



Review on growing up in a conflict zone: Children surviving conflict in Tripura written by Melvil Pereira, Shaunna Rodrigues, and Ankita Gupta, North East Social research centre, Guwahati

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Abstract

The book *Growing Up in a Conflict Zone: Children Surviving Conflict in Tripura*, writes about the ethnic conflict between the two communities. Both communities had suffered irreparable losses, it affected the children the most especially missing their loved ones. These ethnic clashes had brought mistrust between the people belonging to various ethnic communities in the state of Tripura. The ethnic riot started on a very simple issue between the pineapple vendor and the customer. From here the ethnic conflict was said to escalate all over the state of Tripura. The problem between this pineapple vendor and the customer was not solved and instead, people encouraged fighting and took their own community sides. Hence this paper reviews and analyses the book written by Melvil Pereira, Shaunna Rodrigues, and Ankita Gupta, North East Social Research Centre, Guwahati, Length 192. The paper also suggests a few lines at the end of the paper.

Keywords: Ethnicity, migrations, land, and politics

Introduction

The book *'Growing Up in A Conflict Zone: Children Surviving Conflict in Tripura'* writes about the children who have been growing up in the state of Tripura during the communal riot in 1980. This communal riot is between the Bengali community and the Tribal/Tiprasa (indigenous peoples of Tripura) and because of this violence, Tripura has been suffering intolerance and hatred between the two communities. From both sides of the communities, people have suffered dreadfully from hunger and diseases, houses burned down, things being looted from the houses, and people being killed and missed. Almost all families missed their loved ones during the riot. The children in particular had suffered psychologically affecting their physical and mental health. Then, people could hardly trust each other, and people living in the villages went to more interior forests to take shelter with hardly any food and water to drink.

It was a dark and painful year for the state of Tripura as the riot escalated in almost all parts of the state. The wars are now hardly fought on the battlefield, it is fought in the common people's habitat. Hence, there is a paradigm shift of war from battlefield to common people habited. Due to this innocent life is lost and people's sufferings are unending and inhuman.

Indigenous people of Tripura as mentioned have been marginalized in their state. They have been politically and socio-economically deprived. Excluded from various governmental processes and decision-making. Indigenous peoples felt they were being deprived and marginalized in their state and they had been fighting for their political rights since Tripura merged with the Union of India.

The research in the book covered 3 districts of Tripura that is West Tripura, Kowai, and Sepahijala. It included an in-depth interview with persons who were children at the time of the conflict. Including an interview with the age group of 6-18 years as of today and included a focus group discussion.

The information about children who were directly exposed to the conflict was studied along with information on displacement, rehabilitation, and resettlement. The kind of help from various organizations and people was studied. The impact of children's education along with their mental and physical health during the conflict was mentioned in the book.

The definition of the age of children has been mentioned both at the international and national levels. As there is a conflicting age mentioned, at the international level it said up to 18 years as children but in Indian law, there is no fixed age.

Chapter one *'Memories of the Conflict'*, discusses the state's authority in Tripura which has been continuously ignoring the hardship people faced because of communal conflict between the two communities. It further relates the memories people experienced during the communal conflict in 1980. It also shares the experience of a few persons from both sides of the community who were children at the time of conflict in the year 1980 in Tripura.

It discusses the property being looted, houses being burned, and people being harmed by both communities. It relates to the people taking shelter in the jungles to protect themselves from further harm. Children had to give up their educations during the conflict and even much later after the conflict was over in Tripura.

The conflict first initiated over selling pineapple in *Lembucherra* between two men. One belonging to Bengali and the other belonging to an indigenous community of Tripura, from here the conflict is said to be accelerated across the state of Tripura.

It also writes about aid provided by the state during the conflict, displacement, returning to their respective villages, and repercussions of the conflict. Freedom of movement was curtailed during the conflict of 1980. The emergence and activities of insurgent groups in the state of Tripura were discussed and elaborated on further.

Chapter two *'Dilemma of Security within the Socio-Political Context of Tripura'*, discusses the migration and the scarcity

of resources in the state of Tripura to meet the needs of the people living in the state during the time of emergency. The resources could not meet the basic needs of the people. Day by day the population in the state has been increasing, with lakhs of people coming from Bangladesh, indigenous peoples are being outnumbered by drastic changes in their socioeconomic and political life.

It also relates to the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) and its implementation in the state. Due to this prolonged implementation of the law in Tripura, there has been a change in the way of life of the people. The people living in the villages were not able to access their resources in the forests and they were not able to move freely. Many innocent people were being arrested and life for the village people was not normal because of this prolonged implementation of the AFSPA. This law was implemented only in the remote indigenous peoples' villages.

It provides statistical data on awareness of children's knowledge about the conflict, knowledge of the identity of groups who are party to the conflict, and knowledge of material damage caused during the conflict from both sides of the communities that is the indigenous and the non-indigenous community in the state from three districts of Tripura that is West Tripura, Sepahijala and Khowai.

