
State of Conflict Resolution & Peace Studies in India

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“Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies (CRPS)” has emerged as one of the newer disciplines in

social sciences. As it develops its core body of knowledge and distinct approaches, it basically seeks to address and examine both ‘Peace’ and ‘Conflict’ using multivariate interdisciplinary methodologies borrowing heavily from the other established disciplines of social and even natural sciences.

Conflict, for instance, is sought to be viewed not just as a negative indicator of ill-health of a given society but also as a positive force that can be channelized constructively, almost creatively, to become a locomotive for human progress. As their unique first step, the CRPS approaches seek to deflect ‘Conflict’ from being something ‘between’ the parties to a new status of being a challenge ‘for’ these parties that are

involved in a given conflict. This shift provides these involved parties with common stakes to work for eliminating or mitigating the negative impact of their conflict.

Similarly, Peace is being defined not as mere ‘absence of violence’ and scholars like Marry Parker Follett and Takeshi Ishida have worked on multiplicity of connotations, through various words describing ‘Peace’ in various communities. Prof Johan Galtung has singularly done extensive seminal work from early 1960s to combine security with development and justice, which are defined as conditions of positive peace. Development and justice now remain at the Centre of all CRPS discourses.

Having developed a substantive body of theoretical work from interdisciplinary perspectives to their credit, experts of CRPS have been staking claims as representing an

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independent discipline in the field of social sciences. Nevertheless, even if their claims continues to be questioned, CRPS continues to be taught as subset of other disciplines like Psychology, Sociology, Political Science, History, International Relations and so on. Also, its umbilical-cord with other Social Science disciplines remains vital and this also needs to be underlined.

Indeed, there are only fewer places where CRPS is treated as a separate department and discipline though recent years have witnessed a rapid rise in such recognition and initiatives. It remains common place since all conflicts and peace always germinate in the 'minds' of men and women, it is in their minds that these need to be resolved. As a result, people have sought to examine, avoid, confront, manage, regulate, transform, prevent, and resolve conflicts from social and psychological perspectives. More specifically, one major part of academic works on CRPS remains focused on the study of the generation of 'irrational' perceptions that trigger and sustain all conflicts and how can these be controlled, if not eliminated, altogether.

More specifically, 'Conflict' has been defined as 'incompatibility'

between actors/parties based on their perceptions/interactions about issues of interests, values, beliefs, emotions. Way back in 1968, in an article titled "Some Conceptual Difficulties in the theory of social conflict", published in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, C F Fink (Vol.12, No.4, at p. 456) had defined conflict as "one form of antagonistic psychological relation". Later, a whole school of socio-psychological analysis of Conflict was to further expand this thesis.

Scholars like Kurt Lewin, Morton Deutsch, Leon Festinger, Bluma Zeigarnik, Harold Dwight Lasswell were to make pioneering contributions to CRPS from this perspective. Similarly, scholars from International Relations, Political Science, History, Sociology, have also contributed to the evolution of CRPS as a stand-alone discipline. While post-World War II period of 1950s and 1960s can be described as the first major phase of its historical evolution, the CRPS has also witnessed an upsurge during the last two decades of post-Cold War years. It is in this new context that CRPS has rapidly evolved and expanded in India. And, it is this recent mushrooming CRPS initiatives in India that make this subject worth examining.

II

To begin with, CRPS had, for long, remained confined to studies of the Gandhian thought and non-violence strategies, with rare and minimal examination of rest of India's cultural and religious heritage and other social reform movements. Late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed serious work being done by journals like *Journal of Gandhian Studies* (Allahabad University) *Gandhi Marg* (Gandhi Peace Foundation, Delhi), and so on. These encouraged several book publications on Gandhian thought as a potent approach to peace and conflict resolution. Traditionally, over three dozen universities have had started various initiatives in Gandhian Studies, followed by several Nehru Centres which also partially worked on issues of international peace and more recently a few Rajiv Gandhi Chairs on Disarmament have come up in various places in India. All of these have generally emphasized on the conventional wisdom of 'non-violence' and professed peace from high-moral platform in social life.

