Dynamics of communal conflict in India: The need for an effective power of inquiry

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"There is no way to peace. Peace is the way."
-Mahatma Gandhi

Introduction

This is 150th year of Mahatma Gandhi's birth. Mahatma's contribution to promotion of communal harmony and peace is most significant in modern India. The present research paper deals with communal conflicts in the regional state of India, and how these become a national issue ending in violence in both pre and post independence India .The trend of communal violence is increasing , turning perilous to society, and becomes a frightful phenomenon and becomes a permanent curse for the society and the people. It becomes a debatable topic in 24/7 basis where the riots outbreak, violence and clashes among the communities and polarization can be witnessed in all forms of media thereby leaving the footprints of fear and hatred among the citizens. Civil society is in peril. The principles of nation and state have been demolished, but there is light at the end of the tunnel because human evolution jump starts at every crisis for survival that has happened before and again. It is a clash of classes, the bureaucratic class forming the upper layer of society and the elected representatives forming the lower strata and the ambition of sustainable development has become a distant dream. The world fears for a total change in their life style and living pattern and changing demographics and this become inevitable in the new millennium. Clashes of interest and the unequal distribution of powers are two main concepts studied by the conflict theorists. The conflict theorists see the order that exists as being the result of one's group to control the other is the root cause of the communal conflict. There is a multi stranded link between the natural resources and the individual lives. Ultimately the resources form the basics of life and this is beyond doubt. Even the simple matters of water, food and shelter, the basic needs for survival becomes more complex and strategic behaviour of the individuals will change if one party gets the resource, while the other does not. All conflicts based on resources can be analysed in such a way that the resources of that people are attempting to obtain, the availability of the resource and the number of people who wants to

share the resources. Thus resources have become an explicit factor for the riots and communal conflict in real life situations as per the social science pathways vis a vis human behaviour.

One of the oldest institutions in Indian society is the caste system, and it is the frame of Hinduism. According to M.N Srinivas-:

Caste is undoubtedly an all India phenomenon in the sense that there are hereditary endogamous group which forms the hierarchy and that each of these groups has a traditional association with one or two occupations. Everywhere there are Brahmins, untouchables and peasants, artisans, trading and service castes ... certain Hindu theological ideas of karma and dharma are woven into the caste system, but it is not known whether awareness of these concepts is universal or confined only to certain sections of hierarchy".

The lower castes became aware of their position/ hierarchy and resent oppression and discrimination by higher castes. This change ends in social tension and conflict among the higher and lower castes, which can be broadly distinguished between Brahmins and non-Brahmins and between the so called caste Hindus and the Dalits/ Harijans. The conflicts led to violence, rioting and arson and most of the time police and the government failed to restore order and justice always favoured the higher rather than the lower caste on various legal disabilities living in the chamber of horrors. Hence the sense of security and fulfilment of the individual is always a challenge and the basic social values of equality and dignity of man/human are not achieved."If the fundamental rights are opposed by the community, no law, no judiciary, no parliament can guarantee them in the real sense of the word" said Ambedkar. "what is the use of fundamental rights to the negro in America, to the Jews in Germany, and to the untouchables in India?.Many communal riots have indeed been precipitated by discord between state and central governments and between local and national administrators. In most of the cases however community conflict between leaders and government representatives have worked together to prevent or contain violence. Such diverse examples in India warn against the dangers of overtly simple characterizations of the state in situations of communal unrest. (Amrita Basu&Atul Kohli, 1998)

