

Power Conflict: Empowering Human Relation

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Abstract

‘Power-conflict’ has been in existence in different forms in our lives. Notionally, it estranges interpersonal relations. But the present paper seeks to show that the interplay of power is not necessarily violent and coercive rupturing human relation, rather it strengthens man’s bond with his own being and with others. The thoughts, emotions and values which an individual nurtures within him through his interaction with Nature constitute his inherent power, the inner strength and the latent disposition. When one tries to influence others through such power, clash of thoughts and opinions arises. But this apparent opposition clears doubts, resolves tension and generates mutual understanding among everyone involved. An inner struggle of conflicting ideas within one’s own thought world enhances his self development. However, if the individual’s ego, aggression, selfish interests predominate over the social ego, power-conflict takes a destructive turn distorting human relation. This paper wants to emphasize upon the cultivation of the values of agreeableness, forgiveness, tolerance, compassion and empathy, to transform such aggressive hard power-conflict to soft non-violent creative power, thus empowering human relation. It also seeks to explore the Indian philosophy of language that highlights how inner-power enhances speech-act and initiates communication. The Sankhya metaphysical principles of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas signify the evolutionary power-confluence present in the cosmic realm. Again, the Jaina doctrine of relativity would be referred which logically reflects upon the ongoing conflict of ‘to be or not to be’ as an obvious fact of individual’s life. Power-conflict therefore redefines human relation.

Keywords: Power-conflict, Interpersonal relation, Hard-power, Soft-power, Inner-strength, Tolerance, Mutual understanding, Empathy

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Introduction

Human existence is inalienably rooted in man's intrinsic relation with the vital Nature and the universe as a whole. That is why from the very beginning of the journey of his life down from his mother's womb he makes relentless attempts to relate himself with the world beyond his immediate needs and interests. He thus discovers and rediscovers himself in the midst of an interpersonal bond of dependence and interdependence with his fellow beings. However the desire to secure such existence of his own and acquire a distinct identity amidst all variations, often leads the individual to induce a kind of power or control over the other conscious social beings as well as the animate and inanimate Nature. It is then that one experiences a form of power conflict within human relations and in all other prospects of natural relationships. Generally it might seem that such power conflict estranges any form of relationships and strikes as if at the very nodal point of social network. But the present paper seeks to show that the interplay of power is not necessarily destructive in nature that ruptures social bonding; it rather empowers man's relatedness with his own being and with others. However if such conflict takes a negative turn and brings in an existential crisis for mankind, then of course it has to be combated and resolved by positive power flow of human values. The present paper would focus upon some such social and moral means that would generate harmonious coexistence within the entire cosmic scenario.

Section- 1: The Meaning of 'Power'

'Power is a word the meaning of which we do not understand'.

Indeed this statement made by Leo Tolstoy in his novel War and Peace is very true. We really find that it is quite difficult to provide a clear and precise definition of the term 'power'. It is commonly understood as the control, influence and the exercise of authority over others. One generally tends to consider such power as the means to dominate people and situations for the fulfillment of one's own self interest. Such a notion of power therefore carries a negative intonation. But 'power' in itself can neither be described as negative nor as anything positive. This implies that power cannot be necessarily characterized as destructive, violent and coercive, nor can it be originally designated as constructive, non-violent and creative; it is rather neutral. The nature of power is determined by the way one interprets power and applies it in the different spheres of life. Thus the concept of power is very much relative. In fact a deeper reflection into our life and existence would reveal that everything in this world is an expression and manifestation of the power latent within it. Thus 'power' signifies the inherent strength and the latent disposition of an entity or a being. In case of an individual, the thoughts, emotions and values which he cultivates from the external world and nurtures within him through his interaction with the Nature constitute his inherent power. It is through a continuous exchange of such thoughts and ideas that one communicates with one's own self and as well as with others and that is how we are related to every other being of the world. The entire universe is therefore a fine tuned network of psychological processes, thoughts and emotions. Underlying this network of interrelationship, there goes interplay of power both on the physical realm and on the psychological sphere.

