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Diverse Interests, Common Resources Navigating Conflicts in a Pluralistic Society

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Abstract

India is known to world as “Unity in Diversity”, but this is not true all the times. When comes to the point of sharing resources of the country, state governments try to favor home state people. Intention is really good, but in due course this leads to interstate conflicts sometimes. As the natural resources are limited, the governments, officials and people will try to do favor to the nearby people by giving some extra resources.

India being a land of diversity has its own internal conflicts within the state or between the states for reasons related to resource majority of which being for the water and mineral resources which manifests due to increasing population and diverse socio-political landscape. In this paper the various conflicts and their reasons is pointed out.

Regionalism plays a vital role while sharing the resources mainly in the case of water, metals, and minerals. This is leading to conflicts and many a times central government and supreme court had to intervene to solve the conflicts. Growing population, shifting population and complex sociopolitical environment are also contributing to the above issue. There are wide variety of diverse resource conflicts in India in the last 70 years. The present paper focuses on various interstate conflicts and aftermath positions in the states after the independence.

Keywords: Diverse resource conflicts, Interstate conflicts, Regionalism, and Socio-political landscape.

Introduction

India is popularly known for its diversity and is often addressed as a land with “Unity in Diversity.” There are so many different cultures, rituals, religions, languages, food, dressings, landscapes, and many others. Despite all these variations, it has been shown over centuries that unity still exists. The states have been divided on the basis of linguistic rather than geography, bringing the variations between states. States have different languages and cultures, which are run by separate administrations. Elections are held by democratic means, and run by the elected Government with their policies. While the unity in diversity is described, there are conflicts between the states, when it comes to sharing of the resources. Each elected Government in order to please their natives, they bring in policies that they want to portray to help and support their own people, rather than in the larger interest of the nation. Favoring their own people seems much needed, but this can lead to conflicts. The heads of the state may start arguing in their favor to ensure their own people get benefit. This has led to several conflicts as the natural resources are limited.

Natural resources of interest in this article are water, minerals, and the socio-political landscape. There are internal conflicts within the state also and not just between the states for reasons related to these resources. It is important to understand how these resources can be sources of conflict, and needs to be studied. Despite the diversity, where there could have been conflicts and disagreements, unity has existed. But when the matter goes into the hands of the state administration, there the conflicts start appearing. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is reviewing the understanding of the conflicts in the context of unity in diversity. The present paper focuses on various interstate conflicts and aftermath positions in the states after the independence.

Review of Literature

Regional Disparities and Regionalism

Regional disparities are bound to occur as there cannot be perfect divisions of regions. Political influence will also play role at the time of divisions. It is a well-known fact that over centuries, administrators and rulers have used divide and rule policy. This they create differences in the minds of people and then take advantage of them. Hence at the time of division, they invariably look at such opportunities. Hence the differences can be more than predicted (Gochhayat 2014).

Regionalism plays a vital role while sharing the resources mainly in the case of water, metals, and minerals. This may need to be understood and solution may need to be found. Unfortunately, politicization will lead to worsening of the conflicts than solution being found. This is leading to ongoing conflicts. Both the administrations will then try to involve the Central Government, which may form a committee to resolve this. This may take years. If this is not resolving then the regions knock the judiciary and wait.

There are wide variety of diverse resource conflicts in India in the last 70 years. Let us discuss few examples and understand.

Karnataka and Tamil Nadu water conflict

Cauvery River flows originate in Kodagu and flows through Tamil Nadu (TN) before joining Bay of Bengal. It is one of the big rivers of the South India. There is a conflict as there is demand from the TN to Karnataka to release more water, to benefit their farmers and others (Ferdin 2010). The issue that Karnataka will have in sharing water with TN occurs when there is shortage of the water flow. This conflict dates back to 1800s, when issue seems to have been documented between Princely states of Mysore and Madras. Then the farmers around the Cauvery basin in Karnataka would want it as a priority for them, as their livelihood depend on them. This means, the TN may demand the same to support their farmers and others. This has led to crisis for centuries and there is a central committee's suggestions were not agreed. In 1990, A Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) was formed to deal with water disputes involving the states of Karnataka, TN, Kerala and Puducherry. The CWDT gave ruling after 17 years in 2007, and outlined the distribution between four states. The verdict regarding sharing of water between Karnataka and TN is difficult to implement. This led to discontentment between these two states. In 2018, The Supreme Court declared Cauvery River as a natural resource, and upheld the decision of the CWDT. This issue keeps cropping up whenever there is a shortfall during the south west monsoon. Sharing may not be a problem when there is excess rains during the monsoon. Therefore, it is now conflict that is with the Supreme Court, which provided interim orders for release so much every now and again. TN Government in Sept 2023, went to Supreme Court and got order to release more water. The resolution of conflict by sharing is hard to convince both the parties. The Karnataka state is arguing deficit in rainfall and writing to the Cauvery River Management authority to reconsider the release of water from the reservoir. There is also a political tug of war, that opposition party is accusing the current ruling party is trying to release more water to TN to please its national ally in TN. The media plays a role, and supporters of parties will magnify the conflict, rather than resolving the problem.

Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Issues

The division that occurred in 2014, has led to issues in the division of the state government-related offices and positions, which apparently affected. There are also issues related to water sharing and resources sharing. There have been conflicts over division of assets, power bills where were due. The two states in the last 10 years have been in conflict and have had legal battle also. The new Andhra Pradesh (AP) has been demanding special status to make up for the loss of revenues that may have occurred during the division. Until June 2024, the Hyderabad, was the capital for both the states. Hyderabad would be sole capital of Telangana as per the Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Act 2014. There were discontentment in sharing of institutions and state-run company. The power bill due crisis is also not resolved. Employees are not happy with regards to the transfers. The assets of road transport of the state has not been amicably divided. Hyderabad remained as common capital till June 2024 as per the AP Reorganization Act. Amaravati was proposed to be likely capital as per the Chief Minister then of the AP. Then Chief Minister announced a green filled world class capital there. This was reconsidered by another Chief Minister from different party until June 2024. There were intra-regional conflicts in Andhra Pradesh between different districts over the capital city, with Amaravati or Vizag (Upadhya 2017). This will eventually depend on which political party has won the recent elections and their preference. It appears that Amaravati will be likely to be capital since there is change of the ruling party. Apart from inter-state conflict, the capital city also was a source of intra-state conflict.

Issues with Kerala tribes

Due to the increasing population, there have been apparent conflicts in terms of exploiting the tribal people in Kerala is also another example (Nithya 2014). The lack of employment, unavailability of nutritious food, and poor distribution of resources have led to the tribal being denied also have been reported. Water shortage and extreme heat have caused problems for them. Internet availability shortage has also been reported. The state Government's refusal to allow Tribal community to have rights over the forest land, has led to this crisis. Stalin's approach has been that the ruling state can change the law, and community to abide by that change. Unstable communities such as the tribal community needs to be supported to change, and this is also the duty of the Government. There were cultural conflicts occurring, and ambivalence to change. The tribal outburst in Wayanad led to reconsideration by the ruling party who insisted they were integral part of the secular India. Through an autonomous council, the ruling party affiliated Agricultural council backed the demands of the Tribal community. Tribal rights over the forest land seems to continue unresolved. This conflict is due to resolution (Damodaran 2006).

Karnataka Goa Mahadayi river sharing issue

Since 2006, Goa Government is trying to prevent Karnataka to divert Mahadayi river. This river is related to Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra. Goa argues the divert of this river would impact on the flora and fauna in the border area. Progressive River Authority for Water and Harmony (PRAWAH) is appointed by the Centre to oversee compliance of the Mahdayi water dispute tribunal (MWDT) as well as the Court rulings. Here Goa had filed to the Supreme Court expressing discontentment to the

MWDT ruling in 2018. This is another water sharing issue, that Karnataka is experiencing apart from the Cauvery River. The farmers in the Karnataka are not happy with the Goa's interference and are urging the Government to support them. This is yet another example of the problem between states.

Karnataka Maharashtra Border dispute

The border town of Belagavi now District headquarters covering large territory has been source of dispute since the enactment of the States Reorganisation Act in 1956. The Maharashtra claim is that Belagavi should have come under their state. This became an issue again when the Karnataka Government made claims on a taluk in Maharashtra.

