

## **Tracing the Life Cycle of Water Conflict News Coverage: A Case study of Cauvery River Tribunal Final Verdict**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background of the Study**

The study focuses on the life cycle of a news issue and the researcher has chosen the final verdict of the Cauvery tribunal as the news issue whose life cycle is to be traced and analyzed. The Cauvery River Dispute has been selected among the major interstate water disputes in India, because it is the oldest and most contentious one. The study is centered on the Cauvery tribunal's final verdict. So it is necessary to delve a little into some background information about the river, the history of the conflict, the recent tribunal's verdict and the reaction of the people of the two states to this verdict. An understanding of these points will help in analyzing the content of the regional media and draw conclusions about its coverage of the issue.

#### **Tracing the course of Cauvery**

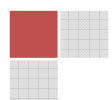
The River Cauvery is an Inter-State river in Southern India. It is one of the major rivers of Peninsular India whose basin covers the four South Indian political units of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry of which the last one is a union territory and the first three are states. Cauvery originates at Tala Cauvery in Karnataka and empties itself through two principal mouths into the Bay of Bengal in Tamil Nadu. The total length of the river is around 820 kilometers out of which 380 kilometers lie in Karnataka and 352 kilometers lie in Tamil Nadu.

#### **History of the Conflict**

The British controlled both Mysore and Madras for a short period in the middle of the 19th century. During their regime, numerous plans were drawn up for the utilization of the Kaveri waters by both states. However, the drought and subsequent famine in the mid 1870s put a hold on the implementation of these plans. The plans were revived by Mysore in 1881 by which time Mysore was back in the hands of the Mysore kings while present day Tamil Nadu continued to remain a part of the Madras Presidency.

Mysore's plans to revive the irrigation projects met with resistance from the Madras Presidency. Mysore state made a representation to the then British government as a result of which, the Agreement of 1892 was signed. Karnataka deems this agreement as having been between

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unequal partners because while Mysore state was a princely state, Madras formed a part of the British Raj. Karnataka also considers this agreement to have been severely inimical to its interests as it gave sweeping powers and prescriptive rights to Madras, the lower riparian state. As per this agreement, Mysore was required to obtain Madras' consent for any water it wished to utilize or for any project it wished to undertake to utilize the waters. In other words, Madras was vested with powers to veto any plans Mysore state might draw up for utilization of the waters.

Things came to a head in 1910 when Mysore, under Nalvadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar as the king and Sir. M.Vishweshwariah as Chief Engineer came up with a plan to construct a dam at Kannambadi village to hold up to 41.5 TMC of water. The dam was planned to be built in two stages. In the first stage a capacity of 11 TMC was envisioned, while in the second stage the full capacity was set to be realized. Madras however, refused to give its consent for this move as it had its own plans to build a storage dam at Mettur with a capacity of 80 TMC. The dispute continued.

After a reference to the Government of India, permission was accorded to Mysore, but for a reduced storage of 11TMC. Mysore had no option but to accept the decision and proceeded with the construction. During construction, however, the foundation was laid to suit the earlier desired full storage. This raised Madras' hackles and the dispute continued. As a result, the then British Government of India referred the matter to arbitration under Rule IV of the 1892 Agreement. The Cauvery dispute thus had come up for arbitration for the first time. Sir H D Griffin was appointed arbitrator and M. Nether sole, the Inspector General of Irrigation in India, was made the Assessor. They entered into proceedings on 16 July 1913 and the Award was given on 12 May 1914. The award upheld the earlier decision of the Government of India and allowed Mysore to go ahead with the construction of the dam up to 11 TMC.

Following numerous meeting and discussions between 1910 and 1924, a consensus was reached with the signing of 1924 agreement. . The 1924 agreement was set to lapse after 50 years, a very long run by any standards. As a result of these agreements, both Mysore and Madras were able to complete their projects at Kannambadi and Mettur respectively. While Mysore constructed the Krishna Raja Sagar dam at Kannambadi to a capacity of 45 TMC, Madras built the Mettur Dam to hold 93.5 TMC.

The 1924 Agreement also gave the upper limit to irrigated lands in Mysore at 110,000 acres. Similarly, the Madras government agrees to limit new areas of irrigation from the mettur project to 301,000 acres. It was also decided that the limitations mentioned in the agreement is open to reconsideration after 50 years. It is due to these agreements that the stretch of river between KRS and Mettur dam acquired the centre-stage in Cauvery water dispute.

Following the expiry of the 1924 agreement, several discussions were held between Karnataka and Tamilnadu post independence in 1960's and 70's over the allocation of water among the states. But these meetings and negotiations did not yield any result. By 1981 the claims made by the riparian states became quite divergent with each state demanding their share of t.m.c.ft of water from Cauvery.

