

## ALTERNATIVE EFFORTS AT CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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### Abstract

*Conflict management and Conflict Resolution have become one of the primary issues pervading world politics after the end of the World War II and especially after the end of the Cold War. Ethnicities have been expressing themselves freely under the newly established democratic systems. After the larger objective of the Nation State and its independence was fulfilled, the internal domestic compulsions led to the outbreak of internal rivalries that fractured communities. Although there are several methods used to bring communities together through the conflict management process like peacekeeping and peacemaking, the peace-building process is what leads us to a long-term solution to the conflict. This paper seeks to understand the significance of the peace-building process and the several alternative efforts made to bring this to fruition. All the efforts can be largely discussed under the paradigm of Restorative Justice.*

**Keywords:** *Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution, Reconciliation, Restorative Justice, Peace*



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## Introduction

One of the most important issues grappling World Politics is the issue of Conflict Resolution. Conflict Management and Conflict Resolution have both theoretical and practical significance. Attempts to evolve a uniform consensus definition with regard to conflict resolution are being made. However, like all the concepts in social sciences, it is very difficult to arrive at a common definition. An overall and broad understanding can be identified.

Conflict Management refers to putting an end to the violence between communities. When a wall is erected between the warring factions so that they do not come face to face with each other it can be said that the conflict is managed. The process of Conflict Resolution begins after the conflict is managed. Once the conflict is managed then the attempt can be

made to build bridges between communities so that they can meet each other with open minds. This attempt at building bridges and discarding hostilities and attitudes of hatred leading to a conducive environment can be termed as Conflict Resolution.

However, one of the challenges faced in this process is that of the politics of identity. It can be witnessed especially after the end of the World War II. It is not just a phenomenon observed in specific regions but has pervaded the entire world. Several dark spots in terms of conflicts can be seen all over the globe. Ethnicities have emerged strongly in the Cold War era and have become stronger in the Post Cold War period. The belief that people can be gathered around their social identities gained ground (Chandra, 1993, 148).

The identities of the 'self' and the 'other' became a factor of political and social mobilization. The formation of myths and stereotypes became a natural process of identification of groups. The identity markers thus gained significance in either building or destroying communities. Communities were viewed more in a negative light than a positive one. Glorification of one's values and traditions was one part of the strategy, the other being to demean and devalue the other community. This fostered a sense of inclusiveness or otherwise between communities.

In this process of realizing the 'self', the in group values became a yardstick to judge the out groups (Hagendoorn, 1993, 51). The 'self' was always viewed in a favorable light as compared to the 'other'. The negative attributes of the 'self' were due to external factors and the positive attributes were internally genetically designed. This was exactly the reverse for the 'other' (Hagendoorn, 1993, 51). The portrayal of the 'self' against the other with the 'self' being more superior to the other formed the premise for conflict building. In this environment, therefore, the parallel processes of Conflict Resolution gained momentum

### **Process of Conflict Resolution**

At the level of the process, Conflict Resolution has a more serious problem to tackle. The Conflict Resolution process had to tackle the growing fear and suspicion of the self vis a vis the other. The term Conflict Resolution can be defined as the analysis of the underlying sources of conflict situations (Burton, 1987, 18). The issue that the resolutionists had to tackle was that of lack of security, identity and participation. The problem is with regard to the dissimilation of the attitudes of hatred and suspicion and behavior of hostility between communities. If the Conflict Management process could be tackled at a physical /military level, the Conflict Resolution process has to be tackled at an emotional and psychological level. This makes the problem graver to tackle.

For a resolution of the problem, it is important to tackle this problem at the mass level, at the level of the creation of identities. It is a problem that has developed over generations and therefore no short-term solutions are possible. This is a lengthy process. A long-term strategy is required. It is important that the socio-economic causes of the conflict are eradicated. This paper aims to discuss some international efforts that are being undertaken to tackle the problem of resolution. They rest on the premise that the psyche needs to change. Certain alternative techniques hereto untapped need to be explored. The idea of Restorative Justice is significant in this regard.

