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Water Conflicts in the Anthropocene: The India-Pakistan Water Dispute

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Abstract

In the domain of Anthropocene, the water conflict is not only linked with geopolitical tensions, but it is closely associated with environmental and technological aspects intrigued with the colonial legacies. This precise academic paper will shortly explore the India-Pakistan water dispute through the relevant frameworks of Science and Technology (STS) and Amanda Kearney's theorization of place related violence that include ecological decay, physical destruction and delignification. By encompassing the principles of ecological anthropology, indigenous epistemologies and STS, the analysis will try to ascertain how the geographical flow of the Indus River system exacerbates and reflects the ontological disruptions, inter-state tensions and colonial infrastructure legacies. The study also highlights the social, cultural and epistemic preconditions of water-based violence and considers kincentric worldviews and re-centering of dwelling as alternate epistemic approaches to sustainability and peace, foregrounding the decolonial environmental futures.

Introduction

Water is classified as a symbol of life and purity and unfortunately, in the political reality of the Anthropocene, it has become a site of contestation and violence. Undoubtedly the Anthropocene has exposed the increasing fragility of transboundary ecosystems, particularly rivers as they have become strong sites of conflict, dispute, control and cooperation as well. Elsewhere in South Asia, it is not more evident than India-Pakistan water conflict that continue to dispute the fates and flow of Indus River Basin that was signed in 1960, known as the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) that allocated and divided the water usage between the two states increasing political tensions, climate change and developmental water storage ambitions have made this treaty an overlying transboundary water conflict. (ALAM, 2002). In recent years the changing geological environmental patterns, manipulation of water flows by dams building, hydropower projects and diversions have escalated geopolitical tensions, suspicions and inflamed nationalist rhetoric. The paper incorporates and applies Amanda's Kearney work on place-related violence that shows how artificial control over water not only creates and contributes to Ecological and physical violence but also epistemic violence that includes indigenous water ontologies and relations. It also includes the insights of Science and Technology (STS) which interrogates the co-production of knowledge and power that offers critical tools for evaluating and understanding the layered violence. (Kearney, 2018).

The Geography of Water Conflict and Indus Water Treaty

The Indus water basin is regarded as one of the biggest in the world that stretches over 3,180 kilometers that support the livelihoods of over 300 million people. The Indus water treaty was contracted in 1960 between Pakistan and India by World Bank that divides the Indus Basin's waters between India and Pakistan and allocated three western rivers (Jhelum, Chenab and Indus) to Pakistan and three eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas and Sutlej) to India and permitted both countries do not use rivalry side waters for hydropower or agriculture. (Shaukat Ali, 2015)

Irrespective of being regarded as a rare success in international water diplomacy, the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) is under pressure due to factors like climate change, disruption in water flows, nationalist politics and Infrastructure developments like hydropower plants on rivalry side rivers. The hydropower projects and construction of dams like Baglihar dam and Kishanganga dams by India have sparked tensions between India and Pakistan as it violates the treaty provisions by India being an upper riparian country and it becomes even more problematic during the times of droughts and floods that affect and becomes a proxy tool for control, sovereignty and survival in both regions. (Newton, 2007)

In terms of Science and Technology (STS) the sharing of Indus River Basin between Pakistan and India is a socio-technical conglomeration and dynamic field point where scientific, technological and political discourses shape the physical material realities. The hydro-politics of the Indus Water Basin is a classic example of pertinent "hydro-social" relations, where water is contested and governed through natural and social intertwined processes. (Sultana, 2013)

Modalities of Amanda Kearney's Place-Related violence

There are three interrelated forms of place-related violence that are introduced by Amanda Kearney, termed as: ecological decay, physical destruction and delignification. These following concepts are vital to understand and analyze how large-scale water control in the Indus Basin by India and Pakistan enact overall violence. (Kearney, Cultural Wounding, Healing, and Emerging Ethnicities, 2014)

A. Ecological Decay

The term ecological decay is termed as degradation of riverine ecosystems. It is the depletion in downstream flows that has affected the Indus delta's biodiversity which are particularly called as fish stocks and mangroves that undermine both food security and ecological integrity in southern Pakistan. (Amjad, 2007)

B. Physical Destruction

It revolves around the mass-displacement of communities due to dam construction such as Kishanganga and Baglihar dams in India. The loss of agrarian land, submergence of villages and militarization of infrastructure directly destroys the traditional relationship to place. (Newton, 2007)

C. Delignification

Delignification is the stripping of cultural meaning from water and land as it usually occurs when the rivers are limited to hydrological or legal entities that devoid identity, ritual and memory. The on-ground implementation of the Indus Water Treaty disregarded the metaphysical and historical significance of rivers to communities such as Kashmiris and Sindhis.