### **Four phases in the history of the dispute**

The First phase of the disputes surrounding the waters of Cauvery lasted from the earliest times till the end of the 19th century. This was concentrated primarily round the regulatory and diversionary issues and was minor in character. The second phase lasted from 1892 to 1934 with 1924 as a land mark and it centered round the construction of Kannambadi and Mettur Dams. The third phase lasted from 1934 to 1990 and centered on issues relating to anekats and ayacuts. The fourth phase lasted from 1990 to 2007 and in this phase the dispute shifted to the legal arena with the site of action shifting to the Cauvery Tribunal and the Supreme Court.

### **The Cauvery river water tribunal verdict**

The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal was established under the formal request of Government of Tamil Nadu in July, 1986 under the provisions of Inter State Water Disputes Act, 1956 for constitution of a Tribunal (Tribunal has adjudication powers). Notification to this effect was issued on 2nd June, 1990 and the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal was established having the headquarters at New Delhi.

The interim order of the tribunal dated June 25, 1991 directed Karnataka to release 205 tmcft of water to Tamil Nadu on weekly basis. Karnataka opposed the very setting up of the Tribunal in 1990 and had also enacted a law against the interim award which was later struck down by the Supreme Court. This outraged the people of Karnataka and lead to widespread violence and protest in the state, the same year. The tribunal was reconstituted in 2003 comprising of three members under the chairmanship of Justice N.P. Singh and members Justice N.S. Rao and Justice Sudhir Narain, gave the much-awaited final verdict after more than 16 years of hearings, the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal gave its Final Verdict on 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2007, which allocated 419 tmc ft of water annually to Tamil Nadu and 270 tmc ft to Karnataka which however will actually release only 192 tmc ft of water to Tamil Nadu in a year. The Tribunal also awarded 30 tmc ft of Cauvery river water to Kerala and 7 tmc ft to Puducherry, the other parties to the dispute.

The verdict came amid tension in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, where inter-states buses stopped plying and schools were closed partially. With tension building up on both sides, security has been beefed up with 43 platoons of police, 18,000 security personnel and 600 home guards deployed in Karnataka to thwart any untoward incident. Tamil Nadu state government buses cancelled trips to Karnataka as a precautionary measure. Karnataka has secured one battalion of police force from neighboring Andhra Pradesh.

Technically and legally, the dispute is over after the tribunal pronounced the final verdict on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2007, but the irony is the Inter-State Water Dispute tribunal can only give an award; it has no role to play in its implementation. Apart from the fact that once the tribunal has given its final award; it will cease to exist. It has no powers of enforcement. Even when it is in existence. It has not been clothed with powers of punishment for contempt. Now that the dispute is back in the Supreme Court by a special leave petition by both the riparian states, and it may take some or many more years before whatever final verdict is announced. The legal course has already taken one full round without any prospect.

The main focus of the study is to find out how the Newspapers reported this sensitive final tribunal verdict through their coverage and how the Life Cycle of this particular issue is has been followed –up. The time frame of this analysis has been decided from 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2007 (a day before the final verdict) to one month (4<sup>th</sup> March, 2007) or to the extent the particular newspapers followed the issue.

### **Aim of the Study**

To Trace and Document the Life Cycle of the Post Cauvery Tribunal’s Final Verdict as News Coverage by the Newspapers in Tamil Nadu with special reference to ‘The Hindu’ and ‘Dinathanthi’.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To analyze the birth stage and disappearance of the News follow up pattern.
2. To analyze the various life stages of the News Coverage of a Water Dispute.
3. To analyze the key factors that propels the news Coverage during Cauvery Dispute coverage.
4. To analyze the key factors that acts as the buffering agent in diluting the news Coverage.
5. To compare the coverage on the taken news item by “The Hindu and Dinathanthi”.

### **Need for the Study**

Each news Coverage undergoes different phases starting from birth to disappearance stage of it in any media, but the life cycle differs from media to media. Hence to determine the life cycle of a news item with its coverage in two different news papers. The results of this study will help us to determine the various factors involved in increasing or decreasing the life cycle of Water Conflict coverage in a regional and English newspaper in Tamil Nadu.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The researcher had chosen “the Cauvery tribunal's final verdict” as the case study because the whole life cycle could be analyzed on the basis of the coverage given for it in two newspapers “the Hindu” and “Dinathanthi”. Further the researcher had determined the birth and death phase of the Cauvery verdict for the better convenience to finish the study within the given time period and to avoid the study getting diverted from its main objective of Tracing the life cycle. The researcher mainly concentrates on the life cycle of the news item and not the Cauvery issue.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Jake Lynch & Annabel McGoldrick (2005) defines Conflict as, relationship between two or more parties (Individual or groups) who have, or think they have, incompatible goals, needs and interests. Conflict can be also conceptualized as a ‘distribution’ or ‘collaboration’ problem between parties with competing and incompatible demands.(Zartman & Rubin, 2000) commonly in such a situation, one party (intentionally or otherwise) frustrates over another actor’s objectives (Frey, 1993). Conflict can also be perceived as a contest that parties try to win

through various strategies (Schelling, 1960) Inequality can also be a decisive influencing variable that determines the level of conflict (Dutta & Mishra , 2005), and it is important to understand that this extend to both inter-state and intra-state scenarios.

