Enhancing Social Cohesion in a Hetero-Ethnic Country

Swapna Banerjee[1] ,Basudeb Adhikary[2] , Sarmistha Adhikary[3]

[1]Professor, Department of Library and Information Science, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

[2]Librarian, Netaji Mahavidyalaya, Arambagh, West Bengal, India

[3]Librarian, A. K. P. C. Mahavidyalaya, Bengai, Arambagh, West Bengal, India

*Corresponding Author: Basudeb Adhikary

Abstract

India is the home of about 1.21 billion populations originating from various ethnic as well as racial groups like Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Mongoloid, Aryo-Dravidian, Mongolo-Dravidian, Scytho-Dravidian, Turko-Iranian etc. Among these populations, we have approximately 540 tribal groups representing about 8.6% of the total population. Each of these tribal groups has their own indigenous culture, social structure or religious belief. It is easy to understand the difficulty in living together peacefully with so much diverse cultures. The cementing substance which binds these diverse communities together is known as the social cohesion. In this paper, we will discuss about social cohesion, various problems of hetero-ethnicity and lastly we will try to identify various factors of social cohesion which can provide crucial solution to these problems.

Key Words: Social cohesion; Ethnic diversity; Solidarity

Article

Social cohesion:Social cohesion is a question of concern to a large cross-section of academicians from different disciplines like sociology, psychology, social psychology, social policy analysis. They all defined and explained social cohesion from their own aspect. The proliferations of definitions in different ways make it a difficult and confusing concept. *Jane Jenson*, while defining social cohesion for UNRISD, mentioned social cohesion as the "quasi-concept" or the "hybrid idea". Social cohesion can be described or better to be constructed by individual or personal level cohesion and group level cohesion (by summing up the individual level cohesion). Individual level cohesion indicators can be of two types: first individual's membership attitude, which is best expressed by their desire to remain in a group, their identification to a group, their attitudes towards the members of the group and second individual's membership behavior, expressed by their decisions to strengthen, maintain, weaken, severe the relation with the group, susceptibility to interpersonal influence and other commitment and attachment to the group. Social psychological definition of social cohesion generally deals with the above mentioned individual membership attitude and behavior. Individual's group membership duration was considered as an important factor of this individual membership attitude and behavior. Let us now examine some definition provided in this aspect. *Moreno and Jennings* (1937) defined cohesion as the forces holding the individuals within the group in which they belong. *Fesinger* (1950) defined cohesion as the total field of forces – resultant of all forces acting on the members of a group to remain in a group. *Back* (1951), explained cohesiveness as the resultant forces which influence its members to stay in a group – or in other words, the attraction of membership in a group for its members. Again the factor of group membership duration is elaborated in two important angles. First, the substantive focus on individual's decision to remain or leave a group should be widened to consider the attitudes about their membership. In this approach, group membership is an attitudinal object to which each group member is positively or negatively inclined to some degrees. Second, another approach recognized that each theory of social cohesion should be grounded or based on development of individual's membership

attitudes and behavior. *Gross & Martin* (1952) defined cohesion as the individual attitude about how attractive the group is to them personally because such attitude is the proximate cause of person's decision to remain in or depart from a group. *Libo* (1953), provided cohesion's modified version of definition as the resultant of forces acting on each members to remain in the group. *McPherson & Smith-Lovin* (2002) supported the theory that the group cohesion may be defined according to the membership duration.

If we represent these in a formulary pattern, then it can be represented as:

Group cohesion = ∫ (Group membership duration) = ∫(X)

Membership Duration (X) = ∫ (Person's intention to remain in the group) [Cart Wright, 1968]; (Identification with the group) [Hogg, 1992]; (Interpersonal ties) [Lott & Lott, 1965]

Apart from these conditions, we have other preconditions like individual's susceptibility to the interpersonal influence of other members, participation in group activities, cooperativeness or other contributions to the welfare to the groups.

So, if we combine, we can get the following relationship.

Group cohesion = ∫ [(Group membership duration), (individual's susceptibility to the interpersonal influence of other members), (participation in group activities), (cooperativeness), (contributions to the welfare to the groups)]

Laurence, in 2011, while discussing social cohesion of UK, argued that social cohesion has two core aspects – social capital and interethnic relations.

