

# The Kakatiya Legacy of Pro-people Governance and Water Management and Its Revival Through Mission Kakatiya

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This paper is about a legacy of Kakatiya dynasty in South India. This dynasty set an example of people centric governance by establishing a water management system comprising of well-built reservoirs or tanks which were interconnected and used to quench the thirst of many people and were the sources of irrigation to many farms in medieval times. Water in these small tanks was completely controlled by local people. This paper also deals about, how Kakatiya rulers developed this system, how this small scale decentralized system of irrigation was ignored by subsequent rulers, and how the big dams replaced it as we moved to modern times. As control over water was lost, the region not only remained thirsty but also was relegated to backward area in the process of development. This paper also discusses how people fought for their rights over their resources and were successful in doing so. A new state was formed and the tide is again turned back to small scale irrigation systems with Mission Kakatiya, a mission undertaken by the newest state of India, Telangana.

*Keywords:* Kakatiya, water management, minor irrigation, Telangana

Kakatiya dynasty (1163-1323 C.E.) was a very distinguished South Indian dynasty which shaped history and civilization of the region (Sastry, 1978, p. 36; Sen, 2013, pp. 56-58). This dynasty was preceded by Western Chalukyan Empire and Eastern Chalukyas. Kakatiyas initially ruled over upland dry region on Deccan Plateau of South India, traditionally known as Telangana. Monsoon was the only source of the water for Telangana. The rain water normally used to flow down to low lands and people experienced shortage of water for rest of the year. Kakatiya rulers built small reservoirs to store this water and make it available to people and their farms during remaining part of the year. This was only source of water for upland region and building reservoirs to store the rainwater was the most suitable option of water management. The Kakatiya rulers had built thousands of such small reservoirs or tanks across Telangana and interconnected them for efficient water management. The people in the Kakatiya kingdom could easily manage and maintain these minor water management systems. This was the essence of decentralized system of governance where even a villager could have a control over this most precious resource, water. This empowered the people as they enjoyed controlling over their resources and trading the path of development on their own.

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The rulers who followed Kakatiyas neglected this traditional water management system. There was a sea change in water management and large irrigation systems like big or large dams which were controlled by rulers became dominant. This was a centralized system of management where the ruler or the state had the complete control over every resource.

The same policy was followed even after India got independence from British in 1947. Post-independence Telangana was included in Andhra Pradesh along with the coastal areas where it experienced that the resources and the wealth of the state were unequally distributed and there was disparity in development. People of Telangana had to fight for their rights.



Figure 1. Map of India with all the states with special reference to Telangana state in South India.

Ultimately, Telangana region was separated from Andhra Pradesh and was given a status of separate state (see Figure 1). This was the most successful people's movement in India after independence which gave back the

people of Telangana control over their resources. This was a historical opportunity for the people to initiate the change in the governance, manage their resources in a better way, and relive their glorious past.

## **A Legacy of Kakatiya Dynasty**

### **The Beginning**

The Kakatiya dynasty was an important dynasty in South India. The predecessors of the dynasty rose in feudatory ranks in Chalukyan Empire in the region. Venna, Gunda, Erra, Beta, Prola I, and Durgaraja were a few of the early rulers in the family. Prola II, son of Durgaraja made efforts to win over some territories in the western parts of Chalukyan Empire around 1157 to 1158 C.E. (Sastry, 1978, p. 36). This was a first rebellion attempt by Kakatiya feudatory chief against the declining Western Chalukayan Empire. He died in a battle fighting against Velanti Choda ruler Gonka II (Prasad, 1988, pp. 119, 124; Talbot, 2001, p. 184).

### **Rise to Power and Beginning of New Era of People-Centric Governance**

Prataprudra I (1158-1195 C.E.), son of Prola II declared in 1163 that the status of Kakatiyas as feudatory chiefs of Chalukyas was over. He declared that Kakatiya's kingdom was now an independent kingdom. The Kakatiya base was Orugallu in dry uplands of northern Telangana on the Deccan Plateau in South India. He also took the decision that the region's vernacular language "Telugu" would be the official language thereafter and the inscriptions would also be in Telugu rather than prevailing Kannada language which was the language of erstwhile rulers, Chalukyas (Eaton, 2005, p. 13). Prataprudra I not only gave voice to masses by giving their language "Telugu", a royal status but also extended his patronage to art and literature. He himself was a great poet with a very famous Sanskrit work *Nitisara* to his credit.