### **Restorative Justice**

Like all other concepts in social science the idea of Restorative Justice also does not have a uniform definition. Different scholars look at Restorative Justice in different ways depending upon the circumstances and the cultural specificities. Restorative Justice can be regarded as a form of justice in which all the stakeholders in the conflict decide to collectively resolve the conflict so as to deal with its future implications. (Marshal, 1999, 5). The process is not just about nursing the victims in the conflict but also allowing the offenders to vent their emotions of guilt and regret and thus rehabilitate them. It is a comprehensive process that seeks to remove the feelings of hatred, suspicion and fear and restore some semblance of balance and rationality. It involves not just the victims and offenders but also the society at large and the policy makers. (Ness and Strong, 2002)

The traditional way of looking at justice is to right the wrong. The whole premise is built on the notion that the wrong has to be punished and only then can the right be restored and justice is done. This is a very limited way of looking at the process of justice. Justice is much more than this. It is multi-dimensional and this has to be understood while imparting it as a form of rectification.

Restorative Justice believes that the victim and the offender both have to be considered while imparting justice. Justice is not just about Conflict Management but it is about Conflict Resolution which is possible only if the feeling of ill will and hatred are addressed and nullified.

In this form of justice, parties explore the pain and try to overcome it. They seek to build trust and live cooperatively with each other. The chief instrument used to bring about restorative justice is reconciliation. Reconciliation has assumed significance in the field of conflict resolution. It seeks to arrive at a more stable peace.

Temporary peace can be achieved between parties by putting an end to the fighting. What reconciliation aims to achieve is a stable peace. It seeks to put an end to the conflict itself. Mere separation of the parties to the conflict is not enough. It is also necessary that the core issues to the conflict are resolved. Only this will ensure lasting peace.

Reconciliation is a technique that is used to end the conflict by hitting at the issues that are involved in the conflict, by tackling the real issues. The mere physical separation of parties is not enough. It is also necessary that the psychological discontent that exists is removed. It is a process whereby societies learn to live together in post-conflict situation. (Kelman, 2010, 3)

Reconciliation is all about individuals. It cannot be forced upon the people. The individual has to decide for himself whether he wants to reconcile or not. Just as the individual has to decide whether he wants to forgive the aggressor also has to decide whether he wants to admit to his guilt. It is therefore a bottom-up process that cannot be imposed by the state. Governments, however, can do a lot. It can promote reconciliation and provide opportunities to people to come to terms with the past.

However, this cannot take place through third-party intervention. The locals have to be involved in the process. Non-Government Organizations can play a substantial role in the peace building process. Reconciliation is not an easy task. Simplistically described it means making people talk to each other but this is not an easy task. It involves an emotional upheaval. It relieves both parties of the guilt and the pain that they have carried with them for years. Restorative Justice seeks to promote the dignity of the victims and the offenders and thus seeks to reestablish humanity on a wider and broader scale.

### **Efforts at Conflict Resolution**

Several efforts at reconciliation at the international level are being made for a complete resolution of the conflict. The principle behind these efforts can be universal however, these efforts have to be viewed from a localized point of view. Local conflicts require local solutions similarly the cultural sensitivities and the contexts have to be considered for it to gain weight among the conflicting parties.

These techniques are termed as alternatives since they go beyond the traditional method of assuming that if a conflict is managed, it is also automatically resolved. The conflict has ended. It looks beyond and seeks to repair and nurse fractured communities not just from a singular/one-sided point of view but from a multidimensional side which is

acceptable and incorporates the viewpoints of both conflicting parties. It provides a forum for conflicting parties to come to peace with each other through a dialogue.

### **Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

One such effort at the international level is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This can be seen as a manifestation of Restorative Justice. It believes in the principle of transforming conflicts through face to face encounters and thus repairing the damage caused through the years. It provides a forum for the two parties to come together and explore their mutual fear and anger and build bridges of trust between them. This started in South Africa around 1995.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa worked against the backdrop of the apartheid regime and the atrocities that it had perpetrated. Its emphasis was on not just listening to the testimonies of the victims of apartheid and prosecuting the offenders but also on gathering evidence and information from the victims and the offenders so that true and long term justice can be restored. Although the testimonies were based on a one on one encounter and dialogue between the stakeholders it also sought to restore the society. The annihilation of individual suffering and feelings of exploitation to establish a well ordained society was the ultimate goal of the truth and reconciliation commission. Therefore even if the treatment was individualistic, and case by case, the objective was societal.

The commission that was established in 1995, worked via 17 commissioners who were assigned the task of gathering information about human right violation that had taken place. (Tutu, 2019). A comprehensive account in the form of a report was to be prepared by them along with all the evidences of their findings. The Human Rights violation committee along with the rehabilitation committee and the amnesty committee were the three forums through which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission worked. The Human rights violation committee looked into the cases of Human rights violations and the way for repatriation. The rehabilitation committee worked towards a solution to rehabilitate and resettle the victims with dignity and the amnesty committee looked into the matter of providing amnesty to the offenders.

