UNDERSTANDING LOCAL CONFLICTS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: A CRITICAL SECURITY STUDIES PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The role of local conflicts is important to understand sectional and communal differences in post-colonial societies. In spite of the rhetoric of democracy and secularism, state governance has not been successful in restraining instances of communal conflicts and also the incessant rise of jingoism and parochial tendencies within mainstream politics. The absence of a linear progression in the improvement of social relations between people, especially between religious communities is indeed puzzling. This problem has also engulfed the Indian state. These events not only contradict the image of India as a secular democratic state, but also question the legitimacy of conferring such designations as 'responsible' and 'rising' upon the Indian state. These internal conflicts throw light upon inherent deficiencies of the Indian state and raises apprehensions about its international perceptions. Rather than explaining this scenario, it is important to understand the background of such confrontation between communities. From the perspective of Critical Security Studies, it is possible to contextualise conflicts within post-colonial societies and understand their relevance in global society. In this paper, an attempt has been made in transcending the gulf between the local and the global through engaging in episodes of internal violence.

KEY WORDS: *Critical Security Studies, Post-colonialism, India, responsible, global society, local conflict*

INTRODUCTION

Why do local conflicts matter in International Relations? This question is pertinent in the context of growing connexions between different regions and the manner in which security concerns criss-cross one region to another. During the Cold War, with huge emphasis upon bipolarity in international relations and the dominance of Realism in International Relations, the focus was very much upon the 'war-of-nerves' between the Super Powers. However, in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, internal crisis of the states has received some attention. This along with the 'deepening' and 'broadening' of security matters caused a shift on the referent point of security from the state to the people, as is envisaged by Critical Security Studies (Booth 2007). Based on the ideals of emancipation and inclusion, the CSS argues for security of all citizens, especially the unprivileged sections of the society (Floyd 2008, MacDonald 2008). The biggest contribution of critical theory to security studies lies in the challenge that it poses to the mainstream of security studies wherein the focus is upon the threat specific concerns of the state and highlighted the insecurities that accrue from the anarchical structure of the international system. The 'increasing insecurity' of security studies lies in the expansion of dimensions of security which

has, of recently, transcended the traditional practices which focuses only on state (Smith 1999).

At the same time, there has been an enhancement in the multiplicity of visions on questions of security that are essentially non-western (Acharya and Buzan 2010, Suganami 2011). This has also ensured that the 'hegemonic discipline' of International Relations (Smith 2002) transcends the western boundaries and heeds the voice of the non-western subject in global politics. Although the insider-outsider dichotomy could be problematized (Hollis and Smith 1990), the narrative from within are extremely significant in bringing the silenced voices to the fore. Epp (2002) in his analysis of the contribution of the English School to International Relations theorising, says that it has paid some attention to the concerns of the Third World, given that its history is different from the West.

There are different facets of conflict in a post-colonial state. The local dynamics and manifestations of conflict are indeed unique by themselves. A conflict, that is puzzling given its ceaselessness and magnitude, is that of communal violence in India—a country that proclaims to be a successful democracy. At a time, when India is considered to be a 'rising' regional power (Narlikar 2013, Hurrell

2006), the 'resurgence' of communal forces which cause tension and exclusion at the political and societal level seem to be an anomaly. The political discussion on politics of the Indian state camouflages its significance for the international level. If the barrier between the domestic and the international is transcended, the contradiction would seem stark: the appraisal of the Indian state at the international scene as 'responsible' does not adequately reflect upon the realities within the state, where certain sections of the society suffer from regular discrimination. The local scene, therefore, belies claims made by the Indian state as well as the international community about its responsible behaviour because of the inability of the state to prevent internal conflicts, given that in age of 'global society' the local and the global are interlinked.

