



Novel Insights, An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly Research Journal
ISSN: 3048-6572

Volume-I, Issue-II, November 2024, Page No. 106-111

Published by Uttarsuri, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711



Website: <http://novelinsights.in/>

DOI: 10.69655/novelinsights.vol.1.issue.02W.011

Conflict and Conflict Resolution for Peace in Tripura – An Overview

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Received: 29.10.2024; Accepted: 22.11.2024; Available online: 30.11.2024

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Abstract

Human history is the history of struggle for power and resources and human society has been encountering conflict since time immemorial. Human society is a complex organization with a web like inter-relationships among individuals, and each of them is unique in their own way. So there is proportionately high chance of friction and conflict. Therefore, conflict emerges as a result of clash of interest among various diverse groups. Conflict in the society takes place due to several causes namely community identity, struggle for power and resources, race, ethnicity, religion, language etc., which have been playing a crucial role in cultivating conflict and dividing society into different warring groups. Society without conflict is just an imagination because it is a heterogeneous group and is prone to conflict. Therefore, it is very difficult, to analyses conditions to identify all the possible causes of conflict accurately as conflict is natural where various groups make their demands which play a sporadic role in disintegrating the society (Sen Gupta, 2007). In this back drop the present paper examines conflict and conflict resolution for peace in Tripura.

Keywords: Conflict, Society, Peace, Tripura, Violence.

Introduction: Conflict is a basic form of interaction; it is a divisive process which is in contrast with the unifying force of co-operation. Social conflict is a relationship between two or more parties who believe they have conflicting goals. Such views are inherent in human relations. But this does not mean that every social relationship is entirely or even partly conflicting all the time. Conflicts vary in their bases, duration, and modes of settlement, outcomes and their consequences (Sen Gupta, 2011).

There are two kinds of circumstances which underline social conflict. One is consensus and the other is dissensus. Conflict arising from consensus may be based on various pertinent and abstract dimensions of power, prestige and wealth. Consensus may be based

upon the shared culture of particular social system. The social system may be a society with extended means of socialization. Consensus may also be the result of universal human experiences in a variety of social relations. Dissensual (dissension – based) conflict situations exits when the parties want different things or different values whereas such claims or conflicting demands militate against the spirit of cooperation and coordination. The claims/demands prove to be irreconcilable thus creating situation of conflict. In regard to the abstract and qualitative sharing of views, opinions and cultural values, antithesis situation develops sooner or later giving rise to conflict (Sen Gupta, 2011).

Thus, in case of consensual conflicts, a group may seek to flee from the chains made by the other side or it may hope to destroy or exterminate the other party considered as adversary. In case of dissensual conflicts, the relationship may be terminated by succession conflict group, bringing the other party round to views held by the first party so that the second party to longer exists as a dissensual.

The major cause and also effect of conflict is violence, both direct and structural. Society is replete with both of them. Direct violence may be personal attack on another individual physically, mentally or materially. Structural violence is a situation in which certain individuals are so “influenced that their actual somatic and mental realization is below their potential capacity”. Whether direct or structural, violence does create a situation for conflicts in society. In society, people live in close association and no individual is independent of others. Individual’s behaviour and activities are influenced by the society and vice-versa. This influence and impact of one’s behaviour is called as “internalities effect” by Kelvin Cox. According to this, the utility of individual is very much influenced by the resource allocation of other individuals. Individual’s every behaviour act brings forth either negative or positive utility to the society. Some effects are obvious and some are not. When individual’s behaviour is more and more self-centered, the amount of disutility to the society increases which may occur in the form of loss, failure or deterioration. This irritates the masses and causes frustration and conflict.

Economic factors have close correlation with social maladjustment giving rise to social tensions. Inequalities in economic levels bring about such tensions. There are, therefore, more tensions among the poorer classes. It is generally understood that everybody aspires for a living rather peaceful living. For ensuring peaceful and reasonably compatible living, the humans require certain goods and services and their timely supply for satisfaction. Shortage of these wanted/desired goods and services causes’ dissatisfaction which gets converted into frustration and lead to conflict.

There is no denying of the fact that varied ideologies also cause tensions in society. An Ideological society has commitments (rather affiliations) towards other society of similar ideology resulting in opposing society or societies of different ideology leading to conflict, since each justifies its ideology as just and right and that of opponents as unjust and wrong. Galtung (1958) opines that objective interests of a person crystallize into objective goals. Desire to fulfill an interests may become one’s objectives. When the interests are put into

action, the difference between the interest of actor and threat of action, the difference between the interest of actor and that of the public (others), becomes incompatible (or incongruent) to each other's interests. This situation breeds evil designs and undesirable feelings thus leading to conflict.

There may be the case with all social conflicts, especially group conflicts, based on communal, ethnic, radical issues. There may be some objectives at the centre but, owing to a number of conflict lanes simultaneously operating which the group experiences, there is always displacement of frustration through various defense mechanisms to avoid or resolve conflict in society. Conflict has more than one cause because of the practical spill-over and displacement of frustration of disappointment.