Section-2: Power-Conflict: Its Positive Aspect

We find that every individual being possesses a distinct identity and personality characterized by some essential qualities of his own. But his inherent potentialities, his unique power would lose their meaning and significance unless there is someone

in the opposite to appreciate and recognize their distinct value. Hence the desire for self-recognition and self-realization motivates one to relate himself and thereby share and exchange his beliefs and opinions with his fellow social being. However during such social interaction one often tries to influence the other person through his own attitudes and beliefs. But since every individual is distinct guided by his own ideas, culture, language and social conditions, here conflicts and clashes of thoughts and opinions become obvious.

However, it may be noted that such apparent power-conflict actually gives a positive and dynamic turn to social bonding. For it provides an opportunity for both the parties to identify the flaws of their own thought patterns and thereby clears doubts, resolves tension and generates mutual understanding between them. Further it is interesting to note that a society can never move ahead without the constant interplay of the two opposite forces of likeness and difference. Similarity or likeness of beliefs and interests is necessary as it generates the feeling of belonging together which is required for the sustenance of the society. But if all men would have thought alike, felt alike and acted alike, accept the same customs and uphold the same opinions without any variation, then in the absence of reciprocal exchange of thoughts and interests, social relationships would lose their dynamic character and get limited; social progress would then come to a halt. This idea of progress through conflict is the key concept of the metaphysical thoughts of the great German philosopher G.F.Hegel (1770-1831).

In the history of philosophy Hegel is known as a great and powerful metaphysical thinker. In spite of being interested in abstract metaphysical and epistemological thoughts, Hegel was deeply concerned with socio-political issues. He was an Idealist and a monist as he regarded the Spirit or Idea (Geist) to be the only reality. This Spirit according to Hegel is active and self-creating. In order to be self-conscious, the Spirit posits the objects which it knows. According to Hegel the process by which the Spirit becomes self-conscious is dialectical. In his method of dialectic Hegel showed that it is through a conflict between two apparently opposite ideas, namely the thesis and the antithesis that there is origination of a new idea or synthesis. Therefore the Absolute Spirit, in Hegel's philosophy always develops through the conflict of opposed concepts followed by their resolution, which itself turns out to harbor another opposition, upon which a further resolution follows, and so on until the entire system is complete. It is through such a method of progress through conflict that there is development of the society, nation and the world as a whole. We may then say that the apparent collision between the seemingly opposite forces of association and dissociation, friendship and enmity, unity and disunity that we experience within social life provides the inherent power necessary for moulding, regenerating and strengthening the bonds of social network.

In this connection it may be noted that the friction of the various thoughts and interests that we experience in the external physical world in our relationships with others, is actually an expression of the struggle between the different psychological processes that we often experience within our internal thought world. Every individual self is a conglomeration of diverse psychical forces, for instance, anger, pride, hatred, as well as love, kindness, humility and selflessness. Often one is faced with an inner conflict between such apparently opposite sentiments and emotions. As one seeks to resolve such inner struggle, it positively acts as a mirror in

respect of which the individual can judge himself and becomes aware of his own defects and shortcomings. Such inner power confluence shapes the individual's social and moral self, nurtures his self-respect and self-esteem and thereby strengthens his internal relationships with his own self which in turn empowers his relation with the external world as well.

We get a reflection of such a positive interpretation of the concept of power in the thoughts of Michel Foucault (1926-1984) who was equally a philosopher, a psychologist and a historian. The power problem was central to his thoughts regarding the relations between society, individuals, groups and institutions. He was of the view that power is not essentially something that the institutions possess and use oppressively against individuals and groups. In the first volume of his book *The History of sexuality* Foucault argues that power is not to be interpreted as the oppression of the powerless by the powerful. The great thinker rather regards power as coextensive with resistance and says that such resistance is productive in the sense that it has positive effects in the self-development of an individual and often helps in the emergence of new behavior.