Conflict theory: An over view

Communal conflicts have become a curse for Indian society and community. Conflicts, engineered by politically motivated men and the brutalities happening in these riots are a shame for the nation. According to the conflict model, struggles between contending forces in the society and the source of social change, it sees society as being composed of group pitted against group. Clashes of interest abound and contending forces struggle either to maintain power or grasp it. From the struggle comes change which is not only inevitable but also meritable. A society in conflict must be dynamic and the struggle for power results in the redistribution of power better reflecting the interests of the society's members. The basic conflict according to Marx is the economic sphere in the industrial societies where conflict between owners and non owners are inevitable and such conflict ends in the creation of a new social order. According to Karl Marx, the private ownership of production and the exploitation of the masses by the few powerful member of the bourgeois' class is the product of capitalism which predisposes them to conflict and crime. According to Merton's Anomie theory, is based on the values and norms on the basis of the social order in the society, which says the crime and conflict consist of acts which can break or depart from the shared norms and values and legitimacy in achieving ones goal without any discrepancy, because difference breeds contradictions and ends in conflict followed by crime. The   collective behaviour theory proposed by(Smelser,1962)deals with mob, crowd, riots and social movements with the intention to change the situation in a deliberate way, by mobilising the masses with a pertinent social action for a period of time. The collective communal conflict might vary according to the circumstances from mild disapproval to violence, crime and killing. The Ethnic relations have generated several theoretical frameworks mainly based on majority – minority theory, in multi-ethnic societies, enthnocentricism due to monopoly attitude of political ,economic, social, environmental and technological advantages in the society will generate the communal contradictions in different forms. In some cases the inside-outside religious groups, dominant vs host groups can cause communal conflict based on the contradictions and confrontation with the dominant groups. The German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf(1973) probably the leading exponent of conflict theory emphasises the unequal distribution of power in society. The new conflict theory analyses the transformation of new issues in national and international agenda such as the antagonism between urban and rural space facing threat to the environment thereby not emphasising the sustainable

development ultimately development options un –sustainable liberalisation, privatisation, globalisation, in the environmental century. Apart from the conflict theory, there is theory of development, theory of civilization, theory of peace.(Transcend university press,1979).The perspective of communal conflict differs according to the very understanding , in most of the cases, it is proved that exploitation of the masses is principally the root cause of the conflict which invariably ends in crime. The more the exploitation, the more the conflict, the more the poverty, the more the crime, which eventually proves the theory of relativity . Hence from the above theories we may say that the unequal advantage given to the segment of the population over the other is the seed for conflict and criminality.

Communal conflict in India: A Failed Paradise

According to Swami Vivekananda, a great religious leader of India, was constrained to observe that,

"There is nothing that has brought more horror than religion…nothing has engendered fiercer hatred than religion…nothing has bred more bitter enemity between man and man than religion…nothing has deluged the world with more blood than religion."
Religion should be understood as a tool for the moral betterment of thesociety and toleration towards other religions should be considered as a duty of every citizen. Religious belief and spiritual faith should not get developed to a level of communalism or religious fundamentalism".

Communal conflict, also termed as violent conflict, refers to the fact that parties use lethal violence to gain control over some disputed and perceived indivisible resource, such as piece of land or local political power (Gultung, 1965). For instance in local conflicts, where the dividing line is between the original inhabitants of an area and more recent settlers, this would seen as a communal conflict since people very strongly identify themselves with the other group along these lines of demarcation along such lines often causes 'son of the soil' conflicts where the indigenous perceive themselves as the rightful owners of the land (Laitin and Fearon,2011).Communal identity with ethnic or religious identity with common culture, common history and common core values (Gurr,2000). Sometimes even livelihood conflicts may be fought along these lines no matter whether homogeneous or heterogeneous. The bottom line is that which constitutes the basis of communal identity and thus may differ across space and time and leads to communal conflicts. It is therefore viewed as a condition of social disharmony and unrest in the community like disagreement, antagonism, crimes, violence and large scale destruction of property and human lives .It also entails

disorderliness, coercive illegitimate communal force constituting threat to all fellow citizens. More scientific knowledge and in-depth research is required to understand communal conflict underlying the global scenario ,the LPG syndrome and changing world affairs .It should not be viewed as a mere law and order problem , disharmony and social unrest. This unbridled lunatic communalism and religious fanaticism may lead to terrorism . In India religion has become a weapon for separating the society and is the root cause in most of the communal conflicts.