While in the recent past new institutions of CRPS have been mushrooming, these have largely remained hostage to the aforesaid 'conventional' wisdom. They have

also remained largely individual enterprises that lack institutionalization. The University Grants Commission (UGC) of India has for sure encouraged universities to undertake newer initiatives in CRPS, yet there has been no effort to integrate or coordinate the activities undertaken under these separate initiatives. They have neither tried to pool their precious little resources or to even share their methods and models. Secondly, most of the CRPS experts (mostly working part-time for CRPS and limited in number), continue to approach issues of CRPS from the perspectives of their original Social Science disciplines, segregating rather than integrating their work. This exclusive approach is often described as developing one's own niche. Their debates also remain guided by their physical location, memberships, and immediate requirements or even by their funding agencies.

Moreover, most of the initiatives to mainstream CRPS as a fresh discipline in India remain focused on South Asian conflicts without comparative study or analysis of similar case studies elsewhere, leave alone applying newer models, methods and techniques developed elsewhere for the CRPS discourses in Social Sciences. In addition, given

our cultural preferences for bonhomie over professionalism, most of the Indian discourses in CRPS remain part of informal and personal networks of people which often have less to do with their expertise than their personal proximity to people managing such networks. There have been few fresh PhDs produced in CRPS from Banaras Hindu University and Jawaharlal Nehru University and these are beginning to show a more focused approach from the perspective of CRPS discipline. However, the slow pace of institutionalization and capacity-building remains still visible in their sporadic conferences of CRPS. Prima facie, therefore, the current scenario of CRPS in India can be at best described as the first stage of evolution of CRPS discipline in India. This is not to deny that some serious initiatives, though nascent, have been taken and these seem to hold some promise.

III

In this context, it is useful to add that some serious efforts at institutionalizing CRPS, like the one by Jamia Milia Islamia, has had a visible impact. The evolution of the Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution (NMCPCR) at Jamia had begun from 2003 and it

was formally launched in 2004. Today it contributes amply in fields of research, education, capacity-building and documentation in CRPS. Similarly, the Lady Sriram College in Delhi has been another institution imparting teaching of a Post-Graduate Diploma in "Conflict Transformation and Peace Building". It is also planning to start teaching of a Master's program in CRPS. Similarly, in Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh), the Banaras Hindu University had set up its Malviya Centre for Peace Research way back in 1997. This has been running a Post-Graduate Diploma in "Conflict Management and Development" and they also have plans of launching an MA programme in CRPS. BHU has had close cooperation with students of Wellesley College and also with Ohio State University as also with United Nations mandated University of Peace (Costa Rica). University of Madras has a UGC sponsored Mahatma Gandhi Chair for Peace Studies and it also has a Peace Studies Group since late 1990s.

School of International Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi), had introduced, in July 2005, two Masters' courses that focus on CRPS from an International relations perspective of 'theories and concepts' in the evolution of CRPS

discipline as well as various 'Case Studies' from around the world where perspectives remains strongly influenced by traditional strategic studies. These two aforementioned courses, namely (a) Introduction to Peace and Conflict Resolution, and (b) Case Studies, have been popular courses since their inception. Besides, the School has also been traditionally teaching several courses like (a) Peace and War in Nuclear Age, (b) Strategies of War and Peace, or (c) Laws of War and Peace and so on. All of these have had bearing on debates on CRPS. Individual faculty members of JNU have also made substantial contributions in the evolution of feminist and pacifist perspectives on Conflict and Security which remain critical part of CRPS. But, JNU's school of International Studies also had a programme on Gandhian Studies which has since become dysfunctional.

