Caste Conflicts

An incident at Chunduru Village
Andhra Pradesh, India

VIKAS GORA
Caste Hierarchy

- Brahmins (Intellectuals)
- Kshytriyas (Soldiers)
- Vishayas (Entrepreneurs)
- Sudras (Work Force)
  - Dalits (Untouchables)
August 6, 1991, Chunduru Village, 150 families

Guntur District: Caste sensitive area

Land Issue between landlords and peasants

8 Dalits were butchered after they stabbed to death four Reddy Landowners.

Dalit Bodies were packed in gunny bags and disposed into irrigation canal.

Brutality of murders struck the national news.
Onslaught

- 32 killed on both sides
- 2 police officers investigating the crime were murdered.
- 150 were injured and 40 survived fatal injuries.
- Govt. issued 21 day curfew with ‘shoot at sight’ orders
Pre 1991

- 50 years of co-existence within the village
- Sharing common schools and Primary Health Centre.
- Both castes housed in the same neighborhood.
Table 1 All India-Crimes against Dalits-1992 to 2000

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Source: Crime in India, National Crime Record Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi, 1994-2000
Third Party NGO

- Atheist Centre, an NGO with secular, non-religious, Gandhian social development philosophy.
- Started 1940.
- Founders: Gora (1902-1975) and Saraswathi Gora (1912-2006)
Govt. Recognition of Founder: Gora
Commemorative Postage Stamp (2002)
NGO has 67 years of conflict resolution experience (Focal points: rehabilitation of extremists, criminal settlements, landlordism, religious fundamentalists, inter & intra caste conflicts, witchcraft & sorcery, trafficking, temple prostitutes etc)

NGO as a Third Party Mediator on the request of State Level Dalits & Reddy Organizations and the Supreme Court of India.

Plunged into action on the Fourth Day after the conflict.
The Actors

- 12 member NGO Team:
  - 6 Social Workers
  - 3 Doctors
  - 1 Member of Parliament
  - 1 Member of Legislative Assembly
  - 1 Documenter.

Accompanied by:

- Police Commissioner,
- Lawyers
- Media.
Objectives of the Third Party

- To work towards a consensus between the caste leaders within one month.
- To isolate the conflict and not to make it contagious to caste sensitive areas.
- To bring back collaboration and peace among the castes.
- To facilitate the germination of a community based conflict resolution plan.
Gandhian Conflict Resolution
Satyagraha Approach

- Begins with negotiation & arbitration
- On site accumulation and analysis of facts, with opponent participation
- Identification of interests in common with opponents
- Formulation of limited action goal acceptable to all parties and mutual discussion of the same.
- A search for compromise without ceding on essentials.

(If conflict not resolved: Direct Action – agitation, non co-operation, civil disobedience etc.)
Transformative Approach

- Lederach describes the paradox posed by commitment to process vs. commitment to outcome. Which is more important, the means or the ends?
- He calls this the "Gandhi Dilemma," and notes that the transformative approach similarly adopts a Gandhian solution.
Commitment to process becomes understood as a commitment to a particular philosophy and lifestyle: the pursuit of truth and the restoration of relationships.

The desired outcome is also similarly reconceptualized as achieving commitment to truth and restoration.
Third Party Mediation Process

Transformative Process was followed

**Rapport Building:**
- Interaction with Heads of both castes, Village Local Self Governments, the survivors of the victims, women & youth.

**Conflict Analysis:**
- Sharing of findings between the team members.
Designing the Plan:

- Based on the findings and rapport building.
- Methods used:
  - Public gathering and talking about solidarity of the community before the conflict
  - Peace March
  - Peace Circle
  - Cosmopolitan Lunches
  - Children’s and youth cultural evenings
  - Caste Heads sharing common dais
Community Based Conflict Resolution

- Promoting tolerance among youth and caste & religious leaders through training and capacity building.
- Strengthening next generation
- Integrated development programs (Water, Health, Education, Livelihoods, Gender sensitivity etc)
- Peace Education as a component of Moral Science
Challenges

- Politicization of the conflict
- Over sensitization by the Media
- Stopping the triggering of the conflict from local to regional
- Balancing dialogue between the families of those murdered and of the murderers.
- Providing assurance to Govt. for lifting the curfew.
- Conflict Resolution under the watchful eyes of police gunmen.
Positive Signs of Mediation

- Caste Heads and Panchayat Leaders recognizing & trusting the organization to be the 3rd Party.
- A ‘public oath’ of both Caste Heads that such incidents will not occur again and coming to a Compromise.
Observations

- Since 1991 till date, no caste conflict in the village.
- Approx. 20 inter-caste marriages from the village were performed by the organization.
Legal Action

Supreme Court set up a Special Bench.

Outcome:

- 21 people were sentenced to life imprisonment
- 35 people were sentenced for one year imprisonment
- 123 people had to pay a fine of Rs. 2000 each for burning the houses.
Life of the Intervention

- Life of Intervention
  Addressing the event: 29 days
  Peace Education: One month
THANK YOU