### **A New Vision of Water Management**

Prataprudra I was the first sovereign ruler of Kakatiyas. He fought many wars to maintain and expand the newly found kingdom. Prataprudra I mentioned about all the wars that he fought in his inscription at magnanimous Rudreswara Temple in Hanamakonda which he started constructing in 1163 C.E. Earlier, the temples in upland dry areas of the region were small and received less funding from rulers. In lowland and more populous areas, the temples were large, well established because they attracted more attention from rulers who wanted to gain popularity and control the masses. The temples in low lands had association with social network related to domestic and foreign trade and temples were also constructed to gain grazing rights over surrounding pastures. In contrast, the upland dry areas lacked pastures, lacked trade because it lacked water. So, the visionary rulers like Prataprudra I associated temples with construction and maintenance of reservoirs or tanks in uplands. Construction of tank was the most important method of storing rainwater in dry uplands which was the only ray of hope in rest of the year as soon as monsoon was over. The low lands were bestowed with coastal areas and rivers. So in low lands and river valleys, the neighboring rulers were capitalizing on water that was already available to them in plenty (see Figure 2). This was not the case in upland dry areas where the Kakatiya rulers had begun constructing reservoirs to store the rainwater and supporting the construction of temples alongside these reservoirs so that people would respect and maintain these sources of water in the name of faith. Thus they developed a different type of networking based on faith which strengthened these structures which were very much needed to support the upland dry agricultural activities by the subjects of Kakatiyas (Eaton, 2005, pp. 14-15).

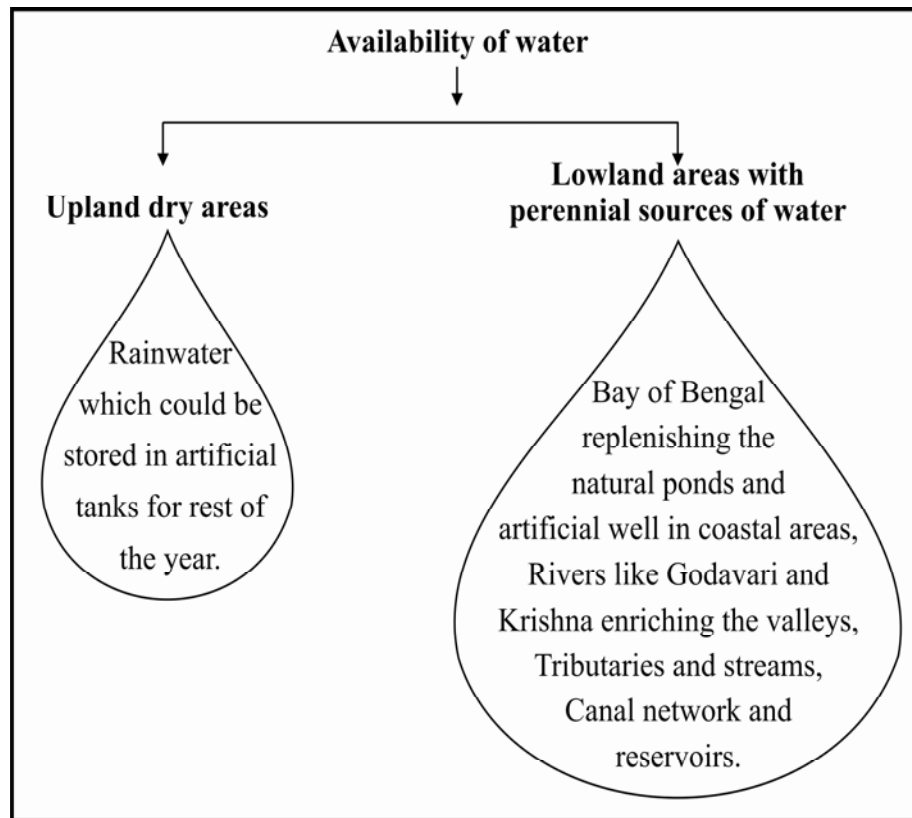


Figure 2. Availability of water in upland and lowland areas.

Pratraprudra I started construction of Rudreswara Temple, the largest temple in the region at Hanamakonda which was dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, and Surya. This was done to include all the three important deities of Indian tradition. Shiva is a chief deity for Shaivites, Vishnu for Vaishnavites which represent two major sects in Hinduism. Worshipping Surya that is Sun God is also one of the oldest traditions of all civilizations. The order of Kakatiya kings continued with constructions of this temple which comprised of 1,000 pillars and by building the largest temple in the region, they reached the pinnacle of the well thought of strategy which combined faith, people, and water.

