



From Drought to Deliverance Nilwande Dam Becomes A Lifeline for Ahilyanagar and Nashik

Introductory Memo

Celebrations erupted in Dahegaon and Pimplas villages of Rahata taluka, Ahilyanagar, as water from the Nilwande Dam finally arrived—an emotional moment that villagers had awaited for five long generations. This marked the end of a 53-year saga that began in 1970, bringing renewed hope to the drought-prone farmlands of Ahilyanagar. The project, plagued by repeated delays, political neglect, and over 100 work stoppages, spanned the tenure of 34 Chief Ministers. Yet, the persistent efforts of local communities and strong political will by the Mahayuti government kept the dream alive. Eventually, Prime Minister Narendra Modi officially inaugurated the completed Nilwande Dam and canal system in 2023.

With water now flowing to villages like Dahegaon and Pimpalgaon, the dam stands as more than just an infrastructure project—it represents the triumph of perseverance and effective governance. Under the leadership of Devendra Fadnavis, the project received much-needed momentum, especially for drought-hit regions like Ahilyanagar and Nashik, offering a lifeline to farmers through improved irrigation and water access.

Table Of Contents

1. News at Glance
2. Analytical View
3. By The Numbers
4. Academic Insight

5. Social Media Pulse
6. On Our Reading List

1. News at Glance

1. पाच पिढ्यांची पाण्याची प्रतीक्षा संपली! अखेर निळवंडेचे पाणी पोहोचले दहेगावात, शेतकऱ्यांच्या चेहऱ्यावर आनंदाश्रू
2. Maharashtra village gets water after 50 years. But it comes with a huge cost
3. 6 हजार कोटींचा खर्च अन् राजकारणाची 53 वर्षे; निळवंडे प्रकल्प का रखडला
4. Farmers protest demanding water supply from Nilwande dam
5. Upper Pravara(Nilwande) Major Irrigation Project JI00468
6. निळवंडे धरण कालवे आणि आधुनिक भगीरथ देवेंद्र
7. Shirdi Saibaba Trust gives Rs 500 crore for Nilwande Dam
8. We did it: BJP, NCP take credit over long-pending Nilwande dam in Ahmednagar
9. Revised cost of Rs 5,177 crore for Upper Pravara irrigation project gets nod, new deadline 2027
10. PM Modi dedicates Nilwande dam to people in Maharashtra's Ahmednagar district
11. Maharashtra: After 53-year wait, Nilwande canal network set for start
12. Maharashtra: 53 years on, project to be opened tomorrow, cost up 655 times
13. NCP slams Maharashtra over Rs 500 crore loan from Shirdi temple trust

2. Analytical View

The Struggle for the Nilwande Dam and Canals

In our country, it is hard to predict when and why a development project might get stalled. There is no certainty that a project will reach completion. Rural infrastructure projects, especially those related to water and agriculture, often fall victim to a mix of political indecision, funding shortfalls, and rehabilitation-related protests. The Nilwande Dam is a textbook example of how systemic inefficiencies can derail critical development.

Approved in 1970 during the tenure of then-Chief Minister Vasant Rao Naik, the Nilwande Dam was initially estimated to cost ₹7.9 crore with a planned capacity of 11 TMC. However, what followed was not development, but decades of delay. Instead of solving the pressing issues of water scarcity in Ahilyanagar—a district known for its chronic droughts—the project languished in political limbo. Over time, the dam's cost skyrocketed to an astronomical ₹5,000 crore, and its planned capacity was eventually reduced to 8 TMC. The project was also relocated from its originally proposed sites at Mhaladevi and Nilwande.

Throughout these years, the Congress-led governments repeatedly pledged support

but failed to move the project forward meaningfully. It seemed less about completing the dam and more about keeping the issue alive as a political talking point. Protests, land acquisition challenges, and shifting priorities continued to push the project further down the list.

Though the dam structure itself was completed by 2014, the lifeline of the project—the canal network—remained incomplete. In 2014, as the CM, Fadnavis had reviewed all pending irrigation projects and directed the water resources department to accord the highest priority to incomplete work. A policy decision was also taken by then water resources minister Girish Mahajan to not allow new irrigation projects. Instead, it was emphasised that all incomplete works should be fast-tracked. Consequently, until 2019, the canal work had begun to progress steadily. However, political instability struck Maharashtra that year, halting the momentum. With the formation of the Maha Vikas Aghadi government, the project once again came to a standstill.