Section-3: Power-conflict: A Creative Principle

A deeper reflection into the root cause of such power struggle manifested at the different levels of our physical and psychological existence would reveal that it is actually ingrained in the very bosom of Nature. For power conflict is the very essence of creation. Creation is not possible without the friction of the various particles and the diverse elements that constitute Nature as a whole. This would become clear if we mention here about the Sāṅkhya system of Indian philosophy. The Sāṅkhya philosophers regard Prakṛti- the material principle as the root cause of the objects of the world. Prakṛti is described as the unity of the three Guṇa-s, namely Sattva, Rajas and Tamas held in a state of equilibrium (guṇānām sāmyāvasthā). These guṇa-s are the very constituents of Prakṛiti and thereby of every objects of the world. It is interesting to note that each one of the guṇa-s possesses some specific qualities of its own which are apparently opposed to one another. Such qualities constitute the inherent power of the guṇa-s. For instance Sattva is said to be the principle of goodness and as such it illuminates and manifests the objects of the world. Pleasure, happiness, contentment and bliss are all due to it. Rajas is the principle of motion and as such it provides things with mobility. It is responsible for producing pain, dissatisfaction, anger, desire and impatience. Tamas is the principle of inertia. It causes ignorance, apathy, indifference and negativity. The Sāṅkhya-s holds that the creation or evolution of the worldly objects does not take place when these guṇa-s are in a state of equilibrium. Evolution starts when there is heterogeneous change in the proportion of the guṇa-s and one predominates over the other two and brings about a terrific commotion within the bosom of Prakṛti. Without such power conflict among the guṇa-s creation is not possible.

The relation among the guṇa-s is such that they conflict and yet cooperate with one another and are always found intermingled. This constant conflict as well cooperation between the guṇa-s gets reflected within human nature and is also manifested through the social relation of one individual to the other. Thus according to the power or preponderance of the guṇa-s human nature as well his relation to the world at large is either good or bad or indifferent; pure, impure or neutral. It may be noted here that Sattva Guṇa is the spiritual quality. When such Sāttvik Guṇa is dominant, a person

has inherent desire to be good and caring, there is a resolute constancy of his mind and senses. The light of wisdom shines through such an individual; he clearly understands the difference between desirable and undesirable, undutiful and dutiful action; such a person pays homage to divine and spiritual values. Under the predominance of the Rājasik Guṇa— there is rise of passion and desire within a person which causes greed, restlessness and attachment for things; due to dominance of self-interest the intellect of such a person fails to distinguish between right and wrong. A person under the influence of Tāmasik Guṇa becomes ignorant, idle, slothful, apprehensive and revengeful. Hence an ideal human being attempts at the cultivation of the power of the Sāttvik Guṇa.

We thus find that power conflict lies at the very root of creation and positively affects human relations as well. But often when the Rājasik Guṇa-s of anger, pride, desire, greed and hatred influence and vitiate man's consciousness and his individual ego tends to dominate the social ego, it is then that the negative forces of mutual suspicion, mutual hostility and mutual hatred become powerful and disrupt the interpersonal bond between the individuals. It generates a hard power- conflict among them which often gets expressed in the social sphere in the form of violence and coercion.

Section-4: Destructive Power Conflict: Its Resolution

Being conscious rational beings we must resist and resolve such destructive power-struggle through the exercise of the positive and constructive soft powers lying within us and thereby reconstruct human relation. And one such most potent force that can be universally and effectively employed by mankind for the sustenance of its existence against all forms of evil forces is the soft and noble power of non-violence. We know that Mahatma Gandhi, who is known as the apostle of peace and non-violence all over the world devoted his entire life and work in the practice of this ideal and tried to make humanity aware of the application of this noble virtue in every sphere of social, moral, political and religious life.

Non-violence literally means abstinence from violence. Here violence does not merely imply causing physical harm to a person. If there is any bad intention or ill-will to hurt a person even within our thought, speech and action, it would also be considered as an act of violence. In its positive aspect non-violence means such universal and unbounded love for mankind which impels one to love not only one who loves him but also one who hates him. This means that if there is any conflict between two or more individuals over a certain issue, then there instead of showing anger or hatred towards the opponent, non-violence demands that the latter should rather be dealt with love and affection. Here one might think that if our intention is to resist evils and injustices then there loving the wrong- doer means to help him or to assist him in carrying out his wrongs. In that case how can non-violence help to combat violence? Here Gandhi was of the view that showing affection and being compassionate towards the wrong-doer through words and deeds would gradually help to bring about a positive change within him. He might then realize his mistake and thereby try to reform himself. But here the practice of violence on the other hand by coercing and humiliating the evil-doer can make him more arrogant and furious. Being rational beings we cannot allow such destruction of humanity. Non-violence therefore seeks to resist conflict not by coercing but by converting the opponent through love and compassion.