In all of this, however, the main objective of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was the restoration of human dignity of the victims. The primary measure of success of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is its transparency and openness. This creates confidence about the working in the minds of the take holders and also helps in

restoring faith in the system that has had a loss of face. Transparency is the key to the success of restorative justice.

There are 20 other such commissions throughout the world. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa has heard about 22,000 testimonies and they received about 7,000 applications for amnesty. (Tutu, 2019). Considering the success of South Africa East Timor, Yugoslavia, Rwanda have also established their own Truth and Reconciliation Commissions.

### **Community Villages**

Several other experiments at conflict resolution can also be cited. Another experiment at conflict resolution is the Oasis of Peace (in America) or Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam (in Hebrew and Arabic) (oasisofpeace.org). A similar kind of an effort can be witnessed in Northern Ireland called the Corrymeela Community (corrymeela.org). The uniqueness about these efforts at conflict resolution is that they have established an entire village where people of all faiths live together.

The Oasis of Peace is a village which is regarded as a safe haven for the Israeli and Palestinian students who spend time together there. Its main intention is to bring create a feeling of goodwill between the Arabs and the Israelis who wish to shed their stereotypes and want peace. They work on the premise that difference and diversity is a part of life and therefore the true solution to the conflict is not to do away with difference but learn to respect it. They wish to work around the confrontation of identities (Zerger, 2007, 300).

This village is in existence since 1972. It is administered by a steering committee governed by a constitution (Feuerverger, 2001, 16). This experiment brings teachers and students together from both sides of the divide. Transformation can take place only through education. A whole new generation of children are taught about the values of empathy, diversity and so on. Through this they learn to respect each other's traditions and culture. The ground work for conflict resolution is created. This village provides a roadmap for long-lasting peace.

The Corrymeela Community too, works on the principle that 'together is better'. It was mainly established against the backdrop of the conflict in Ireland. It however basically works towards the reconstruction of faith and belief among the survivors of racial hatred, intolerance and oppression. The work of the Corrymeela Community is at a more personal level through change in environment (Davey, 1979, 18). The other point of view can be understood and respect created leading to well-adjusted feelings with regard to each other.

This is the basic ground that they stand on. The founder Ray Davey saw the destruction that was caused by the World War II and decided to build communities in conflict (Davey, 1972, 10). The destruction caused by the conflict in Northern Ireland finally led to the building of the village free from hatred. The village like the Oasis of Peace is mainly based on voluntary work conducted by members who believe in establishing a good world. Corrymeela along with Oasis of Peace completed 50 years of peacemaking very recently in 2015.

### **Building Leadership for Conflict Resolution**

Several other experiments focus on building leadership for conflict resolution. The Search for Common Ground (sfcg.org) and the Seeds of Peace (seedsofpeace.org) are examples of this effort. The Search for Common Ground work along with local people in the regions of conflict. Their main purpose is to build safe lives. They believe that conflict is inevitable since diversity cannot be discarded but the level of violence is not natural. Cooperative solutions should be worked out to resolve conflict. Hence they work together with people in conflict prone regions /areas to so that through shared experiences a certain empathy can be created that works towards peace.

The Seeds of Peace is a leadership development program that creates leaders for bring out a more just and inclusive society. These leaders situated in different parts of the world are the change makers. People who have experienced conflict are trained so that better solutions to end conflict in their regions can be thought about. They believe that there are many paths to peace and so do not recommend a singular solution to all conflict. Solutions also have to be diverse to reflect the diversity of issues and cultural contexts that they have to work on. They are committed to dialogue.

### **Conclusion**

There are several paths to peace. The conflict resolution process concentrates on the peace building rather than the peace making or peace keeping techniques for conflict. Out of the three ways of tackling conflict there is none that can claim to have a permanent solution to the conflict. Each conflict is unique and so the conflict resolution process also has to reflect that uniqueness.

All the techniques cited here work towards the final resolution of the conflict which is based on the feeling of exploitation, ill will, jealousy, suspicion and fear. When cultures bind together and traditions are respected only then can we say that we have moved one step ahead in the conflict resolution process. The Oasis of Peace and Corrymeela Community provide a space for people to come together and live and understand each other. On the other hand the

Seeds of Change program and the Search for common ground work where the conflict is actually a reality. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission are the most widely used techniques to resolve conflict. The success of the entire conflict resolution process depends on the other two methods. The will and determination of the political elite towards resolution and the amount of violence between societies.

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