The water resources in Chennai: Cooum River

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Abstract
Chennai was one of the most beautiful cities of India with lots of greens, lake, ponds and rivers. The most important river that watered Chennai was considered as Adayar, Cooum and the Kosasthaliyar. But it also had many tanks, and ponds to its credit. All the important water resources of Chennai is lost forever.

This paper focus on the main water resource, the Cooum River. It traces the origin its decline and also focus on the restoration projects started from 1967 onwards. But there is no final solution to the retrieval of the water source.

Keywords: Water resources, Cooum, Rivers of Tamilnadu, chennai. Adyar.

Introduction
It is accessed the Chennai had nearly the important rivers. That were the main water bodies that watered the city of Chennai and the around places. They are at present the dead and corrupted water bodies of Adayar, Cooum and kosasthalaiyar passes through the city and flows into the Bay of Bengal. Kesavaram anicut constructed on the Kosataliyar river of Kesavaram village situated in the Thiruvallur district is the origin of river Cooum. During its course water from Cooum tank also joins the course in about 8 kilometers. It also receives water from Chembarambakkam tank in its course. (Chidambaram S: 2010) According to the assessment of JNURM (Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission) says that the city had nearly 320 tanks and many more dated waterways.

History and Culture:
'Triplicane River was the other name for Cooum River that passed through the then villages of Chetpet, Nungambakkam and Egmore. (Tercentenary Commemoration Volume: 1939). The river had its origin in Thiruvallur District. It is believed that having a dip in the Cooum river led to Salvation, when it was clean and unpolluted. The river was merged as an integral part with the Socio-economic and cultural life of the people. The great philanthropist Pachaiyappan Mudaliyar of the late 18th century bathed in the Cooum River before offering prayers in the Komaleeswaran Temple at Komaleeswampet. (https://www.thehindu.com)

Course of the river:
The river originates from Thiruvallur. The course of the river starts from Sattarai village nearly 65 km from Chennai. (S. Muthiah (Ed. Madras Chennai...), It flows through Poonamallee and enters through Arumbakkam and passes through Choolaimedu, Chetpet, Egmore and Chindadripet. Near to Egmore the river divides and the Southern and the Northern arms join together near the Naiper Bridge. This formation is the Island and known as the Island Grounds

The Northern part of the Buckingham Canal joins the Cooum at Old Central Jail and the Southern part of the canal emerges behind the Madras University – and back of Victoria hostel backside. The river finally joins the Bay of Bengal south of Fort St. George below the Naiper Bridge. (S. Muthiah (Ed.), Madras Chennai...)

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Bridges:
The Naiper Bridge, the Wallajah Bridge, the Periamet Bridge, the Chintadripet Bridge, Hani’s Bridge, Commander-in-Chief Bridge, College Road Bridge, Spur Tank Bridge and the Aminjukkarai Bridge are the most important built up above the river. (S. Muthiah (Ed Madras Chennai...). There are other Bridges also across the river among which the Chennai Corporation maintains about 18 of them.

Pollution in the River:
The river once considered sacred and a dip in it was also considered sacred but in due course lost its importance and became polluted. Once Cooum was a fishing river and now it has proved that fish were about to survive in the water only for 3-5 hours. There are traces of heavy metals such as copper, pesticides like endosulphan, and lindane in it. It has been said the Chennai Corporation and the Industrial and business retail outlets were mainly responsible for its pollution. Out of these outlets are contributed by 450 commercial buildings, there are nearly 700 points were sewage directly flows in to the river. In addition to this nearly 70,000 families live along the course of the river and the sewage is directly let out to the river. Even after the cleanup programmes the Municipal Solid Waste was dumped in to the river. (https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/illegal-disposal-of-solid-waste-in-cooum-on-the-increase/article8634479.ece) Effects were taken to seal all the sewage outfalls into the river in 2012.