Dynamics of conflict

The dynamics of conflict is qualitatively and quantitatively different from medieval to modern times. First the feudal, social and political structures are basically different from that of the colonial or the capitalist society. Secondly the feudal society rests on loyalty to the zamindars on one hand and the ruling monarch on the other irrespective of the religious community and it marks the expression *true to one's salt*, and loyalty has lost its significance. Thirdly the colonial society had its own characteristic structure, neither feudal nor capitalist. Fourthly the feudal disposition it is not ethnic and communal division which is essential to rule .And fifthly ,yet another characteristic of the colonial society and the rulers find it detrimental to their economy to encourage full capitalist growth in the colonial country. If there is no full economic growth there will be competition between various communal and ethnic groups exacerbating ethnic and communal feelings among the people. So both economic and political competition exacerbate inter- communal relationship. Hence under pressure the rulers had to introduce certain democratic reformation in order to create an illusion of democratic- functioning in the society in order to satisfy the ego of the colonial elite. This leads to the beginning of the democratic rule and it was rightly expected that after the Britishers withdrew the only alternative rule would be democracy in nature thereby putting an end to feudal monarchy and to put the elite group and other communities on alert. The elite minorities were naturally more worried as they saw no prospects of controlling political power in a democratic disposition. The introduction of the colonial rule, began to sharpen the problem of communal conflict. It can therefore be hypothesized that colonial rule creates conditions to transform medieval religious consciousness into communal consciousness.

Thus we can see that colonial rule of the British that produced the socio-political phenomenon of communalism and left its bitter legacy in the form of nagging communal divide. Then communalism aroused deep passions and brought about the sharpest division between two communities (hindu-muslim) and this left bitterness even today. The minority community is perceived as fanatical and highly communal for stressing primordial identity, and the situation goes on getting more and more communalised threatening the unity and integrity of the country. Thus it is seen that ethnic or communal conflict is a politico-economic phenomenon. It becomes aggravated by various organisations and movements whenever a structural shift takes place as one group or community. The community which loses, emphasis its identity in the society in order to mobilize the entire community to fight for justice and the community which has usurped all and most of the benefits tries to cling to them by mobilising other members through stressing its identity, hence the ethnic or communal conflict spreads and gets sharpened and sometimes remain unresolved making conflict inevitable and violence appear to be unavoidable. (Asghar Ali Engineer, 1989). Most of the time the conflict cannot be solved, it cannot be transformed to be constructive rather than destructive unless and until the three important factors are solved at the same time namely, attitude, behaviour and contradictions. The Galtung 's triangle is a known classical conflict paradigms of the 20th century, depicted in the **pic-1** shows three main elements for the conflict is A stands for attitude , B for behaviour, and C for contradictions which is the concrete object, behaviour of different actors and their deep feeling for the communal conflict.(Gaitung,1996)There are interesting analogies with one of the classical and most known conflict paradigms, that is Galtung's ABC triangle, depicted in Figure 3, where A stands for Attitudes, B for Behaviour and C for Contradiction (Galtung, 1996). According to the ABC triangle, a conflict is defined by three main elements, the contradiction, which is the concrete object of the conflict, the behavior of the different actors, and their deep feelings, the attitudes. A conflict cannot be solved, or better transformed to become constructive instead of destructive, unless we tackle all the three components at the same time.