The turning point came in 2022 with the formation of the Mahayuti government. Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who also took charge of the Water Resources Department, prioritised long-pending irrigation projects like Nilwande and Gosekhurd. This government sanctioned Rs 5,177 crore for the Nilwande Dam by giving the fifth revised administrative approval. Fadnavis had also made a provision of Rs 425 crore for the Nilwande Dam in the State Budget. It helped resume the work on the left and right canals of the Nilwande Dam. Under his leadership, it received a much-needed push and was completed in a record time of just 11 months.

And finally on October 26, 2023, PM Modi formally performed the jal puja and dedicated the Nilwande Dam to the people of Maharashtra—bringing closure to a decades-long struggle and marking a new beginning for the region's farmers.

The Significance of Nilwande Dam

The Nilwande Dam provides reliable irrigation to 182 villages in Sangamner, Akole, Rahata, Rahuri, and Kopargaon in Ahilyanagar district and Sinnar in Nashik district. The irrigation component includes the construction of two major canals—the Upper Pravara Left Bank Canal and Right Bank Canal. The Right Bank Canal will benefit 11 villages in Akole, 37 in Sangamner, and 21 in Rahuri. Meanwhile, the Left Bank Canal will serve 13 villages in Akole, 43 in Sangamner, 11 in Kopargaon, 37 in Rahata, three in Shrirampur, and six villages in Sinnar. In total, the project will bring nearly 68,000 hectares of agricultural land under irrigation, reducing regional disparities and supporting rural livelihoods.

The Nilwande Dam comprises two associated gravity dams built using roller-compacted concrete, marking the first use of this technique in India. **The dam system plays a crucial role in addressing water scarcity and supporting agricultural development in a drought-prone region.** The dam complex includes two reservoirs: the Upper Nilwande Dam, which is 15 meters (49 feet) tall and built on the Pravara River—a tributary of the Godavari River—and the Lower Nilwande Dam, standing 86 meters (282 feet) tall on the Shahi Nalla River, located to the southwest in a steep valley. Together, they form an integral part of a broader water management system aimed at benefiting both agriculture and power generation.

Apart from irrigation, the Nilwande project also includes a **hydroelectric power station** strategically located between the two reservoirs. This means that the availability of water not only strengthens the agricultural sector but also contributes to industrial growth, creating a ripple effect of development in the region.

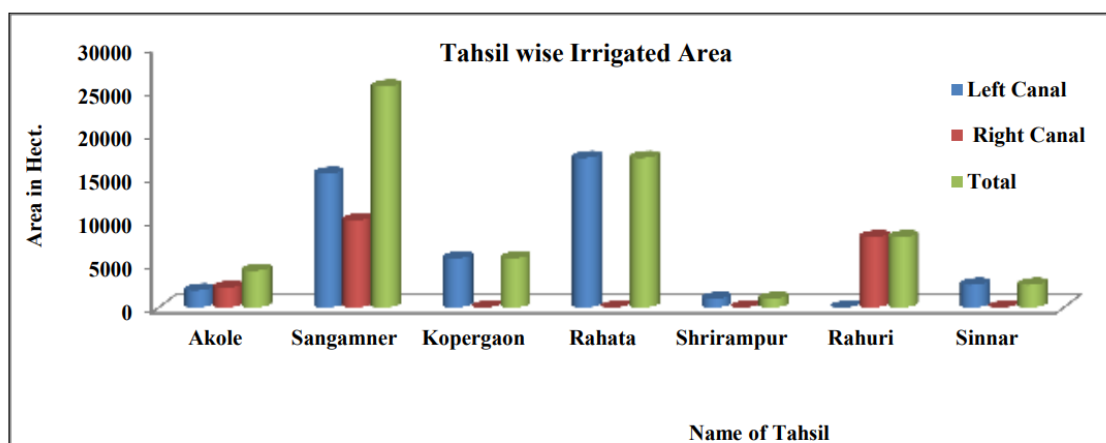
It operates on a pumped storage model: during peak electricity demand, water from the upper reservoir drives two 125 MW reversible Francis turbine-generators. During off-peak hours, especially at night, the turbines reverse to pump water back into the upper reservoir from the lower one, ensuring efficient energy use and storage.

