

A B S T R A C T

**CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN A MULTICULTURAL
SOCIETY: A STUDY OF TERAI AND DOOARS REGION IN
WEST BENGAL**

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“Multiculturalism is used to refer to a desired end–state, as a way of referring to a society in which different cultures are respected and the reproduction of culturally defined group is protected and social diversity celebrated” (Joseph: 2002, 159). In present democratic societies, numerous identities are trying to acquire their social position following the path of multicultural values. Hence, in the postmodern world where each and every community is vocal to preserve their self-identity, the issue of managing diversity is catching everyone’s consciousness.

In the post-colonial situation, the newly formed states have tried to consolidate and unite by following some homogenised rights and policies. This homogenization further led to uneven development and cultural unrest among the communities in the South Asian countries. That further resulted in social conflicts, ethnic violence, secessionist movements and civil war. The recent history of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh reveals the real picture. Continuous inter-country mobility and migration flow further turned the ethnic equation more complex. Internal migration on the other hand in the south Asian countries and particularly in Indian societies has challenged the social balance.

This diverse social composition has a dark side as well. The multiple identities in the existing society also led to multiple linguistic, religious and ethnic conflicts within the society. In such diverse societies, it is important to manage conflicts among these communities and groups and make a sense of unity among the individuals, groups and communities for peaceful coexistence. The key purpose of this dissertation is to highlight the perspective of conflict management in Indian society.

The first chapter of my dissertation is the compilation of a background study of my research work along with a detailed discussion of applied research methodologies. This chapter deals with various works of literature based on Multicultural discourse, Conflict Management and Tribal Politics to identify the research gap, the objective of this study, also research questions and the organisation of the chapters.

Multiculturalism as a value and ideology has been praised throughout the world. Multiculturalism basically reflects a positive embodiment of individual and group identity, as well as communal diversity, usually arising from racial, ethnic, and linguistic identity differences. Hence, in many cases existence of a multicultural social system has promoted an atmosphere where multiculturalism can raise conflicts within a society as well as can play a big role in conflict situations. My second chapter entails a thorough discussion on the perspective of multiculturalism as a theory and the vision of multiculturalism in the Indian context. In the present post-modern world order when micro identities are assuring and stabilising their identities, the value of multiculturalism comes alongside. Various scholars have highlighted the importance of multiculturalism and tried to conceptualise the same. Will Kymlicka, Charles Taylor, Bhikhu Parekh, Chandran Kukathas, and Iris Marion Young, have tried to establish a multicultural standpoint on the international ground. An in-depth analysis of all the thoughts and perspectives reveals that multiculturalism is closely associated with some other vital values of present-day societies like diversity, Pluralism, nationalism, and minority rights in a democratic structure in the globalised order. India is also not an exception to that situation.

India's linguistic, religious, ethnic, and cultural diversities are proverbial. So, political mobilisations and violent conflicts and antagonisms have arisen from time to time among persons and groups. However, it is important to note that neither political mobilization nor ethnic and cultural antagonisms flow naturally out of India's diversities. Being aware of the diverse social structure of India, the constitution since the beginning has tried to ensure individual and group identities to accommodate distinct communities in a federal structure.

Any theory resulting in practice is always under question, and so is the concept of unity. In a diverse multi-ethnic, multi-culture, multi-religious and multi-lingual social system where everything is plural and heterogeneous, the interests of the existing communities are going to be diverse. This difference in identities and interests further results in a clash of identity and interest resulting in serious conflicts within the society sometimes appears violent in nature. Such conflicts are equipped with potentialities to destabilise the social system from a broader perspective. Hence, managing conflicts become crucial over here. My third chapter deals with the various theoretical perspectives of social conflict and conflict management in general as well as in the Indian scenario. In the course of social science, numerous eminent scholars have tried to understand the conflict from different approaches, Karl Marx, Max Weber, Ralf Dahrendorf, Georg Simmel, and Lewis A. Coser, are prominent among them. A

detailed discussion of these approaches reveals that conflict contains actions, processes, goals, power relations and conflict interactions, moulded by cultural standards and scarce resources. Conflicts are common in contemporary societies and India is no exception. India since independence has witnessed a number of religious, linguistic as well as ethnic conflicts. Management of these conflicts has raised the tension among social scientists, academicians, as well as political and governmental actors. To deal with the conflicts different mechanisms have been developed which consist of conflict management, conflict resolution and conflict transformation. Governmental institutions also play a key role in this process of conflict management. In the case of India as well the institutional arrangements have played a crucial role in managing the conflicts raised on religious, linguistic and ethnic lines.

Since independence, the process of nation-building encourages the different communities to live with dignity and distinct identity to grow up an idea of unity and integrity among the citizens. However, agitations, movements and conflicts resulting in social unrest have emerged from time to time in different parts of the country. The fourth chapter of my thesis has initiated to analyse of the *adivasi* movement in the Terai and Dooars region of West Bengal, which further resulted in an intergroup conflict in the region. The Terai and Dooars region of North Bengal has witnessed several social conflicts arising out of religious, linguistic and ethnic tensions. In recent times there is an upsurge in *adivasi* community in the region. With a backdrop of the history of migration and a sense of statelessness, mobilised under the leadership of Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Vikash Parishad (ABAVP), they are demanding an autonomous body in the region to secure their identity as well as to intensify the development process in general and socio-economic and cultural development in particular. In this process, they have indulged in a conflict with Gorkha/Nepali community from the hills, who have demanded a separate state named 'Gorkhaland'. The conflict has further taken a crucial turn with the demand for the inclusion of areas from Terai and Dooars within the domain of the proposed territorial map of Gorkhaland and later within the administrative jurisdiction of 'Gorkhaland Territorial Administration'.

The conflict between Gorkhas and *Adivasis* in the region created a social crisis in the region. In such a situation managing the existing conflict becomes important to the government. The fifth chapter of my thesis has tried to look at the aspect of state response towards the management of *adivasi* conflict in the region. The relevant question here is how far the existing governmental institutions and structures are equipped to deal with such conflicts. On the one hand, prevailing constitutional arrangements are there which consist of various

provisions to safeguard the interests of the *adivasi* community; hence constitutional arrangements have a big role to play. On the other hand, in the process of conflict management central, state and local government institutions can play a vital part. Thus, the role of governmental institutions to deal with *adivasi* conflict has been analysed in this context. Thus, the aim of the thesis revolves around the role of governmental institutions in managing *adivasi* conflict in the Terai and Dooars region in West Bengal.