Hamdard University in New Delhi, in collaboration with the AMAN Trust, had started a "Peace and Conflict Studies" Course during September-October 2004. Not much is known of their current status. Aman is an NGO that was set up in 2001 to render humanitarian assistance and training to vulnerable sections of Indian society. Similarly, women studies and strategic studies experts

in most universities have done work on themes that remain integral to CRPS. But, beyond these four universities in New Delhi, there are several other universities that have initiated and expanded their work on CRPS themes. Several of these new initiatives at universities have been lately promoted by the University Grants Commission (as special Centres/programmes) which has given recognition to research and teaching in CRPS enhancing its potential to become an independent discipline in Social Sciences.

IV

Calcutta University, for instance, had launched its Peace Studies Group of their Department of History that was established in 1995 with a financial grant from the Ford Foundation. It has since evolved as a nodal agency in eastern India for coordinating policy analysis and research, teaching, formulating alternative strategies for Peace Studies and influencing opinion on issues relating to regional peace, sub-regional cooperation and traditional and non-traditional security issues. Drawing upon the continuing financial support of the Ford Foundation and the University Grants Commission's Special Assistance Programme, the Peace

Studies Group now focuses on the following areas: Research, Teaching, Publication, Public Awareness Exercise, Creation of a state of the art Library and Database in Eastern India for Peace Studies.

Pondicherry University (PU) also had a School of International Studies which has since been merged with Department of Political Science. This school teaches several courses concerning peace and conflict, especially from South Asian perspective. PU has also been running a special CRPS teaching programme since 2006. In collaboration with the Oslo University College, Pondicherry University offers, in both its Autumn and Spring semesters, an interdisciplinary teaching in the nature of a Ten-week Workshop (30 two-hour lectures) on "Peace and Conflict Studies".

Jammu University's Gandhian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies was set up in April 2004. It has been teaching courses like (a) Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict Resolution, (b) Fundamentals of Conflict Resolution and Diplomacy, (c) Theories and Methods of Conflict Resolution, (d) Gandhian Methods of Conflict Resolution (e) Indigenisation of Conflict Resolution and so on. It also

expects its Post Graduate Diploma Students to write a Dissertation on Conflict Resolution. Some such work is also done by their Centre for Regional and Strategic Studies.

Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam (Kerala) has a School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies that was set up in 1984. This also has teaching courses on Peace and Conflict Resolution as also has a record of intervening into local conflict situations. Then there have been some more recent initiatives.

V

Amongst some of the more recent academic initiatives in CRPS, the Islamic University of Science and Technology at Avantipora (Jammu & Kashmir), had created in April 2008, a Centre for International Peace and Conflict Studies (CIPACS). Kashmir remains an active "field" within the context of CRPS and it seeks to fulfill the deficit of peace scholars in the region. Scholars trained here are expected to go on to work in different spheres of the civil society, like media, governmental/international/non-governmental organisations, human rights groups as well as academia. CIPACS already offers an M.A. in International Peace and Conflict Studies, which is a two-year

degree program. At present, CIPACS has begun training their first batch of students, a total of nine that was selected in June 2008. The selected group of students, which includes mid-career professionals, comes from quite varied academic/professional backgrounds. Amongst others this Centre has been particularly successful in inviting Visiting Faculty and has developed a close cooperation with Costa Rica based University of Peace.

The Sikkim University, is another newly set up institution which has taken the lead in setting up a formal and full Department of Peace and Conflict Studies and Management. The Department began functioning in July 2008 and has already begun teaching its first batch of students. In their own outline, the chief focus of the department is to educate and equip graduate students with the aptitude and concepts of Peace Research, Conflicts and Peaceful Conflict Resolution. Its expressed aim remains to widen the pool of personnel who are equipped to apply theoretical tools and knowledge in dealing with real conflicts in the region as well as its immediate neighbourhood and to encourage them to contribute further in training and literature towards resolving conflicts through Peace Education

and Peace Research.

