

Conflict Resolution: The Need of the Hour Approaches And Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Conflict has been an inherent phenomenon in the world since the very beginning. However, it is only in recent times that the conceptualisation of conflict has begun. The inception of conflict, the management of conflict and the resolution of conflict is a matter of scholarly study especially after the end of the cold war. Intrastate conflicts defined in terms of ethnicity are becoming very prominent. Communities are mobilised around their ethnicities and they are politicised. Ethnicity by itself does not lead to conflict. It is when they are used for elite gains that conflict becomes inevitable. Thus the study of conflict and its various dimensions becomes a very significant aspect of study. This paper attempts to understand not just the concept of conflict but also discusses certain strategies for conflict resolution. Tackling incompatibilities is a very important challenge faced by state systems. The state has to at the outset determine whether conflict has to be managed or they have to move beyond management and seek its resolution as well. If resolution of conflicts is the ultimate aim then peace keeping, peace making and peace building are the strategies that can be implemented. Conflict management is the primary approach and conflict resolution is the ultimate approach that the state has to adopt.

KEY WORDS

Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution, Ethnicity, PeaceBuilding, Peacekeeping, Peacemaking.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The politicisation of ethnicity by the elite within ethnic groups has led to the proliferation of conflicts that are mainly intrastate in character. These conflicts can be termed as ethnic conflicts. In most of these conflicts the legitimacy of the state is challenged. The post cold war period especially saw the proliferation of these conflicts that were up until now below the surface.

Ethnic identity per se is not conflictual. When these identities are combined with a political and socio economic goal they become conflictual. This makes the process of understanding and resolving ethnic conflicts very complex. Democracy and development are the victims of this atmosphere of violence and distrust.

This paper seeks to understand the whole process of conflict resolution and also bring out the different approaches and strategies that can be implemented to ensure long lasting peace. The paper is significant since it tries to understand the problem of proliferation of conflicts. To analyse conflict is one thing to devise means to resolve them is another. World peace and security depends upon the stability of the state systems. The stability of states depends upon the level of assimilation and integration of communities and groups within the state. This paper attempts to understand the process of conflict in theory and in practise. The methodology used in the paper is descriptive and analytical.

A CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Like most concepts involving societies, there is no consensus regarding the concept of conflict. It continues to be an elusive one despite it being an almost ever-present process. Conflict is defined as a social situation since it involves groups within a society. This social situation arises when two or more parties strive to attain the same set of scarce resources at the same time (Wallensteen, 1988).

Thus a condition of scarcity is vital in any conflict situation. A conflict therefore is a situation of social incompatibilities. When two or more parties perceive themselves to be incompatible a conflict emerges.

However the question that arises then is what is the difference between competition and conflict? Competition connotes a positive meaning and conflicts connote a negative one. Like conflict, competition too is the endeavour of two or more people to attain the same set of scarce resources. But unlike conflict, it does not involve any coercive element. Conflict is competition in its more hostile form. It disregards social norms. Incompatibilities are reflected more aggressively. Conflict needs to be distinguished from a crisis as well. A

crisis is one stage of the conflict. Its distinguishing feature includes a sudden eruption of unexpected events caused by previous conflict (Holsti, 1992). Any unanticipated action by the other party that raises the perception of threat can be described as a crisis.

Therefore, what needs to be stressed in a conflict resolution process are the incompatibilities faced by the parties. Tackling incompatibilities is one of the greatest challenges to the conflict resolution process. The term conflict resolution can be defined as the analysis of the underlying sources of conflict situations (Burton, 1987).

In other words conflict resolution refers to the process of analysis of incompatibilities that lie at the core of a given conflict situation and on the basis of it arrive at a compromise. Conflict resolution is different from conflict settlement. Settlement can be the result of an enforced decision or a compromise. On the other hand resolution is always voluntary on the part of the parties involved.

Traditionally, the elders or the coercive wing of the state has handled the conflict situations. This was the authoritarian model of resolving conflicts. In this situation no distinction was made between conflict resolution and conflict management. However as the nature and type of conflict changed from interstate to intrastate conflicts, this was not enough. In interstate conflicts, authoritative decisions could end the conflicts because the legitimacy of the authoritative body i.e. the state was not challenged. In intrastate conflicts on the other hand, the state is also a party to the conflict and its legitimacy is questioned. Hence any attempt by the state to use its authoritative powers is seen as an attempt to impose its will and subjugate the other party. This necessitated a change in the traditional authoritarian model.

The required change occurred during the 1960s when ethnicity, too, was being popularised as a concept in the social sciences. A distinction came to be made between management and resolution. Based on this development there emerged two strategies to the conflict resolution process. These were the conflict management strategy and the conflict resolution strategy.

II. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION.