By the Indian Constitution, all citizens are equal before law and fundamental rights are given to all the citizens (The Constitution of India, Articles12 to 35). All the more, security is accorded to all citizens to profess and practice religion of their choice (The Constitution of India, Articles 25 to 28). In spite of this, however, communal violence has marred the Indian society. Riots between the majority and minority communities and social exclusion of certain sections of the population demystify the professed secular nature of the Indian state which fails to secure people adequately. Moreover, the societal prejudices speak for the conflict that is undercurrent in the Indian society— its manifestation in terms of violence is only episodic but the fear from the 'other' community is rather entrenched in the Indian society.

In spite of the rhetoric of democracy and secularism, state governance has not been successful in restraining instances of communal conflicts and also the incessant rise of jingoism and parochial tendencies within mainstream politics. The absence of a linear progression in the improvement of social relations between people, especially between religious communities is indeed puzzling. This problem has also engulfed the Indian state. These events not only contradict the image of India as a secular democratic state, but also question the legitimacy of conferring such designations as 'responsible' and 'rising' upon the Indian state. These internal conflicts throw light upon inherent deficiencies of the Indian state and raises apprehensions about its international perceptions. Rather than explaining this scenario, it is important to understand the background of such confrontation between communities. From the perspective of Critical Security Studies, it is possible to contextualise conflicts within post-colonial

societies and understand their relevance in global society. In this paper, an attempt has been made in transcending the gulf between the local and the global through engaging in episodes of internal violence.

Although conflict on religious lines is very common in the South Asian region, in case of India which is 'secular' by the Constitution, such conflicts reveal parochial tendencies which are inconsistent with the ethos of the Indian Constitution. It is for this reason that the 'secular' character of the Indian state stands to test. From the viewpoint of the post-colonial subject, such conflicts perpetually insecures and 'others' certain communities. In this paper, communal conflict that occurs on the Indian scene would be recast according to post-colonial perspective, for the uniqueness of the conflict begs a reconceptualization of the thematic of conflict. For this reason, rather than adhering to a positivist methodology which relies on empirical evidence, there is a need to resort to post-positivism. By design and definition, post-positivism intends to look beyond the established epistemology and challenges the extant practices (Smith 1996). In the paper, the linguistics that revolves around the word 'conflict' would be explicated upon. More importantly, however, the labelling of a state as 'responsible' and 'rising' would be critiqued because this is done irrespective of the contemporary societal scenario. There is also an attempt to question dominant discourse in International Relations which seems to distinguish between the domestic and the international, especially in matters relating to security. Hence a broader theoretical exercise is to attempt a conversation between post-colonialism and critical theory, given that both intend to privilege the unprivileged in global politics.

CONFLICT IN POST-COLONIAL INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

In the field of International Relations, ever since the advent of Cold War, the focus was primarily upon the Super Powers. Structural Realism with its emphasis on the great powers and the anarchic international system, recognises material capabilities, such as the military and economic, as the factors that matter in the international politics and other internal factors are indeed not so significant (Waltz 1979). Also, the states that were inferior in capabilities were not considered influential in international politics. For similar reasons, the newly independent states were pushed to the periphery of the discipline. However, a larger issue was the ignorance of agency in international relations. With social constructivism and critical theory, this gap has been

increasingly filled in wherein the different agencies have been recognised and explicated upon. The analysis that comes from historical sociology is relevant for including opinions that go unaddressed by the mainstream.

At this juncture, the Post-colonial critique on International Relations is of extreme significance wherein it is argued that IR as a discipline does not engage in historicisation (Seth 2011). For this reason, Post-colonial theory insists on historical contextualisation and for the voice of the subaltern. The plausibility of exploring the core of critical theory— emancipation and inclusion— by the Post-colonial lens holds promise towards understanding the significance of agency in post-colonial society. In the context of conflict also, some of them have roots in the historical past and calls for a deeper engagement with the societal dynamics. Local narrativescould bring several phenomena to the fore in international relations, which have hitherto not been recognised in International Relations. To rephrase Spivak (1988), the knowledge that could be acquired by looking into alternative sources of information, can enable the 'subaltern' to speak. In other words, construction and deconstruction becomes vital in identity formation, and, therefore, to questions of post-coloniality.

