

## **Justice, Peace and New Subjects**

Akhil Ranjan Dutta

### **Introduction**

The initiatives undertaken by GOI both for development and making peace in Northeast India have brought into being multi-layered mechanisms and tendencies of exclusion and marginalization in the region. Thereby, it has created new categories of 'subjects' who are vulnerable to the process of development and peace. Such initiatives have also contributed towards the growth of more and more obsessive and chauvinist tendencies and thereby have created a 'durable' state of conflict both within and among communities. Flow of money to the region under different populist schemes of the GOI has created a 'beneficiary regime', but at the same time these schemes have also created a state of complete dependence of the citizens on the government. These schemes, rather than contributing towards strengthening the morale foundation of the polity has done just the opposite i.e. making corruption a day to day reality from the top to the bottom layers of the government. The much proclaimed 'governance' has not been able to check this erosion in the very foundation of the polity. These erosions, on the other hand are not unintended outcomes of the initiatives of the government, rather these are very much embedded into the political economy of the Indian state today. The resource rich regions across the world have been the worst victims to such processes, Northeast India is no exception to it. Justice is a casualty in the process. Such a process has evoked resistance from different quarters. The resistance, unless is guided by proper understanding of the nature of the state, its class and corporate allies and also an alternative vision will be co-opted by the state and corporate interests.

What I intend to give in this concept note a few dimensions of the whole process.

### **Fractured Peace and No Peace at all**

When we talk about peace in Northeast India today we usually refer to the peace accords signed between the government and the insurgent groups. There were indeed number of accords signed, thereby bringing rebels into the mainstream. But, the peace brought about by the accords has been fractured in nature, those were done to create more discontents and violence than to resolve conflict and bring peace. One decade of politics in BTAD after the signing of the BTC Accord ( 2003) is a glaring example in this regard. The accord was exclusionary in more than one sense. First of all, it did not take different sections of the Bodo community into confidence, secondly the voice and representation of non-Bodos in the newly created BTAD was not given due consideration. This has resulted in disunity and conflict within the Bodos. The Bodo National Convention (BNC), a platform that aims at bringing all factions of Bodos together has not yet

been successful to do so. Bodos did not witness such fierce conflicts within themselves before the formation of BTC. It has also created unmanageable distrust and discontents between the Bodos and the non Bodos living in BTAD. The accord has not even brought procedural justice to the non-Bodos in the BTAD area.

### **‘Resource Curse’**

The resource rich regions across the world have emerged as conflict zones under the neo-liberal global economic regime. Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel laureate in economics defines the phenomena as ‘resource curse’. This is true in case of Northeast India too. The region has now emerged as new destination of the corporate investors for investment over natural resources, this time over hydro power where the Indian state acts as the facilitator. This has added additional fuel for conflicts in the region- conflict between states in the region and conflict between state authorities and common masses. The controversy over Lower Subansiri Hydro Electric Project (LSHEP) is a symptom of the new conflicts. The conflict exposes deficits in ‘governance’ in the development model and invites casualty both for justice and peace in the region. The check and balance mechanism under the democratic set up to restrain and restrict unwarranted damages have also been undermined in the process. For example, the scrutiny by the ministry of environment and forest as well as tribal affairs are now considered hindrances towards the investor friendly development model. The Environment Impact Study is not carried out properly, the cumulative impact study is not undertaken, top management and board members of investment houses are also taken into the impact study groups that clearly indicate the nexus between the state and corporate agencies. Colonial instruments of land acquisition are applied to move ahead with such anti-people development initiatives. The process undermines the rights of the communities over resources and thereby denies peoples’ right to justice and creates new grounds of conflict. It also creates ‘new subjects’- new category of people whose traditional mode of livelihood is either threatened or taken away.

### **Forcing women into new prisons**

Arupa Patangia Kalita, a prominent Assamese novelist in her work ‘Phelanee’ (which literally means something thrown away) shows the strong patriarchal tendencies in the nationalist and ethnic movements in the state of Assam- whether they are unarmed or armed. Women are vulnerable not only in the hands of the state armed forces, but also in the hands of the ‘revolutionaries’. These ‘revolutionaries’ asks for unquestionable hospitality from younger girls when they (revolutionaries) take shelter in houses. It is just to point out another dimension of vulnerabilities of women- a new ‘subject’ in the region. There are studies on the plight of women in conflict situation. These studies have revealed both the material, cultural and psychological trauma of women and children in conflict situation. The women belonging to minority communities, for example the Adivasi or Santhal women in BTAD areas are more vulnerable to different kinds of trauma. In Cambodia, after the Pol Pot regime, the women continues to be

victims in the hands of their own relatives. They are molested, even raped by very close relatives. In the camps of IDPs in conflict ridden areas, where an entire village or a community has to live under the single roof of a camp without separate compartments, the young girls are victims in the hands of the male inmates of the same village/community. It is true in all refugee camps, for example in the Burmese refugee camps in Thailand. Confined to a camp and detached from cultural and social interaction, these communities in camps witness cultural breakdown, indulges in activities which, otherwise, is not allowed in a community life. Not only those women in such camps are deprived from adequate food, sanitation, healthcare etc., which of course they are deprived of, the girls in these camps are forced to get married at early age to get rid of molestation, even rape from inmates inside. They become mothers at early age, without access to nutrition and adequate healthcare. While talking about the plight of women in Northeast India, these issues must find a place.

### **Profiteering over Migrant labourers**

The Thailand economy survived during the global recession of late 1990s, which also had devastated the economies of the South East Asia, primarily due to the presence of the Burmese migrant labourers. These labourers are paid less, are forced to work for longer hours, victims in the hands of the state authorities and the industrial managements and live in deplorable conditions. The international campaign for the Burmese refugees had forced the Thailand government to introduce some social security initiatives, which also benefit to some extent these migrant labourers. In Assam and also in other parts of Northeast India there is presence of migrant labourers. The manufacturing sector in Guwahati is mostly dependent on these migrant labourers. There are middlemen to bring them in to a city like Guwahati. They are forced to work with low wages and live in deplorable conditions. The women labourers and their children are the worst victims. They neither have access to healthcare facilities, nor to other safeguards like childcare etc. There is also huge discrimination in wage. The migrant male labourers, who work as house stead workers on daily wages, are paid relatively better. However, the female household labourers, who work on both monthly and part time basis as domestic help are paid very low.

These are only a few examples to illustrate the state of peace and justice in Northeast India. Whereas in the global discourse on rights and justice, the marginalized groups- whether it is women, minorities, refugees, IDPs etc. are given additional importance, in Northeast India these communities are no doubt more vulnerable, but the region as a whole is vulnerable to state's manipulation and vested interest.

## Making Women Count for Peace: Gender, Empowerment and Conflict in South Asia

Anjuman Ara Begum

North East India has been witnessing active armed conflicts for decades now. Women, as survivor or as combatant, are often highlighted to represent the impact of armed conflict while their role in peace building is somewhere not so visible or recognised. In the last decade, several UN resolutions, treaties brought forth the role of women as peace builders. One of these resolutions like UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) includes valuable recommendations to strengthen women's role in all stages of conflict prevention, management and resolution was adopted in October 2000. However, despite the high promises made in several international/national documents, women's situation in conflict situation remains vulnerable and inclusion of women in peace process remained grim specially in cases of unrecognised situations of internal (non-international) armed conflicts as prevails in north east India. Though women are much visible in demonstrations as Meira Paibis, Mother's Union etc, they are absent in negotiation table or in any decision making position related to the conflict.

In any conflict women participate in the conflict in different roles most of the time women are victims of sexual violence and other forms of violence. Also women take part as militants or combatants, as 'sleeper cell', as household heads, as bread winner by taking up employments and rarely, as peace negotiators. Conflict often increases percent of women activists in NGOs or informal women collective and thus increases their mobility.

Experiences and case studies show that absence of women in decision making positions have several negative impacts as follows:

- Personal initiatives made by women are discouraged/ or are not given support at the proper level
- Women are forced to confine themselves within their homes on the pretext of their own safety
- If women disobey social norms, they are seen as dishonoring their ethnic identity as women are supposed to be cultural vanguards of their society.
- Women's contributions to the peace process is acknowledged only in the confines of motherhood
- Sometime if women protest against any situation, seeking normalcy, their association is suspected of having unsolicited affiliation.

In north east India, women have undertaken activities in wide aspects of peace building and bridging ethnic divides. In 1997, the Naga Mothers Association (NMA) played an important role in the facilitation of a ceasefire between the Government of India (GoI) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland<sup>1</sup>. Women peace negotiators mostly use the banner of motherhood to frame their contribution to the peace process, as this is the only socially accepted form of

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<sup>1</sup> Banerjee (2010): 259-260.

engagement<sup>2</sup>. However, ‘whenever there’s a protest or *bandh*, the women are the first to be sent into harm’s way, but when it comes to discussing solutions they are excluded’<sup>3</sup>.

At this moment, several peace talks and negotiations are conducted between the Government of India and insurgent groups, but involvement of women are rare and as a result none of the peace agreements addresses women’s issues.

On the aspects of governance, women participation in administrative, political or judiciary posts are marginalized and at times, are almost absent from public and political life. India is one of the few countries in the world that has made it mandatory for one-third of the seats in local governance. In some states, like Tripura it is upto 50%. Yet the patriarchal mindset in NEI has prevented women from enjoying these entitlements to the full. Especially in the tribal areas, customary laws are used as an excuse to implement legislation for positive discrimination in favour of women. The Nagaland Government for example passed an amendment in 2006 ensuring 33% of all seats in town and municipal councils to be reserved for women. The male dominated councils sought to obstruct implementation by delaying council elections. It took women activists until 2011 to force the councils to adopt the new legislation through court order<sup>4</sup>.

