

# PARADIPLMACY IN INDIAN STATES: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF TEESTA RIVER WATER DISPUTE

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**Abstract-** There is a detonation of international affairs on the part of region across the globe, and India is no exception to this. In current scenario of international politics, State governments within the Indian federal system are playing an emphatic role in foreign policy making. And this phenomenon of regional governments can be called as par diplomacy. It makes regional power extrusive in international orb and creates the concept of political decentralization of power. Subnational units are influencing central government in many ways to take account of their respective inclinations. Teesta river water dispute between India and Bangladesh is an admissible example of this. India and Bangladesh, two South Asian neighbours have always shared strong cultural, linguistic and geographical ties. But this friendly relation is occasionally mithered by tensions. Sharing the water of Teesta River is one of the most extended issues between the two friendly neighbour, India, and Bangladesh. Teesta is equally important for both of the regions as it covers a huge area of Bangladesh as well as area of India (West Bengal). It is considered the lifeline of the people situated around it from both the region. West Bengal CM Mamta Banerjee's approach of paradiplomacy was understood when she refused to accompany the than Indian PM Manmohan Singh to Dhaka and again In 2015 in 'indo-Bangla cultural adda' said she and PM of Bangladesh Sheikh Haseena would find an effective solution which serve the interest of both the nations. The role of west Bengal in Teesta dispute and failure to ink a deal had its fallout on the country's politics, putting the ruling NDA and Awami League in a spot. In this context, the paper explores the evolution and progress of paradiplomacy in India and give a brief introduction about the growing role of sub regional units in foreign policy making. The author also intends to analyse the scope of sub national diplomacy, as India is a federal country and appreciates promoting regional interest in international sphere. Overall the main focus of the paper is to scrutinize the origin of Teesta river dispute and role of west Bengal in it and analyse through archetype of paradiplomacy.

**Index terms** - Paradiplomacy, Federalism, foreign policy, Teesta river dispute

## I. INTRODUCTION

In India, federal structure is one of the major factors that helps in giving shape to India's foreign policy. "In this era of globalisation, the boundaries within the domestic policy and foreign policy seem to be more fragile. It is therefore necessary to take foreign policy decisions by keeping domestic issues in mind" (Sinha , 2017). A sea change is noticeable in the concept of federalism and democracy after liberalisation. After this era, various questions are coming from the regional governments about cooperative federalism. Since the beginning India's foreign policy was determined by the union government. The states were not consulted about it. But in current scenario of world politics, states are playing an emphatic role in India's foreign policy. We are living in the era of coalition politics, till 1967 there was single dominance of congress party but after this, along with the rise of regional parties, demands from states increased which became difficult for union government to fulfil. And after liberalisation states became more active to promote their interest in international sphere which weakened the centre's role in foreign policy making. As a result, a new concept of diplomacy took place in Indian political system which is called 'paradiplomacy'. "The phenomenon of regional government developing international relations is called paradiplomacy".(Sinha , 2017). "Paradiplomacy as an emerging policy capacity of sub-state entities in general can be enjoyed by both the states, provinces, regions or *Länder* of

federations and by the autonomous entities of otherwise unitary states” (Wolff, 2007). The concept of paradiplomacy is relevant in current era because country is no longer speaking as one voice in international stage. The Teesta river water dispute is one of the paramount examples in this regard. From both the nation, nearly 30 million people reside in the Teesta river basin. Hence Teesta became the main area of concern between Indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations. Bangladesh, is geographically and historically close to India so it has an important variable in the making of foreign policy. The emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign country was a very emphatic event in the sub-continent. “For the people of Bangladesh it was an end of the nightmare of terror and torture and for India, it was a major victory of democratic socialism” (Khanna, 2012).

