interested to speak to the researcher.

This chapter began with a discussion on the centrality of water to human life and the present crisis the world in general and India in particular is facing in terms of managing water resource and meeting the water demands. Subsequently it was seen that there is intense debate on the changing perspectives on water; whether it is a CPR or public good vs. private commodity and right vs. need. It is also seen how the rapid pace of unregulated urbanisation has fuelled the demands for drinking water on the face of ever shrinking water source in India. A good part of the chapter is devoted to review of relevant literature followed by identification of gaps in literature. The chapter, towards the end discussed the outline of the present study. The next chapter deals with the challenges of urbanisation and response of the Indian State in providing drinking water to its citizens.

6 Aristotle wrote, “Men journey together with a view to gather particular advantage, and by way of providing some particular thing needed for the purposes of life, and similarly the political association seems to have come together originally, and to continue in existence, for the sake of the general advantages it brings.” (Ethics, viii.9.1160a) cited in, Mancur Olson, 1971, The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, p.6.
9 Op cit, No- 6, p.15.
12 Op cit, No-1, p.357.
15 Op cit, No-3.
16 Op cit, No-14, p.82.
18 Op cit, No-3.
19 Op cit, No-3.
21 Access to labour opportunities, access to markets, access to capital, access to technology, access to authority, access through social identity access via the negotiation of other social relations are structural and relational mechanisms of access, Ibid, p.160.
28 Banerjee and Somanathan while taking a different view point suggests that getting the State to make explicit commitments may be important in fighting these inequities- commitments that will increasingly have to be based on the quality of these goods rather than on physical access. Abhijit Banerjee and Rohini Somanathan, “The Political Economy of Public Goods: Some Evidence from India”, *Journal of Development Economics*, Vol- 82, 2007, pp. 312-13.
29 There have been large scale unrest among the larger section of the population and this makes apparent the negative externalities of the so called development process and reveals the inherent injustice attached to it. Vandana Shiva, *Ecology and the Politics of Survival: Conflicts over Natural Resources in India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi & UNU press, Tokyo, 1991, p.193.
31 “Assessment of water supply options for urban India – large dams have no case”, *SANDARP*, New Delhi, 1999, p.12.
34 Op cit, No-29, p.193.
36 The rationale of the market mechanism is geared to private goods…rather than to public goods. Therefore ‘public goods’ argument supplements the case for social provisioning that arises from the need of basic capabilities, such as elementary health care and basic educational opportunities.
Efficiency considerations thus supplement the argument for equity in supporting public assistance in providing basic education, health facilities and other public goods. Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp.128-29.

37 Op cit, No-29, p.333.


40 Op cit, No-29, p.332.

41 Op cit, No-29, p.333.


46 To cite few cases, the colonial rulers monopolised the water rights in the Sambar Lake of Rajasthan and the Damodar Canal in Bengal. Their intervention in the management of natural resources in India resulted in conflicts involving natural resources, Op cit, No-29, p. 16.


49 In the present context, the demand for natural resources for development has led to the shrinking of this resource base for the weaker sections ‘either by direct transfer of resources or by destruction of the ecological process that ensures renewability’ of the natural resources, Op cit, No-29, p. 19.

50 Ibid, p. 335.


53 Op cit, No-52, p.11.


55 Ibid, paragraph 21-22.


57 Ibid, paragraph 25-29.

58 There is a general opposition to such freedoms and entitlements in developing countries including India. As Sen analyses, there is the claim that ‘these freedoms and rights hamper economic growth and development’ (1999: 148). It is perceived that the denial of such freedoms and rights helps stimulate economic growth and is good for rapid economic growth. Sometimes it is proposed to have harsher political systems—with denial of basic civil and political rights—for their alleged advantages in promoting economic development. This phenomenon is often referred to as the ‘Lee Thesis’ (after the former prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew), Ibid, p.15.

59 Op cit, No-54, paragraph 10.


The Water and Sustainable Development International Conference was held in Paris in March 1998 and the Ministerial Session of the International Conference on Freshwater was held in Bonn in December 2000. The declaration in both these conferences defines water as a basic human need.

Op cit, No-61, p.16.

The declaration was adopted unanimously by the General Assembly of the United Nations and was signed by 147 heads of States who attended the Millennium Summit. For further details on Millennium Declaration and the MDGs see www.developmentgoals.org.