The exclusion of women from decision making processes affects women’s right to life. The lack of adequate attention for enacting legislation against witch hunting in Assam is a classic example of this.<sup>5</sup> Another example is the protest of women who felt excluded from decisions about the construction of the Mapithel Dam. As Banerjee and others (2010) write in a case study: ‘On 3 November 2008 Manipur hit the news when the state forces brutally tortured more than forty protesters, mostly women, who were voicing their concerns against construction of the Mapithel Dam in the Thoubal Multipurpose Project. (...)Such instances suggest that understanding of the consequences of development projects on the lives of women and men living in the project area are often not considered in state development initiatives’<sup>6</sup>.

In the above context, it is pertinent to statistically scrutinize the status of women and their participation in decision making process in the armed conflict situation of north east India.

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<sup>2</sup> Roshmi Goswami, Women in Armed Conflict Situation, NEN, 2005

<sup>3</sup> ‘Between a bloc and a hard place: Northeast India, human rights and fair trade’, Cordaid background paper by Ben Hayes, October 2011 (draft), p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> In October 2011, the Court directed that elections to the Municipal and Town Councils in Nagaland – that had long been overdue - should be conducted before 20<sup>th</sup> January 2012, and that 33% of the newly elected council members should be women.

<sup>5</sup> Ben Hayes (draft report 2011: 15) writes, ‘Witch-hunting’, which inevitably discriminates against women, is also prominent in some tribes in NEI. In one region of Assam alone, 27 ‘witches’ have been killed in the first six months of this year; more have been expelled from their villages (it is said that control over land is often the real motive behind allegations of witchcraft). Despite widespread condemnation of the practice there is no state policy or law on witch-hunting and while it should be covered by the criminal procedure most cases fail because of a lack of evidence and witnesses to what are crimes in which entire communities are often complicit.’

<sup>6</sup> Banerjee ao (2010): 268.

## **Political Economy of Peace and Conflicts in Northeast India**

Deepak Mishra

1. Capitalism, even in its neoliberal form in 21st Century, requires the state to demarcate and recognise private property rights over resources, to create effective contract enforcement mechanisms along with a host of other essential functions including the maintenance of law and order. To the extent that border and 'disturbed' areas create problems for economic stability and safety for capital, these areas generally are weakly integrated with market economies. However, when there is a need for specific resources (such as minerals, hydropower etc.) capital attempts to create a conducive atmosphere for specific extraction of resources even under conditions of political instability, disruption and violence. There is an attempt to socialize the risks of business operation (of capital) in such circumstances. Increased state investment (such as, investment in security and market infrastructure), in such a situation, is what is needed by capital itself, apart from the many other functions of state intervention. Such expansion in state interventionism, which seems to be at odds with the overall logic of neoliberal economic policies, is routinely explained and justified through the logic of 'exceptionalism'.

Thus, it is hardly surprising that during the post-reform period, state intervention, in terms of public investment has expanded in the northeastern region and contrary to initial apprehensions in some quarters, resource inflow to the region has expanded and the policy of 'special packages' for the northeast has been further strengthened. However, a careful analysis of the nature of public expenditure in the region clearly demonstrate (a) the continued anchoring of development projects with the security needs or at least with a security-centric framework of development; (b) expansion, consolidation and deepening of the institutional infrastructure of development and its governance; (c) continued ethnicisation of development through a variety of formal and informal/ legal and illegal means; and (d) a gradual and selective move towards privatisation and deregulation of the economy, particularly in the sectors and areas where private capital has already been involved or has shown some interest.

2. In the official parlance, the increased inflow of resources to the region has resulted in growth and also, more importantly, in a significant reduction in poverty. This growth, however, is primarily driven by public sector, which in turn is based on liberal financial assistance from the centre. A more important aspect is the exclusionary nature of this growth process. This state-led expansion of sectors like public administration has failed to create backward and forward growth linkages with the local economy. Monetisation and commercialisation of the economy has not resulted in a positive transformation of the productive base and hence, much of the resource flow has only been circulated through the region with limited multiplier effects. Traditionally important private sector enterprises, such as those in plantation and mining sectors, have faced difficult challenges in the post-reforms period. Thus, notwithstanding the rapid expansion of

consumerist culture in the region, the economies of the States are based on very weak foundations.

3. At the bottom of these economies are small, independent producers- small and marginal farmers and forest dependent populations. Capitalist integration of the economies has ensured that these peasant producers are very much integrated into the market economy to the extent that even in the remotest hilly areas of the region, independent peasant households cannot reproduce themselves without interacting with markets of one kind or other. Commercialisation of the need-based local economies has been undergoing in an alarmingly rapid manner, but the processes of dispossession, that is normally associated with such commercialisation, is manifested in a highly uneven manner. In some sectors and places the classic processes of differentiation, marginalisation and pauperisation are clearly visible in the way more and more people are turning into landless labourers, but there are many instances where commercialisation and capitalist transformation has proceeded without significant differentiation and depeasantisation. Among the factors responsible for such local variations are: (a) institutional heterogeneity and complexity such as community control over land and forests, laws blocking transfer of land to non-indigenous populations, (b) low population density (particularly in hilly States) and (c) the relative importance of non-agrarian surplus for the accumulating classes.

4. Among the key features of the economy of the region is the simultaneous existence of different types of economies across the same spatial scale. The non-agrarian economy that has close linkages with the process of state investment in the region have been the key site for accumulation for the elites governing the region. Unlike many other parts of the country where access to political power has been used by the property-owning classes to extract rent from the market economy, in the north-eastern region, because of the overwhelming dominance of the state sector, state itself has become the key site for generation and extraction of rents of various kinds. Some observers feel that this has been such a pervasive feature of the region that the entire economy of the region might be termed as a 'rentier economy'.

5. A key aspect of the institutional framework of development in the north-eastern region is institutional complexity and diversity. Institutional diversity appears to be a pervasive feature of this process. The older forms of institutional arrangement are not simply being replaced by new, market institutions; rather the institutional transitions are far more varied. Some of the old institutional arrangements weaken and new institutions emerge, but many of the non-market institutional arrangements persist, albeit in different forms, serving new regulative purposes in the emerging capitalist economy. These uneven processes of institutional diversity, hybridity and interdependence are deeply influenced by existing and emerging power relations. There is a significance of such institutional diversity for the emergence and reproduction of local elites. Just as its evolution is characterised by 'infinite diversity', capitalist transformation, also does not necessarily involve institutional convergence. The institutional diversity and ambiguity is not simply a relic of the past or a part of the colourful mosaic of the cultural diversity of the region;

it is not something that has just somehow managed to escape the onslaught of modernity, this institutional diversity is the outcome of the deliberate actions by the state and also, to a lesser extent, by capital.

6. Insurgency, of course, creates barriers for rent-seeking politicians in very specific ways. To the extent that the normal capacities to govern are restricted by insurgency-related violence, the prestige, power and legitimacy of political leaders before their own constituencies get affected. Secondly, and more importantly, the rents through corruption are shared with insurgent groups and hence it effectively cuts into the illegal earnings of the politicians. Thirdly, use of violence against political leaders, their supporters and families have been recurrent phenomena in almost all insurgency-affected areas of northeast. Finally, by restricting the space available for politicians to maneuver through diverse political concerns in a violent political context, insurgents keep them confined to limited choices. Suspension of mass mobilization strategies, during periods of violence, for example, increases the cost of support mobilization for the politicians. Regional and ethnic political parties, typically compete for the same political space with the insurgent groups; and in the presence of a more radical articulation of ethnic demands by these insurgent groups, they face a lot of disadvantages. However, it is not true that political parties do not have any countervailing power over the insurgents. The selective use of state power holds the key to their bargaining chips against the militants. Often, political parties ride over the waves of radical demands articulated by insurgents, by providing symbolic or direct support to their causes. Divisions among the insurgents are exploited by political parties to consolidate their own position.

7. The political economy of peace building in the region has also been based on mutually beneficial agreement on rent sharing by mainstream politicians and insurgent groups. A key aspect of 'cease fire' agreement has been the that the state machinery do not disrupt the rent/ 'tax' collection drives by militant groups. The unstable, short-term rent-sharing arrangements among different sections of the elites are getting stabilized and are being more durable under the 'peace' that neoliberal prosperity has brought to the region. The sheer durability of conflicts has ensured that elites of various hues have learned to coexist, and negotiate with each other, and 'peace' has been (is continuously being) redefined at varied spatial scales depending on the immediate interests of those who control the structures of accumulation and circulation in the economy of the region.

8. This fragile tranquility and relative lack of large scale violence is, of course, based on very shaky foundations. The possibility of violent eruption is always present. But in between episodes of violence, rents are being extracted and distributed, fragile structures of accumulation are being created and protected through a varied combination of legal and illegal/ violent and non-violent means. The developmental outcome of this is the collapse of democratic deliberations, particularly involving the poor and the dispossessed. Accountability structures are either absent or are blatantly partisan. Predatory forms of capital accumulation coexist within a discourse of

ethnic competition and neoliberal optimism regarding benefits from transborder linkages. The middle classes, in the meantime, are in tune with the real and virtual consumerist utopias that celebrate the arrival of India (and by extension, that of the 'northeast') on the global map!

## Lessons of Peace Accords on Autonomy and Homelands Movements

Sukhendu Debbarma

The histories of autonomy and homelands movements are part of the human history and dates back since early times. The quest for autonomy and homeland is inherent and means to achieve the goals differs from people to people and region to region. Who does not want autonomy or homeland? In the process of gaining exclusive autonomy and exclusive homeland for one group/s of people, there is always the danger of forced inclusive or deliberate exclusion. Thus, gaining exclusive autonomy or exclusive homeland for one group/s of people may not bring the end solution. Our experience clearly shows that more problems have been created in the name of such autonomy or exclusive homeland. In fact, the movement for autonomy and homelands are the root cause of all conflict. At the same there is no denying the fact that in most cases autonomy or homeland movements are justified by one way or the other. Such justification may be adhering to peace or may not but those involved in such movement would justify their own view points. In order to achieve the goal of autonomy and homeland any kinds of actions or justification become legitimate. However, in order to gain a deeper understanding or before making any judgment of any such movement, one has to understand the core history the movement.