According to Ross Howard (2006), predominantly conflict arises typically in circumstances where:

- Resources are scarce
- Power is unevenly distributed
- Unresolved grievances exist from the past.

and at the same time conflict becomes intractable when:

- Poor or no Communication exists between the parties
- Parties have incorrect or biased perceptions of each other
- Lack of trust
- Parties do not value the relationship (Simon Cottle, 2005)

Different roles are attributed to the media: to report and cover events; to interpret and suggest a broader meaning to events; to monitor the powerful and strong in society; to advance the weak and promote social justice; to mediate between the public and the political leadership; and to enable individuals to practice their freedom of speech. Some expect journalists to report conflicts “objectively.” However, the very presence of the media might change the course of the conflict, and in fact interfere in its dynamics. Sometimes the media becomes an active actor within the controversy (Gamson & Modigliani, 1992).

Gadi Wolfsfeld (1997) in his article *Promoting Peace through the News Media* states that there are at least three major ways in which the news media can serve as obstacles to peace:

1. By focusing on events rather than processes;
2. By focusing on the unusual, the dramatic, and the conflictual aspects of the process;
3. By making it difficult to conduct successful negotiations.

In the 1960s, the conflict theory in the social sciences pointed out the emergence and escalation of many conflicts. Sometimes the media plays a double role in conflicts. On one hand, it covers them; and on the other hand, the media’s very choice of topics and words reflects a point of view with regard to the conflicts at stake. The more the media covers disputes – the more arrows of public criticism might be pointed at it. As with any other representation of reality, the media’s picture of it is, by definition, partial, and does not necessarily reflect it without bias. The more a complex a conflict, the harder it is to agree about its coverage by the media (Caspi, 1995).

In a linear model suggested by Wanta (1997), the types of sway and the extent to which the media influences the agendas of individuals are determined by a set of variables that include demographic traits, behavioral patterns, and dependence on the media as a reliable source of information. Printed newspaper shaves an advantage over television because they enable readers to perceive the dispute’s depth and complexity, and they allow each reader to process the information at his or her own pace.

Reporters and editors are structurally dependant on dominant power groups as sources of information, partly because they offer a regular supply of news. Although journalists tend to support the dominant value system (Gans, 1979), other research shows that they tend to be slightly more liberal than either the general public or the elite groups (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986). This also suggests that media at times have the capacity to produce stories critical of the status quo.

The media can also influence the strategies and behavior of those in power. When violence breaks out for example, leaders come under tremendous pressure to do something and the press is the important agent for creating this sense of urgency. The influence of a news media on a peace process is best seen in terms of a cycle in which the changes in the political environment lead to changes in media performance that often lead to further changes in the political environment. This principle is referred to as politics-media-politics (PMP) cycle.

The myth circulated by news media helps consumers of mass media to construct a world view. This worldview in the long run can make the consumers accept as being 'natural' something in fact is a manufactured reality, created to mask the real structures. In other words mass media plays a crucial ideological role, promoting the values and interest of dominant groups and implanting beliefs and representation that sustain and legitimize their domination (Thussu, 2006).

The propaganda model argues that there are 5 classes of 'filters' in society which determine what 'news' is; in other words, what gets printed in newspapers. Herman and Chomsky's model (1998) also explains how dissent from the mainstream is given little, or zero, coverage, while governments and big business gain easy access to the public.

Gadi Wolfsfeld (2004) quotes that the news media can have four major types of impact on any peace process.

1. They can play a major role in defining the political atmosphere in which the process takes place.
2. The media can have the important influence on the nature of the debate about a peace process.
3. They can have an impact on antagonist strategies and behavior.
4. They can raise and lower the public standing and legitimacy of antagonist involved in the process and their positions.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The Parameters of content analysis in this research are:

- Photograph (color/black white)
- Number of Columns
- Page Number
- Placement of News
- Protest / Event based News item.
- Political Statement
- Type of news item

- Nature of the issue covered
- Content of photograph
- Factors affecting the growth and decline of the life cycle.

The researcher had chosen two Newspapers namely The Hindu and Dinathanthi, Chennai edition. Other important reasons for choosing these two newspapers are that these are the only newspapers which are popular and widely read as well as no affinity to any political parties in the state in terms of ideology as well as ownership.

The Hindu is English daily, published from 13 locations with a circulation of 1.45 million. The Hindu is the second-largest circulated daily English newspaper in India, next to the Times of India. According to the Indian Readership Survey, 2009, The Hindu is the third most-widely read English newspaper in India with a readership of 5.2 million. It has its largest base of circulation in South India, especially TamilNadu. Headquartered at Chennai, The Hindu was published as a weekly when it was launched in 1878, and started publishing as daily since 1889.