One of the primary strengths of the Department lies in its physical location, in the so-called 'periphery' of India, a peaceful but forgotten region but in close vicinity to many conflicts (Gorkhaland, Illegal Immigration, Refugees, Insurgencies and Maoists) straddling the interstate-intrastate divide, serving as a local vantage point. By privileging inter-disciplinary approaches the Department aims to apply education to resolving problems of ethnic minorities and tribal societies. The Department, while currently manned primarily by experts from Political Science and International Relations strives to enrich its teaching content with insights from sociology and psychology and other disciplines. The focus is also on gradually bringing to the fore various indigenous traditions of peace, conflict resolution and management that are prevalent in the cultures and experiences of the region.

VI

Then there are various institutions that continue to hold one-time events, resulting in sporadic, repetitive or unconnected conferences on CRPS on various

occasions. Some of them are also very useful and serious but neither its outcome widely circulated nor any efforts made for any follow-ups. For instance, in January 2004, University of Rajasthan held an excellent international conference on "Peace Education and Contemporary Concerns". Similarly, US have also been sporadically sending their Fulbright Scholars on CRPS to various Indian Centres and institutions of CRPS in India which has creates occasional focus on CRPS. Other than the University Grant Commission facilitated programmes in various Indian universities, several autonomous institutions and NGOs have also been active in research and advocacy in CRPS. One occasionally comes across various think-tanks and civil-society networks as also other sporadic (or seasonal) initiatives in issues of CRPS using various agencies and individual experts but it is harder to evaluate their contributions as many of these remain irregular and therefore less visible in CRPS discourses.

To begin with the think-tanks, the Delhi-based Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) has become one most visible institute dealing with issues of Peace and conflict though its focus has remained quite confined to foreign policy, security

and strategic issues, and nuclear debates in South Asia. As its motto, IPCS seeks to develop an alternative and independent framework for peace and security studies in South Asia. In their own words, the IPCS seeks to do so through regular interactions with leading strategic thinkers, former members of the Indian Administrative Service, the Foreign Service and the Armed Forces, the academic community as well as the media. This reflects their limited and statist perspective that applies but only traditional approaches of IR to issues of CRPS. But IPCS has had an impressive record of publications and has one of the most useful websites.

Another extremely active institution in Delhi, the Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP), is a South Asian research network and training initiative. WISCOMP aims at facilitating the leadership of women in the areas of peace, security and international affairs. Initiated in 1999 by Dr Meenakshi Gopinath, who currently serves as the Honorary Director, WISCOMP positions their work at the confluence of peace-building, conflict transformation and security studies. The intersection of these themes of CRPS with gender concerns provides the focus of its

engagement and is the leitmotif that informs its programs. Put simply, the WISCOMP sees itself as an agency to enhance the role of women as peace-builders, negotiators and as agents for nonviolent social change, which respects the diversity and foregrounds the perspectives of women and the hitherto other marginalized sections. At the same time, it also remains conscious of its responsibility about facilitating theory-building and of encouraging innovative research on holistic paradigms that address the resolution and transformation of intra- and inter-state conflicts. Its fellowship programs since 2002 have particularly been successful in evolving into a strong and extensive network of young peace researchers, and activists across South Asia.

VII

Similarly, Guwahati-based Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development (OKDISCD) in Assam has taken several initiatives for peace studies which remain focused on its critical location i.e. India's turmoil-ridden northeastern region. In 2004, the Ford Foundation had provided them with a grant to create an Endowed Chair 'Professor of Peace Studies.' The Peace Chair started functioning since October 1, 2004 and they have held several

conferences and published research reports under this programme. These include a visits to Agartala on 1 December 2004 and to Diphu and Haflong on 27 December 2004. These visits were an attempt to establish relations with the different sections of the society to facilitate further study of the situation. A discussion on "Peace Education in School Curriculum" was organized on 4 April, 2005. The State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), bureaucrats from state primary and secondary education board, principals from vernacular and English medium schools of Guwahati and faculties from Gauhati University had participated along with the research scholars of the institute. Similarly, a discussion on Identifying the Cause of Identity Conflict in BTAD was organized in Kokrajhar on April 22, 2008.