The underlying factors for such movements may be due to:

1. Long historical injustice
2. Aspirations
3. Self-determination
4. Identity crisis
5. Lesson learn- influence of neighbors etc.

In recent times the history of Croatia is an example where the movement for independence and the subsequent war that followed came to be termed as *homeland war* by the Croatians.

In the context of North East India, the movement for autonomy and homeland is a very complex issue. The reason being that the total area of the region is about 1,01,250 sq.miles and there are more than 400 ethnic groups (approx). The paradox is if each of these ethnic groups in the name

of autonomy and homeland wants to carve out and create exclusive areas, where is the space? However, at the same time if the people or community desires no justification will prevent them. The will and aspirations of the people must also be accommodated since we live in a democratic country. Thus discussing about autonomy and homeland is like opening Pandora's Box. It's like a dialogue which is essential and needs continuation but nonetheless never ending.

Let me know share the genesis of the autonomy movement in Tripura. The strong impact of partition, independence of India followed by communal riots on Tripura was exerted through the influx of refugees. Tripura became part of the Indian Union on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1949. The influx continued over a long period of time and ultimately outnumbering the indigenous (tribal) Borok people of the state. The situation can be gauged as within the period of about 24 years i.e. 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947 to 24<sup>th</sup> March 1971, there were 6,09,998 refugees officially settled in the state. However, these excluded those refugees settled in Tripura without being registered and those who did not avail rehabilitation facilities from the Government. The refugees at present constitute the main business group and play a vital role in the economy and political affairs of the state. It is pertinent to mention here that in 1955 Sri G. B. Pant, the then Home Minister in the union Govt. of India, expressed the opinion that the pressure of population had already reached a saturation point in Tripura and it would not be advisable to allow further absorption of additional people in such a tiny state. But the opinion of the then Union Home Minister was not taken into consideration and refugees settlement continued. In 1952 Mr. Dasarath Deb the then M.P. of Tripura suggested before a National Conference convened by the Prime Minister that some area be reserved exclusively for the tribal but the demand was not met. In order to safeguard the interest of the tribal in 1960 Mr. N.M. Patnaik, the then Chief Commissioner of Tripura in a note submitted to Dhebar Commission suggested that specific area should be declared as reserve for the tribal under V Schedule of the Indian constitution. The Commission rather suggested setup Tribal Development Blocks in tribal compact areas failing which V Schedule might be given a trial.

At the same time there were movements for autonomy and demands from various corners-political and non-political by the indigenous people for the protection of their rights. **The**

**Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS)** is the first indigenous political party formed in 1967 by the tribal intellectuals in Tripura. The major demand of the TUJS was:

1. Creation of Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution
2. Recognition and adoption of Kokborok as official language
3. Restoration of Tribal lands allotted to the non-tribals

It was against this background that the Autonomous District Council under the VII Schedule was established by an Act 1979 and the elected members were sworn in 18<sup>th</sup> January 1982. The VI Schedule of the Indian Constitution was introduced with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 1985 (49<sup>th</sup> Amendment) and led to the creation of the “Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC)”. The election of the TTAADC under the VI Schedule was held on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1985 and the elected members were sworn in on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1985. To be more precise the TTAADC was created under the VI Schedule of the Indian Constitution in order to combine tribal development with tribal autonomy. Out of the total area of 10,478.78 sq. Km. Of Tripura, the area under TTAADC comprises of 7,132.56 sq. Km..

The powers and functions of the TTAADC are not well equipped to deal with the kind of aims and objectives set before it. There is a gap between the powers and functions and the aspirations of the indigenous people. The present movement for more autonomy to the TTAADC itself speaks for its own. It is pertinent to mention here that it was thought that earlier that the powers and functions of the TTAADC were quite sufficient enough to deal with the purpose for which it has been established. But as time passed by it has been realized by the indigenous people that until and unless more autonomy in the form of functioning and finance is given, the TTAADC can not function. This is well reflected as in the manifesto of the Congress and Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura (INPT) in the recently concluded Assembly election (2013) promised for more powers to the TTAADC.

## Lessons of peace accords on autonomy and homelands movements: A Note

Sanjay (Xonzoi) Barbora

On October 17, 2005 a passenger bus carrying the usual cargo of people was winding its way to Diphu, the district headquarter of KarbiAnglong district in Assam. It was stopped near Charchim – a village where the ethnic Karbidominate – by a group of armed men. They asked all the Karbis to step out and many did, since they had no way of avoiding their ethnic markers. One Karbi woman, who was the mother of two young children quickly got rid of her *pekok*-- a sheet of embroidered cloth worn on the upper part of the body by women in KarbiAnglong and associated mainly with the Karbi community – and lied, saying that she was Garo, as were her two little children (Hussain 2005). That probably saved her life, as twenty-two Karbi women and men were hacked to death and left to die on the bus.

One wonders what went through the minds of the passengers who were asked to step out of the vehicle. Did they feel a sense of outrage that their fellow passengers were about to be butchered? Or did the relief of being out and therefore less likely to be dead, make them grateful? What of those who were responsible for the killings? The magazine report cited above, went on to provide a tragic but curious series of allegations and denials by those who claimed to speak for the victims and their alleged perpetrators. The publicity secretary of the predominantly Karbi armed opposition group, United Peoples Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), Tung-E Nongldasaid that the killings were carried out by a faction of the predominantly Dimasa armed opposition group, the DimaHalamDaoga (DHD). In response, the chairman of the DHD, DilipNunisa, said that his group, engaged in a ceasefire with the government of India, were in no way responsible for the killings and that this was probably the handiwork of a breakaway faction called the Black Widows. The magazine report also mentioned that Nonglda and Nunisa were roommates in college.

How does one begin a conversation on peace here? And who is best placed to start it? Could it be the desperate woman, lying to save herself and her children? Or could it be those who survived? Or the one-time college roommates now locked in battle for territory? Or should it be the state, with its legal aid and enforcement agencies? This author is not sure about where the conversation has to begin, but it is clear that it has to start soon. When we recognize the enormity of the silence that accompanies our attempts at speaking to power, we will be left with no options but to begin talking in a different tongue. For, is it not ironical that it is only when our college roommates choose to engage with the long arm of law and our country's famed constitution; they find themselves flailing at each other with machetes and *daos*. There is little doubt that this tragedy is compounded by a lax, lazy political vocabulary that emanates from confident constitutional certainties, where every solution for dissent is either the big coercion trick, or the insidious cooption treats.

There are but two lessons to draw from the different experiences of the autonomy and homeland movements in Northeast India. The first is crystalized in what Roman senator and antiquity's best known historian, Gaius Cornelius Tacitus, was reported to have said about the Roman Empire: "To plunder, butcher, steal, these things they misname empire: they make a desolation and they call it peace"<sup>7</sup>. Tacitus was speaking about the character of the Roman state and the people who were empowered to man the various military and political organs of ancient Rome. Those who have watched and studied the Indian state's dealings with the various movements and dissenters in Northeast India would vouch for a similar trajectory in contemporary times.

The second is more closely tied to those who claim to pick up arms for the different peoples of the region. It echoes the Irish nationalist poet, William Butler Yeats, who pensively asked if we will be able "to hold in a single thought reality and justice"<sup>8</sup> when we are doing politics. Yeats, forever a melancholic poet who wished to see an end to the colonial exploitation of his country by its more powerful neighbor, was always wistful in his reflections on politics. When one looks at the manner in which expressions of dissent have so readily been co-opted into mathematical calculations of constitutional proportions, one is forced to confront the expediency of justice in most of the armed conflicts for homelands and autonomy (in the region).

Maybe Tacitus was right: our experiences with autonomy and homeland movements in Northeast India tell us that we might just be riding into a dead-end peace. Our resources are all but taken; our backs broken and our children in well-heeled schools in different parts of the country. All of this has been part of the repertoire of resolving the knotted roots of armed conflicts in the region. Generations of beneficiaries of such resolutions are still in the making, as we debate the direction and trajectories of an earlier generation's attempts at negotiating the balance of power between our kin communities and the Indian state. It is not clear if they will rubbish us for our impertinence for standing up to Empire, or they too will follow rebellious paths. If they do, they would be well advised to bear Yeats' caution in mind: they have to be able to hold both reality and justice in one single thought. It would be a difficult task, because our reality is fraught with compromise that is borne from engaging with a political vocabulary that cannot bear to let college roommates be. It is from this unenviable position that one has to learn lessons from our forgotten peace accords that follow autonomy and homeland movements in Northeast India.

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<sup>7</sup>From Chapter 30 of *De vita et moribus Iulii Agricolae*(On the Life and Character of Julius Agricola), by Tacitus (translated by William Peterson).

<sup>8</sup>William Butler Yeats, 1962. *A Vision*, London: Macmillan.

## **‘Lessons of Peace Talks and Peace Dialogues’**

Samir Kumar Das

Now that the first phase of insurgency is over, peace seems to have come to stay at least for some time in the Northeast historically marked by acute violence and chronic insurgency since the colonial times. With the declining number of violent incidents and human casualties recording a new low particularly in recent years, a good deal of literature on peace albeit in a self-critical vein is now focused on assessing the quality and durability of *the* peace that has returned and most importantly in finding out how peace by being ‘governed’ gets routinized and institutionalized and becomes an obstacle to the realization of the triadic principle of rights, justice and democracy. I too in my CORE paper made a distinction between peace being informed by the triadic principle and what I preferred to call ‘peace impasse’ that establishes itself precisely by annihilating these principles or as the Berghoff’s theoretical paper puts it - by ‘delimiting the field of intervention for building peace’.