The problem of inequality has to be addressed because a system cannot withstand beyond a point the increasing inequality that nurtures high growth. When inequality persists for a longer period, there is rising dissent among the poor, which again must either be suppressed with increasing State violence flouting every norm of democracy, and violence will be met with counter-violence to engulf the whole society. See Amit Bhaduri, “Predatory Growth”, Economic and Political Weekly, April 19, 2008, p.14, and also see Mahendra Dev, Inclusive Growth in India: Agriculture, Poverty and Human Development, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008, p. 291.


Op cit, No-29, p.23.

The primary objective of the present model as it is described by many is that of development focussing on optimal use of natural resources fuelled by free market. According to critics vast majority of the population are left with no or little resources. Market mechanism can not meet their needs as they cannot afford it. Regarding free market as the highest organising principle of society perhaps may lead to the neglect of vast majority of population and in the process reported to be created new forms of deprivation and underdevelopment The unrest among the majority of the population is imperative for them as their survival needs are not taken care of by the State nor the free market economy, rather it has threatened the very survival by the expansion of market. Op cit, No-29, p.29.


The State is an important actor which intervenes directly or indirectly in many activities of the people. The policies and actions of the State in production and distribution are primarily important for inclusion and exclusion of the people in the process of development. S. Mahendra Dev, Inclusive Growth in India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008, p. 1.

Op cit, No-27, p.3.

Government of India, the Planning Commission, X Five Year Plan, New Delhi, 2002-07, pp.601-634.
98 Mr. Bharat Lal, (Director, Department of Drinking Water Supply, Government of India and Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission, India) pointed out that, it is ‘nearly impossible’ to monitor a centralised water system in a large country like India, Keya Acharya, “MGD and India’s Drinking Water: Racing Ahead at What Cost?”, cited in the Hindu, 19 June 2008, Hyderabad. This shows the helplessness and the lack of will power among the people in responsible position. In a way, these people advocated for private sector participation in drinking water provisioning.

Many of India’s leaders both national (such as Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi) as well as regional (such as M G Ramachandran in Tamil Nadu and N T Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh) have resorted to such steps in order to keep their power base intact. The personalistic and populist ruling style has become a major impediment to the use of State power to solve the nation’s problem.

In this point Thomas Hobbes argued that the powers of a ruler are never personal powers, but are owed to entirely to his standing as holder “of the sovereign”, whose primary duty is to uphold the trust of the members for which he was trusted with the sovereign power. This protection underpins the basis of the Hobbesian social contract. Individuals exchange the freedoms that they had in state of nature and pledge continued loyalty and obedience to the sovereign in exchange for the protection that the sovereign can provide. In the absence of that arrangement, which is secured by the State, people would live in a Hobbesian state of nature in which anarchy prevails and human behaviour mostly driven by self-interest not common interest, Pateman, “The Problem of Political Obligation”, in R. E. Goodin and P. Pettit (Ed.), Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology, Blackwell, Oxford, 1997, p.13.

According to Amartya Sen, development is a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. It includes both the elimination of persistent, endemic deprivation and the prevention of sudden, severe destitution. When these institutions contribute to freedoms, they are actually promoting development of the people. Further he argued, “Development consists of removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency. The removal of substantial unfreedoms is constitutive of development”. Op cit, No-36, p. xii, 3.


Now many donor governments and multilateral institutions routinely attach the so-called ‘governance conditionalities’ to their financial assistance which call for changes not just in economic policy but also in political, legal and social institutions by the recipient country, D. Kapur and R Webber, “Governance-Related Conditionalities of the IFIs”, G24 Discussion Paper Series, No-6, Geneva, UNCTAD, 2000. Overtime, the scope of such external intervention has been constantly widening, with serious implications for national sovereignty and the mandate of the multilateral institutions.


However, Sen argued, these efficiency results do not say anything about the equity of outcomes, or about the equity in the distribution of freedoms. A situation can be efficient in the sense that no one’s utility or freedom can be enhanced without cutting into the utility or freedom of someone else, and yet there could be enormous inequalities in the distribution of utilities and of freedoms. Therefore, these efficiency results do not, on their own, guarantee distributional equity. The far-reaching powers of the market mechanism have to be supplemented by the creation of basic social opportunities for social equity and justice. Op cit, No-36, p. 119, 143.

Op cit, No-3.