

# Internal “Oil War” in the Asian Giant: Politics and Environmental Activism



**Ramkumar Mu\***

*Department of Geology, Periyar University, India*

**Submission:** July 15, 2017; **Published:** July 20, 2017

**\*Corresponding author:** Mu Ramkumar, Department of Geology, Periyar University, Salem-636011, India, Email: [muramkumar@yahoo.co.in](mailto:muramkumar@yahoo.co.in)

## Opinion

India is one of the fastest growing economies and fourth largest consumer of energy in the world. The euphoria that soon filled the minds of the Indians soon after the discovery of hydrocarbon in the offshore Cenozoic fields of the western part of India during the 1980's has since been faded as the gap between demand-supply ratio grew wide. The nation depends heavily on imports and the coffers of the precious foreign exchange reserves are almost entirely being depleted for servicing the hydrocarbon import bills. India has 26 sedimentary basins that are spread across on land and offshore covering about 3134700 sqkm. A total of 360 exploration blocks were identified within these sedimentary basins, out of which 254 blocks are under various stages of exploration, production and expansion. According to an estimate of the Directorate of Hydrocarbons, the nodal agency that regulates awards and monitors the hydrocarbon industry in India, the oil and oil equivalent gas in place reserve accretion under the new exploration licensing policy is approximately 745 million metric ton (MMT). With the conversion of Indian economy to global players by unleashing of economic reforms in the 1990s, the gap was set in an exponential upward spiral, leading to integration of upstream and downstream industry, intensive exploration of lesser explored, unexplored areas of Indian and other territories, research and innovation in exploration and refining strategies, experimenting with conventional (enhanced recovery of natural gas and oil) and non-conventional energy sources (Coal bed methane, shale gas, gas hydrate and oil shale). Acceding to the Paris convention by the Indian Government has also in an oblique way, forced the administrators, strategies, and technocrats to turn into reduction of usage of more harmful fuels (Coal) and enhancement of relatively cleaner fuels (natural gas) and or alternative/green energy sources (hydroelectricity, solar and wind power harnessing). Despite these efforts, and also due to the requirement to meet the demands for “Strategic reserve” should any security threat that may emanate due

to the expansionist and ill-willed neighbors of India, India as a nation state is yet to feel “secure” principally as a result of hydrocarbon demands.

As part of creating open-economy, letting the private and foreign players in the Exploration and Production (E & P) was and is being attempted by the policy makers as a strategy to augment technology influx and reduction of dependence on foreign imports. Nevertheless, there were major troubles such as the acrimonious battles in the 1990s with ENRON due to faulty technology purported to be used, transport and use of a fuel that has not existed in India, and unhealthy business practices, and unceremonious expulsion of SHELL from Indian soils due to “refusal to refuel” Indian flights when the country was with its neighbor country, and the pricing and profit sharing war between foreign collaborating partner with Indian private player during the recent past pertaining to a major gas reserve in the Krishna-Godavari offshore asset. However, successive governments or for that matter, the government machinery learned to do business with foreign and domestic private players by modifying the terms and procedures involved in the licensing and incentivizing exploration and production of hither to lesser explored, marginal and smaller fields. The “Make in India” drive, a pet initiative of the current dispensation at the helm of affairs has seen ushering few dramatic policy changes in the E & P industry as well. These include, discovered small/marginal field policy aimed at accretion of 85MMT Oil and oil equivalent gas reserves, single license for exploring and producing all types of hydrocarbon reserves (i.e., conventional and non-conventional hydrocarbon), etc.

Since introduction of these new reforms in E & P industry, widespread protests have commenced, especially in the Tamil Nadu State, South India. Initially considered to be a sign of venting of voter apathy against incumbent government, it grew into major controversy and widespread protests, often turning violent. A difference in these protests than other forms of

protests in this politically surcharged country is that instead of participation of “truly affected” local inhabitants, participation of youth, often from far and wide places. In addition, instead of “one off” or “onetime event”, the agitations/protests persist for months continually, often with regular replenishments of Protestants on rotation basis. Further, the protesters are served food and beverages, with financial, logistic and labor support from locals and others. While the protests were initially thwarted commencement of exploration activities anew, in areas that were awarded for hydrocarbon (Oil and gas) exploration in marginal and small fields, later expanded against exploration for shale gas, secondary recovery, and currently, protests are going on against those already producing wells, transport pipelines and refineries. About 150 wells and fields that are in various stages of development and production, spread all across the Cauvery Basin of South India are at stake now.