COMMUNITY CONFLICT TRIANGLE
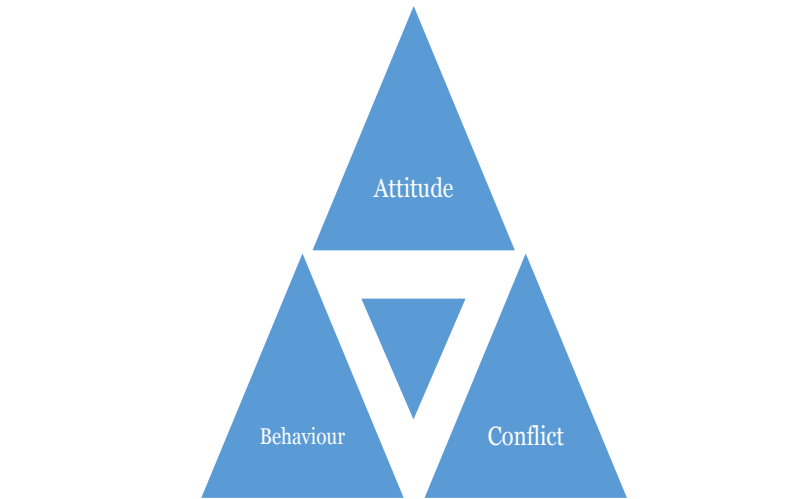
The cities in India periodically witnessed violence. The most common form of collective violence is communal violence which has plagued the country's urban environment since independence. The caste, community and regional ties also call for tensions leading to violence. The intricate relationship between urbanizations and communalism, the communal conflict ends in violence in India and the politics of communalism have to be analyzed within the context of the economic relationship peculiar to urban growth in India, the crisis of the nation and specially the distribution of power and property and it is manifested in everyday life in India. . Accordingly, the communal conflict in India is a response to, and a reaction against, the breakdown of the system and the inability of the ruling groups to create a new one which can accommodate the aspirations of all .(sharit K.Bhomnik, edited by Yogesh atal,,icssr,2009).

Community Conflict Model
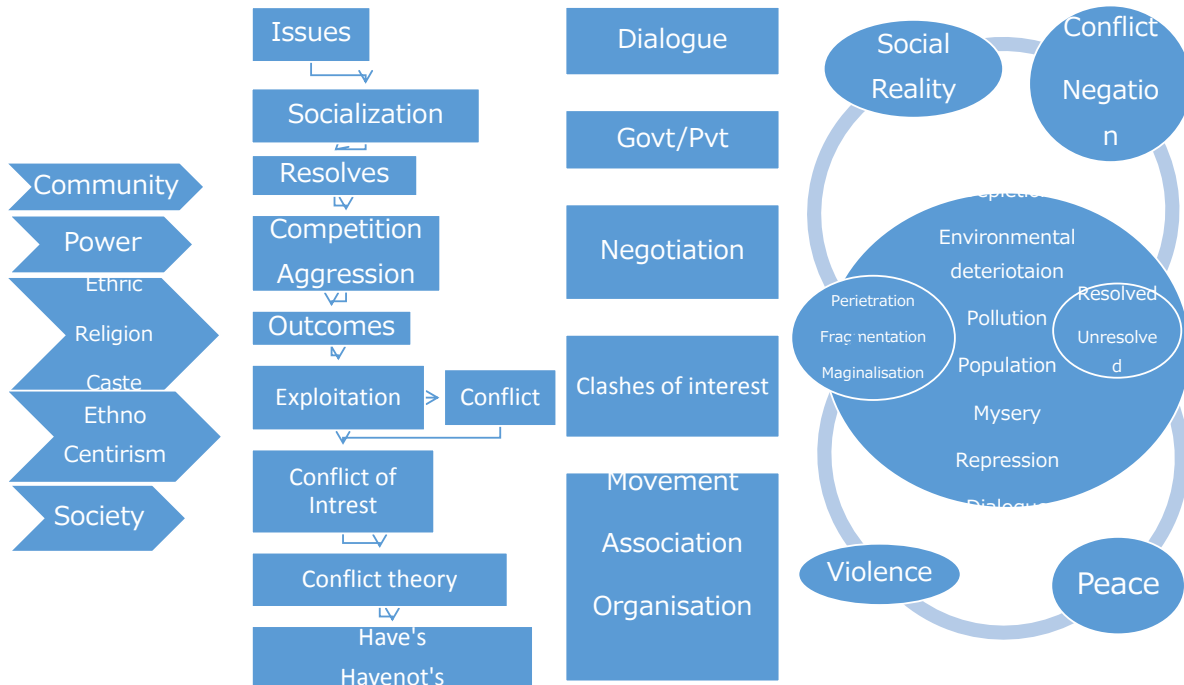
Concluding comments