For one thing, it compels us to look back and reflect on the question of how the peace that has returned to the region could have staged its return in the first place. While it is always interesting to see how the promise of ‘peace through governance’ turned into a practice of ‘governing peace’, there is an equally dangerous tendency of depreciating – if not completely writing off – the kind of rights that the forms and technologies of governance had guaranteed during the first phase. The enjoyment of these rights played a significant part in the making of peace in this region. For another, peace impasse has made peace interventions in peace times difficult compared to what these are in times of civil war, violence and insurgency. Accordingly, this brief presentation seeks to reflect on these two rather interrelated questions.

### **The Ethnic Subject**

While the distinction between peace informed by the triadic principle of rights, justice and democracy and peace impasse is too important to be wished away, there is hardly any scope for exaggerating it beyond a certain point. For, as I will argue in the first part of my presentation, every attempt at achieving peace through governance also doubles up as a practice of governing peace itself by ‘delimiting’ not only ‘the field of intervention for building peace’ as the Berghoff paper suggests but the very agenda of rights - by laying down what could be claimed as right and what could not be and most importantly by creating a world in which the those who claim rights beyond this critical threshold *as it were* do not exist.

Peace during the first phase that has come to create today’s impasse was sought to be achieved first by mapping a group or a community with the help of an inventory of apparently distinct social and phenotypical features and settling it within a ‘space of its own’ earmarked and ‘partitioned’ for it and secondly by subjecting it to an economy of care in such forms as states reorganization, inner line, excluded area, special category status, sixth schedule, elite cooption,

economic package and corruption etc that obliges it to constantly seek help and protection from the Centre and by becoming increasingly dependent on it. These two taken together were combined with such hard counterinsurgency measures as military operations and village grouping etc which played a crucial role in bringing peace in the region.

The recent plea for turning away from what is called ‘Partition-based strategies’ to ‘Rights-based approach’ ignores that the former strategies contributed to the formation of a particular kind of subject – an ethnic subject as we may call her - and most importantly invests her with only certain kinds of rights like right to homeland, right to be protected against foreigners-cum-outsiders, right to practice customary laws so on and so forth which were essential for the production and reproduction of her ethnic identity. While privileging these rights, these governing strategies also disprivileged or even censored certain other kinds of rights like right to voice dissent against the community and other human rights. These rights seemed ‘liberating’; but these also ruled out the enjoyment of many other kinds of rights. ‘Control in this way is no longer exercised through repression, but through the stimulation of an ideal’ i.e. an ethnic subject in our case (Gadda 2008:10).

### **The Regime of Rights and Spiraling Ethnicity**

The practice of governing peace - while introducing and bringing into circulation a particular agenda of rights - could not resolve what I prefer to call rights paradox. On one hand, rights pertain to the ethnic subject as an indivisible collective – not to an individual subject as a unit claiming rights vis-à-vis her community. The collectivization of rights agenda, we may recall, has its devastating ramifications for the individual as an autonomous subject and not as a member of her community. On the other hand, in a region where there is hardly any homogeneous space that a community might call its own, partitioning of space amounts to peeling of an onion to a point in which there will just not be any space for many communities to inhabit. It is possible to trace the implications of this paradox in Mizoram, in Tripura, in Manipur and in such districts of Assam as Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao and Bodo-inhabited areas etc which have become flashpoints in recent years.

No wonder, oppositional politics under such conditions takes on “ethnic, linguistic and national consciousness”. The practice of governing peace not only produces the ethnic subject but proliferates and reproduces her. Governed peace was really a tribute to the ethnic subject that emerges from out of it and since she emerges from it she cannot turn against it. The ethnic subject – to borrow a phrase that Golder has used in one of his recent essays - is like ‘a stable metaphysical substance, a subjectum fully present to itself’.

The paradox was sought to be addressed in the Northeast by incorporating the rights into a regime of power primarily in two rather complementary ways, first by vesting the civil society

with the responsibility of moderating and reconciling the contending rights claims in a way that multiple groups and communities come to realize the importance of coexistence and mutual respect for each other's rights, and secondly by seeking judicial interventions. Civil society, as I argued elsewhere, is caught between the two extremes of having to moderate and reconcile without being significantly heard by conflicting ethnic subjects or allowing itself to be inserted into the ambit of ethnic subjectivity. Ethnicity may not have been successful in *civil-izing* itself as the liberal commentators would have us believe; but civil society wherever it exists in the Northeast has been open to a process of ethnicization. While the second plea for depending on judicial interventions is based on Dworkin's famous assumption that judicial interpretations are also 'moral' pronouncements, it really requires someone to unpack not so much how impunity may be 'moral' under certain conditions but how it grows into a 'culture' with a formidable history of its own in the region.

### **Peace and Intersectionality of Rights Claims**

The rights of the ethnic subject, as we have argued, constitute themselves into a regime allowing and privileging only certain kinds of rights and by the same token disprivileging, censoring and ruling out others. If the region has been a standing witness to violence and insurgency - to a form of oppositional politics equally emerging out of community and ethnic consciousness, it is not because there were no rights but because there were rights which after being constituted into a regime perpetrated its hegemony since Independence in the region. Violence and insurgency are the byproduct – not of simple absence or denial of rights – but of the presence and hegemony of this particular regime of rights.

Now that the first phase of insurgency is over, the region has been subjected to a new mode particularly since the early 1990s without however completely replacing the partition-based strategies, with its accent on development as the trump of governance. The region has experienced a series of social movements across it organized whether for protesting against state's inept handling of floods, earthquakes and similar man-made or natural disasters, corruption, displacement induced by construction of big dams while asking for preserving the already fragile ecology of the region, or for securing tenancy rights etc particularly in upper Assam.

The introduction of new forms and technologies of governance has made the older regime of rights, to say the least, uncertain and rendering it 'a conflicted effect of power-knowledge relations, an always achieved, always unravelling subject-effect, its capacity for re-articulation the fraught legacy of discourses and institutions whose commands are variously repeated, obeyed, appropriated and transgressed' (Golder 2010:3). This has for the first time in the history of the region inaugurated a new era of struggle for rights. We conducted over 100-odd interviews in upper Assam in early December 2012 with various cross-sections of people affected by the construction of dam in order to understand how they prioritize different kinds of rights – if at all. While all of them barring a few serving directly under District Councils

symbolizing ethnically constituted spaces admittedly had had their reasons of attachment to the functioning Councils, argue that the right to security of life (under threat due to proposed construction of the dam) prevails over all other rights including their right as a member of any particular community – although none of them is willing to completely relinquish her claim to a right to identity. What will they do with autonomy if they are not alive?

In this new hierarchy of rights, right to security seems to have challenged the ethnic subject and her rights in at least two major ways: One, right to life is one which has the potential of cutting across ethnic boundaries and brings people of diverse groups and communities together. Two, while homeland is imagined as an indivisible whole, the unit that is considered as crucial to the exercise of one's right to life is not the homeland whether real or imagined – but *thai*, the immediate dwelling place and neighbourhood. With the eclipse of the ethnic regime, there has truly been a disaggregation of homeland. These have become the twin pillars on which the new biopolitics of rights claims<sup>9</sup> in the region is going to draw its potential till a new regime of rights is founded if it is ever founded at all. The new regime can establish itself only by suspending this potential.

As a matter of counterfactual statement, peace of the *ungoverned* sort is not perched on a regime of rights; but on the contested nature of rights claims, the imponderables and uncertainties of the claims which potentially refuse to be subsumed under any regime. On the other hand, the articulation of rights into a regime is possible only by suspending this potential and rendering it unrealizable. Rights-based approach to peace not only calls for realization of the importance of rights but implies an appreciation of their contested and contingent nature. Since peace of this sort marks no great respite from conflict and war, it is best attained through incessant movements and struggles.

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<sup>9</sup> I prefer to retain the term 'biopolitics of rights claims' for these claims are unlikely to be established as a regime of rights.

## **"Political Economy of Development and Prospects of Peace"**

### **A Concept Note**

**Sajal Nag**

One of the earliest discourses on secessionist politics, insurgency and anti-state movements in post colonial north east India centered around the thesis that such movements developed because of the 'insularity' of the tribal communities due to which they had not felt the 'sensation' of being a part of the Indian nation making process and hence failed to develop any pan-Indian sentiment. Subsequently, the discourse changed its position a little and actually started a blame game. As the violence did not show any sign of abatement even after deploying counter insurgency measures, it blamed the colonial administrators and more particularly the Christian missionaries for fanning anti-Indian feeling among the tribal. But as disturbances spread to other parts and engulfed the entire region, this discourse took another turn and emphasized the economic backwardness and lack of development as the explanation for such anti state activities. It indirectly blamed itself for keeping the region backward and harped on correcting it by initiating development measures. Inherent in this discourse is that 'development' is the panacea for resolving the crisis in north east India. Backwardness was sought to be neutralized by doses of development and consistent cash flow through financial packages. It was premised that since geographical link between the region and rest of India was slender, development would be the bridge through which people of the region are integrated with other parts of India and vice versa. This will also expose the people of the region to other parts of India and its people. Such exposure will narrow down the cultural gap and mental distance between the two facilitating emotional integration.