Cleanup Projects:
The cleanup projects were started during the period of C.N. Annadurai the then Chief Minister, he launched the Cooum Improvement Scheme in 1967 September 19th (Ganesan, P C: 2003). This project focused on removing the encroachments and also diverted the sewage from Chetpet Bridge to Naiper Bridge Cement Concrete slabs were made to enable as a walkway on either sides of the river. Seven Boat docks were also constructed. These developments were done when M. Karunanidhi was the Public Works Department Minister. During the Chief Ministership of M. Karunanidhi in 1973 he introduced a pleasure boat service. (http://www.asiantribune.com/) The raving boats, power boats and paddle boats existed at a nominal change. But these efforts went in vein when the sand pumb and regulator installed during the period of C.N. Annadurai in the river mouth created problems. The Boat docks are still seen on the river edges. The next project was started during the next tenure of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in 1996. It was an imitative to cover all the important courses including Buckingham Canal and the Adayar River. This resulted in the Chennai City River Conservation Project (CCRCP) in 2001. (Munian, A, 2010,). This project was supported by Union Environment and Forests Ministry, which mainly focused on an arresting all the outfalls of the sewage. But this also ended up in failure because of not covering the Thiruvallur districts as the river originate in Thiruvallur district.

In the next ministry the same part came into force in 2006 and the Chennai River Authority headed by the Deputy Chief Minister was formed in 2009. It mainly aimed clean up the entire Cooum River in 10 years. This project was in collaboration with Singapore Enterprise Corporation (SEC) and signed an MOU. The SEC also prepared a report based on the discussions with the related Departments such as Chennai Corporation, Municipal administration, Metro Water, Pollution Control Board, Slum Clearance Board and the Public Works Department. This proposal was accepted by the World Bank and approved 222.1 million for the restoration and development of the canal for irrigation potential. This project was expected to benefit Kancheepuram and Thiruvallur district. (https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/City-awash-with-dreams-of-a-clean-Cooum/article16825795.ece).

The team comprising the Deputy Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, former Chennai Mayar M. Subramaniam and other senior officers visited San Antonia in Teras and saw the successful cleaned up river once polluted. This project was multi-sided it also joined with Tamil Nadu Urban Infrastructure and Financial Services Limited (TNUIFSL) and also the Chennai River Restoration Trust to develop the ecological plan it was decided to plant up many of floral species such as to control the erosion in to the Cooum river. (http://www.chennai-corporation.gov.in/images/swd/Draft%20EA%20Chennai%20%20ISWD%20Dec%202014.pdf) But what has happened to all these initiatives, everything has gone to vein. What could be the main reasons for the unsuccessfulness of the project? The main reasons attributed should be a Scheme initiated by a Government or a part will not be continued during the next tenure. Not even continue but will be rejected to the core point. Lack
of awareness among the public for dumping plastics, throwing of water bottles, much-plastic, including food wrappers, cups, covers, and packaged water bottles plastics and packaging materials form 7% of the municipal solid waste. The main aspect is lack of Segregation of waste materials. Another impact would be from the River bank dwellers who have occupied the places and also dump plastics, but also drain the entire sewage into the waterway directly. We need to go back to the society of our when we use cups and plates mode. Banana leaves in change of plastic plates and cups.

During monsoon the rainwater is blocked with plastics. It is told that nearly 30% of the water resources in Chennai are dumped with plastics. Many of the water bodies have turned into dumping yards. This will spoil the water resource and unable to use for drinking and other usage. Hence water has to be purchased at a larger quantity that will create lot of health hazards to customers. The plastics over the water body had led to the complete demise of certain water resources. Tamil Nadu Plastic Manufacturers Association is ready to recycle the used plastics. But here the problem is Secretion of the plastics or the collection of used plastics. The main issue is that this entire project has to be done by the policy makers who consist of the Government and the main officials. The initiative is taken from 1907 but efforts in vein, though the political parties change and the ruling parties are different. The common goal should be the ultimate idea of cleaning the Cooum. It should be deep rooted in all of us. So it should be an aim of the administrators also to take care of the future Generations. As the political scenario changes the entire previous projects are also changing. Hence the common goal of restoring the Cooum River must be the ultimate aim without discriminations that only will save the water and our lives too.

References


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