Communal violence in India is a legacy of the colonial period. The policy of divide and rule pursued by the British sowed the seeds of communalism in the country. Several studies had been conducted on communal riots, caste violence, Hinduism and politics, Ayodyha crisis, communal politics and others in India. On the basis of the study done by,(Asghar Ali Engineer,1995), he came to the conclusion that communalism is not a religious phenomenon but the phenomenon connected with the interest group of a religious community.According to him communalism right from the 19 th century had been generated by conflicting interest of educated elites, not the masses. Communal hatred is further escalated due to partisan propaganda by political parties, the mass media, and various other organizations perpetuating violence. The emergence of Hindu nationalism striving to construct a monolith Hindu identity, may lead to the emergence of supremacy of the Hindus. Hence the distinctive and pluralistic model society for India in which all religions are respected and special considerations given to the minorities and their rights is a fundamental issue in the Indian civil society. Despite the disintegration of the rural community and the

gradual decline in the significance of agriculture in the Indian economy, the logic of demographics works against the caste and community. More research is required , because the neglect of agriculture and rural populations can thus become socially and politically perilous.(surinder s. Jodhka and paul d souza, icssr,2009). Hence communal conflict is part of a struggle to capture control over resources of power economic, political, social, illiterate, and tradition bound masses are exploited by few individuals to gain dominance over resources. The emergence of political culture of corruption and criminalisation of politics may also affect the credibility of democracy and its system. More studies are required whether policies favouring the minorities and the dis-advantage and depressed groups have layed the counter role of subverting secularism and promoting casteism and communalism and civil society organizations deserves prior attention. The following areas need careful empirical investigation like criminalisation of politics, role of communication in crisis situation of caste clashes, politicization of caste affecting the functioning of democracy, the content analysis of election manifestos of various political parties, the impact of economic development and rural power structure.

 There is an intricate relationship between urbanization and communalism. It has to be analysed that communal violence in India and the politics of communalism and the economic growth might be peculiar but it is manifested at every stage of urban India. There is communal violence in response to the reaction against the policies and break down of the system and the inability of the ruling group to control or to create one which can accommodate the aspirations of all the citizens. There is violence every day in the private sphere of the home or within the family and this is becoming a lasting phenomenon in the form of harassment by the self-styled leaders .Both men and women become the victims and violence against women is even more worse .All of them suffer from some sort of social myopia/ state hegemony at every level, which often leads us to recognize some manifestations of violence, but makes us indifferent to various other socio-political and economic actions that indirectly violate our democratic rights. The units of the society not only functions properly but sometimes dysfunctions and dis-organised as well thereby creating instability in the community. Nevertheless one can see the logical interdependence of conflict and regional development. The successful development of education, health care , sustainable livelihood, law and order, good governance, infrastructure for all and social security considered to be the important parameters to make the nations conflict-free .The

development should be sustainable at every level   through long term plans empowering the civil society through gender equality with less challenges and abundant opportunities taking into account the social, economical, political, technological, environmental, and   cultural factors for the overall human development of the nation.. The entire globe is interconnected through various networks constituting society/ community, hence the contradictions will occur at any moment incessantly is considered to be illogical   illegal, crude and aberrant to social harmony, and we have to admit the very fact that communal conflict is inevitable and we can make sure that not all conflicts can be managed and resolved instantly unless the government has a strong policy to tackle the issue at the right time. Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence was his belief- that strength comes from righteousness, not force. Power comes from truth, not might. Victory comes from moral courage, not imposed submission. But Love is the basis of our friendship as it is of religion. Gandhi should be remembered as one of the messiahs, who constantly strove for the communal unity in all the most significant periods of the nation's history.

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