Post-colonialism is not per se a theory of International Relations. Its roots rather lie in social and political history of the erstwhile colonies. For this reason, certain phenomenon including the theme of conflict, date back to colonial past. As Pandey (2002) suggests, communalism ought not to be studied in isolation from the colonial or postcolonial period. Therefore, history and context form the backbone of post-colonial discourses which argue for an 'insider's' perspective. Although the insider-outsider dichotomy needs to be problematized (Hollis and Smith 1990), it is important to look deep within contemporary societies so that issues and concerns of the global order get adequately expressed. The focus on context specifications to the background renders generalisations inappropriate. What is more important, however, is to locate the voices in International Relations. Post-colonialism has by far been used mostly in history writings. Non-western approaches to the understanding of International Politics have hitherto been a marginal idea. Post-colonialism with its emphasis upon the inside stories seem to be an antidote to the hegemonic discursive practices of the west in the field of International Relations (Smith 2002).

In the study of Post-Colonialism, certain issues have become very relevant in the context of International Relations. For Ashcroft (2000), the issue of the 'sacred' is very 'prevalent' in the 'post-secular age'. Post-secularism implies two things— one, a resurgence of 'religious traditions in modern life' and two, as a critique of secularism which does not necessarily prevent exclusion (Mavelli and Petito 2012). In the case of the post-colonial societies, it is not an overstatement to suggest that the secular ideals acclaimed by the state need not have necessarily been carried out in practice. For Post-Colonial theory, therefore, the idea is to look at the state beyond the label of secularism and analyse conflicts that occur in these places on the basis of their histories. This, in a way, also speaks for the negligence of the western scholarship of the Third World because they rarely reflect upon the social realities of these states. In the case of conflict also, some of these which are unique to these parts of the world, date back to the colonial period and reflect upon the internal incoherence of societal practices. Simultaneously, it could also produce alternative sources of information that constructs knowledge hidden beyond the purview of the readers.

CRITICAL SECURITY STUDIES PERSPECTIVE ON CONFLICT IN POST COLONIAL SOCIETIES

One of the most violent manifestations of communal riots is during the days of the partition of India in 1947. As Pandey (2002) notes, there are several 'victims' of partition: most of them suffered from expulsion, violence, arson and rape. The 'event' of partition, therefore, does not just mark the creation of two sovereign states (Pandey 2002). It is also reflective of the several narratives that are marred in blood and tells the stories of extremes of communal violence. To borrow from Brass (2003), riots in India have become a part and parcel of the modern Indian political scenario. The preceding conditions and scenarios ensured that the tension remained rife and continued unabated and unresolvable. Therefore, the political tension between the two groups remained undercurrent, and the political atmosphere has increasingly nurtured this difference rather than mellowing it down. The communal tensions are unabated in the Indian scene. Moreover, in spite of all the rhetoric of a 'rising' or 'responsible' power, there has hardly been any linear progression in the inter-community relations. In fact, the tensions have manifest in several ways: communal carnages, unprovoked reactions or unnecessary targeting of select groups of people which has rendered secularism in India a façade.

In the disciplinary practices of International Relations, 'conflict' has mostly been viewed as confrontation between two or more states. In Realism, material capabilities are the decisive factors of a state's

position in the international system and in order to enhance it state's gets involved in competition with other states. Therefore, material resources are the most significant factors in the anarchic international system (Waltz 1979). For this reason, realists do not focus upon internal conflicts as they seem to be a part of the domestic and not the international. This strict binary has led scholars of International Relations to neglect the 'domestic'. Social Constructivism for that matter intends to look at the level of the ideational also and argue for the influence of institutions and ideologies on international politics. It does not, however, do away with the idea of an ungoverned international system; it analyses the role of ideologies in international relations. With the 'deepening' and 'broadening' of security studies, some attention has been given to people who suffer from conflicts (Booth 2007). This has enabled analysis to take cognisance of human agency and argue how conflicts within intra-state groups become significant in global society. From a more sociological perspective, conflict between groups can 'prevent accommodation and habitual relations' because of the lack of acceptance of one for the other (Coser 1957). Conflict leads to displacement and disharmony. However, conflict may not necessarily mean the use of physical violence but it also implies regular clash of interests. For this reason, conflict could also have a trajectory that could be historically contextualised. It is important to engage in a thicker reading of conflict which gives a sense of the manner in which it is manifest in the post-colonial societies wherein the communalism has become a malady for the Indian state. Not only has it marred the socialisation processes between communities, it has injected a repulsive behaviour on part of one community towards the other. Therefore, the voice of the subaltern becomes the dominant one thus suppressing the extant discourses which have hitherto shaped knowledge about conflict in international relations.