The practice of non-violence therefore demands an attitude of being respectful, tolerant and understanding towards the views of the opponent. It points out that while resolving a conflict one must not reject or ignore others' views as totally false as that may lead to further confusion. Rather one should acknowledge that every individual has different ways of seeing and interpreting things. Here the *Jaina* doctrine of relativity of knowledge rightly points out that from a particular standpoint every individual's beliefs have some element of truth in it; none can be regarded as either wholly true or wholly false. Hence one must try to respect and understand the other person's point of view, put himself in other's position and if necessary revise his own views as well. Such empathic understanding would reduce confusions, hatred and misunderstandings between the individuals to a great extent and strengthen social relation and enhance social cooperation as well. Hence Gandhi rightly pointed out that three fourths of the miseries and misunderstandings of the world would disappear if we try to step into the shoes of our adversaries' and attempts to ascertain their thoughts and feelings as well. This would become possible through a process of constructive conversation and dialogue between the respective individuals.

We thus find that as a method of peaceful conflict resolution, the practice of non-violence is an inner moral and psychological process of purifying and thereby strengthening oneself by controlling the natural instincts of anger, pride, desire and hatred and arousing the soft powers of agreeableness, tolerance, forgiveness, patience and self-control above all. It is interesting to note that, as means towards such inner development, besides non-violence (*ahimsā*), our ancient Indian Vedic tradition also suggests the nurture of the ethical virtues of truth (*satya*), self-sacrifice (*yajña*), penance (*tapas*), compassion (*dayā*), and self-control. The *Veda*-s also emphasizes upon the commonality of thinking, feeling, willing, peaceful coexistence, and world fraternity. For individual's self-development the *Bauddha* philosophy also insists upon the observation of the five-fold virtues (*pañcaśila*) of non-violence (*ahimsā*), truth (*satya*), non-stealing (*asteya*), non-possession (*aparigraha*), and celibacy (*brahmacharya*). For affecting universal peace and brotherhood the Buddhist philosophers ask for the cultivation of *Brahmavihāra*-s which include friendship (*maitrī*), compassion (*karunā*), joy/satisfaction (*muditā*) and indifference (*upekṣā*). The *Jaina* philosophers also recognize the importance of the cultivation of the five-fold virtues admitted in *Bauddha* philosophy, which they term as *pañcamahāvratā*. The *Sāṅkhya* philosophy asks for the practice of the *sāttvika guṇa*-s of kindness, restraint of sense organs, and freedom from hatred.

It may however be inquired here that how can the nurture of these different values be effective means towards conflict resolution? In this connection we would like point out that just as there is conflict and opposition present within Nature, similarly there is also an underlying principle of unity and harmony encircling the entire cosmic life. Nature forms a harmonious whole through the reconciliation of both these positive and negative forces. Being a part of Nature, man also possesses the soft and the subtle powers of love, kindness, honesty, and selflessness, besides the negative forces of greed and hatred. But due to their egoistic tendencies and selfish desires individuals fail to realize those humanitarian potentialities lying latent within them. Now, the cultivation of the different moral values as admitted in our ethical and cultural tradition would prepare the individuals from within so that they might become aware of their inner human forces and nurture them properly so as to channelize their negative thoughts and energies towards positive and constructive goals of human life.

The values would act as the means through which the individual would attain an inner integrity and harmony between his thoughts and emotions and thereby strengthen his relation with his own self. This would in turn improve and uplift his external relationships with his fellow beings and enable him to realize his integral unity and harmony with the Nature as a whole. One must remember that the relationships one has with others are actually the expressions and extensions of the relationships one has with one's own self. Hence unless we realize peace within our own beings and love and forgive all parts of our own selves, we cannot love and forgive others. And this is the basic tenet and philosophy of all world religions.