After more than half a century, the Nilwande Dam project has finally come to fruition. Its long delay reflected a mix of factors: shifting political priorities, repeated administrative resets, lack of funds, chronic funding shortfalls, land-acquisition and rehabilitation hurdles, court challenges, and local “vested interest” disputes over water use. A key turnaround was the BJP-led state government’s decision post-2022 to fully fund and expedite the remaining work. As a result, tens of thousands of hectares in drought-prone Maharashtra will now receive irrigation and drinking water.

The Nilwande saga illustrates both the perils of political neglect (over decades) and the impact of renewed commitment: once resources were allocated, the project rapidly reached completion.

3. By The Numbers

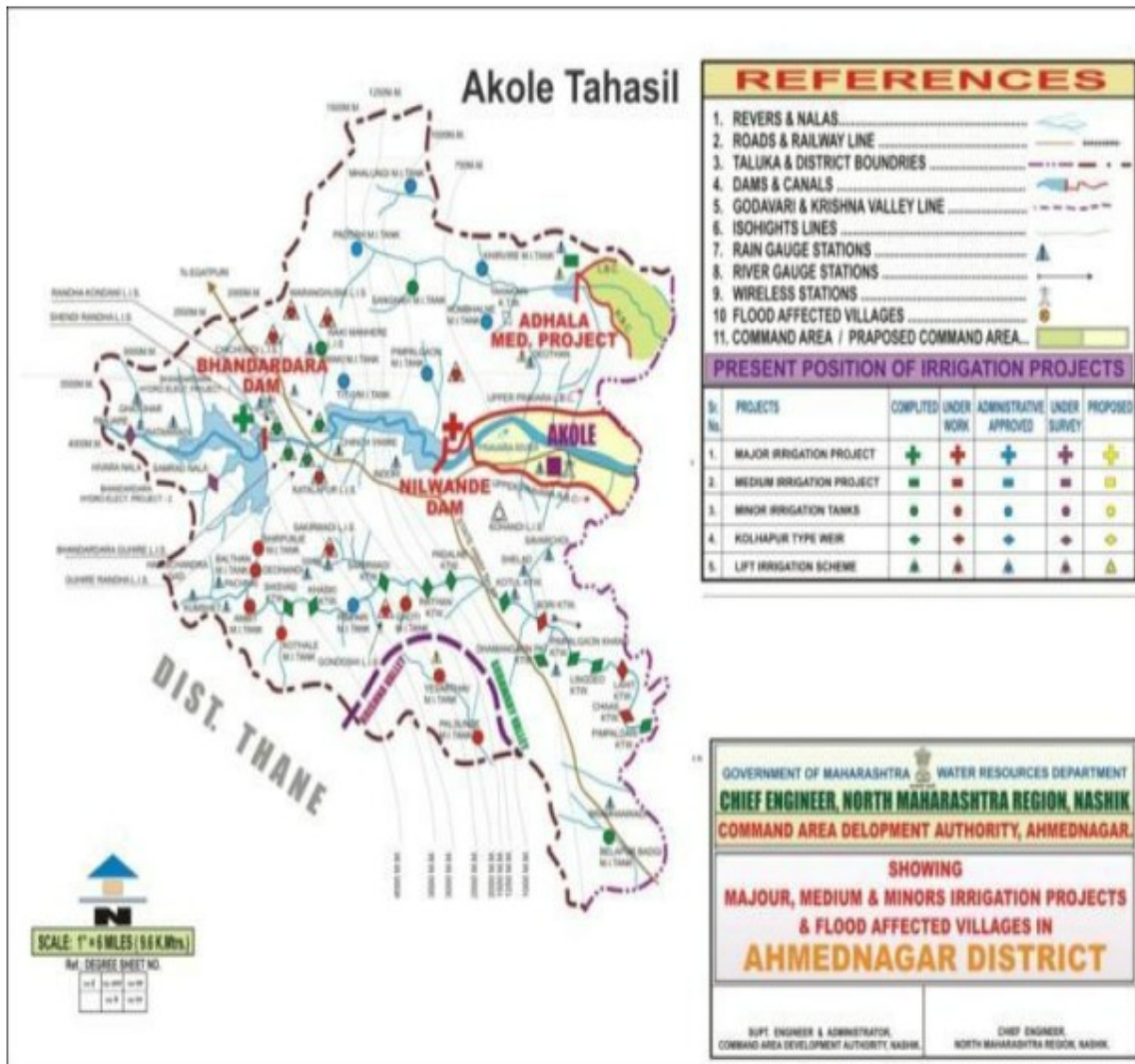
Source: A Geographical Study of Nilwande Canal in Ahmednagar District, Pravara River