Since 1971, there were several treaty or agreements signed between the two countries to enhance this relationships. Paradiplomacy is influencing the federal structure of the state as West Bengal has been playing a very prominent role in this issue. Since water comes under the state list under Indian constitution, union government cannot take any decision without consulting with the state government. In past there were plenty of initiatives that has been taken to resolve the issue but tension is increasing day by day. Teesta has been negotiated since Bangladesh came into existence and sometimes it was finalized but not able to sign and resolve the issue. In 1972 a joint river commission was established and examined this issue in a series of meetings between both the nations, but each time there was some problems and it could not reach to any conclusion. In 1975, the construction of Farakka Barrage by West Bengal created serious roughness in the bilateral relations. In 1983 an ad hoc water sharing agreement reached between two nations and which was opposed by West Bengal chief minister Mamta Banerjee. Again the same was repeated in 2011 when the than PM of India visited Bangladesh and in last moment the agreement was refused by Mamta Banerjee. In 2015, along with PM Narendra Modi, Mamta Banerjee visited to Bangladesh to put an end to this dispute. She assured Bangladesh that an unfair deal would not be concluded but no solid agreement happened. As a result of absence of unanimous decisions among union and state government, conflict arises in centre state relations and the concept of paradiplomacy is increasing its scope gradually because of this.

## II. OBJECTIVE

In this context, the paper explores the evolution and progress of paradiplomacy in India and gives a brief introduction about the growing role of sub regional units in foreign policy making. The author also intends to analyse the scope of sub national diplomacy, as India is a federal country and appreciates promoting regional interest in international sphere. In general, the researcher will focus on Teesta river water disputes by analysing the current scenario and role played by west Bengal from the perspective of paradiplomacy.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The researcher has adopted historical and analytical method in making the study. The researcher has been mainly depended on the secondary data which include books, articles, journals, newspaper readings, informations from websites, blogs etc.

## IV. DEFINING PARADIPLMACY: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Defining diplomacy is an increasingly difficult task because of its growing nature and involvement of different sub national units and other organisations. Earlier, diplomacy was a concept of sovereign states only and it was not transferable to any other units. Para diplomacy as a concept in international relations is recent origin. “ The concept of paradiplomacy was first proposed in 1990 by John Kincaid, an American scholar who outlined a foreign policy role for local governments within a democratic federal system” (Pant & Tiwari, 2017) . “Although there is no single bounded definition of paradiplomacy, it generally refers to the international activities and foreign policy capacities of sub state political units” (Jackson, 2017). Stefan Wolff describes paradiplomacy as a “foreign policy capacity of sub-state entities, their participation, independent of their metropolitan state, in the international arena in pursuit of their own specific international interest.” (Wolff, 2007). It is a policy which can be adopted

by the states in federations and autonomous body of unitary states. We can summarize Paradiplomacy as a new concept in international relations and a foreign policy capacity to sub national units and their participation in international relations to put forward their own specific interest. Paradiplomacy can be simply defined as subnational governments' involvement in international relations through the establishment of formal and informal ties, be they permanent or ad hoc, with foreign public or private entities, with the objective of promoting social, economic, cultural or political dimensions of development" (Milani & Ribeiro, 2011). It is also regarded as lander diplomacy, sub national diplomacy, regional diplomacy etc. Canadian scholar, Panayotis Soldatos called it "a coordinated, decentralized process in foreign policy is present when the federal government joins forces with the subnational unit, co-ordinates or monitors subnational international initiatives, and manages to harmonize the various trans-sovereign activities with its own policies." (Tiwari, 2017).