Hence financial packages in the name of 'development funds' were granted to afflicted states of north eastern region with the hope that such initiative will bring peace in the region. In fact to unitize the development initiative, the region was reorganized into seven small states and each of which was declared special category states who were granted financial assistance to the tune of 90% of their expenditure from the Centre. A separate ministry called Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER) was established to look after exclusively the problems of north eastern region. The already existing North Eastern Council, established for the same purpose, was merged with it. There is an extra allocation from the planning commission to the concerned state called Peace Package. To pre-empt more anti state activities all ministries at the centre was asked to keep aside a part of its total allocation (10%) as non-lapsable pool for the north eastern region. Those states like Mizoram which had just given up violence and signed a peace treaty were given an additional fund called 'peace package' for reconstruction. Surrendered militants are given one time rehabilitation packages as well as employment in state government offices mainly in the police force. The concerned state was also given extra funds to rehabilitate the ex-undergrounds. A number of central office apparatus are opened in the area

where local people are given employment at the lower grades. Universities, IIT, IIMs and such higher educational institutions are established. The central administrative cadres working in the region are given additional salary to work in 'difficult' regions. Besides this certain infrastructural projects like construction of national highway, railway gauge conversion and Big Dam projects were declared as National and Priority Projects. In some cases relative autonomy in the form of federal states or autonomous areas/councils are also sanctioned which are invested given financial packages so that there are decentralization of development initiative. The place is opened up for tourism to outsiders to develop it as an industry. In fact a new policy called the Look East Policy was inaugurated so that the north eastern region could be linked to the South East Asian countries and benefit from economic exchanges from those countries. All these initiative however did not exclude the withdrawal of the military from the area. Hence development initiatives were to coexist with the presence of army and other draconian laws and devices. The argument behind it was that turbulence leads to instability which in turn leads to economic disruption.

The critical issue however is, though these are liberal views on causation-resolution of conflicts, these are essentially state perspective. It is the state which decides on its own what are the causes of the conflict and also how it should be resolved. Hence the definitions of 'disturbed areas' 'peace' and 'development' are also state initiated. In this definition anti state movements are secessionist, anti-Indian and insurgency and conflicts. Peace in its definition is demilitarization and establishment of the rule of law and maintenance of order. These are desirable for the state. But if the people are against that very state, order can not be maintained. The right to speak against the state is a part of a developed polity. Hence peace is much more than the state centric definition. In this very definition there are germs of disorder. Absence of war is negative peace. In such definition therefore peace appears as conformism or capitulation to state policies and absolute prevalence of law and order. Peace is absence of war or war like situation. This definition failed to recognize that war like situation was created by the state itself by its deployment of armed forces. In the name of peace keeping it actually perpetrated more violence. It is also based on the premise that peaceful condition is necessary for development and once development takes place, the conditions for conflict and turbulence automatically are neutralized. It also is blackmail by the state that unless peaceful conditions prevail, development would not be initiated. Most interestingly, the discourse does not explain why 'development' did not take place so far when the conditions were indeed peaceful and had to wait for conflict to break out to realize the necessity of development. Although it is valid that most of the regions where anti-state activities thrived are immensely backward, it is also true that most stark violence and conflict taken place in some of the most developed region of India e.g. Gujarat, Delhi and Maharashtra. At the same time a strong secessionist movement had developed in Punjab which was by no means underdeveloped. It has successive agrarian revolutions and had a strong base for transition to an industrial economy. The secessionist movement in Tamilnadu was one of earliest in India where backwardness was not the issue but Brahmanical hegemony and imposition

of a North Indian language was the core issue. Hence proceeding on the premise that development facilitates peace building is fallacious. But the state refuses to entertain any such critique of peace and development since it is state itself had generated it. Therefore the other theories that development cannot ensure peace as development generates inequality which sharpens conflict potentials or the dependency theorist's argument that development for some always depends of forceful suppression or control of others are not given a look into. Such lack of democratic debate on the issue of peace and development strengthens the Neo-realist argument that development enhances the power of state to build and mobilize military power which threatens peace instead of ushering it. Hence development actually generates more instability.

Such statist notions of development and peace failed to take into account the basic issue the conflicts in the north east are political in nature. It interrogates the premise that there can be peace without political rights. It raises more questions like are not discourse of right and also part of development agenda? Most of the movements which are seen as 'violence' are movements for political rights. The Nagas for example openly state that they do not want any development initiative by the Indian state. What it wants are the political rights and justice. Can there be development without justice and political rights. The Neo liberal and Humanist view like that of Amartya Sen feel the growth of GNP or per capita income cannot alone ensure peace unless it is equitable. "Development can be seen as a process of expanding the real freedom that people enjoy. Focusing on human freedom contrasts with the narrower views of development such as identifying development with growth of GNO or with rise in individual income can of course be very important as means to expanding the freedom enjoyed by members of society. But freedom depends also on other things such as social and economic arrangements... as well as political and civil rights. Raising the standard of living quality and quality of housing, food clothing transformation, medical care etc alone cannot ensure either development or peace. It has to be accompanied by political development. Political development is a process which provides member of civil society with civil liberties, freedom of speech, organization, press, and human rights. It also means access to full participation in the political process, to choosing those who will govern them, having their voices heard and the grievances and opinions taken seriously."

Development, according to the State or its agencies like Planning Commission, growth of GNP or personal income the indicators of which are of course dubious. Often it aims at temporary gratification of the dissenters or temporary cessation of hostility. However even a casual look at the definition of 'trouble' provided by the state is that it never accepted that the movement is a people's movement. It always branded the leaders as certain misguided elements. In academic parlance the state sees most of them as middle class movement who want to standardize their material standard of living. Hence the attempt of state is also to appease these middle class elements. The development models it devised is aimed at providing sources which will pacify the middle class. Hence up gradation of the areas into urban space, providing electricity through

construction of dams, encourages private investment in the construction of shopping complexes. Providing higher education in within the state for their children, Bank loans for construction of houses and buying of cars, employment in Universities and Government offices where by a regular source of earning is ensured. In many cases like Mizoram, Tripura, Assam and Bodoland areas it also bears fruit because the middle classes indeed lap it all up. In the process the vast mass of people who were the base of the movement, are not only deprived but also now neglected by the leadership itself. The interesting part of the initiative was that the development package was never aimed at alleviating the material standards of the rural masses or to be more specific the peasants, artisans, landless, urban poor, and such classes of people and hence they never benefit from the development package. There are no proposals of agrarian development or land reforms or providing land to the landless peasants. In fact some get further victimized by the development initiative as some development projects tend to displace and deprive them from their habitat and livelihoods. In fact in the development models which are aimed at peace building hardly ever there are any schemes for the vast majority of rural masses. The political economy of such development initiatives have to be understood to understand why most of the peace initiatives fail or have multiplier effect.

In the light of the above, hence, the debate should be on:

What are the definitions of peace and development as enunciated by its initiators?

Are they State-centered?

What are people's ideas of Peace?

How does state define Development?

Who are the targets of this development initiative?

What is the nature of development initiative? What kind of transformation it seeks to bring in?

What is the overall objective of this initiative?

What is people's perception of development?

What kind of development people desire?

Are their necessities and perception taken care of in such development project?

Has such there been any instance in India where such initiative yielded the desired result?

## Justice, Peace, and the New Subjects

Ranabir Samaddar

1. While insurgency, armed protests, and rebellions as a whole have diminished considerably in the Northeast, clearly justice has not been ensured. Genuine political autonomy, popular governance, people's access to land and other resources, women's dignity, and redress for wrong doings in the past, and several other related issues remain unaddressed. Some people therefore say that the present condition is one of peace without justice; some say it is one of fragile peace. Some say that this is a no-war no-peace condition. This sense of peace without justice is exacerbated in the wake of globalization, neo-liberal economic reforms, rampant corruption, domination of security agencies, and a self-serving electoral democracy serving mostly the elites. In a way therefore the old idea of citizen as the subject of democracy is either outdated or seems to be an un-realizable figure. In the years of militancy possibly the militant was the subject of politics in the region, and in place of a standard public sphere we had a sphere marked by the interface of the underground and the civilian life and the government/s of the state/regions.
2. Such a situation provokes the idea of *minimal justice*. Here we can speak of five conditions related to the idea of minimal justice, and interestingly all these conditions are related to a companion idea of *sharing of sovereignty*:
  - (a) Recognition of past injustices along with guarantees that they would not be repeated;
  - (b) Setting up of instruments of such guarantee/s;
  - (c) Establishment of joint custodianship of new structures of governance;
  - (d) Enhancing people's ownership of resources (including common property resources) with special attention to the issue of access by the vulnerable groups, which is one of the instruments of ensuring social justice;
  - (e) Innovation of new mechanisms
3. However, while these demands are being raised by the subjects in various ways, the fragmentary ways in which these issues are coming to the fore indicate the presence of a dispersed subject-hood and dispersed subjectivities. These subjects and subjectivities indicate the emergence of a distinct politics of justice in transitional situation. Therefore the subject of such "transitional justice" itself carries the mark of a transition from nation-state/nationalism/independence/ethnicity/homeland to a state of neo-liberal market fluidity and the rise of a neo-liberal self.
4. In this way we can locate the nature of a transient subject. To be clear, this subject is not a collective and internally un-differentiated subject. There are peace seeking groups;

intermediary groups, groups still looking for return to old ways of protest and resistance, and groups of women as new political actors. Also some speak of the return of peasants to mass protest politics. There are environmental groups. Likewise there are Gandhian and other similar groups working for village reconstruction. There are immigrant laboring groups waiting for justice. Yet again, there are groups fighting for tribal homelands. North eastern states have developed distinct regionally or sub-regionally specific identities. Likewise, Muslims and other minorities may have specific subjectivities. There are again groups working for legal pluralism to positively combine the best of the legal provisions for dignity, rights, and justice, and the customarily accepted rights of the people. Finally tea tribes and other indigenous population groups also demands and aspire for what they think to minimal justice.

5. It may seem that in this kind of situation where the above mentioned population groups constitute a multitude of new political actors, the state and local governments will have an easy way towards neo-liberal restructuring of the societies and economies of the region. In one sense, it may be true. But this fragmentary situation will in many other ways make the task of governing the region in a uniform way difficult.

Therefore in this perspective will it be farfetched to say that Northeast in its present condition of dispersed subjectivities may show India a new path towards popular democracy?

## **WOMEN AND PEACE**

**Rakhee Kalita**

The last two decades have witnessed women assuming key roles in conflict resolution and peace. Where women were earlier viewed often as only 'precarious' and vulnerable entities during violence and war, the visible shift from being objects of conflict to active participants in conflict transformation marks a significant development in understanding gender roles. Actual practices in conflict situations have opened up emerging areas of scholarly interest amidst a rethinking of women-in-conflict paradigms.