Analysis of the pattern of evolution of protests and the distribution of protests not only in the Cauvery basin, but also other regions of India portrays a possible sinister design that seems to be working against India becoming energy-sufficient nation. It is of common knowledge that, economic progress comes with enhancement of infrastructure, industries and productivity (industrial, agricultural and service), all of which require adequate energy supply, which in turn depends on fossil fuels. Though India is making rapid progress in unconventional and green energy sources such as solar and wind energy, current realization from these sources is insignificant in comparison with the demand, and cannot reduce the dependence of demands from conventional sources in the foreseeable near future. Also, though Indian coal reserves are fourth largest in the World, as India is committed with the Paris convention and thus reduction of coal usage, tapping the hydrocarbon reserves from conventional and non-conventional sources is inevitable. At this juncture, it is plain that almost all the major fuel sources or energy installations of India have become the point of contention by so called environment warriors. For example, the protests against Uranium and coal mining in Central and Eastern India, Atomic power plant at Koodankulam and oil exploration and production sites all over the Cauvery basin in Tamil Nadu are all not originally initiated by so called affected people or those people whose livelihood or agricultural are either affected or likely to be affected; instead, the agitations are initiated by others who are not either affected or likely to be affected or knowledgeable on the ore/mineral/fuel exploration, extraction, processing etc. The insightful perceptual analysis of the chronology and expansion of these protests also reveals

that, initially, the “outsiders” initiate a fear psychosis, spread it with the help of social media, draw the attention of mainstream media, rope in few participants from extreme leftists, religious fringe groups and separatists, under the disguise of protection of land, agriculture, environment, etc. , and successfully foist those “perceived catastrophes” into the minds of vulnerable local people, by exploiting the ignorance of local people. It is ironical that, the opinion makers and awareness creators are all invariably film-actors, directors, and wannabe political leaders, who command insignificant-sizable followers in a country where public perception/response is, by majority, dependent on the affinity rather than hard scientific facts. Things have come to such a pass that regular maintenance works of transport pipes of hydrocarbon from drill site to refinery, that existed for more than 15 years are not allowed, putting the safety of people, environment and energy security at risk. On a larger perspective, these protests could not be washed away as localized phenomenon. Rather, the crux of the problem lies at the inadequacy of geological-environmental education, which grew to hamper the strategic calculations of energy efficiency, self-sufficiency, and macroeconomic progress, and inclusive growth of all the stakeholders planned/being envisaged by the government machinery.

Finding faults with the non-technical and general public and wannabe mass leaders will not be the solution to the issue. As geologists, exploration scientists and academicians who are directly involved in mineral exploration, processing and up-downstream professionals know more than anybody in the citizenry, they have to be tasked to educate the administrators, planners, general public, without which handling the issue, which often turns into ‘free for all’ acrimonious events in the social media, main stream media, and also in the locations where exploration, production, processing, etc., are going on. This education would not only reduce the level of ignorance, but would also make the ignorant to see the “light” and remove the obstacles in the path of “Make in India” and enhance the strategic and economic empowerment and self-reliance. As a long term measure, formation of audit committees, to monitor, assess and disseminate status reports on environmental quality and safety of the exploration-production sites. Involving local people in such committees will work to sooth the ruffled feathers and alleviate the unnecessary, unscientific rumors. Though environmental assessment, creation of environmental baseline data are already in practice, their implementation in Indian conditions is mostly exist on paper and has become ritualistic. This has also to be revamped, for our own benefit.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License  
DOI: [10.19080/RAPSCI.2017.02.555590](https://doi.org/10.19080/RAPSCI.2017.02.555590)

### Your next submission with Juniper Publishers will reach you the below assets

- Quality Editorial service
- Swift Peer Review
- Reprints availability
- E-prints Service
- Manuscript Podcast for convenient understanding
- Global attainment for your research
- Manuscript accessibility in different formats  
( Pdf, E-pub, Full Text, Audio)
- Unceasing customer service

Track the below URL for one-step submission  
<https://juniperpublishers.com/online-submission.php>