Robert Putnam, in 1993, defined social capital as the features of social organization as trust, norm, networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action. These features enable participants to act together more effectively to achieve the shared objective. So, social capital is mainly based upon interaction, social networks, and most importantly upon their level of interconnectedness.

Francis Fukuyama, in 1995, explained social capital as a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in the society. It can be embodied in the smallest social part – family to the largest social part – nation and all other medium sized social groups in between. It implies collective action among all stakeholders to attain the shared common objective. This collective action or consensus building is a direct positive indicator of social capital. Along with the positive indicators, it has some negative indicators also as exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, and enhanced restrictions on the individual freedom.

Social cohesion, as defined by *Lockwood* in 1999, generally refers to a state of strong primary networks (like kinship) at the communal level. He considers social cohesion as the other extreme of social dissolution. *Bernard* considers social cohesion as a dialectic balance between three values: freedom, equality and solidarity.

Kawach & Berkman (2000) and *Chan & Chan* (2006) hold the view that social cohesion is characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that include trust a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help. He explained social cohesion from three aspects as: 'social inclusion', 'social capital' and 'institution and governance'.

Now, if we formulate above discussion about social cohesion, we can find that:

Social cohesion = ∫ (social capital), (interethnic relationship), (social inclusion), (institution & governance)

Social capital = ∫ (Trust), (Norm), (Networks), (Coordinated action to achieve common objectives)

If we combine this definition of social capital in the previous formula, we can get:

Social cohesion = ∫ (Trust), (Norm), (Networks), (Coordinated action to achieve common objectives), (Interethnic relationship), (social inclusion), (institution & governance)

Now, let us see what actually inter governmental organizations, policy formulating institutions tell about social cohesion.

OECD is the first institutions, which asks the member states to take a social investment approach for a future social welfare state. Here the investment is social investment and the output is social cohesion, which will result in (and itself is the result of) the active societal participation by the citizenry. So, it is a sort of input – output concept, where, social investment is the input and social cohesion is the invisible output.

European Union, in 2000, declared social and economic cohesion as the main goal. This cohesion is to be created through modernized social policy, regional redistribution, and new norms of governance involving both active citizenship and mechanism for identifying best democratic practices. Regional redistribution may be termed as decentralization of authority or transfer of additional responsibilities to regional or local authorities. European Union used the term 'best democratic practices'. So, democracy ultimately plays a role in increasing social cohesion.

Council of Europe, for the first time provided a consensus based explanation of social cohesion as social inclusion. On one hand it wants to ensure every citizen of 'equal access and equal opportunities' and 'social and economic rights'. 'Equal access and opportunities' mean access to the means to secure their basic requirements, opportunities to advance, opportunity of protection and legal rights, opportunity to the dignity and social confidence. On the other hand, the concept of social cohesion constantly reminds us to be vigilant of any kind of discrimination, inequality, marginality and exclusion. Social cohesion, as previously explained as traditional homogenizing form of social integration. In this approach, social integration is identity, sharing of the same culture, acceptance of the same value. Council of Europe does not accept social integration in such a way, instead they refer to it as an open and multi cultural society. In this respect, a comment by *Alison Gilchrist* (2004) is worth mentioning – community cohesion is not the absence of conflict (among various communities) but the ability to quickly managing the situation when the conflict happens.

World Bank, in 2000, merged the concept of social cohesion with development. Easterly, mentioned a two stage hypothesis regarding the social cohesion and growth which reads as follows: more social cohesion leads to better institutions through the participation of active citizenry, and better institutions in turn leads to higher growth and development. They also show that building social cohesion through the construction and maintenance of high quality institutions and good governance pursuing common good, and lowering of economic and social divisions remains a vital task for developing countries. So, it can be seen as a cyclic event. Social cohesion increases citizen or public participation which results in better institution and governance, which will also result in better development and better social cohesion level. From the above discussions, it is clear that the social cohesion policy specialists – various cross country institutions like OECD, World Bank, European Union, Council of Europe held social cohesion as a function of social inclusion, social and economic and other equality, good institution and government, participation by the active citizenry, growth, social development, better democratic process etc. If we combine both sets (academicians and agencies or inter country organizations) of factors responsible for social cohesion, then we have: Group membership duration, individual's susceptibility to the interpersonal influence of other members, cooperativeness, contributions to the welfare to the groups, Trust, Norm, Networks, Coordinated action to achieve common objectives, Interethnic relationship, social inclusion, institution & governance, equality, social inclusion, better democracy, social development. So it is evident that social cohesion is a complex concept which is composed of various indicators. So, if any of the indicators get disturbed or affected, then the total equilibrium of social cohesion get disturbed. So the importance of maintaining a good social cohesion is inherent in maintaining the equilibrium among indicators in proper way.