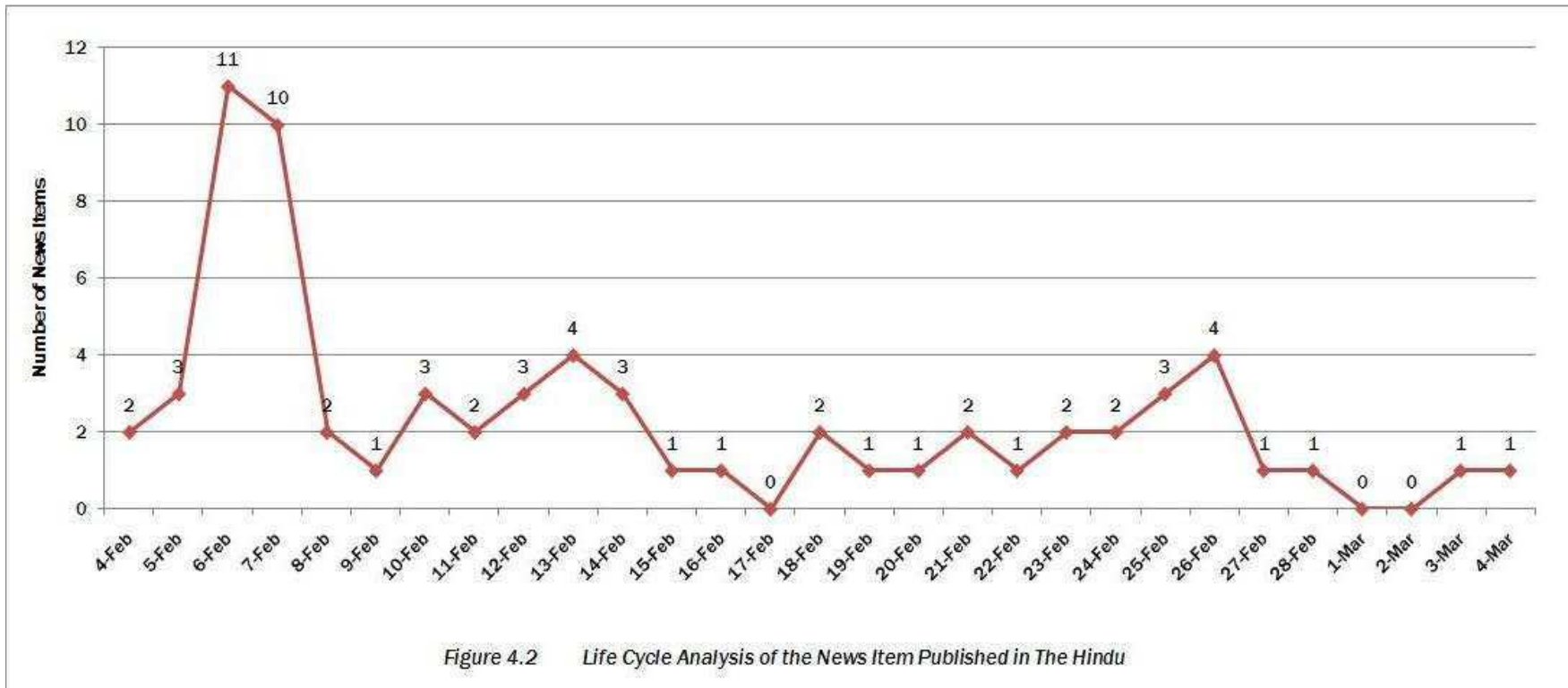
Dinathanthi is a Tamil daily newspaper, published from 14 locations. It is the second highest circulated Tamil daily newspaper with a circulation of 790,900 copies daily in TamilNadu. It was founded by S.P. Adithanar in 1940. It is the highest circulated Tamil daily newspaper in Bangalore and Pondicherry and one of the largest in Tamil Nadu. Dinathanthi's simple language and presentation style is commended by people of the state over the decades.

The researcher explains the said life cycle of news item as follows “When the number of news items related to chosen Cauvery tribunal verdict carried by a newspaper is greater than one before the verdict is to be announced, then it is considered as the birth stage. The death or fading point is considered to be the disappearance of the news item in the newspaper. When the daily carries no news item for a continuous week, then the researcher considers that to be the death period”