Any conflict analysis includes two competing paradigms. An assertion is often made that a conflict can either be managed or resolved. This is the management versus resolution debate in conflict theory. Though by definition both are considered to be mutually exclusive, it is impractical to assume that one can exist without the other. Any process of conflict resolution has to start at one stage with the management of the conflict.

The conflict resolution approach is a more broad-based approach than the conflict management approach (Ryan, 1990). The resolution approach is idealistic since it believes that conflicts can be totally resolved. The violent and disruptive tendencies can be eliminated and a possibility of reaching an agreement over the fundamental issue that divides the parties can be created. The resolutionists, therefore, tackle the source of the conflict. They deal with the issues involved rather than the actors and believe that it is possible to reach some kind of a settlement acceptable to all parties.

Conflict resolution converts the conflict into a shared problem. Parties are involved in the process of finding an outcome that is acceptable to all. Thus, the settlement arrived at is not imposed upon the parties but is a product of consensus. It has a greater chance of succeeding and sustaining itself. This means that the third parties have a limited role in the conflict resolution phase. Since the belief is that a settlement has to be arrived at by the parties themselves, third party involvement is restricted to, merely providing assistance and facilitating interaction between them.

The management approach, on the other hand, is a limited approach. It believes in putting an end to the violence between groups. It acts as a barrier that divides the groups and does not allow them to interact. Due to lack of interaction the conflict automatically ends. However since it does not strike at the fundamental issue, once the barrier is removed there is a possibility of resumption of hostility and hence of the conflict. It concentrates on the actors and their attitudes, actions and reactions. This is because of an inherent lack of belief that conflicts can be resolved. Basic issues cannot be altogether tackled. There is no common interest that can enable the parties to forget their differences. The conflicting issue is the fundamental issue that overshadows everything else.

They believe that resolution of any conflict is impossible and its pursuit a waste of time. The most that can be attained is suppression rather than the elimination of the conflict. Based on this belief the managers accept a very wide role for third parties that have to carry out the task of suppression. It is the third party either a bilateral or multilateral force that separates the parties and provides an overlay that suppresses the conflict as well. The very word 'management' signifies a certain amount of arm-twisting or force. Hence conflict management involves external coercive interference.

Conflict management accepts an enforced settlement whereas conflict resolution does not. For them settlement has to be voluntary based on consent. The basis for these divergent approaches lies in their assumptions. The conflict resolutionists assume that a conflict is a positive sum game in which it is possible for

both parties to win. This is because the conflict is over the denial of certain basic human rights. They emphasise the need for a human needs approach to analyse conflicts (Burton, 1987). Physical and psychological factors have to be considered to understand the basic issues involved in the conflict.

The resolutionists accept that the most common manifestation of an ethnic conflict is over issues of sovereignty and autonomy. However, they believe that if one delves deeper the real issue appears to be different from the focus. It is most often the denial of human needs for security, identity, and participation. The granting of the need for identity and participation to one group does not automatically deny the same to the other and hence it is possible to eliminate discontent and the conflict itself. The managers assume that conflict is a zero sum game in which one party is always the loser and the other the winner. This is because they believe that conflict occurs over issues of sovereignty and acquisition of power, which is viewed in either/or terms. These are the real issues involved. The granting of state power to one automatically leads to its denial to the other.

Based upon this incompatibility the general perception that seems to have evolved is that one cannot be a conflict manager and a resolver at one and the same time. Either one believes that a conflict can be resolved and a settlement brokered or one does not. The managers favour dissociation and the resolvers favour association between groups. Although this is true to a certain extent one should also not deny the fact that every conflict is dynamic and so also are people and situations. Therefore, if a conflict is thought to be unresolvable at one point of time this view may not hold indefinitely.

Both the management and resolution approaches are not without problems. Resolutionists might in their optimism and enthusiasm assume unrealistic perceptions about the willingness of parties to cooperate. The unwillingness of the parties to give up certain core beliefs might hinder the resolution process. On the other hand management might temporarily stop the conflict but there is no guarantee that the conflict will not recur. If the manager begins with the attitude that the conflict cannot be resolved, he will not be encouraged to look for signals that could be converted into resolution prospects. There is a limited commitment on the part of the manager, which might lead to withdrawal or disinterest as well. The management approach merely seeks to eliminate the symptoms of the conflict.

A combination of the two approaches is essential. A resolution process is incomplete unless it incorporates conflict management as a part of the process. Unless violence is brought to an end, no settlement can be brokered. The first step to any conflict resolution process has to be conflict management. The management approach is too pessimistic and may attempt too little whereas the resolution approach is too optimistic and may attempt too much. Therefore, a conflict resolution strategy should involve both the approaches. An integrated approach maybe the best strategy to use.