This social cohesion affects the national integrity in a major way. It balances the external negative influences in a society or better to say, in a large society i.e. a country.

Problems of hetero-ethnic countries:As already mentioned earlier that each and every tribe has their very own culture, social structure and religious belief. India is not an exception. The problems lie here. The presence of various cultures and ethnicity make hindrances to the establishment of a nation-hood. So, to build a new nation-hood, one has to devise a new identity. Now, the question stands here that how to create such a new identity? This new national identity can be achieved by either *expansion or elevation of any major indigenous ethnic or cultural identity imposing upon other less indigenous or minority groups* or, by *development of a supra-ethnic identity, treating various ethnic identities on equal footings.* In both cases, the development of the new national identity is not natural or spontaneous. So the crucial problem faced by the multi-ethnic state is the potential conflict between loyalty to one's ethnic community and wider national society comprising of various ethnic communities. Now, let us try to point some genuine problems of hetero-ethnicity in India as well as of any multi-ethnic country.

Societal difference:It is usually believed that, human society had undergone several changes. From hunting and food gathering based society to agriculture based society; agriculture based society to industry based society; and presently industry based society to information dependant society. It is the general pattern of change through which any society usually undergoes. In any society, these changes do not happen all of a sudden or abruptly. This change happens in stages or there are some blurred areas between the two. Agriculture based society to industry based society change does not mean that all people of a society left farming and turn to industry. It indicates that predominantly agriculture society turn to predominantly industrial society. The people engaged in agriculture sector start using the results of industrial sector like pesticides, machines for their benefit. Till now, we were discussing about any open society. Open society stands for the society, which mixes with other societies with openness to accept. But in case of any tribal society, the situation is different. Generally, tribal people live in seclusion from the outside world and society. Here seclusion means seclusion in physical as well as psychological seclusion. So, due to this seclusion, the modern development process or change in any external society does not leave any effect upon the tribal society. In agrarian society, land and cattle are the main resources. Now, if we go through the tribal society, the main resource of any household is the land, the amount of crop cultivated and cattle. Till now, in Santal tribe, the best match for a girl or boy is considered upon the land property, not by the job or liquid cash in possession of the boy or the girl. So, it can be easily understood that the societal difference exists between the tribal society and other societies in our country.

Distrust:There exists a sense of distrust between tribesman and people from other non-tribal communities. In case of Indian tribesman, it started from the early period of Aryan invasion, forcing these tribes to adopt a 'Z' pattern migration from their own fertile land to more remote, less fertile, inaccessible areas. It continued as the matter of forced conversion from their original religion to other religion goes on. It increases as they continue to be cheated by private money lenders. They used to call the people from other communities as "diku". The sense of distrust has started from those days to the most recent incident of Vedanta Mining snatching the hillock of worship from the tribesman for the benefit of outsiders.

Fear:Tribal people generally lives in seclude from the outside so called 'modern' world. Distrust gives birth of fear and hatred. They always justly fear that their land, their forest, their property will be snatched by the people from outside society. This fear for losing the control over the limited resources they have, made them more distrustful as well as fearful towards the other non-tribal people.

Cultural Difference:Every tribal group as well as every non-tribal group has their own culture, of which they boast. The cultural difference is there. Sometimes tribal people rightly fear of the cultural infiltration which used to corrode their very own indigenous culture. In Santal traditional music, 'dhamsa', 'madal' is generally used. But presently, Santali youths are sometimes use music instruments like guitar, drums in their music. In various ceremonies, different non-tribal customs have infiltrated.

