

## Social Conflict and Political Integration: An Overview

**Shashikanta Mohapatra,**

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Utkal University, Vani Vihar, Bhubaneswar, India.

### Abstract

The analysis concentrates on the conceptual frame work of social conflict and political integration. Nowadays social conflict has been becoming a permanent feature of the society though it had been persisted from the beginning of the civilization. Many thinkers over the centuries have depicted about this, including Plato, Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, George Spinoza and Jonathan Swift (Honneth, 1995). Conflict has both negative and positive aspect. If we integrate conflict it would be constructive, if not would be destructive. So, through my writing I have tried to integrate social conflict through political integration. Some political mechanisms will be applied to institutionalize conflict including democracy, constitutionalism, decentralization of power etc. in order to get justice and sustainable welfare of society, because conflict is not always negative and dangerous (Coser, 1956; Simmel, 1955; Sumner, 1952). The PRIs will be best to beat conflict and integrate society.

**KEYWORDS:-**Democracy, Social conflict, political integration, constitutionalism PRIs.

### 1. Introduction

Conflict would be defined as fight, competition or war and aggression between two parties, groups or individuals for a common goal. The goal might be an object, an ideology etc. Tussel between India and Pakistan for 'Kashmir' and war between Israel and Palestine over 'Gaza' are examples of 'conflict for object' and 'Cold War' between USSR and USA was ideological conflict. The communal conflict, caste conflict, racial conflict etc might be included in the group of 'ideological conflict', because these are just some ideas, though countless innocents die and suffer and public and private properties damage. Conflict is just a state of mind. It begins and ends in mind. A conscious mind can engulf in conflict, because the party involve in conflict knows very well about the purpose of conflict but does not know what would be the result. Therefore conflict is always conscious (Park and Burgess, 1921, p.574). As a human being everybody is hungry for prestige, power, status, money, pleasure etc. at the cost of others. All competes against all to pocket all these, because competition and conflict are two forms of struggle (Park and Burgess, 1921, p.574). One can be aggressive against another if he/she does not get respect. Aggression is a kind of conflict which does not show any sympathy to the opponent, whereas, conflict includes both violent and non-violent activities of actors. Struggle for preservation or struggle for recognition are two principal factors of conflict (Honneth, 1995). Every individual and group likes to preserve their identity or originality at any cost. That might be through violence or non-violence. Hindu majority trying to preserve their identity and the minorities are struggling hard for recognition too. According to Jayram community identity is a major factor of conflict (Jayram, 2012). Doubtless that collective identity brings group solidarity (ibid.) but it has negative consequences too. Maximum communal conflicts may be religious, caste; racial or ethnic is based on communal identity. Thought of "I" and "you" and "mine" and "yours" breed conflict and intolerance among communities (Jayram, 2012). The nation having diversity in culture, religion, region, language, caste like

India experiences conflict a lot. That does not mean integration could not be possible, if not completely. The manifestation of multiculturalism, secularism, and constitutionalism can maintain unity in diversity. The Panchayat Raj Institution is a mechanism which has potentiality to overcome conflict and consolidate the pluralistic society. This institution decentralizes socio-economic and political power and gives equal power to every citizen.

Many sociological theorists focus on positive functions of conflict e. g. it makes conscious the actors and develops group strength and helps in the integration of organizations. These theorists are Lewis Coser, Randall Collins, Ralf Dahrendorf. Karl Marx the founder of conflict theory discusses social conflict from economic perspective i. e. class conflict. At present conflict theorists emphasize on conflict between different groups where inequality exist such as race, ethnicity, caste, religion, gender and so on. Conflict does not only cultivate from economic factor but also from other factors like power, property, status, and prestige and so forth as said by Max Weber, Peterson etc. Power and property are two fundamental sources of conflict (Dutta, 1980, p. 147). Unequal groups are always prone to conflict because they compete against each other to maximize their benefit. A sustainable conflict goes on because of unequal distribution of power, authority, resources and so on. For instance minorities do not hesitate to be dissent against majority in order to end suppression, dominance and to get due justice. This has been going on in different parts of the world. The unequal distribution of resources tailors conflict as said by Karl Marx. The long standing alienation, deprivation, exploitation, inequality, and economic exclusion of proletariats by bourgeois initiated them to choose revolution as their last hope to come out from such inhuman society. Social conflict is a fact, which has been accepted by two theorists first the father of conflict theory Karl Marx, second father of Indian Nation Mahatma Gandhi (Gupta, 1968, p. 1876).

