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Political Science

Social Conflict: Insights from Odisha

Dr. Shashikanta Mohapatra

Lect. In Pol.Sc. P.G. Mahavidyalaya, Sebakpur, Gajapati

ABSTRACT

Conflict in multi-diverse society is natural. Especially in case of India it is more appropriate, because it is a multi-diverse country. Every part of India from states to union territories conflict is prevailing predominantly. Another factor which has fanned up the velocity of it is development. Unplanned and faulty principle of development irritates people. Maximum development projects could be materialized at the cost of displacement of some and they must be accordingly rehabilitated, compensated and benefited. But in maximum case the result is reverse. Obviously conflict and discontent arise among the affecters. We see non-affecters get all the benefits but worst affecters do not. This encourages conflict. Odisha is one of the worst affected states of India which has experienced a number of development induced unrest especially among tribes for instance Hirakud hydel project at Bural, the Rengali Hydel Project at Sambalpur, Kalinganagar tragedy etc.

KEYWORDS : Conflict, development, displacement

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL CONFLICT

Human history is witness to numeral conflicts and struggles across the world. This has taken a heavy toll on human lives and property, being fought for power, property and wealth. With the passage of time, conflict took new dimensions under factors like religion, caste, race, ethnicity etc giving rise to several social movements like feminism, environmentalism, land rights, ethnic movements , to name a few. Conflict is a dynamic process and moves very fast from one part to another like a wild fire e. g. communal conflict, cultural conflict, ethnic conflict etc. Conflict occurs between two or more groups or actors to get and enjoy same things such as power, resources, status, rights, liberty and equality. Concentrations of power and wealth in a few have encouraged conflict between sections of society. Deprived peoples have been conflicting against the system and elites. When it takes innocent lives, destroys property, and undermines unity and integration, it is being considered as its negative impact on society e. g. communalism, racism, linguism, regionalism, casteism etc. Several reasons are responsible for conflict in society. These may be political, economic and cultural identity or combination of these. Every conflict claims precious lives or destroy properties

SOCIAL CONFLICT IN ODISHA

These conflicts are reflected across the country as seen above. Odisha has also been witness to several such conflicts (e.g. Kandhamal communal violence 2008, Bhadrak Communal Riot 1948 and 1991, Cuttack Communal Riot 1968, Rourkela Communal Riot 1964 (Kannungo, 2003), Stains tragedy 1999). Soon after the creation in 1936, Orissa also experienced the competitive communal politics and the capital Cuttack obviously became the epicenter (ibid.). The Orissa branch of Muslim League was opened in Cuttack in February 1938 (ibid.). The Hindu Mahasabha became active in Odisha and conducted meeting in Cuttack and other parts of Odisha vigorously. The first Oriya converted into Christian was Gangadhar Sarangi a Brahman of Tangi in Cuttack district and he was Baptised in 1828 (ibid.). The politicization of religion also causes conflict. For example the involvement of BJD government in the matter of Puri Jagannath temple has worsened the religious beliefs of peoples and thousands of devotees of Lord Jagannath and different organizations demonstrated against the Government and demanded for the resignation of Law Minister Aruna Sahu, MLA Maheswar Mahanti and the CM Naveen Pattanaik.

The 19th century forms a great a great divide in the tribal history of Odisha. The impact of the British rule brought about a big upheaval in the tribal life and culture. Prior to the British, the Hindu, Muslim and Maratha ruler left the tribal alone under the care of hill rajas and zamindars (ibid.). These rajas and zamindars exploited them a lot without giving much attention on the development of agriculture. They collected revenues from farmers inhumanly. The 19th century witnessed periodic revolts of tribals because of encroachment on their traditional rights and attacks on their culture. In the first half of the century, revolts, led by Buxi Jagabandhu, Chakra Bisoyi, and Surendra Sai, took place against the annexation of the kingdoms of