Coal mining Issues in Nagaland, Meghalaya and Jharkhand

Bans on coal mining have been imposed in Nagaland and Meghalaya in order to limit the exploitation of coal while taking worker and environmental concerns into consideration. Communities have contested regulations prohibiting the extraction of coal. Debates about environmental deterioration have called Article 371(A) of the Indian Constitution into action. To stop mining without permission, militarization of coal mining sites was planned. Coal mining areas were to become militarized to prevent mining without approval. Apparently, there was a green turn to mining ban at national level (McDuie-Ra, D., & Kikon, D. 2016). Meghalaya has seen a huge rise in production of coal from 1979 to 2014. Majority of coal mine owners are tribals and landowners are free to grant leases under their own terms and conditions (MC Duie – Ra, 2007). There are also reports of rat-hole mining (Rat hole mining is the name given to an antiquated and unscientific practice of extracting coal from the ground by boring small, rat-hole-like tunnels). This practice, which is primarily observed in Meghalaya, has important

environmental and socioeconomic ramifications. Rat hole mining continues despite being outlawed by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in 2014 because of a number of socioeconomic issues. In 2018, the NGT constituted an Independent Committee to protect environment. Satellite images were used to map the mining sites, and restoration process underway. This also has left the contamination acidic water, for which the committee looked at measures to neutralise this. The rat hole mines being planned to close with controlled blasts. Overall, these measures help in restoring the safety of local community. Natural resources considered as boon, seemed to have become a bane.

Jharkhand State in India has the largest reserve of coal. Due to various socio-economic problems large number of tribal populations was displaced who have unknowingly encroached on forest lands and are known as illegal occupants. Mining process could not be controlled without displacing the people since coal was indispensable for Indian's economy the state and central government had to save coal (Malkhandi, M. 2018). Study highlights the disruptive aspects of industrialization and urbanization on tribal life for example they became homeless, jobless, food insecurity and loss of property etc (Vidyarthi, L. P. 1970). This has caused problems to the tribal community locally. Resources are seen as assets, and the same resources have become source of conflict.

Discussion

With the help of above literature, we have gone through some disputes among various states in India. Similarly, there are many other disputes that need resolving and will matter for the politicization, and as already described, politics will be able to resolve the issues. The court proceedings may take several years to decide, which will continue to affect the aggrieved parties.

Table 1: Table Showing some examples of the Issues despite the label “Unity in Diversity”

States/ regions	Resources/ Source of Conflict	Conflict since	Resolving agency
Karnataka vs TamilNadu	Water sharing	1974	Supreme Court
Andhra Pradesh Issues	Capital city	2014	Ruling Party/ Legislation
Tribal population in Kerala	Multiple Resources	1970s	Legislation
Karnataka Goa	Water Mahadayi project	2006	Central Government
Karnataka Maharashtra	Geographical border dispute	1960	Central Government
Nagaland	Illegal mining, environmental degradation, disputes over land rights, and inadequate regulation of mining activities.	Colonial era	National Green Tribunal
Meghalaya	Rat-hole Mining	20th century	National Green Tribunal

Division of States and Union Territories

There are references to the fact that at the time of freedom struggle, there were opposition to creation of states based on linguistics. There had foreseen the issues of diversity if the states were divided based on the linguistics. There was a proposal to divide the country for administrative purposes not on basis of language and culture. The strongest opposition was from Telugu-speaking regions. The Andhra region experienced problems when a veteran Gandhian Potti Sriramulu died of a hunger strike. Because of this opposition and widespread protest, the state government had decided to create Andhra Pradesh in October 1953.

This recently got further divided. This division based on language and culture may have helped in restoration of their culture and language. But this may have caused too much loyalty towards their language and culture compared to nationalistic feelings.

Diversity

There is no doubt with the number of cultures, languages, communities, festivals, etc in India, it is definitely a land of diversities. It may be the climate variation, geographical landscape, coastline, mountains, rivers or forests. From one place to another in Karnataka itself, the culture and style of

Kannada speaking varies. Thus, diversity exists. The unity has been evident in the form of examples of having national sports team, celebrating Independence Day or Republic Day. Tableau display on the Republic Day Parade is evidence of the diversity and they all coming together systematically, indicates the unity in this.

Conclusion

Despite the land of unity in diversity at a larger level, there are issues bound to happen similar to issues that happen in individual households. Therefore, we discussed the issues between different states as examples to understand this better. These disputes will continue, and unfortunately, there have been instances of violence, which should not be the way forward. In the larger interest of the country, there has to be some mechanism to resolve these issues as early as possible to give some negotiable solutions, which the people should also bind to and support the brotherhood. Basic problems of tribal population could be solved by proper resettlement plan. NGOs should be strengthened who play major role in planning, negotiation and implementation of resettlement. The political parties must have joint panel and agreement to the outcome and convince the people, and offer appropriate resettlement package. The nationalism is to be promoted.

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