The path of society is full of ups and down. More or less everybody is related with each other and depends on society for a better and civic life. But some factors are there which brings trouble to the man. If we are capable to manage the problem skillfully, we can spend a happy life. The biggest problem which we face throughout our life is 'conflict'. Nobody could detach it from their lifespan, because it is part of life and heart of society. From mother's womb to tomb we come across several types of conflict in different form and shape. Conflict may come into our life as challenge, struggle, competition, clash etc. Without these life would be test less and colorless. It revolves around our life like a friend, philosopher and guide. It will play a vibrant role in leading us towards a sweet destination, if we handle it so much carefully. Conflict is not a matter but how to manage and change its effect for the wellbeing of the society is a matter. The motto of political integration is like this. It takes all possible steps to overcome negative effects of conflict and to divert positive forces for the welfare of society. For example 'democracy' is a technique which can integrate conflict. The democratic society also faces conflict due to its flexibility. Nevertheless it employs several constitutional mechanisms to tackle this challenge. Change is a regular and unstoppable character of nature sans of which society cannot exist. Conflict is an effective agent which brings change in the society. The most important theories like revolutionary and evolutionary theories have pleaded for change. Structural functional theory stresses for an integral society by resolving conflict through some social means like social integration, civil law etc. Conflict theorists advocate that conflict is a permanent feature of society, where groups or actors make struggle with each other to gain much more power and authority and maximize benefit in favor of them.

## **2. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle's view on Social Conflict and Political Integration**

Socrates has stressed on 'justice' for the unity or unification of society and the government is the sole organization which does every possible thing for the wellbeing of its peoples. So, government plays key role to cultivate integration in and among groups through its law making capacity. Therefore, government can be called as an agent of political integration. Not only then but also still now government has been playing a crucial role in avoiding conflict.

Plato had said about revolution between rich and poor. According to him those who have large amounts of wealth and property assumes power and form government. However they could not retain power in their hand because of their lust for power and wealth. Then aristocracy is being education the poor masses cannot hold power for a long time. Plato's 'education system' will integrate the poor who are majority in number.

Aristotle has emphasized on conflict between two classes namely rich and poor. He puts stress on the end of conflict; otherwise it will bring political instability (Gaub, 2011, p. 73). According to Aristotle social inequality causes conflict. According to Aristotle the sense of injustice and discontent among the members of the non-ruling class causes conflict and that should be ended.

## **3. Karl Marx's View on Social Conflict and Political Integration**

Karl Marx is considered as father of conflict theory. He says that the unequal distribution of resources between two classes' viz. bourgeois and proletariat leads to conflict. The long standing alienation and social exclusion encouraged the have-not class to engulf in conflict with having class. Marx advocated that revolution is necessary to end exploitation and alienation and to establish a classless society, which is ultimately harmonious. His conflict theory is purely economic. No doubt alienated class makes conflict but the bourgeois are responsible for it, because it is the ultimate way to get rid from exploitation and oppression by the resource rich class. Karl Marx's conflict theory proves that conflict brings change because the rich class always wants to maintain statuesque. So, in his opinion 'conflict' is a source of integration. It coordinates having and have-not and make a classless society.

## **4. Machiavellian thought on Social Conflict and Political Integration**

Niccolo Machiavelli gave his precious idea on conflict from political point of view and opined that conflict is a crucial factor for the disintegration of the nation. Machiavelli considers conflict as a universal and permanent feature of the society, which origins from human nature. He said that conflict is the result of continuing struggle between the common man and power holders, who attempt to dominate the masses. Machiavellian conflict is not an economic conflict and according to him conflict develops due to lust for power and domination. He too shades light on positive role of conflict but from a limited point of view. He made endless effort to integrate the conflict ridden nation. Therefore he provided absolute power to the authority, which has so many side-effects.