In all stages of peace process, from the cessation of hostilities, sustainability and credibility of peace on the ground, security, end of violence and administering of justice, and finally to truth-seeking apparatuses and the redressing of impacts of violence, participation of women is vital to complete exercises in conflict resolution.

In conflict zones across the world, women have often been, typically, most violently impacted but also, increasingly now, a necessary part of the peace making. The absence of women in this process and in peace talks especially tends to result in their needs, plight and concerns and contributions in conflict and conflict resolution being overlooked. It has been however noticed that the most vulnerable of women in conflict situations are those that inevitably turn from victimhood to agency. While much attention has been focused on Central America where insurgency and revolutions have been staple or in the case of Africa, West Asia or Northern Ireland where narratives of women in peace and conflict abound, the dominant motifs in these stories have been oppression, disease, discrimination and denial of justice. In light of this, the UN Security Council's Resolution 1325 (2000) has brought to the fore the awareness of women's role in peace- building that attempts to stave off traditional notions about women's spaces being limited to suffering and inequity. This landmark initiative, SCR 1325 mandates for the first time the inter-linkages between development, peace, security and human rights in which the woman is envisaged in an energised sphere of decision making and policy framing. This has

implications in advancing gender equality within transitional recovery, reintegration and reconstruction efforts in the transformation from states of conflict to post conflict.

A particularly interesting strand in understanding women's participation in peace and conflict resolution is the idea of enhancing women's spaces in governance and thus empowering them. Since the late nineties a definitive shift has occurred in this direction, whereby feminist historians and scholarship have come together with advances in peace studies to probe and challenge existing perceptions about how women figure in conflict and violence. The normative role of women as victims and non-political subjects who only suffer has given way to a much more sensitive understanding of the gendered aspect of conflict. In fact even a brief overview of conflict societies in South Asia reveals the dynamic of women's agency in war and peace, whether one is looking at Sri Lanka, Nepal or the northeast of India.

While images of women swamped by conflict and violence and their disappearance or debility in the time of conflict are liberally splashed in the popular imaginary, women have also led wars behind their men, become prominent citizens, wielded guns as combatants, headed households and replaced men as providers and leaders both at the domestic and the local political level. In a curious reversal of stock and received notions about women's exploitation during war and peace, some of South Asia's most troubled regions have demonstrated the capacity of women to turn their adversities to advantage as they grapple with ways and means to survive and surmount violence and transform conflict societies into peaceful communities. Concerted struggles by the Hill Women's Federation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Afghan Women's Network or for instance, by Nepalese women's organisations to be included in the 2006 Peace roadmap drafted by political parties and the Maoists there have shown staccato results often aborted by powerful pressure groups unmindful of women's needs and security. The recently established UN-Women is mandated to boost such local women's activism, to recognizing and validating it, thus enabling women to shape postconflict societies in more sustainable ways.

Where do these women come from? What motivates them to take up cudgels on their own behalf and on behalf of society? Where do they go? What changes do they effect in their communities

and what are the long term results of their efforts at social harmony and redressing justice, or do issues of class, caste, ethnicity and religion cut into their gender identities and responsibilities as women? These are some of the questions that frame new studies in Women and Peace.

In the Northeast of India, as many as three states are currently in various stages of low-intensity conflict are battlegrounds for peace and peace talks. Assam, Manipur and Nagaland are all caught in the cauldron of peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction. It is here that the theatre of women's active participation in peace-building comes alive bringing back flashes of the erstwhile Manipuri kingdom's *Nupi Lan*, or the women's revolt of 1904. In more recent manifestations, women have come together under a common banner to fight black laws like the AFSPA, or to reform a conflict society under the leadership of the *Meira Paibis*, the women torch-bearers. The Naga Mother's Association (NMA) and the NPMHR have adopted similar roles to fight ethnic division and align with other civil society groups to broker sustainable peace. In Assam, the scene is somewhat fuzzy and women's organisations evoke a less formal initiative. However, the players here are the women rebels who found themselves empowered through insurgent activity. Flung into various states of destitution in post-camp life, these are women who have renewed their solidarity in challenging the state for claims of justice and rehabilitation. Some of the wives, widows and half widows of former combatants, missing or dead, have come together to demand their share of a 'just' peace. In a recent civil society drive headed by the SJA( *Sanmilita Jatiya Abhibartan*), the participation of demobilised women rebels, women activists and of at least one woman executive member of the United Liberation Front of Assam(ULFA) in negotiations for peace with their leaders and the government has been incorporated into a charter of conditions upon which peace is being sought to be brokered. What remains to be formally addressed by the state is the prickly question of transitional justice, an apparatus that is hardly known in a society that has already witnessed more than three decades of militarisation and conflict. It is therefore not surprising that the women's groups, civilians, and those at the peripheries of civil society have both invested in solidarity to seek peace and stability after long cycles of violence. In a state-commissioned Truth and Reconciliation probe, Assam has conducted enquiries into 'secret killings' of earlier counter-insurgency operations that left many families destroyed and lives devastated. Women's testimonies figure here as powerful

alternative mechanisms to understand violence and the politics of power that militate against their agency. Consequently women have begun to move the emphasis from just peace to participatory peace.

Yet, in the transition from conflict to post-conflict, a question that rhetorically lingers is “When is Life Grievable? ” For most of South Asia’s armed conflicts this might not be just an intellectual debate but the very issue at the core of their existence. For the women who get pushed back under the pressure of nationalising and communitarian practices of a patriarchy that slot them the attempt to rise and surmount their situation and be agents of transformation is an onerous one. “Do women have a country ... own country?” the poet asks. Women peace makers and agents of peace-building surely believe there is one. There are, as many perhaps as there are such collectivities of women rising up against a world increasingly marked by violence and aggression.

## Women Governance and Peacemaking

### A Short Note

Paula Banerjee

*Reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.*<sup>10</sup>

These are heady times for those of us who have spent the last two decades in trying to stress the fact that women's role is invaluable in conflict situations because many a time women have led communities towards negotiation for ceasefire and peace. For the first time internationally such a strong message was sent supporting women's role in peacemaking through the UNSCR Resolution 1325.. In the case of Northeast India this seemed particularly relevant. Here both the state and non-state military forces recognize women as agents of peace. What does agents of peace in conflicts situations imply? Does it merely mean playing the role of negotiator or mediator to resolve immediate conflicts or does it entail engaging with the larger socio-political framework that produces conflicts? The immediate role in resolving conflicts lies in the shoulder of the women of Manipur as the Chief Minister is quoted in a leading daily, "as saying Manipur is today veritably on fire and the major onus of dousing this fire rests on the shoulders of our womenfolk who have always taken a major role in the shaping the history of the land. He said there are no sons who will not listen to their mothers, no brother who cannot be influenced by their sisters"<sup>11</sup>

In Northeast India women from all the ethnic groups have taken part in the resistance movements and one of the common points of state oppression shared by all the women's groups in the region is the Repeal of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958/72). They claimed it to be merely the most recent state action against women in the region, where women have faced multiple injustices from the colonial period onwards. They also claimed that the brunt of injustices came after the passage of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Northeast India in 1958. It was only in 2004 that women from Manipur launched a well orchestrated campaign against AFSPA after Thangjam Manorama was brutally killed. Most of women's resistance and campaigns for justice are undertaken largely in a non-violent manner in Northeast India.

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<sup>10</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), S/RES/1325 (2000)

<sup>11</sup> Imphal Free Press 17 March 2001.

In Manipur valley women's activism is symbolised by the activities of Meira Paibies, or the torchbearers. Manipuri women today eulogise trace their origin from the military deeds of Linthoingambi of Ningthou Khomba, who was known to have saved her palace from attacks by the enemy. During the last century there were two women led uprisings in Manipur known as the Nupi Lal. These were against the British. Today, there is a women's bazaar in Manipur known as Nupi Keithel where women meet, sell their ware and discuss problems of the day including politics. This bazaar has served as a launching pad for collective revolt by women. The Meira Paibies also trace their origin from such organised women's activism in Manipur. They started as *nasha bandis* or combat groups for the ever-increasing consumption of alcohol by the men. Slowly they captured the imagination of the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA). The PLA imposed a ban on bootlegging and booze in January 1990. Two months later, succumbing to this pressure the United Legislative Front government declared Manipur a dry state. This was a victory for the Meira Paibies. The social cleansing drive it is said, evoked popular support. Other than the Meira Paibies there are the Naga Mothers Association (NMA) of Nagaland that has been very active in the politics for peace in Northeast India. The NMA has rendered valuable service for the cause of peace. It mediated between the Government of Nagaland and the Naga Student's Federation over age limit for jobs and came to an equitable settlement. An achievement of NMA is the formation of the Peace Team in October 1994 to confront the deteriorating political situation. Their theme was *Shed No More Blood*. The NMA spoke against killings not only by the army but also by the militants. In a pamphlet released on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1995 the representatives of NMA wrote that "the way in which our society is being run whether by the overground government or the underground government, have become simply intolerable."

Although women in Northeast India have largely been pillars of strength for their own communities but they are sometimes exploited by their own communities. Women are often marginalized within their own ethnic groups and they are constantly fighting for their socio-economic and political rights. The rising conflict has its own demands from the women to play as negotiators which have increased the role of women in the civilian sphere. For example a startling number of Rabha women controlling property are called witches and thrown out of their own communities. Women do not accept their situation of vulnerability passively and have innovatively created alliances at times with the Indian state and at other times with the rebel movements in Northeast India to create a space in which they can be heard, and that can be considered as their own space of empowerment. Over the course of the conflict they have shaped and reshaped their responses to the state and innovated and changed techniques of negotiation. In this way they have had a profound impact on governance and conflict resolution and in the process reshaped gender relations in their own societies. Also it has to be remembered that alliances might be changing because by now there are two generations of women in the political forefront of northeast India. The second generation do not share the bitter memory of

state repression and show keenness to create alliances with the state for benefits such as thirty three percent representation in the municipality. The Naga women have litigated and gone against the wishes of the HoHos for 33 per cent. The state has helped them in this endeavour and increased women's development fund. Does that mean then that the old form of activism is over and women's peace movement has been governmentalised? Tripura also presents a similar dilemma. Perhaps it is too early to sing the swan song of women's resistance to state injustices. Probably it would be better to think that women's peace movements have become more nuanced and mature. They recognize that there are no permanent enemies. They also recognize that without gender equality a just peace is a distant dream.