## V. PARADIPLMACY IN INDIA: EVOLUTION AND GROWTH

Federalism is regarded as one of the key determinants to paradiplomacy in India. The most fundamental nature of federalism is division of power between centre and state which encourages states to peruse their interest in international sphere through paradiplomacy. In India, accommodating nature of foreign policy is always beneficial for the democratic development of the state and paradiplomacy helps in bringing foreign policy and subnational units closer. Often Paradiplomacy takes place because of economic reasons. The resources of union is limited and have to be distributed among all the units. So some dynamic chief minister would like to invite global market economy for the development of their respective state. I.e. POSCO (a South Korean steel making company) in Odisha. Article 246 of Indian constitution deals with subject matter of laws made by parliament and by the legislature of states. Many major issues like "foreign affairs; diplomatic, consular and trade representation; participation in international conferences; entering into treaties and agreements with foreign countries and implementation of treaties, agreements, and conventions with foreign countries; foreign jurisdiction and trade and commerce with foreign countries; and import and export" (Tiwari, 2017) were under the jurisdiction of union government. This regulation was going well till the enormous single party rule of congress party in centre as well as states. But after 1967, coalition politics and minor government came to existence and enormous pressure built on the federal structure of India.

"With the onset of globalisation and felt urgency towards broad-based economic development para-diplomatic practices have come to be regarded as efficient instrument" (Chatterji & Saha, 2017). Since 1990s, Sub national units have arose as a major determinants of innovation and economic transformation and wants to represent themselves and compete in global market without the intervention of the sovereign states concerned. They are known for their production and resources and willing to get investments to enhance their economy through paradiplomacy. "Extreme versions of this theory present regions as engaged in a kind of neo mercantilist competition for absolute advantage, with political choices entirely determined by their market position. More realistic versions present the region as faced with the need to reconcile social cohesion and environmental quality with global market competition in a constant endeavour of political compromise and synthesis" (Keating, 2000).

In last few years, there is a paradigm shift in paradiplomacy in India. In 2015 Andhra Pradesh CM Chanrababu Naidu was asked by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to lead a high profile delegation to china. And again in 2015, Mamta Banerjee was included in PM Modi's official visit to Bangladesh to discuss and find a solution on Teesta river water dispute. Before this, in 2011 the than Indian PM Manmohan Singh made a visit to Bangladesh with four chief ministers (Manik Sarkar of Tripura, Tarun Gogoi of Assam, Mukul Sangma of Meghalaya and Pu Lalthanhawla of Mizoram) of north-eastern states. A clear vision of paradiplomacy of India was visible when it encourage the Border States to establish its own "Haats" for the marketing of local produce and for cultural exchange. World Bank was also extended its loan to the respective states for the same purpose and India is a facilitator for the loan. According to Commerce Minister of

India, 'an estimated \$20 million worth trade will take place annually between India and Bangladesh through Border *Haats*.(Jha, 2014).The economy of Kerala is getting strong by NRIs from gulf and other country is also another shining example of paradiplomacy in Indian states.

Paradiplomacy is happening beyond economic sphere which includes environment, resource management and security and so on. In 2015 the historical land boundary agreement between India-Bangladesh was signed after four decades of wait. Sheikh Haseena, the PM of Bangladesh made an official visit to India was to settle the most awaited Teesta river water issue. There is also a power project in Ratnagiri, Maharashtra which is under the opposition of state government because of environmental concern of the state government. Opposition of Tamil Nadu government to kundakulam nuclear project was another example of state's role in implementation of foreign policy making commitments by the union government. Sometimes it has been seen that, the regional pressure made the union government steps against its will or interest and a perfect example is India's vote with the US against its friendly neighbour Sri Lanka, over a resolution before the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva. Often we are experiencing the political and ideological differences between states and union, for which the judgement of New Delhi may not be for the best interest of concerned states or vice versa. Besides, India's existing diversity, sub national units are better placed in making foreign policy with neighbour countries because of geographical and cultural similarities. West Bengal can have more successful paradiplomacy with Bangladesh and Bhutan rather than the MEA sitting in country's capital. Kerala government is also engaging itself in a better way to have para diplomatic relations with gulf countries to enhance its economy.