### **Interpretation of the content analysis**

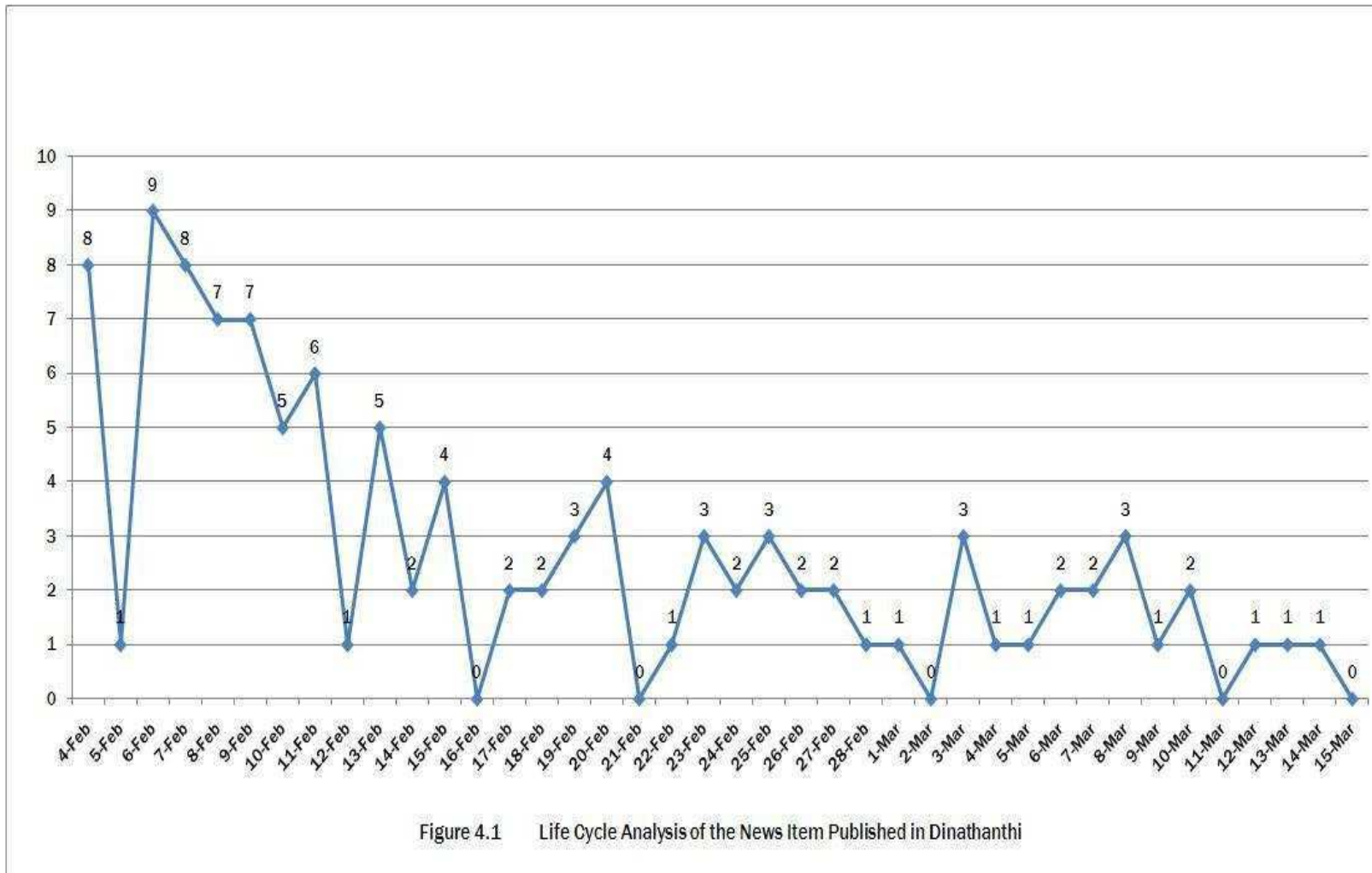
The researcher analyzes the life cycle of the news item i.e. the Cauvery tribunal's final verdict in “The Hindu” is for 29 days(4th February – 4thth march, 2007) . The total number of articles covered within the said so life period is 68 articles. The researcher considers Feb. 4th being the birth Stage or starting point of the news cycle, since it was the day, the daily started covering the news on tribunal verdict. The coverage was in peak between 5th Feb. to 8th Feb. with almost 11 articles per day.

The curve fell down on 9th February with just 1 article. But later gradually raised and reached another peak point on Feb 13th with four articles. From that point the coverage gradually dropped to null point on 17th Feb. Till 24th Feb the coverage curve sketched uniformly with one or two articles. On 26th Feb the coverage reaches its third peak point with 4 articles then immediately the number fell. from next day From 27th feb to 4th march, the coverage was at its very low with null or one news article, hence the researcher considers the above mentioned period to be the death/Fading point of the news item.(*Figure 4.2 Life Cycle analysis of The Hindu* ).





Dinathanthi Life cycle was is longer than The Hindu by 11 days. (*Figure 4.1 Life Cycle analysis of Dinathanthi*) The Dinathanthi had covered 107 articles within the identified life period whereas The Hindu had covered only 68. Almost 40% more than the Hindu’s coverage. On Feb 4th Dinathanthi had the wide coverage on the background of the Cauvery issue as a full page special with 8 articles but the The Hindu gave a less teaser article with just counting one to its credit.



On the day of verdict Dinathanthi just had one news item on verdict but the The Hindu had 3 news items explaining the background of the issue. This background news reports were carried in Dinathanthi on the previous day itself. That's why the life cycle starts with peak on Feb 4 in Dinathanthi. The Hindu records the highest number of articles registered in a day (11 articles on 6th Feb) that's because of the immediate political statements from all political parties was covered by Hindu on all riparian states but the life period is too shorter with 29 days when compared to Dinathanthi's 40 days. Both the dailies reached their peak coverage on 6th and 7th of March because of the verdict analysis and political statements. The peak level prevailed in the The Hindu for 2 days where as the peak continued in Dinathanthi for 4 days. Since Dinathanthi gave much coverage to political statements this stable peak level was possible. There was a rise in curve on both cases whenever a political event or protest was held. (15&25 Feb in Dinathanthi and 13th and 26th of Feb in Hindu).