### Expansion of Kingdom

Mahadeva (1195-1198 C.E.) was the second independent king of Kakatiya. He was brother of Pratraprudra I (Sastri, 1978, p. 36). Like his brother, he also was a great warrior. He continued to fight with Yadavas in the West. He reached at the wall of Devgiri, capital fort of Yadavas with his army but unfortunately got killed there and his son Ganpathideva was imprisoned by Yadavas in 1198 C.E. This news created shockwaves in Kakatiya kingdom which followed a chaos where almost every feudatory set out for a revolt. One loyal general of Kakatiyas, Recheria Rudra tried to control the situation but it remained so volatile that Yadavas thought it prudent to release Ganpathideva and allow him to go back to uplands in order to control the situation.

Ganpathideva (1199-1262 C.E.) controlled all the rebellion factions and ruled for good 60 years over this region. He had expanded the kingdom beyond Kakatiya's traditional stronghold, upland Telangana and brought many more lowland delta areas around the Godavari and Krishna rivers where the Telugu-speaking population

was dominant, under his control. This according to Richard Eaton (2005, p. 13) was catalyzing the process of supralocal identity formation and community building on part of the Kakatiya ruler. For the expansion of kingdom, he required to fight a lot of battles outside the kingdom but he never neglected the traditional capital of Kakatiyas which was then known as Orugallu. Even after the expansion of kingdom, Orugallu or modern day Warangal remained at the centre of activities. Ganpathideva arranged strengthening of the capital by building a massive wall around the entire city. The wall was fortified with strong bastions at strategic points. When it was not enough, a continuous deep channel was dug around this wall to complete the moat around the city. The ramps were built from inside to have access to the wall from inside so that soldiers can easily march towards the wall and take positions on the wall to counter the attacking enemy armies (Eaton, 2005, p. 17).

Ganpathideva had conquered Kalinga, Kanchi and subjugated the Yadavas of Devgiri which was the dream of his father. He was generous enough to help Manumasiddi to regain his kingdom of Nellore. These battles and triumphs and political alignments made him one of the greatest Kakatiya rulers. But what made him greater was his administrative abilities and contributions to society at large. He constructed umpteen reservoirs and number of temples as supporting structures to them. He improved the irrigation facilities for his agrarian subjects.

He also facilitated trade and commerce. But at the core of all the activities were Kakatiya's unique water management systems.

### **Contributions of Kakatiya Rulers in Empowering People**

Each ruler contributed to the unique water management system which empowered the people to great extent. Tanks after tanks were constructed and were strategically interconnected for efficient distribution of water. More we dig deep, more we find inscriptions which become testimonies to thousands of such interconnected tanks constructed by Kakatiyas.

Ganpathideva was followed by unique ruler, Rudrama (1262-1295 C.E.), the only queen of Andhra Pradesh (Sen, 2013, pp. 56-58). She not only broke the male bastion of becoming a ruler but also showed in due course of time that women can be better rulers. The only woman ruler of Andhra Pradesh not only fought against the neighboring Cholas and Yadavas to defend Kakatiya kingdom but also had to fight against her own nobles who were skeptical to accept a woman as their ruler. She had ruled in male dominated society for more than 30 years. She further strengthened the fortifications around the capital, and contributed a great deal to the administration of the kingdom (Eaton, 2005, p. 17). Rudrama also improved irrigation facilities to her subjects which improved the agriculture in the region.

All the Kakatiya rulers (see Table 1) contributed their bit in making their kingdom prosperous. They built their kingdom brick by brick, and they built the reservoirs stone by stone which supplied water to many villages in their kingdom. All these reservoirs are minor irrigation projects by modern definition where they are meant to supply water to area less than 2,000 hectares which can be managed by locals without any state control in a very decentralized manner. In Kakatiya kingdom, the people in the villages controlled their water and used it for irrigation in the dry uplands creating opportunities of development for themselves.

Table 1

*Kakatiya Rulers and the Duration of Their Rule*

Sr. No.	Name of the sovereign ruler	Duration of rule
1	Prataprudra I	1158-1195 C.E.
2	Mahadeva	1195-1198 C.E.
3	Ganapathideva	1199-1262 C.E.
4	Rudramadevi	1262-1295 C.E.
5	Prataprudra II	1295-1323 C.E.

*Note.* Source: Sastry, 1978, p. 36; Sircar, 1979, p. 130.

In addition to these reservoirs or tanks built by Kakatiya rulers, around 5,000 more tanks were built by families subordinate to Kakatiyas.