III. A STRATEGY FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION.

If an integrated approach is considered to be the best then conflict resolution strategy will involve three distinct steps: peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding (Galtung, 1985). These strategies are evolved keeping in mind several distinct problems that need to be addressed at various levels as also specific target groups to be recognised. An ethnic conflict involves three types of groups engaging in three types of activities.

The central role in the entire conflict is played by the leaders who form the elite core. The elite manipulate the ethnic sentiments of the masses and thus generate a support base for the conflict. This support base comes from the ordinary followers. Incompatible interests perceived by the elite are translated into hostile social and economic attitudes of the ordinary people. To attain their goal the elite need to rely on armed groups or 'warriors'. These are the executors of the conflict that constitute the militant core.

Thus, an ethnic conflict also functions through three agencies like that of the government. The mass core or the group of followers, the elite core or the group of decision-makers and the militant core or the group that is responsible for direct action. The three aspects involved in the conflict are the incompatible issues, the context and the actors of the conflict. Any ethnic conflict resolution process should take note of these three actors and aspects of the conflict.

The peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding activity takes into consideration all these levels. The peacekeeping activity is a military activity that seeks to put an end to the violence and stop the militants. The peacemaking activity is a political activity that seeks to remove the perceived incompatibility of interests and thus involves the decision makers to a large extent and the peacebuilding activity is an activity of social and economic reconstruction that seeks to transform the negative attitudes prevalent among the ordinary masses.

PEACEKEEPING

It is a strategy aimed at halting or reducing violence in the conflict by involving the inter positioning of military or police forces between the warring parties (Harbottle, 1989). Peacekeeping is a function, which is traditionally performed by the state. However, in most intrastate conflicts as stated earlier the state machinery no longer acts as a neutral party. Most of the 'perceived incompatibility of interests' is with the state agency.

Therefore the state cannot act as a peacekeeping force. It would be seen as perpetuating violence rather than eliminating it.

When faced with such a situation, third party intervention is called for which may be unilateral, bilateral or multilateral. The third party is not allowed to use force except in matters of self-defence. They are deployed to preserve peace and restore order. One of the many problems that peacekeeping forces have to encounter is the over militarization that prevails with all its ill effects. Militarization leads to the flow and use of lethal weapons in a conflict. Groups employ arms, death squads and private armies. In this environment it becomes very difficult for the peacekeepers to maintain sight of the objective of ending violence without getting directly involved. A successful peacekeeping operation is one where the peacekeepers are able to secure and maintain their balance of participating only to the extent of preventing the outbreak of violence. It concentrates on the actors in the conflict.

PEACEBUILDING

It is the act of bringing about peaceful social change of a more or less permanent type. It involves the reconstruction of the social and economic structures with a view to changing the circumstances of the ordinary people and eliminating hostile attitudes. Behaviour emerges from these attitudes. It does not concentrate on the issues but the context of the conflict. It tries to eliminate the psychological distancing between the warring groups. They are obstacles created due to scapegoating, stereotyping and dehumanisation. The peacebuilding effort is the most difficult and important aspect of conflict resolution. It has a very broad objective. It involves developing contacts between people. If peacekeeping is about building barriers between the warriors, peace building tries to build bridges between ordinary people (Ryan, 1990).

One of the popular ways suggested for building bridges is through encouraging contact between people of different groups. It is generally presumed that people who are segregated easily develop negative images about one another. This is reduced through contact. When people meet and communicate with one another there is always a chance that hostile attitudes will be reinforced but there is also a chance that hostility will give way to amicability between people. Contact could be attained at various levels and through various mediums.

Contact by itself will not be enough. It has to be supplemented by certain conditions. It should be accompanied by various concrete measures. In most instances contact between groups enjoying equal status is of a more amicable nature than contact that is sought to be established between a perceived superior and inferior group. Community of interests also facilitates the process of building bridges. Contacts also merely reduce or eliminate misperceptions. They do not strike at the core issues. What is important from a resolution point of view is that along with misperceptions, conflictual issues are also eliminated. Contact has to be accompanied by certain factors like forgiveness. The feelings of the past have to be tackled. This is a moral aspect that transcends self-interest.

A more concrete basis for resolution could be to devise 'superordinate goals' (Sherif, 1967). Superordinate goals are different from common goals. Common goals can be achieved through unilateral actions. On the other hand superordinate goals can be attained only through co-operative endeavours by the parties. Thus, it tries to eliminate conflict by encouraging the attainment of self-interest and is more realistic in nature. This is in keeping with the functionalist tradition that supersedes divergent goals and establishes a certain community of interests that can be attained only through co-operation. Mutual dependence overshadows political differences. Superordinate goals can be further supplemented through economic development. However though conflict causes economic underdevelopment the reverse may not always be true. Economic development may not always lead to the termination of the conflict. Economic development is a common goal that can be attained separately by the parties and do not require a combined effort. This might also lead to inequality fuelling discontent. The most important drawback is that economic development in no way guarantees economic justice and human rights.