## **Political economy of development and prospects for peace in India's North East**

Working Paper for the CRG workshop scheduled for February 26-27 at

OKD Guwahati

Patricia Mukhim

The North Eastern Region of India is difficult to understand because of the cacophony of trying to encapsulate so many discordant voices, thoughts, aspirations, narratives, frustration and anger, literally in a nutshell. When the Indian state called the entire region by one name it is trying to lump these myriad voices in a nutshell. Because of its unique and difficult locational disadvantages, its infrastructure gaps and above all because the region is labelled as the conflict zone it needs a more creative handling of the situation. The region is afflicted by ethno-nationalistic assertions which more often than not have taken a violent turn. With over 238 ethnic groups each looking for a 'homeland' the region calls for a more pragmatic and creative approaches from the Central and state governments especially while dealing with the security aspect.

India's north eastern frontier also known as the North Eastern Region (NER) is one of South Asia's hottest trouble spots. With as many as 30 armed insurgent organizations operating and fighting the Indian state to push demands ranging from secession to , autonomy and right to self determination, and a plethora of ethnic groups clamouring for their rights and distinct identity—at times not just fighting the Indian state but engaged in internecine turf wars—the region has all the ingredients that make and sustain trouble.

Moreover, the location of the eight north eastern Indian states itself explains why it has always been a hotbed of militancy with trans-border ramifications. This region spread over 263,000 sq. km shares a highly porous and sensitive frontier with China in the North, Myanmar in the East, Bangladesh in the South West and Bhutan to the North West.

That the region is indeed strategically located is evidenced by the fact that it shares a 4,500 km-long international border with the four South Asian neighbours, but is connected to the Indian mainland by a tenuous 22 km-long land corridor passing through Siliguri in the eastern state of West Bengal, fancifully described as the 'Chicken's Neck.' This is the region where India's longest running insurgency is located—spearheaded by the Naga tribal separatists who have been clamouring for an independent homeland ever since India attained independence from the British in 1947. Four of the seven north eastern Indian states, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura, witness scales of conflict that can be categorized as low intensity wars, defined as conflicts in which fatalities are over 100 but less than 1000 per annum. Between 1992 and 2002, there have been 12,175 fatalities due to insurgency and other armed conflicts in India's Northeast.

The region is an ethnic minefield, as it comprises of around 160 Scheduled Tribes, besides an estimated 400 other tribal or sub-tribal communities and groups. Turbulence in India's Northeast is, therefore, not caused just by armed separatist groups representing different ethnic communities fighting the federal or the local governments or their symbols to press for either total independence or autonomy, but also by the recurring battles for territorial supremacy among the different ethnic groups themselves.

What the Northeast of India is witness to are essentially ethno-national movements by these groups to further their sub-national aspirations, often triggered by the fear of losing their distinct ethnic identity. For instance, the movement for maximum autonomy by the Bodos, Assam's largest plains tribal community, has succeeded in the group securing a new politico-administrative structure within the existing State of Assam following a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Government of India on 10 February, 2003. The Bodo-majority areas have now come under the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), a 40-member elective body that would run the day-to-day administration of the areas under it and undertake developmental projects to improve the condition of the community and the areas in which they inhabit with funds allocated to it directly by the federal Government. This arrangement has however created similar aspirations among other groups such as the Dimasas, Karbis and the Rabhas amongst others.

### **Impact and extent of the reach of governance and planned development**

Like many regions of the country the NER suffers a governance deficit despite the fact that all eight states are Special Category States receiving 90% grant from the central government and having to generate only 10 % of revenues internally. The delivery system at the cutting edge of development i.e, at the village level is weak particularly in those states that have not enacted the Panchayati Raj System and also do not other alterative models of local governance.

All The North Eastern States of India are often described as land locked on account of their location. Prior to the Partition of 1947 the region had thriving trade relations with the then East Bengal. The new boundaries of East Pakistan left the NER disconnected. As stated earlier the region is connected to India by a narrow land corridor that skirts the north of Bangladesh. This has been a serious impediment for the development of the region, which has lagged behind the rest of the country in terms of infrastructure and industrial development. Several measures have been undertaken under the aegis of the Look East Policy to uplift North East India such as the Asian Highway, Asian Railway link the Natural Gas pipeline, the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport facility which is aimed at establishing connectivity between Indian ports and Sittwe port in Myanmar through riverine transport and road links in Mizoram. The Ganga Mekong

initiative also signals the opening up of direct air links between Guwhati -Ho-Chi Minh city – Imphal – Hanoi etc.

The above projects have been in the pipeline for over a decade but they have not reached completion point. Delayed projects, abandoned schemes and a lack of monitoring and accountability for projects meant for the region create a dystopia that feed into the frustration of youth.

Studies indicate that the incidence of unemployment in NER is in general higher than the national average. It is highest for Assam among these states. The region needs to move towards a “job oriented economic growth”. Encouraging non-farming activities in the rural areas and enlarging the scope of economic activities in urban areas. It may help in creating additional employment opportunities. The improved intra- and inter-regional trade links coupled with international trade links with neighboring countries like Myanmar, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal could create additional employment opportunities in the long run. Of course, these linkages might not take shape unless proper infrastructural facilities are created. But how this could materialize is the biggest challenge for the policy makers in the region.

Human insecurity can spring from reasons other than conflict. They include a gap in health care and other public delivery systems. Large swathes of villages are not covered by government schemes targeted for the disadvantaged groups. One example of the failure of governance is evident in the manner that the public distribution system functions. It leaves out the unreached, unconnected population in the villages and hamlets of the region. As a result the slash and burn (jhum) method of cultivation continues because people need to subsist on the food they grow.

### **Need for a Strategic Studies Centre in NER**

There is an urgent need for a Strategic Studies Centre (think tank) for the region to study, analyse and help understand the strategic needs, such as security responses, food and environmental security, employment opportunities, new approaches to flood management, impact of big dams and proposals for more sustainable power generation strategies. All these could augment what the Planning Commission and other national and regional bodies like the North Eastern Council and the Ministry for Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) are doing. The think tank would feed into policy advocacy and policy change wherever necessary and articulate steps to makes implementation more visible and effective. The think tank might also analyse the impact of a security responses adopted thus far, especially in the light of the ongoing peace talks and cessation of hostility by some of the more strident armed insurgent groups.

### **Biodiversity, Agrobiodiversity and climate insecurity**

The North Eastern Region (NER) lies between 22° N and 29°5’N latitude and 88°E and 97°30’E longitude and is at the crossroads of two continental plates, the lowland Indo-Malayan Realm

and the Palearctic Realm. The tectonic collision of these geophysical worlds has created one of the most biologically rich regions on earth. The NER (Eastern Himalayas) is one of the 34 biodiversity hotspots of the planet. The plant life, more than ten thousand species, is one of the most diverse in the world. In the ten year span up to 2008, 353 new species of flora and fauna were discovered, ranking ahead of Borneo, the Amazon and Papua-New Guinea. The World Wildlife Fund has identified the area as a Priority Global Eco-region.

The NER was one of the early sites of the domestication of wild biodiversity. *Jhum* (farming the forest) cultivation was first practised in the NER from about 7000 BC, and 35 crops are still grown in this ancient form of agriculture. Perhaps as long as 10,000 years ago cereals and vegetables were cultivated here and early cultigens probably spread to other parts of the world. The Indian Council for Agricultural Research has identified the region as a centre of rice germplasm. Primitive varieties of maize, tea, sorghum, mango, vegetable greens, banana and cucumber have been reported from the region. Nokrek in Meghalaya was declared a UNESCO Biosphere and as the National Citrus Gene Sanctuary after the Indian wild orange (*Citrus indica tanaka*) was identified there in 1984. Genetic studies have shown this species to be the mother germplasm of all citrus species in the world.

The region has sacred forests and groves which have been preserved as primary forests near human settlements. 79 major sacred forests remain to this day. These forests are micro hotspots for a variety of fauna and flora. It is estimated that at least 54 species of rare and threatened species of plants are found in these sacred forests of Meghalaya alone. Some sacred forests have been lost by outside religious influences, but some communities continue to set apart and maintain new sacred groves.

In the light of the above climate change as is being perceived in the form of unseasonal rains, floods, rise in temperatures etc pose a great challenge to the region. Also the reckless mining activities in forest lands, poisoning of rivers through leachings from coal mines, the destruction of heritage caves through limestone mining have added to the dangers posed by climate change. The impact of mega dams on lives and livelihoods; large scale displacement and absence of R&R policies have threatened the rural population and people living in downstream areas. These are areas of potential conflict.

### **Impact and relevance of developments in the neighbourhood countries and their approach, on the situation in the North East**

The North Eastern Region shares about 96% of its borders with Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, Bhutan and Tibet. The region is resource rich. Minerals, forests, cultural and human resources are increasingly becoming trade-able commodities. Any economic initiative, trade and commerce between the NER and South East Asian countries would demand that India shed its traditional security concerns and trade fears. The immense hydroelectric potential of the areas bordering India could be developed to promote rapid economic growth of the North East. Conversely, hydro-electricity generated in the NER is more viable if evacuated to Bangladesh. The NER is a

huge producer of horticulture and floricultural products, all easily perishable and easier to export through Bangladesh. To that extent Bangladesh is a strategic trading neighbour for the region.