## **5. Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau's View on Social Conflict and Political Integration**

Hobbes sketches human beings as power seeker. He says man is neither social nor political but completely an isolated beast or an egoistic creature (Gaub, 2011). According to him the state of nature was totally conflict ridden and the human rights and freedom were insecure. Here nobody had sympathy toward others. To avoid such horrific conditions of state of nature all men made an agreement with each other, which had been considered by Hobbes as 'social contract'. Another

contractualist John Locke's view about 'state of nature' was not gloomy like Hobbes. He said that the state of nature was peaceful, congenial and cooperative, where peoples exercised their duty with complete honor and dignity. But due to absence of statutory law some peoples in the state of nature didn't respect the moral law and made effort to maximize self interests. This had nurtured conflict and destroyed all moral principles. In this chaotic situation Locke proposed for a civil and political society, which could be erected by peoples through the means of contract. In order to bring integration Locke advocated for 'constitutional government' which is based on the consent of the people. Peoples are empowered by Locke to overthrow an arbitrary ruler and set up another government in place of it. J. J. Rousseau too has pictured the state of nature as equal, self-sufficient and contented (ibid.). According to Rousseau inequality prevailed due to development of civilization and private property. 'Private property' and 'inequality' are genesis of conflict in the society. He advised peoples to go back to the 'state of nature' to get back original happiness and innocence. But it is quite impossible to return to the state of nature, therefore he asserted about 'civil society' which will integrate the society and calm down those sources which are responsible for conflict. Rousseau banks on 'general will' which one is necessary for the foundation of civil society, because it subordinates self-interest to the community interests.' It teaches peoples to obey law and respect authority. The social contractualists embark on 'sovereignty' to overcome conflict and maintain integration. But their conception regarding sovereignty is different. Hobbes's sovereignty is more absolute than Locke and Rousseau. Machiavellian 'sovereignty' is more absolute than contractual theorists. He emphasizes that any kind of conflict against sovereignty should be silenced through absolute power of the state.

#### **6. Gandhian View on Social Conflict and Political Integration**

Gandhiji, the worshipper of peace and non-violence also admitted the presence of conflict. To him conflict does not a matter, and the matter is peace. He emphatically emphasized on peace and decentralization of power through village Republic. Gandhian view about conflict is totally different from others. He accepted conflict not as competition or struggle but as a means of peaceful change. Gandhi believes in truth and non-violence as means of conflict management. Gandhiji advises not to think opponents as enemy but as friend for which the rich and poor can live together.

#### **7. Structural Functional Theorist's View on social Conflict and Integration**

Thinkers of this theory has opted that conflict persists in the society and nobody can deny about its presence. But they do not picture it like conflict theorists as negative. These theorists' have propagated about some mechanisms to resolve conflict and prevail integration. Functional theorist Emile Durkheim has pinned his faith on 'religion' and 'public school system' as a source of integration, because these develop common values and help in establishing an equilibrium society, when conflict cannot get chance to take place (Wallace & Wolf, 2006, p. 24). He has focused his study on several social problems faced by individuals. One of the most significant problems would be the absence of solidarity, social cohesion and normlessness (Coser, 2013, p. 130) which cultivate conflict in and among different social groups. Every group has certain rules, which are made to maintain discipline and avoid conflict. All members of the group have to respect these norms. The group must give right and freedom to all its members with certain rational restriction. Everybody should work for the group interests. Internal democracy has to be maintained. Every dispute and problem must be resolved by open discussion, negotiation, and mediation. 'Flexible integration' (Giri, 2013) process should be followed to harmonize the group. Whereas, in the

extreme cases to keep intact the group interests, techniques of 'rigid integration' (force, coercion) can be followed but with greater caution and care. No doubt if not every, but group interests are antagonistic because their goal is antagonistic. Therefore conflict among groups occurs. Keeping this in view the functionalists put forth some mechanisms like social control, laws, social integration etc. to garner unity, solidarity, cooperation and harmony. To minimize conflict a 'common interest' of different groups should find out and every possible effort shall be made to fulfill this interest. Therefore a 'core committee' shall be formed by taking few members from each conflicting group through mediation. To conduct group activities 'common rules' will be prepared and these must be strictly followed. The members involved in the 'core committee' must exercise their duty impartially. A code of conduct should be there to control 'core committee' members. Stringent action has to be taken against those 'core committee' members who don't following the rules. Group ethics and cultures are to be transmitted to the group members by undertaking some socialization programs. Emile Durkheim argues that 'mechanical solidarity' in the ancient society was mechanism of integration whereas in the cotemporary period 'organic solidarity'. He had forwarded another technique to control conflict that was 'social control' which constitutes a regulative force on human thought and behavior. The negative qualities of human beings would be checked through this mechanism. In the absence of social control 'anomie' would take place, which is prone to conflict. Karl Marx's 'alienation' would be compared with Durkheim's 'anomie'. Functionalist Talcot Parson States that 'socialization' is a powerful integrative force which could overcome social conflict and maintain social control and hold society together (Wallace & Wolf 2006, p. 16). The Conflict as well as Functional theorists assume that peoples are generally self interested and like to maximize their benefits at the cost of others. Sometimes short cut methods are being used by actors like, violence, war, and aggression to fulfill their interests. Communalism, regionalism, racism, casteism are some examples of violent conflicts. But positive changes would take place in the social structure from conflict. For example regionalism initiates policy makers for a balanced development. Every region should be properly and equally given importance for growth. Some conflicts do not come under the category of social conflict because of its negative and inhuman impact on society e. g. terrorism. It does not have any positive aspect.