Guwahati also has another institution, the Centre for Development and Peace Studies (CDPS). This is an independent research Centre, registered in 2004 as a non-profit society with the Registrar of Societies, Government of Assam. Centre comprises a core group that is a mix of senior working journalists, retired Indian civil servants, academics, economists and development experts. The CDPS

aims at carrying out meaningful research and writings in the fields of development and peace, or the lack of it, that characterizes India's Northeast. It also aims at highlighting success stories in peace making, draw up linkages between development and security, and suggest measures to tackle the imbalances. Aside from close interaction with the Government and non-governmental organizations, CDPS aims at working in tandem with the media to reach out to the masses. For this it works at sensitizing journalists on the need to shift their focus from violence to development and peace writings. The Centre also aims at assessing the impact of existing development programmes and policies of the Government towards the northeast, and highlighting gaps, if any, and recommending alternative measures wherever necessary.

Another similar institution is the Hyderabad-based, Centre for Peace Studies. It was launched by the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of India at the Bible College on March 2, 2004. Dalton Reimer, founding co-director and presently senior associate of Fresno Pacific University's Centre for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies. Similarly, the Henry Martyn Institute – International Centre for Research,

Interfaith Relations and Reconciliation – in Hyderabad also does teaching and research and conferences in CRPS issues. It provides special focus on Islamic studies. Similarly, Delhi-based Institute of Conflict Management has done impressive work on issues of CRPS especially with regard to continued violence in India's Northeastern Region.

Another Delhi-based International Centre for Peace Studies (ICPS), aims at promotion of world peace and amity by strengthening values that reinforce respect for human rights, individual freedoms and pluralism and it was created in 1993. It has been publishing a journal, *Journal of Peace Studies*, uninterruptedly since 1993. This journal has come up as a useful platform for researchers working in areas related to peace and conflict studies. Similarly, International Centre for Peace Initiatives, has been publishing a journal titled *Peace Initiatives* since mid 1990s.

The Institute of Gandhian Thought and Peace Studies, in Allahabad was established in 1976. It covers research on Conflict Resolution and Social Change. It also publishes a quarterly called *Journal of Gandhian Studies*.

Many other institutions have also, off and on, shown interest in CRPS. IIT Guwahati, for instance, in

collaboration with the Indian Council of Social Science Research had organized a National Seminar on "Peace in dialogue" in February 2007 covering themes like (a) Peace in Texts and Religious discourses, (b) Peace in history of multiethnic traditions, (c) redefining peace (d) women in Peace, (e) culture of Peace, and (f) Military Society dynamics. Similarly, the National Institute of Technology (NIT) at Warangal (Andhra Pradesh), is organizing a two-day national conference on "Communication and Soft-Skills from Academia and Corporate Perspectives" on their campus during 5-6 January 2009. This conference promises to offer participants an opportunity to reflect on topics related to communication and soft skills from the perspective of teachers and industry executives and present papers on topics of interest to them. Several other civil society networks, non-governmental organizations and think-tanks have also been contributing occasionally to CRPS except that their work has not been recorded for referencing. Similarly, several practitioners have also been contributing but that has does not fall within the ambit of this study.

VIII

Of late, the Government of India have also played a visible role in

promoting CRPS through its policy of using mechanism of confidence building measures with its two immediate neighbours, China and Pakistan. More specifically, in terms of promoting CRPS, starting from Gandhi Smriti Trust in New Delhi, several Centres of Gandhian Studies have been established and promoted by the Government of India both inside India as also abroad. Gandhian thought and Nehruvian thinking of peace and non-alignment has traditionally been the cornerstone of most official efforts in promoting approaches to peace in international relations. Some of it has also reflected in its dealings with domestic policy making and initiatives.

