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Roll No - BAP/17/382

SUBJECT: PEACE AND
CONFLICT BUILDING

Topic

What do you mean by ethnic conflict?
Discuss with the examples.

ETHNIC CONFLICT

The civil rights endowed with the minorities and the existence of social relations across ethnic boundaries have not prevented the occurrence of violence between ethnic groups. It is a conflict between two or more contending ethnic groups.

LANGUAGE CONFLICT

In 1980s tension and conflict arose over the issue of language. The government selected Hindi as the national language to create a national community by joining all the members of the different ethnic communities. This attempt at 'Unity in Diversity' had adverse effect on the Indian population. For example in Tamil Nadu. According to Non-Hindi speakers, the language policy of the government meant an advantage for the Hindi speakers, who are perceived to dominate the economic institutions and have political

authority.

RELIGIOUS CONFLICT

Hindu-Muslim Conflicts in Moradabad, U.P.

The manifest cause behind the rioting of August 1986 was the entry of a pig in a congregation during Juma. Some 50,000 persons were gathered to listen to the qutbah or sermon, when the pig wandered inside violating the muslim sense of cleanliness and defiling the sanctity of the prayer. This incident was followed by looting, arson, and rape by a frenzied mob. This incident throws light on the socio-political structure of the town.

The muslims in this town had been traditional artisans engaged in making brassware vessels. In 1970s some of them have started manufacturing brassware and exporting it to western Asian countries. This has broken the existing monopoly of the immigrant Punjabi businessmen.

These immigrant Hindu Punjabis were originally from Pakistan who came to India after partition. The relative success and prosperity to the Muslim Businessmen disturbed their Hindu counterparts.

Common FEATURES OF ETHNIC CONFLICTS

- Ethnic conflicts are a consequence of organised communal bodies. For the conflict to become a public issue, usually the organised bodies, which are backed by political parties, have to come to the fore. Thus communal bodies become institutionalised.
- Ethnic conflicts indicate that whatever be the manifest cause - language, religion or the latent cause is not rooted in cultural disparity. The tensions generally arise when a minority group feels deprived of an equal position in either the economic or political sphere as compared to the majority group, uses the primary ties to motivate

and activate their ethnic group against the dominant group.

- The allegiance as the basis of group loyalty depends on the principle of mutual interest. For instance, during the 1972 Assam riots, the Bengali Muslims who share cultural similarities with Bengali Hindus did not side with them instead they supported the Assamese. In exchange of not being ousted from their land by the politically active Assamese.

Examples

(1) Sikh-Hindu conflict in Punjab

Starting in August 1980, mounting communal tensions b/w Hindus and Sikhs in the state of Punjab led to violent clashes, in the east year in particular. Unlike Assam, Punjab is a state with the highest per capita income. It is the seat of the Green Revolution in India, whose biggest beneficiaries have been the rich Sikh peasants. In Punjab, Sikhs are a majority, Hindus a minority.

Although religious symbols have been used for the mobilization of Sikhs and the secessionist slogan of Khalistan (a sovereign state of Sikhs) has been raised, the Sikh charter of demands, drawn from the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, has strong economic political components, unlike in Assam where the issue of Aliens has sidelined economic demands. Since the exhaustion of the Green Revolution in Punjab, this is the first time that Akalis have not been in power. Although, they had their first relatively stable rule from 1977 to 1980 Congress returned to power in 1980. The ruling Congress has also played an electoral game. In an effort to weaken Akali Dal, it has in the recent past, supported rabidly communal factions, including the present messiah Sant Bhindranvale in the 1984 elections. The Congress is clearly not interested in settling the problem unless some political or electoral games gains are likely, or unless the violence reaches explosive proportions.

(2) Example [The Hindu-Muslim Problem]

The most critical contemporary phase of this history was the partition of 1947. A Muslim sovereign state of Pakistan was born amidst ghastly communal violence but almost as many Muslims as there were in the new constituted Pakistan, for various reasons, stayed in India. The partition did not solve the Hindu-Muslim problems. It caused the situation of the Muslims in India to deteriorate. They were blamed for the division of the country, their leadership had left and their power was further weakened by the removal of all Muslim-majority areas except Kashmir.

CONCLUSION OR SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS

(*) Those who favour this suggest that the first step towards sustenance of communal harmony is to identify the causes that flare up riots.

These are :-

(a) Rumours

(b) Suspicion against the other community

(c) building up sectarian feelings amongst people by religious heads, local political party and self-styled leaders.

To overcome these, it is important to induce encouragement in people to widen their perspectives, to keep an open mind and to be tolerant towards others. This can be achieved by encouraging the members of the different communities to have a dialogue, with each other. This would help in understanding the other community and also reflect their own limitations and the possibility of overcoming them.