The Amanda's Kearney lens of place-related violence exemplifies how the pre-dominant violence in the Pakistan-India water dispute is not only creating scarcity of water for regional communities by artificially controlling the water but also spreading ruptures in ecological and social relationships. The paradigm of colonial and post-colonial water management treats rivers as hydraulic machines as it underpins the mega infrastructure projects which are aimed to control the predictability of water by replacing the indigenous knowledge system with technocratic rationality. Moreover, according to Amanda Kearney, epistemic violence is the core foundation to place-related erasure and trauma. (Kearney, *Cultural Wounding, Healing, and Emerging Ethnicities*, 2014)

Science and Technology (STS), Colonial Infrastructure and Epistemic Violence

The colonial cartography and Infrastructure rationality is an undeniable legacy of the Indus River Basin. The British engineers beginning in the 19th Century introduced irrigation systems and canal colonies to transform Punjab into the “breadbasket” of the British empire in the subcontinent. The systematic interventions redesigned water relations and aided fundamental hydrological knowledge into colonial goals. (Gilmartin, 1994). STS scholars frame these remodeling as epistemic shifts in which hydrological knowledge, scientific expertise and infrastructure coalesce into authoritative regimes of control and knowledge.

The India-Pakistan water dispute resonates with settler-colonial epistemologies, particularly in which the natural resource of water is decontextualized from its cultural

ecologies, and it converted into an object of geopolitical calculation. The Science and Technology (STS) theories that are particularly those involving co-production help materialize how hydrological knowledge and political order are both reinforcing. The Indus Water Treaty (IWT) symbolizes this by co-producing a hydraulic boundary and geo-political order between Pakistan and India. This profound abstraction of water into treaties and models directly eliminates from the current lived experiences of those communities that are heavily affected. (Jasanoff, 2004)

This epistemic violence is profound in India and Pakistan's rural communities in which those who are exclusively tied to the rivers are excluded from the river shift or water remodeling and treaty negotiations including technical knowledge of water flow rates and experiential knowledge of rivers as it identified by STS scholars as socio-technical imaginaries, in which the progress that is encoded in scientific technologies and institutions only prioritize the state interest over local realities. (Jasanoff, 2004)

Epistemological Alternatives and Indigenous Ontologies

The kincentric and indigenous ontologies conceive water as a relative and not just a resource. Kinetic ecology recognizes water bodies as sentient and interconnected beings of reciprocity and protection. In indigenous South Asian traditions, the rivers are pronounced as Sindhu Mata (Mother Indus) and deeply embedded in cosmologies, community ethics and everyday rituals. (Salmon, 2000).

The philosophy of Amanda Kearney nudges a return to emplacement and dwelling that refers to ways of prioritizing lived, embodied and emotional engagement with place. In case of Water Conflicts, it refers to resisting the abstraction of rivers into lines on a map or cubic meters in a reservoir. It further proceeds to alternate governance models that may prioritize the needs of riverine communities and honor indigenous knowledge systems and materialize the non-western ontologies of flow, balance and care. (Kearney, *Violence in Place, Cultural and Environmental Wounding*, 2016). In contrast, the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) focuses on distributive justice which refers to (who gets how much water) while the kincentric framework interrogate the relation justice, that how regional communities in Pakistan and India relate to water, to what extent rivers are cared for, and how water sustainability is considered.

Conclusion: Promoting Decolonial Water Governance for Sustainable Future

The India-Pakistan water dispute illustrates deeper layered violence of the Anthropocene as it a unique combination conflict of epistemic, ecological, colonial and political dimensions and place-based destruction. To frame this conflict, the modalities of violence by Amand Kearney and STS approach provides us with a strong foundation to configure beyond state-centric narratives by examining the limitations of colonial infrastructure, ontological dislocation and technoscientific dominance and it provides us the required tools to interrogate the relevant knowledge systems and therefore sustain this violence. Undoubtedly the indigenous ontologies and kincentric frameworks offers suitable pathways for improved water governance for future generations not by treaties alone but through cultural restoration, reciprocity and kinship and sustainability and it synthesize further possibility of reimagining the Indus River as a shared lifeworld not as a contested border. The conflicting relations can be cured by replacing domination with dwelling and control with care on both sides, that can be a breakthrough both for India and Pakistan towards healing both rivers and relations.

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