Follow-up political reports played as key factor in maintaining the life of the news item. More than 50% of the news items covered in both the dailies were political origins and leads. One third on the total days of the verdict's life cycle in Hindu as well as Dinathanthi was covered as headlines in FrontPage.

In Dinathanthi Only 13% of the total news items came as headline in first page whereas 18% of the total news items of The Hindu appeared as the headline in FrontPage. But when compared in numbers Dinathanthi had more headlines Coverage than Hindu. On an average Dinathanthi carried 2.8 articles per day on Cauvery tribunal's verdict and its post happenings throughout the life cycle. Whereas Hindu carried 2.3 articles per day during the news cycle period. Wide coverage on the local protest and political statements by Dinathanthi had let the life cycle of the verdict news to get extend longer when compared to the Hindu. **(Figure 4.3 The Comparative Life Cycle Analysis of both the newspapers).**

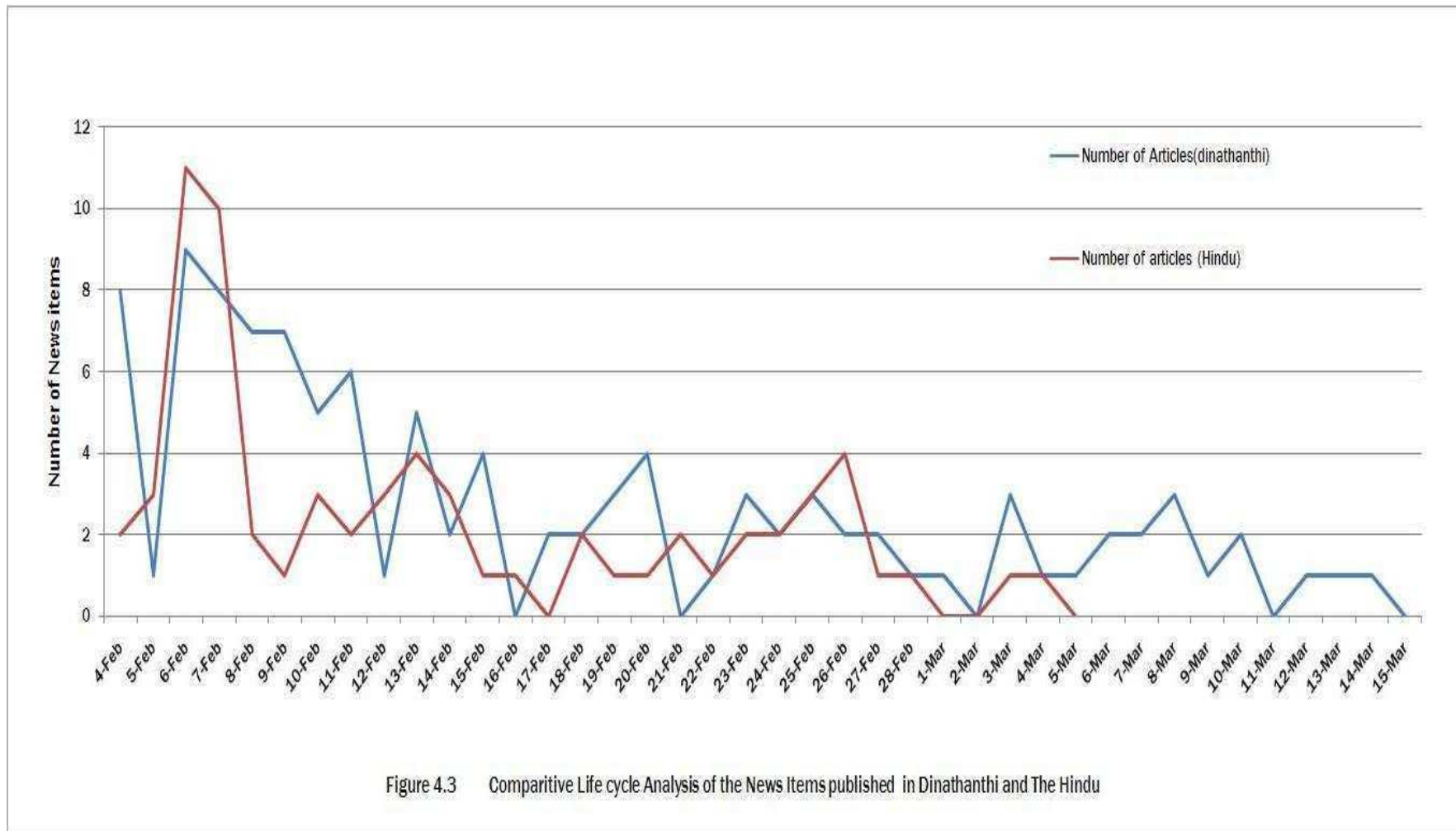


Figure 4.3 Comparative Life cycle Analysis of the News Items published in Dinathanthi and The Hindu

Dinathanthi had published twice the amount of photographs when compared to the The Hindu. Photographs also played a key role in keeping the core issue in lime light. One fourth of the news item carried by the Hindu on Cauvery verdict carries a photograph where as 37% of the articles covered by the Dinathanthi within the life period carries photograph. 14% of the news items carried by Dinathanthi with in the period of analysis were of analysis type, whereas the Hindu shares 9% of the total news as analysis news item.