What is most important in the resolution process is confidence building. During the course of the conflict, the parties develop a deep distrust of one another. Contact is possible only if they develop trust and confidence in one another. The CBM's i.e. confidence building measures seek to establish trust between the parties. A GRIT - gradual reduction in tension (Osgood, 1985) through development of trust is emphasised by making concessions and bringing transparency in the actions. Mutual understanding through education is also emphasised that fosters values like tolerance and respect.

PEACEMAKING

Peace making is a process of arriving at a negotiated settlement of the perceived incompatibility of interests between the parties to the conflict. It tackles the issues in the conflict. Parties can be forced to put an end to the conflict or they may voluntarily accept it. Negotiations are the best method of conflict resolution. Traditionally negotiations would mean that the two parties put their demands on the table, bring into the open

any differences that they may have and voice their expectations. Through mediation the gap between the parties is narrowed and finally a compromise is reached. These traditional ways are seen as inadequate for intrastate ethnic conflicts which deal with identity related issues.

For this purpose a new school of thought known as the ADR-Alternative Dispute Resolution has emerged (Burton, 1987). It calls for a human needs approach while dealing with ethnic conflicts. What lies at the root of an ethnic conflict is the denial of certain human rights and needs. Human needs are such that their enjoyment by one does not lead to denial of rights to another. All humans can enjoy these physical and psychological needs at the same time in equal degree. An inclusion of these in the negotiations process will lead to a win-win situation for all concerned. More important than the negotiation phase is the pre-negotiation phase where attitudes of fear and mistrust are sought to be removed.

These three strategies of the conflict resolution process should be employed simultaneously. Any attempt to employ one strategy and ignore the others would not yield fruitful results. Peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts to succeed require effective peacekeeping. Without any kind of a third party between the warring groups there is every possibility of violence erupting during negotiations disrupting the entire process. Peace initiatives can be sabotaged.

Peace building is just as important. Unless the ordinary people who have been dragged into the conflict by the elite realise its futility it becomes difficult for the elite to accept a solution. Once support of the people for the conflict is secured the conflict to a certain extent moves out of the hands of the elite. The pressure from the counter-elite is always prevalent. They now have to tread carefully so as not to disturb the precarious balance. If they invoke the displeasure of the masses, they are likely to be replaced. There is a possibility of intra group conflict between the hard and soft-liners in the party. To avoid this, ordinary people should be made a part of the peace process.

Peacemaking activity is also important. All peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities will come to naught if the elite refuse to accept a solution. Peacemaking activity is the most important in the resolution process. It tackles the real issue involved. Any cessation of violence will be short lived if the interests are not tackled. Though social change is necessary, ultimately political conflicts can be solved by political agreements. If the elite are not willing to end the conflict any attempt to develop contacts between the people will be looked upon by them with suspicion. Since conflicts are manipulated by the elite, brokering an end to them is also in their hands.

External involvement to some degree is essential at all the three levels. Peacekeeping and peacemaking require assistance from third parties. Peacebuilding activities will also not succeed if the necessary and adequate resources are not available. Peacebuilding exercises are expensive. Outside funding through development aid agencies becomes essential.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is an accepted fact that conflict resolution has become one of the important challenges faced by the State systems in recent times. There are incompatibilities voiced in ethnic terms that need to be given urgent attention. If unattended it could escalate into violence. When discontent and violence is left unattended the stability of the state is endangered. Therefore the conflict resolution process is very important. To it is linked the development and the progress of the state.

There are two competing theoretical paradigms – the conflict management and conflict resolution paradigm. Out of these two although the conflict management approach is important because primarily the violence has to end if dialogue has to open, the approach that is going to ensure lasting peace is the conflict resolution approach. Conflict resolution converts the conflict into cooperation and compromise. Hence, compared to the management approach which is limited the conflict resolution approach is comprehensive. A combination of both the approaches works best to eliminate conflict.

If the conflict resolution approach is considered to be the ideal approach then peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding are the strategies that need to be adopted. They seek to eliminate feelings of ill will from the top to the bottom and vice versa. Mass to mass contact enhances communication between people and is considered to be one of the popular ways of mending fences. Contact along with the will of the political elite to put an end to the atmosphere of distrust and suspicion is necessary. There is no single solution to the challenge that ethnic conflicts pose. The conflict management and resolution approach combined with the peacekeeping, peacebuilding and peacemaking strategy is a workable solution to ensure the success of efforts to resolve conflicts.

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