Increasing role of state in foreign policy making can be a threat to the federal governance in India and it may influence centre state relations. So the union government need to take effective measures to interact with states. Growth of paradiplomacy should stop there, when it comes to the unity and integrity of the nation. One of the effective measures is employment of federal foreign officers by MEA. For an effective way forward to paradiplomacy, regular consultation should be there between the local officers' with MEA and they should take care of the security issues faces by the regions. In 2014, PM Modi express interest in promoting states interest in international sphere. As a result of which MEA initiated some institutional changes and created 'states division' for better coordination between centre and state and promote its export, investment and tourism etc. during this time many CM made a visit to several countries to promote their interest such as "visits of S. Sukhbir Singh Badal (the Deputy Chief Minister of Punjab) to Poland and Hungary to attract investment in the state. A month later, the MEA arranged for the visit of Manohar Lal Khattar (Chief Minister of Haryana) to the US and Canada in a bid to project Haryana as an investment destination" (Tiwari, 2017). Some more foreign visits includes Mamta Banerjee's visit to UK , Maharashtra's Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to Watyaru, Shivraj Singh Chauhan's to Japan and Korea in October 2015 and Telangana's Chief Minister's K Chandrashekhara Rao to China in September 2015 etc.

## VI. TEESTA RIVER WATER DISPUTE

Water is an indispensable requirement to livelihood and socio-economic development. The rapid population growth has increased the water consumption for hydroelectricity, large-scale waterway transportation generation and industrial use etc. Hence, water is an important multi-use resource to the countries sharing the rivers. In the case of India and Bangladesh, the distribution of river water has been the center point of its relationships for the past decades. There are plenty of issue of cooperation between the two friendly neighbours such as refugee crises, the boundary dispute, refugee crisis, etc. but issue of water sharing is remains unsolved till date. Though both the country shares 54 river, Teesta has been the prime reason for conflict. "The Teesta River originates from Teesta Kangse glacier about 7,068 meters (23,189 ft.) height and flow southward through gorges and rapids in the Sikkim Himalaya. It flows through Sikkim, West Bengal and Bangladesh where after coursing through about 45 Km of irrigable land it merges with the Brahmaputra River when it enters Bangladesh and ends in the Bay of Bengal." (Mital,

2016). “The major cause of conflict regarding the sharing of this water body is that while Bangladesh demands 50% of the river’s water, India wants to retain a share of 55% of its water because most of the river’s catchment area is located here”. (Dutta, 2018).

The dispute started when the West Bengal government started constructing a barrage on the river in 1979. Bangladesh opposed this construction by putting forward its agricultural needs. India began the process of negotiation in 1983 and as a result of that, an ad hoc agreement on water sharing was signed between the two nations. As per the agreement, India and Bangladesh allocated 39% and 36 %, of water respectively, which was opposed by Bangladesh. “India controls the flow of water into Bangladesh from the Teesta Barrage at Gazaldoba, constructed to provide water to the northern part of West Bengal. Bangladesh has also constructed a barrage downstream at Dalia in Lalmonirhat District, which supplies water for agriculture and irrigation to drought-prone areas of the northern Bangladesh” (Mital, 2016). “According to a 2010 report ‘water security of India: the external dynamics’ published by the institute for defence studies and analyses (IDSA): India is facing a serious water problem and as trends suggest, it is expected to become ‘water stressed’ by 2025 and ‘water scare’ by 2050” (Roy, 2012). The Joint River commission examined the issue in a series of meetings between 1997 and 2004 and some progress was made. Eventually, a joint technical group (JTG) emerged in 2004. Again in 2011, both the country reached to a 15 year of temporary agreement where, “It has proposed India would be receiving 42.5%, and Bangladesh 37.5% and unallocated 20% for the river, otherwise nothing will reach to the Bay of Bengal” (Mital, 2016). Popular in Bangladesh as yet another lady politician in charge, like many in that country, Banerjee was unwilling to risk trading her domestic votes with foreign popularity, and balked at the last minute both at the treaty and at being in the delegation. (Chowdhury, 2011).