**Oblivion**

The kingdom or empire that rises to the crest would trade the downward path one day or the other. In the oblivion of the Kakatiyas, history had witnessed the same. Rudramadevi was succeeded by her grandson, Prataprudra II (1295-1323 C.E.). During his regime, the Kakatiya dynasty experienced a rude shock when Alauddin Khilji from Delhi sultanate in the North made first attack on the kingdom in 1303 C.E. From 1303 to 1323 C.E., the Kakatiya kingdom was invaded five times and finally in 1323 C.E., the dynasty had lost control over their areas and made way for the new regime (Sastry, 1978, p. 36; Sen, 2013, pp. 56-58).

**Aftermath**

The new rulers (see Table 2) which followed rode strongly on the progress made by the subjects on the basis of foundations laid by Kakatiyas. But with the exception of few rulers, all others neglected the dry upland region, its unique water management system and minor irrigation facilities developed by Kakatiyas over the years.

Table 2

*The Rulers That Followed Kakatiyas and the Duration of Their Rule*

Name of the ruler	Duration of rule
Musunuri Nayaks	1326-1356 C.E.
Delhi Sultanate, the Bahamani Sultanate	1347-1509 C.E.
Vijayanagara Empire	1509-1529 C.E.
Golconda Sultanate	1529-1687 C.E.
Mugal Empire	1636-1724 C.E.
Nizam Rule	1724-1805 C.E.
British Empire	1805-1948 C.E.

*Note.* Source: Eaton, 2005, p. 22; Talbot, 2001, pp. 177-182.

The transregional rulers like Bahamani Sultanate or the Delhi Sultanate and the Mugal Empire replaced the local leaders. These bigger rulers did not identify themselves with the local aspirations and some of them went a step ahead at some places in destroying the faith centers of local people, the temples and thereby breaking the long run tradition of combining faith and water management. For example, the 1,000-pillar temple at Hanamakonda was desecrated by Tughlaq dynasty when they attacked this region. Now, the ruins of the massive structure can be seen at places on Hanamakonda-Warangal highway in Telangana state, about 150 kilometers from the city of Hyderabad.

## **Transition Phase in Governance and in Water Management**

### **Change in Perception About Water Management**

Traditional decentralized water tanks used to fulfill needs of drinking water, water for domestic needs, water for cattle, and water for irrigation of farms. Slowly as we progressed, our populations grew and alongwith it, the demands of water also grew.

Times have changed and the methods of water management have changed too. Bigger and centralized water management systems started gaining prominence as we required more water for our growing populations and for our growing urban centers.

Medieval times gave way to modern times and old rulers were replaced by British. To fulfill the growing demand of water, they started building a series of big dams, each meant to supply water to more than ten thousand hectares across India starting with Khadakwasala (1864 C.E.-1879 C.E.) at Pune, Maharashtra followed by many big dams on many rivers. Independent India also followed the same policy by building bigger dams like Bhakra-Nangal and Sardar Sarovar Project (S.S.P.). “Big dam and big development” became the mantra of modern times as rulers and masses both started demanding big dams and they wanted canals from big dams to reach their villages and pipelines to reach their doorsteps. Small water management systems like home wells, village tanks are neglected; small reservoirs were broken, got silted, and became redundant. At many places, these traditional structures are now taking last breath under the rampaging new constructions owing to urbanization (Joshi, 2007, p. 221; Chitale, 1999, p. 743).

### **Era of Darkness for Telangana**

After India got independence from British in 1947, the Neharuvian model of development dominated the post-independence history of India where industries, big dams, and urban centers started gaining center stage. Mahatma Gandhi’s message of going back to villages was ignored by one and all. The small scale water management system, the villages, and the small regions were relegated to back stage.

Telangana which once was a part of prosperous Kakatiya kingdom became the most undeveloped part of a state called as Andhra Pradesh. After independence of India, the process of reorganization of states on the basis of languages started. Andhra State was formed out of earlier Madras State in 1953 C.E. In 1956, Telangana region from erstwhile princely state Hyderabad was merged with Andhra State to form a larger state, Andhra Pradesh. This was done in order to bring all the Telugu-speaking people and their areas under the umbrella of one administrative unit.

But from the very beginning, Telangana remained neglected. It was observed by Backward Regions Grant Fund 2009-2010 that out of total 13 backward districts in Andhra Pradesh, nine belong to Telangana. Telangana consists of 10 districts out of which only Hyderabad was not considered backward. All the remaining nine districts of Telangana had been termed as backward. This speaks volumes about the inequitable development that has taken place in Andhra Pradesh.