Lack of sense of belonging:The lack of sense of belonging originates in the potential conflict between the loyalty to own tribe, own ethnic origin and loyalty to the larger national society. Sometimes people have to choose between this two. It is evident in various parts of India ranging from North-East to central part. In Nagaland, the fight is between the loyalty to Naga culture, customs, ethnic tradition and loyalty to Indian nationhood. Santals are confused about following the rule of Indian constitution or rules provided by their traditional self governments.

Religious Difference:Tribals are generally worshiping the Mother Nature (naturism or totemism). Their God is represented by various Natural objects like tree, hills various animals. They have many sacred totems. When the other religions infiltrate into the tribal society, the clash is imminent. Some religious preachers try to convert the tribals from their own religion to different ones by exploiting the poverty, illiteracy of them. These converted tribals lose their social identity in tribal society and try their hard to cope up with the new society, which generally proves difficult. We can call it religious infiltration. It also adds to the increasing level of distrust – a major reason of decreasing social cohesion.

Effect of hetero-ethnicity on social cohesion:From the previous discussion, it can be easily derived that, hetero-ethnicity has some problems and they are really grave in nature, and harmful to social cohesion as well as to the national integrity. In this situation, various divisive and harmful elements may get the chance to disturb the equilibrium or national integrity of a nation. In 2007, *Putnam* proposed a theory of constrict proposition, in which he explains an inverse relationship between heterogeneous ethnicity and social cohesion. He put forward the argument that, for any individual, living in any ethnically heterogeneous environment is harmful for interpersonal trust and in turn, erodes the social connection between and within the ethnic groups. The individual retreats from the social life. In this situation, social cohesion decreases. Before Putnam's theory of constrict proposition, we have Blalock's theory of conflict (1967). In this theory, he argued that, diversified social environments induce a feeling of threat and anxiety between majority – minority groups mainly for three reasons: firstly, real or perceived competition over limited resources, secondly, for social identity, thirdly, for relative positions in power and social status hierarchies. Keeping in view the above discussion, our main concern is the ethnic diversity and its negative effects on social cohesion – tribal society and how to improve the situation. The improvement of the situation is possible through improving the social cohesion indicators. In the social cohesion related literature, we can identify two different approaches to deal with. Primarily, the study from purely theoretical point of view – academic discourse on social cohesion, and the second approach is the policy discourse. This second approach is more interested in measuring quantitatively the indicators affecting social cohesion. This has a practical implication upon the policy formulation regarding social cohesion in any multi-ethnic country as rightly stated in an annual report of Department of Canadian Heritage as "a cohesive and inclusive society depends on 'respect for all ethnic groups' and the 'fullest possible participation of all citizens in civic life". It is worth mentioning here that social cohesiveness never suppresses the differences between the communities by any mean. Instead it refers to the need of more opportunities for integration between people of different cultures and of different communities in order to understand each other in a better way. So we may

conclude that social cohesion is not a destination but a journey towards the integration among all communities or groups. Now, let us try to find out the indicators directly affecting both social cohesion and hetero-ethnicity.

1. Sense of belonging & common agenda

    According to **Ferdinand Tonnies** a community is "organic natural kind of social group", whose members are bound together by a sense of belonging, created out of everyday contacts covering the whole range of human activities. So, we can say that, community or in a large sense, society is created out of sense of belonging. Members should feel that they are in the society or a part of the society. 'Sense of belonging' instigates an attachment of an individual with and within the society. This leads to common vision or agenda about the locality or society. In this case, the conflict of loyalty comes into play regarding whom a tribal people should obey – their own traditional authorities or to their national authorities. This conflict is to remain. So the main aim should be to minimise the chance of conflict of loyalty. The sense of being is measured by some factors as follows:

    - Neighbourliness: It is measured by level of interaction with neighbours, friends and family; ethics of care through supporting and helping friends, family, and neighbours. It is also measured by the acceptance of diversity, cultural differences etc as normal. Mutual respect for different cultures and ethnicities and observation of some limit or boundary should be there. In case of tribal society, people generally live in seclusion or in their own hamlet. So, in that case, neighbour may and in maximum case belong to the same tribal group.