The most recent Government of India initiative was India's sponsorship of the Gandhi-Luthuli Chair of Peace Studies at the College of Humanities, University of Kwazulu-Natal, in South Africa. This is aimed at promoting the teaching of philosophies of Gandhi and Chief Albert Luthuli and to seek to engage on issues of human rights, conflict resolution, as well as history of morality in civil society. This Chair is the result of an MoU that was signed between UNZN and ICCR during September 2007. Such initiatives by Government of India only further confirm India's larger

CRPS orientation and strengthen CRPS in its basic objective of fostering peace and non-violence through tools of education.

From outside India as well, Indian academia has been increasingly engaged by outside CRPS experts and agencies. The UN-mandated University of Peace (Costa Rica), called UPEACE, has been active in recruiting Indian students as well as faculty for training in Peace Studies as also in collaborating with Indian institutions with interest in Peace Studies. Way back in November 2004 and February 2005 it had organised two major conferences in New Delhi. Jawaharlal Nehru University had been its partner in organizing these two conferences while Jamia was also its partner in the second of these two conferences focused respectively on Peace through Education and on Curriculum development.

The UPEACE has a New York-based Program for Asia-Pacific Countries which has been particularly active in promoting curriculum development and network development debate. It has since been developing a network on South Asian institutions working in areas of CRPS and held its recent Curriculum development Conference in Kathmandu (Nepal)

during December 1-5, 2008 which was organised in collaboration with Tribhuvan University. In terms of its versatility, variety and capacity-building, UPEACE presents today the foremost institution in the field of CRPS. Indeed in India, UPEACE has been one source of evolving a network amongst various Indian institutions focusing on CRPS as also in building their linkages with other institutions within South Asia and beyond. This has particularly encouraged Indian CRPS to forge ahead with new initiatives.

IX

To conclude, the current state of CRPS in India presents a case of rapid expansion of new initiatives, many of which largely remain on paper. These are invariably slow in institutionalizing and networking the available pool of scattered resources which have both huge potential but also formidable challenges given a whole variety of deep-rooted and complicated conflicts. Secondly, the discipline of CRPS has not been able to fully fathom and adopt India's traditional approach to 'non-violence' which goes beyond Gandhiji and can provide potent tools in developing of new themes and methods of CRPS. There remains an urgent need for

networking among various Centres and institutions focusing specifically on CRPS and evolve modes of coordination. This would mean taking the critical first step towards institutionalizing CRPS at the national level.

The existing vast pool of Gandhian Studies institutions in India can provide the critical infrastructure, but, as has been underlined above, CRPS must to go beyond Gandhiji to include teachings of other great icons from history – from Buddha, Mahavira to Frontier Gandhi – as also include experiences of contemporary trailblazers like Baba Amte, Mother Teresa, Medha Patekar, Illa Bhatt, Rajendra Singh, to list just a few, as a matter of example. Focus on Gandhian Studies, Nehru and Frontier Gandhi and even on Buddha, Mahavir, Kabir also needs to be revived from newer perspectives and methodologies so as to bridge this traditional knowledge with newer innovative and scientific

approaches. Such amalgamation can be particularly experimented at various teachers' Refreshers and Orientation Courses exposing teaching community and from there influencing researchers and activists in CRPS to the frontiers of current CRPS debates around the world.

In the end, the CRPS also remains largely a field overcast by the exclusivist approach of past as also by present orientations where teaching and research continue to be treated as the turf for professional faculty. For the growth and development of CRPS in coming times, it has to increasingly blend together not only past and present methodologies but also skills and expertise of teachers, officials, consultants, activists and non-governmental entrepreneurs and stakeholders to provide CRPS in India its practical usefulness as also a holistic academic rigour and perspective that it needs, urgently. ■