Conclusion

We may not be able to make our society completely free from the negative powers of violence and destruction. In fact we find that there can be no construction without destruction, no continued existence of life without the constant self-feeding and devouring of other life. That is why Charles Darwin rightly pointed out that the struggle for life is the law of evolutionary existence. Moreover, when violent forces become too powerful tending to shatter human life and civilization, there we might have to take recourse to violence alone to save mankind from such annihilation of existence. Yet, violence can never be the last resort towards conflict resolution. For, when violence appears to do good, the good is only temporary, the evil it does is permanent. We are quite conscious of the fact that the negative forces of conflict and destruction coexist with the positive powers of harmony and cooperation. If we sincerely desire mankind to realize its most cherished ideal of a peaceful and harmonious life, then, we should not let these negative forces rule and control our inner being as well as our outer life and existence. Violence creates turbulence within our thought world and stands in the way of realization of peace. Calmness and serenity of mind is essentially required for the pacification of the ailing mankind.

From time immemorial man nurtures the eternal aspiration for the attainment of right cognition and the realization of inner peace or bliss (*ānanda*) within his innermost being. Since bliss is the very nature of one's own self, to 'know thy self' becomes the primary objective of his life and activities. But for that one needs to attain a complete control over his mind and the senses. Since mind- the bosom of human thought is impregnated with immense evolutionary powers, the great responsibility of the human beings is to make it free from all selfish and egoistic tendencies and direct it towards the establishment of the interrelation between one's own being with that of all others. In this connection we would like to mention the famous 'Parable of the chariot', as found in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* which explains the integral relation between our mind, body and the senses. It holds that,

*ātmanaṃ rathinaṃ viddhi, śarīraṃ ratham eva tu:
buddhiṃ tu sāraddhiṃ viddhi, manaḥ pragrahaṃ eva ca. (Kaṭha Upaniṣad 1.3.3.).*

This implies that, *Know the Self as the lord of the chariot and the body as, verily, the chariot, know the intellect as the charioteer and the mind as, verily, the reins.*¹ Here the self (*ātman*) is compared to the owner of a chariot (*rathin*), the body being the chariot (*ratha*), intellect (*budhhi*) is the driver (*sarathi*), the horses are said to be the senses and the mind is the rein by which the intellect controls the senses. Since the mind holds the reins, if it goes unrestrained, the senses would also be out of control and the intellect then fails to attain its desired goal. Such an unrestrained mind is the

source of all forms of evil thoughts and conflicts. So long as we are indulgent to our vices, so long as we nurture hatred and ill-will to others, we cannot realize true knowledge and bliss within. The *Upaniṣad*-s therefore says,

*nāvirato duṣcaritān nāśānto nāsamāhitaḥ
nāśānta-mānaso vāpi prajñānenainam āpnuyāt. (Kaṭha Upaniṣad, 1.2.24)*

This implies that, ‘*not who has not desisted from evil ways, not he who is not tranquil, not he who has not a concentrated mind, not even whose mind is not composed can reach this (self) through right knowledge*’.¹ No one can realize truth and peace within his self without illumination and no one can have illumination without a thorough the cleansing of one’s moral being.

The ancient Indian seers therefore ask for the practice of *Yoga* which would enable the individuals to attain a meditative, contemplative mind and realize harmony between their body, mind and the senses. This endeavour towards the realization of serenity and concord within one’s inner being would enable humanity to win over all destructive power-conflicts and thereby empower human relations with love, unity, mutual cooperation and peaceful co-existence. With this hope for reconstructing human life and existence through the reconciliation of the soft and subtle powers of mankind we may utter the *Ṛg* Vedic verse:

*saṁgachhadvaṁ saṁvadhadvāṁ saṁ va manāṁsi jānatām |
devā bhāgam yathā pūrve sañjānānā upāsate ||
samanī va ākutih samānā hṛdayāni vaḥ |
samānamastu vo mano yathā vaḥ susahāsati ||*

*Let us move in harmony, speak in one voice; let your minds be in agreement; just as the ancient gods shared their portion of sacrifice;
May our intentions and aspirations be alike, so that a common objective unifies us all.*

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