Here in Telangana, people had long forgotten their prosperous past, and they had forgotten the decentralized water conservation and management methods which made their ancestors so prosperous. Now water management was largely dependent on water that was released by government in canals from major irrigation systems or big dams. In Andhra Pradesh, 74.25% irrigation water through canal system under major irrigation

projects went to coastal Andhra region, while Telangana only got 18.20% out of the remaining share (Jayashankar, 2013, p. 8).

The health sector and education sector in Telangana region were also neglected. Employment opportunities to the people in Telangana were far lesser than other parts of Andhra Pradesh (Jayashankar, 2013, pp. 11-24; Srikrishna, 2010, pp. 407-450).

### **Coming of New Dawn**

Whatever small share of water that Telangana used to get had always been diverted to industries and urban centers. So people in villages and remote areas in Telangana waited for their share of water and kept on waiting for their share of development. This is a limitation of big or major centralized water management system where state has the complete control over distribution of water and people are helpless as far as the management of this most crucial resource.

Parallely, the world has also started understanding the limitations of the centralized major water management systems like big dams.

Worldwide, the dams have displaced 40 to 80 million people and the worldwide experiences of rehabilitation of these people have been painful (World Commission on Dams, 2000, p. 104; Sangvai, 2002, pp. 35-36; Morse, 1992, p. 169). The rehabilitation of displaced people is a responsibility of government. In India, a lot of such displaced people are still waiting for comprehensive rehabilitation. The Supreme Court of India has categorically stated that rehabilitation of people displaced from Sardar Sarovar Project, the biggest water management project in India, is incomplete (Supreme Court of India, 2005, p. 1).

The dams have destroyed the flows of rivers, and submerged thriving cultures on their banks. They have also submerged sites which were historically and culturally important. The upstream and downstream eco-systems, habitats, and biodiversity all have suffered immense losses (World Commission on Dams, 2000, pp. 73-92).

The big dams and the flow irrigation have caused water logging in command areas, converting many fertile lands into non-arable fields and at some places converting them into marshes. Indian Agricultural Research Council's report in 1978 has taken serious note of these consequences. The World Commission on Dams (2000, p. 66) has stated that problems of waterlogging and salinity for irrigation systems have reached serious levels globally and have severe, long-run, and often permanent impacts on land, agriculture, and livelihoods.

World Commission on Dams (2000, p. 10) has also observed an emergence of new trend of decommissioning of dams. The larger dams that no longer serve a useful purpose, are not cost effective, or have unacceptable levels of impacts in today's view are being decommissioned all over the world. The report by this world commission further observes, "Since 1998 the decommissioning rate for large dams has overtaken the rate of construction in the United States".

## **Mission Kakatiya**

### **Formation of New State, Telangana**

Back home, fed up with the negligence and under development, people fought for their rights and got a separate state for themselves which was named as Telangana. Telangana became the 29th state of India on June 2, 2014 with Hyderabad as its capital (see Figure 3).



This was not only a revival of their faith in themselves but also an opportunity for them to revive their systems of management of their own resources. They started desilting and restoring the tanks built by Kakatiyas centuries back. The new state government selected by people democratically took the initiative and the masses started participating willingly. They have rejuvenated almost 8,000 out of 45,000 plus tanks built by their predecessors through a very wonderful initiative known as Mission Kakatiya.



Figure 3. A map of state of Telangana.

### Background of Mission Kakatiya

There were thousands of well-built tanks in Telangana during Kakatiya dynasty. But neglect of this has created huge problems. The tanks got filled with silt; they were broken and became defunct. People had faced drought; there had been no production of food grains and mere subsistence had become a problem. The self-sustainable ecology and economy of villages had been adversely affected (Gala, 2016a, p. 11).

### A New Mission

The newly elected Chief Minister of Telangana, K. Chandreshkhari Rao ordered a census of minor irrigation projects. This statewide census identified 45,600 water bodies in all the 10 districts of Telangana state.

After this census, due consultations were made with experts and villagers and a very ambitious project was launched which was named as Mission Kakatiya (M.K.). This program was inaugurated on March 12, 2012 with tagline, “*Mana Ooru Mana Cheruvu*” which means, “One Village One Tank”.