### **8. Conclusions**

Conflict is a permanent feature of the society and also unavoidable. But it can be managed and resolved through some mechanisms and political integration is one among them. Marry Parker Follet said that conflict is not always bad. If it is properly and smoothly integrated the human society would get best result out of it e. g. employer and employee conflict, trade union and industrialist conflict, conflict between government and civil society for power share etc. Therefore Giri has opted for 'flexible integration' of conflict. The use of power and coercion to suppress conflict does not a healthy source of integration of conflict. For example the Afro-Asian and Latin American countries fought vehemently against their colonial force and finally got independence. The negotiation, discussion, debate, intermediation, participation etc. would be used to resolve conflict. Political integration would be proved as useful to deal with conflict situation with very much caution and care. It applies all its mechanisms according to the situation to convert the negative force of conflict into positive. Finally, 'social conflict' will be a process of 'social well-being'. Some well proved techniques of political integration are 'democracy' (socio-

economic-political), 'local self government', 'multiculturalism', 'constitutionalism', 'rule of law', 'empowerment of civil society', 'healthy public opinion' etc.

### References

1. Bellah, Robert N., (1970), "Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post Traditional World, New York: harper Row.
2. Bierstedt, Robert, (1950), "An Analysis of Social Power, American Sociological Review, 15, 6, pp. 730-38.
3. Collins, Randall (1975), "Conflict Sociology: Toward an Explanatory Science", New York, Academic Press.
4. Coser, Lewis A. (1956), "The Functions of Social Conflict", Glencoe, IL, Free Press.
5. Dahrendurf, Ralf (1959), "Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society", Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
6. Das Gupta, A. K.(1968), "Gandhi on Social Conflict", *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 7.
7. Datta, Amlan (1980), "Social Conflict in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 26.
8. Follet, M. P. (1925), "Constructive Conflict", In H. C. Metcalf (ed.) "Scientific Foundation of Business Administration", Baltimore, MD,: Williams and Williams, 1926.
9. Giri, Anant Kumar (2013), "The Poser Rethinking Integration", *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 62, Number- 1, January-April 2013.
10. \_\_\_\_\_, (2012a), "Sociology and Beyond: Windows and Horizon", Rawat Publication, Jaipur.
11. \_\_\_\_\_, (2012b), "Knowledge and Human Liberation: Towards Planetary Liberation", Andem Press, London.
12. Goldstein, Joshua S. & Pevhouse, Jon C. (2013), "International Relations" Pearson, New Delhi.
13. Golhammer, Herbert & Edward, A. Shills, (1939), "Types of Power and Status", *The American Journal of Sociology*, 45, September, pp. 171-82.
14. Gustav, Jung Carll, (1939), "The Integration of Personality", Farar Reinhart, New York.
15. Honneth, Axel (1995), "The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflict", The Mitt Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
16. Kiesberg, Louis, (1968), "International Differentiation and the Establishment of Organizations" in H. S. Becker et. Al. (eds.) *Institutions and the Person* Chicago, Aldine Atherton, Inc. pp. 141-64.
17. Park, Robert E. & Ernest W. Burgess, (1924), "Introduction to the Science of Sociology", Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
18. Parsons, Talcot & Platt, Gerald (1973), "The American University", Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
19. Ratzinger, Joseph & Jurgen, Habermas, (2004), "The Dialectic of Secularization: On Rason and Religion, San Fransisco, Ignatious Press.
20. Ritzer, George (2011), "Sociological theory", Tata McGraw-Hill, New York.
21. Strydom, Piet (2009), "New Horizons of Critical Theory: Collective Learning and Triple Contingency, Shipra Publication, Delhi
22. Wallace, Ruth A. & Wolf, Alison (2012), "Contemporary Sociological Theory", PHI Learning, New Delhi.
23. Weber, Max, (1947), "The Theory of Social and Economic Organization", translated by A. M. Anderson and Talcot Parson, New York, Oxford University Press, original published in 1921.