

Understanding Ethnic Conflict: The International Dimension, Update Edition (3rd Edition)

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Integration through Internal Reorganization: Containing Ethnic Conflict in India
Maya Chadda, William Paterson University

Introduction

During August and September of 2000, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government of Prime Minister Vajpayee created three new states in Northern India. The hill regions of the state of Uttar Pradesh, namely, Gadhwal and Kumaon became the state of Uttaranchal; Jharkhand was carved out of South Bihar, and Chattisgarh was separated from eastern Madhya Pradesh. (The Frontline 2000: <http://www.hindunet.com/line/fl1717/17170340.html>) With the creation of these three new states, India became a union of 28 states and 7 union territories. This is the most recent of several waves of reorganization of existing state boundaries since the consolidation of the Indian union in 1950. The first major reorganization occurred in 1956 following a nation wide movement for the creation of linguistically compact provinces. Kashmir had already been incorporated within the Indian union based on the special status granted to it by Article 370. The second major initiative came in the 1970s, when the Northeast was split up and several new states were created following the establishment of Nagaland in 1963. The third phase was inaugurated with the creation of Jharkhand, Uttaranchal and Chattisgarh in the Northern Hindi-Hindu belt provinces of India.

Why is it pertinent to analyze the evolution of India's federal reorganizations? What is the significance of such internal remapping to debates on federalism and 'third wave' democracies? Even a cursory glance at post-Cold War conflicts shows that management of ethnic identities is important to the balance between domestic and international peace, and for future democratic development. While this balancing act has burdened central authorities in democratizing countries, new forces of interdependence and globalization have strengthened the cause of ethnic and religious nationalists, who have increasingly demanded the grant of large scale autonomy, or, failing that, a separation from the mother country. Containing such demands within national boundaries has become a matter of 'life and death' for many multi-ethnic, multi religious nation-states. The Indian experience of federal nation building provides valuable insights into the dilemmas of power-sharing in an ethnically plural country.

As the Indian experience reveals, splitting up existing federal units and creating new ones is only one of the many strategies new democracies can use to build nation-states and contain ethnic conflicts. Over the course of five decades since independence, Indian governments have entered into various ethnic accords (as for example, that between the Rajiv Gandhi government and Sikh and Assamese militants in the mid eighties), created regional councils straddling several state units (as in the Northeast), and constituted district level autonomous councils to address the needs of rump ethnic regions surrounded by competing ethnic communities. Other strategies range from confederal arrangement to the inclusion of nationalities based on layered sovereignty. The special constitutionally granted arrangement (Article 370) to include the state of Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian union is an example of the latter. While each strategy has a variable record of ethnic containment, the creation of new state units is easily the most successful one in India.

Although there is prolific literature on the evolution of ethnic and regional movements, the response of Indian governments, and the impact of regional conflicts on the Indian polity, very little material is available on the central government's ability to create new

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lack of interest in ethnic conflict by international relations dimension will be introduced with special emphasis being given to the doctrines of . conflicts in the Third World after decolonization raised serious doubts about the See H. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, Fifth Edition (New York,), p.

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