Critical Security Studies is a deviation from the threat specific concerns of the state to the recognition of insecurity amongst citizens. Moreover, Critical Security Studies focuses on the manner in which discursive practices shape and are shaped by concerns of the level of the state. For critical security studies the focus lies upon the 'socially constructed nature of security' (Browning and McDonald 2013). Hence, the 'role of representations' is emphasised upon in this strand (Browning and McDonald 2013). Also, security measures undertaken by the state by design and definition excludes or insecures certain sections of citizenry (Bigo 2002). To this extent, it could be argued that the state and the society in common parlance overlap because the understanding of a norm is conceived and preached on the basis of what the influential sections of the state perceive of it (Bigo 2002). In India, the notion of security, for instance, as a fear from particular groups of people who could be detrimental to the security of the state is reinforced. Over here, it must be mentioned that targeting a specific section is not just prevalent in India: this tendency is visible across spectrum including in other neo-liberal states. It initiates the process of 'othering' and culminates into exclusion of communities. The tragedy lies in the manner in which such exclusion is internalised in the society. This renders communalism inherent in India because the exclusionary practices become the norm.

The contribution that Post-colonial theory via critical frames of analysis could make towards the understanding of conflicts lies in the primacy that it accords to the suffering of the suppressed individual, who is invariably less privileged than others. The understanding of emancipation as it comes from the Welsh School is the availability of equal opportunities and the development of skills of individuals (Booth 2007). It is this that would provide security to individuals and communities. In case of India, only when all the communities get to realise their full potential, the real security concern could get adequately addressed. The inclusion of minorities in social and economic front, for example, would bring them at par with the majority community, thereby leading to progress and emancipation. In the Indian context, both physical and structural violence is eminent. 'Post-colonialism' is a 'theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath' (Gandhi 1998). In a nutshell, the vantage point of the post-colonial subject is comparable to the predicament of marginalised groups across the world: the perception of security and fear from the 'other' leads to turmoil and exclusion.

While analysing the question of security and conflict, the focus lies on the questions of territoriality of the state and security of its boundaries. This dominant discourse substantively obscures the threat that lies to segments of population and the manner in which state security takes precedence over security of others. Imminent in this is the prerogative of the state in identifying its enemies, thus facilitating the targeting of particular communities. In the understanding of Critical Security theorists, the state brings forth the perspective that is held by the dominant sections of the population (Bigo 2002). The exclusion is at some level subtle, while at the other magnanimous. The differences at the social level become very deterministic and detrimental for amicable relations within societies.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, in this paper an appeal has been made in favour of revisiting the very notion of conflict and arguing for a more broad-based understanding of it. In India, the tragedy of conflict lies in the disproportionate emphasis that is given to the threat posed by the neighbouring states and non-state actors. This is not to suggest that the these are vague concerns; over here, the need to look into societal violence supported by the statecraft is highlighted and the need to reconceptualise conflict flows from this very concern. The creation of binaries between us and them invariably induces a feeling of insecurity from the 'other' and malign the social structure. For a country like India this is detrimental to the project of progress and emancipation, two key concerns of the Critical School. Therefore, by annulling the demarcation between the 'inside' and the 'outside', theorisations on conflict has to be seen in context of the region, its unique history and repercussions for contemporary society.

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