Chapter three '*Quality of Education among Children: An Outcome of Polarised Development*' writes about education among the people of Tripura. Lack of education has been mentioned as the main cause of conflict between the two communities. It also writes about the non-availability of quality education in the state of Tripura especially post-conflict. It mentioned access to the education system during and after the conflict for the children in the villages.

It also writes about the lack of recognition of identity, cultural development, community survival, distribution of resources, access to political power, and ideological orientation is connected with the root cause of the conflict in the state of Tripura.

It further discusses the importance of education for understanding each other and in asserting our rights. It elaborates on the education of 1980 like access to school, and the functioning of schools with the presence of teachers, and mentions school as the site of socialization.

Chapter four '*Health, Nutrition and the Psychological Impact of the Conflict on Children*' discussed the impact on physical, mental, and emotional health. The institutions of healthcare in the year 1980 have been discussed. How the institution of government health care had helped the people to be aware of their basic health, providing them with basic health facilities and nutrition in 1980, especially during and after the riot. Resources were limited by the side of the government and they could not reach out to every village but they could network with organizations from within and outside the state of Tripura to help the people at a crucial point in time.

The book writes about the situation of the people in the conflict and how they have suffered from food and other basic needs. It shared the experience of people who have drunk water retained in the footprints of animals. How people's health deteriorated and there was no medical aid available in the villages. People have to live in the jungles for months leaving their homes for their life security. With their homes being looted, and burned down and their loved ones being missed. There was a great effect on people's

mental and physical health. The children in particular were much affected by this communal riot mental and physical.

Chapter five '*Networks for Support*' discussed the destruction of homes and families during the conflict created by the communal riot in Tripura. The riot's impact on families, especially children, whether they feel safe at home or not, if they share their problems with their parents, and if there were any reasons for not sharing their problems. It also discussed the community support given to the families both from within and outside their communities during and after the riot.

It writes about how children were psychologically affected. Children felt a lack of trust and insecurities even within their own homes. It has so much affected them mentally that they could hardly trust anyone. This psychological distress was with everyone living in Tripura then that they could hardly trust anyone. There was complete insecurity in the state of Tripura during the riot of 1980 and even much after the riot.

The insecurities and non-trust growing in the state between the two communities have been discussed. Also relates to how few networks, organizations, and communities were trying to extend their help in bringing peace, providing food, shelter, medical help, and others in the state of Tripura.

Analyses

The book misses exclusive chapters on children's welfare, rights, and opportunities. It also fails to mention the protection and implementation of such positive laws during the conflict and after the conflict period.

The book has few elaborations on the issues of compensation, Counseling, and rehabilitation given to children belonging to both sides of the communities during the time of riot and after. It only mentioned that there was hardly any help from the government and other organizations.

The book has less elaboration on the psychological impact on children caused by a communal riot during and after the riot.

There are hardly any legal positive laws mentioned for the protection of indigenous peoples like the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, the Forests Rights Act, and other laws required for the development of indigenous peoples. If this were mentioned in the book people would be much more aware of asserting their rights and responsibilities.

In the conclusion, the book is more like literature. If a strong suggestion has been incorporated towards Government, Judiciary, Non-Government Organizations, community leaders, youths, and people in general for their respective responsibility in society would have been excellent.

There is less research made on how children in the schools were taught especially on the subject of moral values like tolerance, respect, appreciation, and encouragement towards each other irrespective of any community they come from. If statistical data was provided on how they react toward other communities and what the activities initiated in the school for sowing the seeds of peace, love, and tolerance would be of great importance.

Suggestions

The book should strongly suggest that communities have an organization both formal and non-formal for achieving peace through cultural exchange and appreciation.

The book should also highlight suggestions taking into consideration the deprived sections of the communities of Tripura. To urge the government to set up a platform for the development of deprived communities in Tripura, especially for the children.

The book should strongly suggest the Central Government for proper implementation of laws on foreigners, especially in the state of Tripura. As Tripura has international boundaries with Bangladesh on three sides the state must follow strict implementations of laws on foreigners entering the state.

A suitable suggestion should be made to the state of Tripura for building peace with our neighboring countries especially Bangladesh in the form of awareness programs, cultural events, sports, food festivals, etc. So that people living in Tripura as well as in Bangladesh should feel safe in their land and learn from each other.

The book is also suggested for an elaboration on our basic rights enshrined in the Constitution of India. The Indian Constitution's Fifth and Sixth Schedule, the Forest Rights Act should be implemented in spirit. This implementation of laws would bring prosperity and development to the state and avoid future conflicts. It should also have an exclusive chapter on reconciliation between the two communities. And include data showing the representations of indigenous peoples at various decision-making processes and official posts at the government's higher bodies after the conflict of 1980 in Tripura.

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