However, the deal could not reach any conclusion as it was opposed by the Chief Minister of West Bengal (Mamta Banerjee) by putting the northern Bengal issue which highlighted that this provision of water sharing will dry out northern Bengal completely. “West Bengal has 8 per cent of the Indian population but just 2.7 per cent of national territory. The state has 7.5 per cent of national water resources, which are becoming increasingly scarce with the uncontrolled growth of population, expansion of the irrigation network and developmental needs”. (Anand, 2013). As water comes under the state list in India, the union government can’t reach to any conclusion without the consent of the state. “Although Article 253 of the Indian constitution gives power to the Union government to enter into any trans- boundary river water-related treaty with a riparian state, the Centre cannot do it arbitrarily without taking into consideration the social, political and economic impact of such a treaty in the catchment area.” (Ranjan, 2017). Trinamool Congress was the largest coalition partner of UPA II government. So it can be a major reason behind the drop of Teesta accord. It was very much opposed in Bangladesh and Sheikh Haseena government also faced a lot of political opposition for her failure to resolve Teesta dispute. Hence Dutta has rightly said that, “The Teesta issue will not only lead to a healthy bilateral relation between India and Bangladesh, but will also mend the centre-state relations in India” (Dutta, 2018).

In June 2015, Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi visited Bangladesh along with the chief minister Mamta Banerjee, with a hope of resolving the Teesta river water issue. It is crucial for Bangladesh as well, so, prime minister and Ms Mamta Banerjee also reassured Bangladesh that an unfair deal would not be concluded on water sharing. Addressing the 'Indo-Bangla cultural Adda' in 2015, “the West Bengal Chief Minister remarked that the fencing can never stop love to spread. Reacting to Teesta water sharing, the most crucial issue for Bangladesh, she said, “As far as Teesta is concerned, I will urge you to have faith in me. Please understand West Bengal and Bangladesh both have problems regarding Teesta. We have to reach a common solution.” (Das, 2015). In 2016 after winning elections, Mamta Banerjee invited PM Sheikh Haseena to West Bengal to resolve the Teesta issue and Sheikh Haseena said “even though there existed problems between the two neighbouring countries, these would not in the way of the “friendship and cooperation” that they share” (Dutta, 2018). We cannot deny the fact of Mamta Banerjee’s genuine concern about the interest of West Bengal. The concept of paradiplomacy is questionable here because of her rigid stance on Teesta. Hence, she has her own view point of seeing centre state relations. Because of Teesta, The worsening relations between west Bengal and union government is clearly visible.

As both the counties are gearing up for the next upcoming general elections, Teesta river issue has now a major role to play as it's one of the key stakeholders, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamta Banerjee is yet to approve the deal. In current scenario of 2018, both Awami League and NDA government are on a sticky wicket and both may face a toughest election in coming year for Teesta river issue. The people of Bangladesh and India (West Bengal) will only ask why it has not been done. And both the government have to have an answer.

## VII. CONCLUSION

A positive settlement of Teesta river water issue will boost indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations. It will take the bilateral relation to the text level. Generally paradiplomacy suffers when narrow interest of regional government takes place and became an obstacle for the smooth conduct of national foreign policy. In case of Teesta river water dispute, although the interest of west Bengal is relevant, it comes within the interest of India not beyond it. Hence, the regional government has to understand and needs to take effective steps in a way which will resolve the issue and simultaneously strengthen the centre state relations. "Perhaps it is apt to quote Prof. C.P. Bhambhri who has said, "India is likely to pay a very heavy price if it makes foreign policy a football game where 'regionalists' begin to dictate and decide the direction of policy." (Tiwari, Observer Research Foundation, 2017).

"Paradiplomacy can be used in various ways to strengthen a leader's standing. Incorporating the culture of the home state in their diplomatic initiatives reinforces the regional narratives with which a chief minister associates or promotes" (Wyatt, 2017). It has the potential to rectify the curve of Indian federalism by assisting regional government to realise their calibre in the matter of conducting foreign policy. Despite PM Modi's encouragement to paradiplomacy, state governments has to understand its limitation and final call on foreign policy should be taken by union government by keeping the interest of states and nation as a whole in mind.

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