### Objectives of the Mission

The objectives<sup>1</sup> are as follows:

- (1) To revive 45,600 tanks at the cost of Rs. 20,000 crore;
- (2) To restore 265 TMC Ft. (Thousand Million Cubic Feet) water;
- (3) To use technology for effective planning, designing, and execution of the project;
- (4) To complete the project in time in a transparent manner.

### Implementation of the Project

The restoration work includes revival of 45,600 geo-mapped and tagged tanks. It involves repairs to bunds, sluices, weirs, and feeder channels. Thousands of workers, engineers, and experts are working in co-ordination with various departments of government. The leading national and international academic institutes like Indian Institute of Technology (I.I.T.), Michigan University, and Chicago Law School are carrying out impact research of this project. Regular tracking of the work is being done and government website is being updated very regularly so that the experts and public in general can review the project.

### Outcome

The work is in progress for more than two years and as the Irrigation Minister of Telangana, T. Harish Rao observes, “Mission Kakatiya has become people’s movement”. In the first phase of the project, people of Telangana have participated willingly and they have lifted 7.3 crore cubic meters of silt from tank beds with 2.8 crore tractor trips. Almost 8,000 tanks are already desilted in the process. As compared to big dams, there is no land acquisition required here, observed by T. Harish Rao in an interview given to The Times of India (Gala, 2016b, p. 11). There is no displacement; there is no need of rehabilitation of people. There are no legal or social or political issues here. The people are just restoring the pre-existing network of tanks built by Kakatiya rulers few hundred years ago. This water is made available to the people for drinking, for their cattle, for agriculture, and for all other occupations. The most precious of our resources is being again controlled by the smallest of the stakeholders of our globe, the layman. The circle is now getting completed here and the new age is whispering in the ears of young listeners, “Small is beautiful”.

Thus, this revival of Kakatiya’s legacy is following and implementing the core values of development suggested by World Commission on Dams (2000) like equity, efficiency, participation, accountability, and sustainability.

### Conclusions

Kakatiya rulers in true sense were great leaders as they truly believed it their duty to take care of their subjects. The predecessors of Kakatiya dynasty (1163-1323 C.E.) were local leaders who rose in feudatory ranks in Chalukyan Empire in the Telangana region of South India. Prataprudra I (1158-1195 C.E.) in 1163 C.E. declared that Kakatiya’s kingdom was now an independent kingdom and Kakatiyas were sovereign rulers

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<sup>1</sup> Website: <http://missionkakatiya.cgg.gov.in>.

of the land. They had thereafter designed and implemented an unique water management system which was best suited to their land and their people. The small tanks that they constructed almost in all the villages became perfect vehicles of empowerment of their people. After the fall of Kakatiya dynasty, the control of people over their water was lost and the land was now controlled by transregional regimes like Bahamani Sultanate, Delhi Sultanate, and Mughal Empire in medieval times. So, during these regimes, the momentum of development of entire region was lost in the political turmoil that followed the fall of Kakatiyas. People and rulers, both forgot their traditional water management system comprising of small tanks. The tanks were neglected and got silted and became disfunctional over the period of time. In modern times, also the situation did not improve. Even after India got independence from British in 1947, Telangana did not get its justifiable share of development. It just remained a neglected and backward region of a bigger state in the country, Andhra Pradesh. The water was now controlled by the state by way of bigger water management projects and the dry upland region of Telangana did get very less share of water. Without water, people in Telangana were helpless and they continued to live in the state of misery until they decided to rebel against the state. They decided not to subject themselves to misery and sufferings any more. History has revealed time and again that it is the will of people that ultimately prevails. It was the triumph of people's struggle for control over their resources as they got a separate state for themselves, Telangana, the 29th state of India. In this new state, they elected a new government which initiated revival of irrigation facilities to the fields of Telangana by revitalising the small tanks or reservoirs built by Kakatiya rulers. They called this, "Mission Kakatiya". The efforts made under this initiative for more than two years are now showing desired results. People have been able to cultivate 15.50 lakhs of acres under the water received from the revitalised tanks. Ground water levels have increased to a maximum of 15.17 meters and to a minimum of 1.81 meters. This is not just a case of able leadership but also a case of wonderful monitoring of state affairs. This is something which is called accountability on part of government which is a very rare quality. This government believes in the concept that the development should start from grassroots. The villages are the focal points of policies and the decentralised water management systems like small tanks are ensuring equitable distribution of water. The small scale irrigation is proving to be, "Small solution to big problems". People centric policies and their implementation with people's support can make miracles and by doing so, people of Telangana are reviving legacy of Kakatiya dynasty and also creating their own for the benefit of generations to come.

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