One third of the news item parting with the news cycle of the Hindu was of political statements. Whereas 54% of the Dinathanthi's coverage was political statements. Almost both the papers gave equal importance in covering the events (mostly political) related to the verdict nearing 15% of the total coverage. One fourth of the Dinathanthi news items were focused on protest but the Hindu had only 10% share of protest based news items. Dinathanthi gave much importance to protest based news that's why it gave a longer life cycle for the news item.

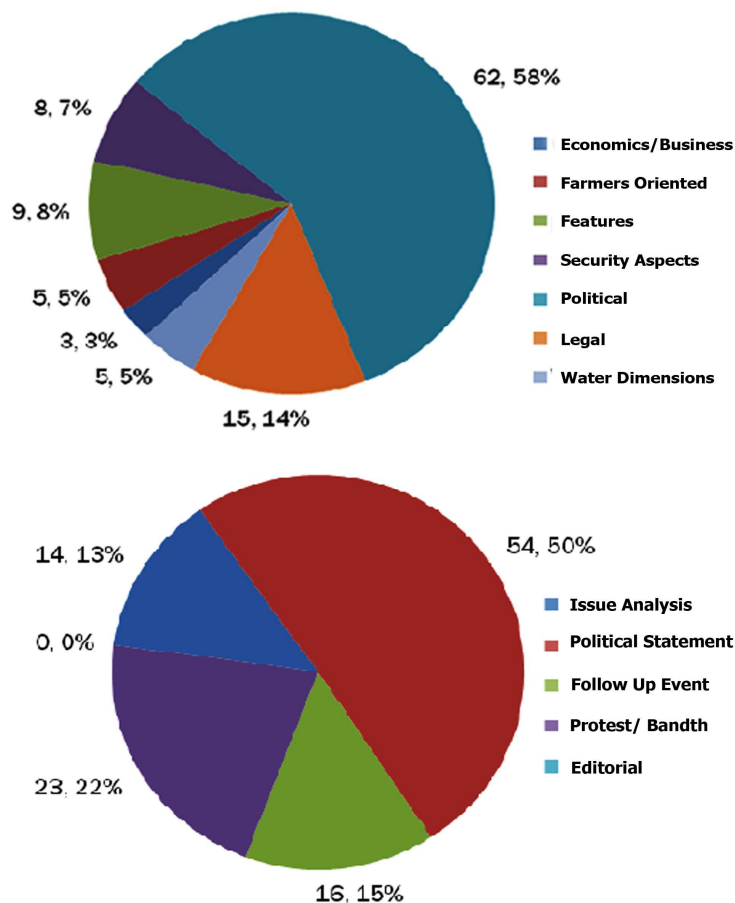


Figure 4.4 Nature of the news item covered by Dinathanthi

The Hindu had parted 5% with the editorials but the Dinathanthi never carried any editorials. During February end the decrease in the graph was because of the Dharmapuri case final verdict

and in March Salem railway division protest steals the importance enjoyed by the Cauvery issue. mullai periyar issue also came to lime light in later Feb and March.

9% of the news items by The Hindu were of legal point of view on the issue. Whereas Dinathanthi had 15% of its news items focusing legal aspects. 3% of the Hindu's coverage was focused on agriculture and farmers but the Dinathanthi has focused 3% of its coverage on economic angle and repercussions of the verdict.