    - Ownership of property: It is observed that the people who are living in hired or temporary housings, have very little choice or preferences about the condition of their locality. But whenever, one purchases any physical property in the locality, he becomes the stake holder of the locality. He has the non-formal as well as formal right to say about the problems and prospects of the locality as well as of the society.

    - Sense of pride: The ownership of physical property provides anybody with a sense of pride about the locality and the related society. Feeling of pride is an important factor regarding sense of being. Members should feel themselves proud regarding the attachment they have with their local society. It is observed that the tribal people feel proud about their own identity and own tribal society.

    - National pride / identity: After feeling proud of their society or locality in the local level, members of a society should feel proud of their national identity. We are considering the country as a large multi cultural heterogeneous diverse society. We have already mentioned that tribal people generally live in small hamlets in mostly inaccessible parts and in seclusion. So to give them a nationalistic feeling, the distance between the tribal world and outside world should be bridged both physically and psychologically.

    - Priorities for improving an area: When people living in a society share a sense of belonging among themselves, they feel some common problems like lack of sanitation, health, educational facilities of their locality also. These problem areas are known as priority area for improvement. It means that the members of the society should share a common vision about the locality. We may call it as issue based unity among the diverse people living in a society.

    - Feeling that they can influence the decision affecting their area: Sense of being in members of the society initiates a feeling that they should influence the decisions regarding their area, which may directly or indirectly affect them positively or adversely. In a legitimate democracy, people have the right to elect their representative, who is supposed to voice the people's demands or grievances

to a larger forum. Again in participatory democracy, people, apart from electing the representative, may join any protest march or initiate any mass movement for their demands, thereby influencing the decision making authority.

2. Tolerance

In a multicultural heterogeneous country, social tolerance is an important factor for influencing the social cohesion.

- Racial / ethnic background tolerance: In a multi ethnic society, people from one ethnic origin should be tolerant towards people from other ethnic origin. This is vital because every ethnic group have their own culture, custom and religion etc. People should accept these differences with respect. This respect gives birth to "unity in diversity" concept and in turn leads to higher social cohesion.

- Tolerance towards outsiders: Here outsiders stand for people coming from other regions to live and work in the locality. They may belong to the same ethnicity or different ethnicity. They may temporarily live or permanently settle in the locality. Tolerance towards these people is vital. It is seldom seen that, the Santal people migrated either willingly or forcefully from Central India to East or North East region as the tea plantation worker.

- Gender based tolerance: Tolerance towards male of female or third gender is important. Society consists of people from all genders. So people's tolerance towards every gender is required for social cohesion.

- Tolerance towards other religion: In a society, where people from many religions reside together, they make a multi religious society. In this case, tolerance towards people from all religions is required for a successful social cohesion. Tribals used to worship nature, believing in totemism or naturism. Now to reside together with peace and harmony among any multi-religious society, people from various religions should maintain and observe mutual respect for every religion.

- Tolerance towards physically disabled / old aged people: It is seldom seen that in some societies, physically disabled people and the old aged people are seen with problematic aspects. In this case, we will judge the indicator with an eye on how it affects the social cohesion. Tolerance towards old aged people must be viewed to find out the relationship between the families, friends, other members of the society and the old aged people.

3. Trust: Morris Ginsberg and Pearson defined society as the term to be used to a collection of individuals united by certain kind of complex relationship or modes of behaviours, which mark them off from other persons, who do not enter into these relations and those, who differs from them in relation and behaviour. The relationship is built upon trust. Trust is the underlying keyword of all relationship – be it in personal level and in societal level. It is generally seen as social capital indicator, which contributes to the making of social cohesion. We have decided to judge trust indicator based upon five aspects.

- General trust: This will deal with general trustworthiness of the people of a society to other members.

- Trust among people of the same society: In a multi ethnic country like India, where a society consists of people from several ethnic origins and religions, this trust within the society is important. We will try to find out how people from one segment will trust people from the same society but belonging to a separate segment.

- Trust outsiders: We have seen that in "sense of belonging" indicator, people from outside living or settled in a locality were asked about their feeling about belonging in that area. But here, the main thrust

will be upon how original people are going to trust the new comers or outsiders. We may call it the acceptance of outsiders in a locality or in a society.