Source: A Geographical Study of Nilwande Canal in Ahmednagar District, Pravara River

Sr. No	District	Tahsil	Upper Pravara Left Canal		Upper Pravara Right Canal		Total	
			No. of Villages	Irrigated Area	No. of Villages	Irrigated Area	No. of Villages	Irrigated Area
1	Ahmednagar	Akole	13	1964	11	2271	24	4235
		Sangamner	43	15393	37	10035	80	25428
		Kopergaon	11	5666	--	--	11	5666
		Rahata	37	17231	--	--	37	17231
		Shrirampur	03	999	--	--	03	999
		Rahuri	---	---	21	8089	21	8089
2	Nashik	Sinnar	06	2612	---	---	06	2612
Total			113	43865	69	20395	182	64260

(Source: Report Upper Pravara Project-II, Sub-Division,Sangamner)



Source: Agricultural Facility: A Case Study of Akole Tahsil in Ahmednagar District

4. Academic Insight

1. A Geographical Study of Nilwande Canal in Ahmednagar District, Pravara River
2. Agricultural Facility: A Case Study of Akole Tahsil in Ahmednagar District

5. Social Media Pulse

Yesterday was Historic and emotional for these people

A wait of 53 Long years for water to Come at their place .

Water from Left Canal of Nilwande Dam is here . pic.twitter.com/nCI73unL0j

— The Maharashtra Index (@TheMahaIndex) February 5, 2024

और क्या चाहिए life में ! [?]

Pure organic joy, celebrations because finally water reached their village and wait of 50+ years was over...

That's Nilwande dam (Nagar) wherein me and CM did testing few days ago.. Water has reached 85km successfully.. pic.twitter.com/AF82xsjoGk

— Devendra Fadnavis (@Dev_Fadnavis) June 8, 2023

On 26th October PM Modi Inaugurated Nilwande Dam & its Canal .

1st Major project in the country where the piped distribution network for smaller distributaries.

The Nilwande Canal:

Length:85KM

Area Irrigation: 1,70,000Acres

Benefitting 189 Villages of Nashik and Anagar.... pic.twitter.com/4i3mOdj8FK

— The Maharashtra Index (@TheMahaIndex) October 28, 2023

Celebrating the Jal Pujan of Nilwande Dam - a milestone that concludes our patient anticipation.

Our dedication to channeling Jal Shakti for societal benefit shines brighter than ever. pic.twitter.com/dcjZjKy3oq

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) October 26, 2023

If this joy cant get tears in your eyes, nothing can!

CM .@mieknathshinde Ji & Dy CM .@Dev_Fadnavis Ji Inaugurated Nilwande dam in Ahilyanagar. Just look at Celebrations after water reaching village after a wait of 53 yrs.

NCP & Uddhav Gang must be too annoyed now as its...
pic.twitter.com/U2NP7tVdMS

— BhikuMhatre (@MumbaichaDon) June 9, 2023

A man made beauty that adds to the natural appeal of this land, Nilwande Dam is a perfect perfect location. Found in Akole, this spot is right in the middle of an enchanting landscape full of small hills. Plan a trip to experience

the charm of this place!

To know more, kindly... pic.twitter.com/cY3b5wwvAk

— Maharashtra Tourism (@maha_tourism) December 3, 2023

The Nilwande project brings happiness, prosperity, and hope for farmers!

Today, our Hon. PM Narendra Modi Ji, performed JalPujan of much-anticipated Nilwande Dam and inaugurated Canal Network Project in Ahmednagar district. Hon Governor Ramesh Bais ji, Chief Minister Eknath...
pic.twitter.com/04XJmVfFgy

— Devendra Fadnavis (@Dev_Fadnavis) October 26, 2023

6. On Our Reading List

1. Dams, Displacement and Rehabilitation: A Case of Western Maharashtra