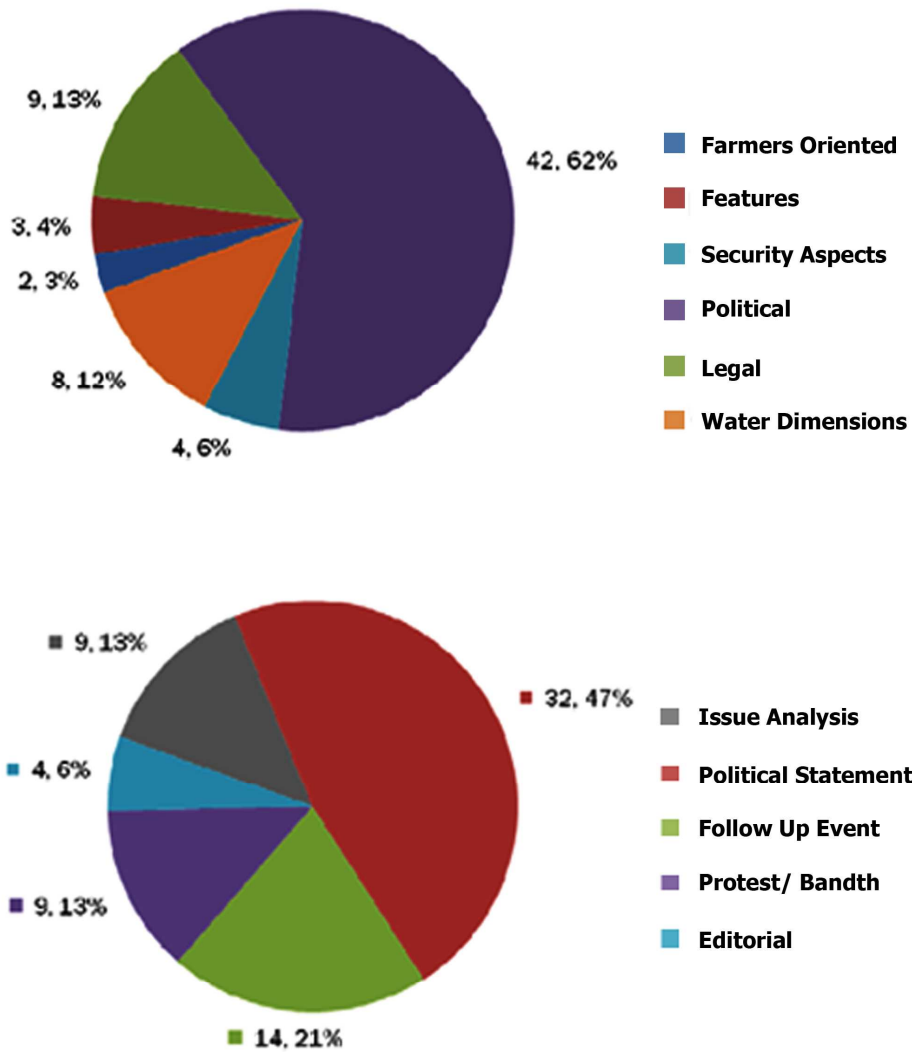


Figure 4.5 Nature of the news item covered by The Hindu

Both the papers life cycle had contributed equally to law & order and security angle in riparian states (nearly 9 %). The Hindu has also covered twice the number of water angled news item when compared to Dinathanthi

Almost two third of the photo content was political leaders and protest in both cases. The Hindu gave much more importance in publishing graphics (map, pictures & tabular columns) for the better understanding than the Dinathanthi. Dinathanthi carried photos of dam and Cauvery River but The Hindu never carried any photo of Dam or River even once.

The main reason that the life cycle in Dinathanthi is longer because of the coverage given for the opposition party leaders which resulted in much more political space thus increasing the life cycle of the issue.

The protest based news items covered by Hindu mostly focused on Karnataka, but Dinathanthi covered both Tamilnadu and Karnataka hence larger number of news on protest enabling longer life cycle on the issue.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Summary of the Study**

The researcher had used the Cauvery Tribunal's Final verdict as a case study to obtain News Life Cycle. The researcher had chosen two Newspapers namely The Hindu and Dinathanthi for sketching the Life cycle. Here the researcher analyses how a news item got framed into a core public issue and what are the various factors that makes the issue to reach the peak level by more coverage, and those factors that leads the fading of the issue in the same newspapers. The findings as follows:

### **FINDINGS**

On comparing the Life Cycle of the Cauvery Tribunal Verdict by The Hindu and Dinathanthi, the Life period of the news item in Dinathanthi is longer than that of The Hindu.

Photographs of the protests and the regular follow –ups contributed more to the life cycle of the news item on both cases of The Hindu and Dinathanthi. It helped the cycle to reach the peak level (More Articles) but not for the prolonged presence of the news item for longer days. In both cases of Hindu and Dinathanthi, the political statements and events contributed more to the lifecycle prolongation than the other angles/ leads of the news articles.

Following factors decide or has a greater role to play on the life cycle of news items coverage in taken newspaper.

- Political orientation of the newspaper
- Ownership policy
- Sensationalism given priority.
- Extent of local relevance.

- Space for the follow-up.
- Regional sentiment that the story possesses.
- Events like Bandh and Protest ... etc)
- Hydro- political nature of the issue
- Involvement of the people of all walks of life as the stakeholders.
- Nature of the other issues within the life period of the news item taken.

This study proves that, any news which is related to the natural resource Sharing conflict especially water conflict, could have a longer life cycle than other nature of news. This kind of sensitive issue fuels up and increase the scope of the nature of the news follow ups, since the people of the entire state gets involved as a activist or the stakeholder in the conflict. Even though it's a purely a farmers issue of the delta region, but starting from politicians cutting across national or regional political parties, government and private sector employees, Film industry, and School and College students took part in the protest and bandth, supporting and hailing the Tribunal verdict and unanimously stood together condemning Karnataka.

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