- Trust / confidence in government: In a democracy, people elect their representatives to form a government. Here government stands for institutions, authority, national distribution system and other government machineries used for public good. We will see if people have trust or confidence in them or not.

- Trust / confidence in judicial system: Apart from government, impartial or neutral judiciary is another pillar of democracy. When people do not get proper service from the government, they can turn to judiciary for justice. So people must have trust or confidence in judiciary as a last resort.

4. Cooperation :It is a process of groups or individuals working or acting together for their common or mutual benefit, as contrary to working in competition for selfish benefit. Cooperation is important in any society even within a family. Here we have divided the cooperation segment within two groups as follows:

- Willingness to cooperate with family and friends.
  This is the willingness to cooperate with the near and dear ones. Sometimes people may cooperate with close ones but don't want to extend hand of cooperation to other people in the same society.

- Willingness to cooperate with others belonging to the same society / locality.
  In this case, the willingness of cooperate with other people not enjoying close relationship but staying in the same society.

5. Participation

- Social involvement: Here participation in any social occasion or gathering is considered. Social occasion may be personal in nature but they provide the chance of social gathering and social interaction. In public social gatherings like fair and festivals, people from different cross-sections of the society participate, thereby increasing the chance of social interaction.

- Voluntary activity: It can be a part of participation activity. Here people provide their services voluntarily for any type of common cause without expecting any remuneration. This 'working together voluntarily' increases the social cohesion.

- Group activity including protest & social change: In any participatory democracy, people may participate in any protest march or for any cause, stage a demonstration regarding any issue which affect them. This has a resemblance with 'issue based unity'. People irrespective of any ethnic origin of a locality or a society may come close due to a common cause like price rise of essential commodity.

- Social support networks: Participation takes the form of extending social support towards under-privileged people, belonging to lower socio-economic status. It can also be extended towards the aged persons and disabled persons. It is also to be seen that this support should be provided to all people irrespective of whatever socio-ethnic societal cross section, they belong.

- Democratic process: Democracy play an important role in enhancing the social cohesion. In a representative democracy, people used to elect their representatives to the higher forums. Here people from every ethnic origin get the ample scope to send their own representation.

6. Equal access to resources

- Adequate service provision: In maintaining a healthy social cohesion, adequate service provision for every segment of society is important. Government or administrative authorities must ensure

that people from every ethnic origin should get equal opportunity or equal access to the resources available.

- Physical connectivity: Physical connectivity play an important role in ensuring every one irrespective of any ethnic origin, equal access opportunities. It is specifically applicable for tribal hamlets, as they are used to live in seclusion. So easy accessibility to physical facilities is required for social cohesion.

- Provision for socially disadvantaged people: Equal access to resources is basically the duty of government and administration. In the eye of a democratically elected government, all people belonging to any society has equal right to services. So, government should provide same facility if not more to the socially disadvantaged and economically backward class people.

7. Life quality

The indicator consists of several sub-indicators like income, health, housing, security, employment and education. All of them are part of development and growth of a nation. According to World Bank, these two factors like development and growth have a relationship with social cohesion.

- Income: Every able person should get some income opportunity, which will enable them to serve their family. This will reduce the problem of income disparity in society, thereby decreasing the economic difference among people in a society. It increases the social cohesion people living in the society.

- Health: Along with income opportunity, health is also an important social indicator. Government should increase the quality and also quantity of health facilities and facilitators, to bring every person living in remote corner under its ambit. In this connection, one thing is worth mentioning that proper care should be taken to analyse and use the indigenous medicines of people from tribal origin.

- Education: Education is the liberating force for any human being. So government should take utmost care to educate the people

Actually, all the previously mentioned factors of life quality are the responsibility of Government. Government should invest in these sectors as social investment without expecting any visible return. This will return as increased social cohesion.

So, we can conclude that if we try to develop the above mentioned social cohesion indicators in a hetero ethnic country like India, the situation of social cohesion will improve. Social cohesion will contribute to the national integrity, thereby solving a major threat or problem to the nationhood.

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