Increasingly the NER is also featuring in the graft list of the country. While central funds have poured into the region the absence of monitoring mechanisms to ensure that those funds reach the intended beneficiaries have given rise to corruption at all levels. This has also widened the gap between the haves and have-not and increased the number of people living below poverty line each year.

The above cited reasons create anxieties on several fronts. They are manifested in different claims, counter claims and the blame game about being ignored by an indifferent Centre. It is true that the responses from the Central Government are not based on ground realities and this further aggravates the feeling of alienation. Hence the proposition for a Strategic Studies Centre for a more informed policy on the region. We will agree that policy makers in Delhi are also not the best informed or only half informed about the problems that beset the region. Delhi is paranoid about the security of the region bordered as it is by international borders. Hence any proposal for opening up the borders for trade and commerce with SE Asia is looked at askance by the security mandarins in Delhi. This puts paid to the possibilities of creating economic opportunities from the internal natural resources of the NER.

It would therefore be in sync with this conference to suggest ways forward to address the multiple deficiencies that the region suffers from as there are already several agencies looking at various aspects of development and governance in the NER. The points listed above may serve as indicators in case the paradigms have remain unchanged despite the rapidly changing scenario in the region.

The prospects for peace depend on how the above issues are addressed for there are multiple and complex reasons for unrest in the region. Also military security is not the solution and cannot bring peace in the region. In fact, the pernicious and oppressive laws like AFSPA are what aggravate the situation here. Unfortunately this Act which gives impunity to the military to shoot a person on suspicion of being a terrorist/extremist/insurgent etc has become a sort of ping-pong between the Defence Ministry and the Home Ministry. With Acts like the AFSPA which are applied in Disturbed Areas, peace will always be an unattainable goal.

## Lessons of Peace Talks and Peace Dialogue

Gina Shangkhram

Let me try to draw the attention of the learned participants to the ‘Lessons of peace talks and peace dialogue’ of the Government of India (GOI) and the Naga people which I have personally gone through in a very intense experience.

The Naga peoples’ struggle for self-determination has been a story of untold suffering of the people for a cause that is so dear to their hearts even today. It is for this cause that the people chose to suffer consciously and pay the cost. Villages were burned down; populations were decimated, uprooted and displaced to new settlements; many young and youthful lives sacrificed; the cream of Naga society dissipated away with the dream of attaining their birth right still unfulfilled. Yet the Nagas are still groping in the dark for an ever-elusive solution to their struggle.

After the Second World War, which was purportedly fought to defend democracy, came to an end with the allied forces emerging victorious, the imperialist powers gradually withdrew from their colonial dominions, in the process giving birth to new nation-states in Africa and Asia. Through a treacherous betrayal, the British government undemocratically gifted away Naga land to two new-born nations in India and Burma (now Myanmar). This was done allegedly because the colonizers failed to procure the consent of the then Naga leadership for a crown colony to be carved out between the Bramahputra and the Chindwin rivers with an access to the Bay of Bengal (as A.Z. Phizo had written to the Governor General of India, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, from Calcutta Presidency Jail on 21 November, 1948). Ever since then, the Nagas have been struggling for their right to self-determination against all odds and the nightmarish repression of the Indian armed forces backed by insidious political agenda of the GOI. Naga land, stretching across two countries, is today divided by the international boundary between India and Myanmar. It is further fragmented into different states and provinces within the said two nation-states. In India, the Nagas are fragmented into Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland states against their wishes with the singular objective of India to reduce the Naga political issue to an insignificant decibel. In the same way, the Nagas in Myanmar, too, were distributed between different provinces with the same objective.

When the Nagas stood up to declare to the world what they thought were their birth rights, the GOI reacted vindictively by passing several draconian laws— laws of the kind, in fact, which were used against the Indian freedom fighters during the British rule in India— such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1958.

With the Damocles’ sword hanging over their heads under such draconian laws, Nagas have lived under virtual military rule in the past many years. The result has been the war of attrition for the last six decades and more, leaving in its trail arson and displacement of villages, the killing of thousands of people, maiming of several thousands more, leaving behind many widows and orphans, and the rape of numberless woman. Today, there is hardly a Naga family

which has no sad stories to tell. On the Indian side, it has been a tragic waste of lives, wealth, time and energy for no cause of honour. Thus, the conflict of a heightened nature goes on between GOI and the Government of the Nagas to the mutual destruction of both. They refuse to see eye to eye, respect and understanding each others views. The conflict has been also eating into the very vital fibre of the Naga life creating all kinds of destruction, mutual hatred, mutual distrust, fratricidal killings, intolerance, division of the people, debased behaviour, greed, mutual slandering and so on under the culture of violence and total militarization. This has threatened the very essential foundation of the Naga people culturally, socially, economically, politically and educationally. This is how we have entered the new millennium, beset as it is with the forces of globalization, liberalization and the so-called democratization of education and economy.

As we see it today, the two conflicting parties have refused to see eye to eye and understand each other's point of view from the very beginning— starting from 1947 till 1950, as will be evident from A.Z. Phizo's letter to the Prime Minister of India on 29 December, 1951, Silghat Camp, Tezpur, Assam. The Naga leadership pursued a peaceful non-violent means to resolve the dispute. However, the GOI resorted to violent repression by sending regular army into the Naga land in 1956. Thus began India's first counter-insurgency action in Naga land. The rest has been a tragic tale of blood, sweat and tears for thousands of people for more than 60 years.

As stated above, peace can only be achieved and preserved through mutual respect and understanding by approaching the issue disinterestedly with an adequate attitude of reciprocity. However, in the past attempts to bring about a negotiated settlement of the Indo-Naga issue has always witnessed the stronger party thrusting its interest over the weaker party and never a fair give-and-take. This proves that justice has sadly meant the imposition of the will of the strong over the weak.

Thus, the creation of Nagaland state within India under the 16-Point Agreement of 1960 was done through backdoor because the GOI had picked a few government servants as a party against their opponents through the diabolical machination of Indian Intelligence agencies, with a view to divide the Nagas under different administrative umbrellas. It left out an area of 15,519 sq. km. in Manipur which is itself almost the size of the present Nagaland state and almost an equal area in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The talk following the 1964 ceasefire met a deadlock when the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) refused to accept the will of New Delhi to be imposed on them. Subsequently, India managed to break the FGN into two by creating divisions within FGN leadership and creating the revolutionary government of Nagaland in 1968.

In 1972, the GOI unilaterally abrogated the ceasefire entered in 1964 and shifted the affair of Nagaland from the Ministry of External Affairs violating the 16-Point Agreement of 1960 to the Ministry of Home Affairs through an administrative order of Delhi Ministry of Home Affairs. This was illegal from the point of view of all national (constitutional) and international legal standards.

Following this, army operation was intensified all over the Naga areas with a propaganda offensive that “Every tree in Naga jungles will be guarded by an Indian army and every Indian army killed, shall be avenged with 3 Nagas killed”. This was literally carried out and the Naga populace was put under heavy pressure from every quarter. And the Shillong Accord was procured at gun point. Late A.Z. Phizo, the then President of Naga National Council (NNC), told M.J. Akbar in London way back in 1979 that the Accord hroroughly failed to settle the issue. National Socialist Council of Nagland (NSCN) was formed in 1980 resisting this Accord. The NSCN eventually split into NSCN (IM) under the leadership of Thuingaleng Muivah and Isac Chisi Swu and NSCN (K) under S.S. Khaplang.

NSCN (IM) entered into ceasefire with the GOI in 1997 and the peace process has dragged on for more than the past 15 years without any tangible progress or solution. Even today, peace has remained elusive. In the search for lasting peace, we need to reflect on the processes that the GOI have attempted in the past and why they have failed to secure a lasting peace in the region. This also requires us to carefully understand the present state of things and evolve to correct the perspectives as to what the whole issue is all about.

The ray of hope to settle the issue amicably, provided when the two conflicting parties entered into ceasefire since 1997, appears to have been frittered away in pursuit of little nothings. The ceasefire has at least facilitated the civil societies of both Nagas and Indians to ventilate their democratic voices. It was hoped that when the two parties in conflict settled down to try and understand each other’s predicaments with the people’s support behind them, things could be sorted out. This would have required great patience for both to take the peoples’ wishes along with them. But it appears that both sides have considered precious little about the importance of taking the peoples’ democratic voice along.

In order to evolve a concrete people’s voices, we need to draw inspiration from the Naga democratic traditions and from the word of God— the Bible, as Nagas today are a Christian community and have the slogan “Nagaland for Christ” as their national objective.

Believe it or not, the Naga people still draw strong inspiration from their traditions and there is a need to strengthen their own creative cultural values when the long journey of the peoples’ struggle has landed them in a state of seized mentality of a very dominating nature. Nagas are a community of Christians. Their lives are profoundly fashioned by the teachings of the Bible. As such, in a heightened conflict situation, the Christian convictions of non-violence, of being one’s brother’s keeper, of not being vengeful, of forgiveness, of being peaceable with everybody, etc are being put to a great test. The role of the church towards this end is crucial to strengthen this thinking at different levels.

The Naga people are fortunate in some way to have a great tradition of non-violence, as epitomized by Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Indian nation. It is hoped that the Christian non-violent tradition that the Nagas uphold will be reciprocated by the Gandhian tradition of non-violence from India.

Thus, against this background of the important historical events, the inherent strength in the Naga tradition itself and the great Indian tradition of non-violence epitomized by Mahatma

Gandhi, the Nagas have embarked on a “Journey of Conscience” – a journey to touch the soul of India and journey within the minds of the Naga people. We are of the opinion that accusations and counter-accusations have stalled the ongoing democratic processes. While trying to reach out to India, it has been also important for us to retrospect what is wrong with our Naga society. We believe that the acceptance of our needs and interests, listening to India’s needs and interests and the predicaments of the issue itself require concerted and collaborative efforts from both sides to bring about a better understanding and respect between two peoples in order to bring about a mutually acceptable solution.