Khurda (1804), Ghumsar (1836,) and Sambalpur (1849). There were many revolts in the Princely States, the most important ones being the Nayagarh uprising (1849–52 and 1893–94) and the Kandh uprisings in Patna (1868) and Kalahandi (1881). The Patna and Kalahandi uprisings were of a serious nature, as the Kandhs were driven to the wall by the policy of the state government to settle Oriya farmers (Kultas) in order to advance cultivation. In Ganjam and Vizag agency areas, the British government established police stations, administrative offices, courts, schools, and hospitals. The practice of human sacrifice and female infanticide prevalent in some tribes was ruthlessly suppressed. Some well-intentioned measures meant to improve the economic and moral status of the tribals, backfired due to lack of understanding of the tribal life and culture. Home distillation of liquor was banned to prevent drunkenness and indebtedness, forgetting that wine was used in ritual and social functions. At the same time, licensed vendors of wine were allowed, and Sundhis (wine sellers) and Sahukars (moneylenders) were given licences. Drunkenness was not prevented but the tribals took to borrowing to pay for wine. Indebtedness increased and the tribal land was alienated and went to the Sundhis and Sahukars and other non-tribals. Shifting cultivation was banned and at the same time, free access to protected forests was prohibited. This was not only an encroachment on the tribals' traditional rights but also a denial of their livelihood security, since during the scarcity months they depended on forests for fruits, roots, and other forest produce. After 1861, the tribal areas were opened up through road construction, which facilitated the use of free tribal labour (Bethi) by the administration. Through these roads came contractors, traders, moneylenders and others from the plains. These outsiders, with no cultural or traditional links with tribals (the Bisoyis, Patras and Paikas or soldiers of former Rajas), became instruments of exploitation. The new waves of migration to tribal areas, by their very nature, brought bitterness and conflicts (Majumdar 1997).

The State has unfortunately witnessed communal violence in recent past, first during the Christmas last year and again, only a few days ago, during Janmastmi celebrations this year. But it should not be viewed only as a communal problem. This is an issue involving eth conversion, socio-economic status and the right over land a reservation in nicety, religious jobs. The Panas who belong to the Scheduled castes claim Scheduled Tribe status on the basis that they also speak Kui language. Those Panas (Scheduled Caste), who have managed to obtain ST certificates, get the benefits of land records and reservation even after conversion, at the cost of tribals. This hurts the Kandhas, who belong to the Scheduled Tribe. The Panas are economically a little better off"[1].

The New Social Movement (NSM) in Odisha (Pattanaik, 2013: 53-78) that is Resistance movements by landless, peasants, fishermen, tribals, and displaced people against the system (government) and Multi National Companies (MNCs) has grown up rapidly. The movement has radicalised its activity against the forces that threaten sustainable use of land, water, forest and their unequal distribution, exploitative

power relations behind this, centralisation of decision- making and disempowerment of communities caused by the related development process (ibid.). The wrong and faulty Rehabilitation and Resettlement policy of the government has fuelled the movement. The people's movements are also against the violation of human rights, civil, political and natural rights and demand systemic equality and justice within the larger framework of development (ibid.). For example the resistance movement against the Hirakud hydel project at Bural, Sambalpur,in 1960s and the similar resistance movement against the Rengali Hydel Project in the 1970, the well-known Baliapal protest moment during 1985-90 against the missile-testing range, the save Gandhamardan Movement in the early 1980 in the Bargerh district against the mining of Gandhamardan hills by the Bharat Aluminium Company (BALCO), the Gopalpur protest movement against export based Tata steel during 1995-96, the Chilika Banchao Andolan against the Integrated Shrimp Farming Project (ISFP), of Tata Group and Govt. Of Odisha in early 1990s and the tribal resistance movement at Lower Suktel dam at Bolangir in 2005, the resistance against Korean steel company POSCO in jagatsignpur since 2002 are some of the micro-movements (typically resistance movements) that had shaken up the socio-political live of Odisha the south eastern state of India (ibid.). The Hirakud dam submerged 325 villages (291 villages of Odisha and 34 villages of Madhya Pradesh) covering 183,000 acres of land out of which 123,000 acres of land were cultivable and about 26,501 families (approximately 100,000 people) displace (Nayak, 2013: 408-9).

CONCLUSION

Generally Odisha is a peace loving state. Besides of some little violence it is almost a peaceful state. But gradually right from last decades of 20th century Odisha became a hot bed of conflict. Violence between Hindu-Muslim, Hindu-Christian became a regular feature. Kandhamal communal violence of 2008 made it conflict prone state. Other conflicts relate with development projects such as the Gopalpur protest movement against export based Tata steel during 1995-96, Kalinganagar tragedy, POSCO unrest, uprise in Niyamagiri against Buxite mining by Dongaria Kondh, the tribal resistance movement at Lower Suktel dam at Bolangir etc drew attention of researchers and intellectuals.

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