Outbreak of Conflict Situation in Tripura – A Short Account: In Tripura the beginning of ethnic militancy in the state is linked with the partition and consequent migration of Hindu Bengali Population from erstwhile East Pakistan presently known as Bangladesh (Mohanta, 2004; Chakraborty, 2004). This mass migration of about 0.6 million Hindu Bengali refugees in Tripura by 1971 resulted into economic, political and cultural marginalization of the tribal population (Subramanian, 2000; Upadhyay, 2005; Bhowmik, 2015) whose number has drastically declined from 50.91 percent in 1941 to 28.45 percent in 1981 (Census of India, 1981). This huge immigration of Hindu Bengalis had pushed the indigenous people to the interior of the hills. As the tribals were traditional Jhumias (practitioners of shifting cultivation) and did not practice wet rice cultivation, large scale immigration of Bengalis had squeezed their living space as the area of Jhum cultivation was drastically reduced (Banik and Das, 2021). Contrarily, non-tribals (i.e., Bengali immigrants) used to practice wet rice cultivation and they were better skilled. The immiserizing economic condition of the tribals during this period might be discerned from the growing number of tribal landless agricultural workers from 8.93 percent in 1951 to 23.91 percent in 1981. While in 1951, tribal cultivators constituted 62.94 percent of total tribal workforce in the state, it has come down to 43.57 percent in 1981 (Bhowmik, 2015). As the non-tribals were better educated compared to their tribal counterparts, they managed to occupy a large share in the government and private jobs, and completely dominated over the administrative structure of Tripura. This disproportionate entitlement gradually excluded the tribals from the decision-making affairs of the state. This uneven competition resulted in an awkward feeling of insecurity among the tribals whose economic interest was seriously affected and faced a huge challenge thrown by socio-economic, political and cultural superiority of the Bengalis (Banik and Das, 2021).

This insecurity and fear of the natives gave rise to the Tripura Rajya Mukti Parishad (TRMP) which was established in 1948 to promote and protect the interests of the native people of the state. It was renamed Tripura Upajati Gana Mukti Parishad (JUGMP) in 1967. Again in 1967, the Tripura Upajati Juba Samati (TUJS) was formed by a group of intellectuals to strengthen the native peoples' struggle. These groups were concerned about the high rates of population growth and the plight of the native peoples, and hence demanded the deportation of the refugees who had come to Tripura, the formation of an

Autonomous Region (Ganguly, 1988), the introduction of the Kokborok written in Roman script as the medium of education for native students and the restoration of land once belonged to natives but taken away by the Bengali immigrants (Singh, 2014).

TUJS reported raise a group of armed volunteers known as the Tripura Sena. It was soon succeeded by Sengkrak. Finally, the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) was formed by former members of TUJS and Sengkrak in 1978. There after the passing of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council Act, 1979, an autonomous region was established in the state. It was opposed by large sections of the Bengali population leading to the formation of a militant organization called Amra Bengali (Singh, 2014).

Besides sowing the seeds of a feeling of discontent and distrust in the tribal psyche, the economic deprivation of the autochthons had triggered inter-ethnic conflict leading to the emergence of tribal militancy in the early 1980s in Tripura (Bhattacharjee, 1990; Paul, 2009). The first phase of armed conflict came to an end after the peace agreement between the government and TNV in 1988. However, some former insurgents restarted the armed conflict in 1990 and formed All Tripura Tribal Force (later renamed All Tripura Tiger Force). Finally, the state was declared 'Disturbed Area' in 1997 and the Armed Force (Special Powers) Act, 1958 was promulgated. In due course of time, separate peace agreements have been concluded, but have been less successful. The political situation in the state has slightly improved since the insurgent groups have weakened (Singh, 2014). And by the early years of 2000 the intensity of insurgency had declined before coming to an end in 2014 (Banik and Das, 2021).

Strategies Adopted for Conflict Resolution to Bring Peace in the State: The approaches for solution of conflict has been addressed the problems of insurgency and extremism in a holistic manner by the state government. The state government has been considering and ready to consider any political demand within the democratic framework of the constitution of India in the overall interest of the state as a whole. Restoration of alienated tribal lands is being undertaken and provisions relating to these have been made very strictly. The state government has also taken up various initiatives for broadcasting programmes in local languages on radio and television and opening of a channel of ALL India Radio in Kokborok, the main tribal language in the state. Kokborok is also taught as a language in the tribal areas at the school level (Choudhury, 2017).

The state government has also given top priorities for supply of drinking water, public housing and connectivity of village roads. It has also identified deficiencies and resource requirements for universal coverage on other basic minimum services such as nutrition, public distribution system, primary health and primary education and new infrastructure such as transport, electricity, radio, television, post primary education, agriculture and allied sectors, administrative and cultural infrastructure including tourism etc. In addition different policies have been taken and are under consideration to create more economic and employment opportunities for the tribal youths. These are in the form of opening up of international border for trade and transit, permitting forest based development through

viable schemes of small scale rubber and tea plantations and support for gas based industries. These various options enable the living standards of the tribal population in the state and it helped for the need for marginalizing the extremist elements (Choudhury, 2017). At the same time it is worth mentioning here that the state government had appealed several times to the misguided elements to give up the path of violence and join the mainstream so that the state could proceed with nation building activities and take up various programmes for economic development with an atmosphere of peace and tranquility throughout the state with democratic process. Thus, a state policy of persuasion, political and economic inclusion and cultural accommodation was devised along with a policy of securitization of development and skilful cross-border diplomacy (Banik and Das, 2021).

Conclusion: To conclude, conflict resolution in society is an integral part of work towards development, social justice and social transformation, which aims to tackle the emerging contentious issues. The techniques of conflict resolution are themselves changing and developing, as they must, to deal with the changing nature of conflict. Attempts to resolve conflict have to be taken into account both the objective issues and other subjective frustration both at the social and individual level. In order to prevent conflict from falling into violence, conflict has to be resolved through proper means. The perception of conflict is changed from ‘antagonism’ to a means of solving ‘incompatibility’. The conflicting parties should not be considered as irreconcilable enemies but as parties having common problems. So, what is required is not a violent encounter but a positive co-operation between parties for smooth functioning of the society and the present paper on Tripura is also no exception to this.

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