

Guwahati Workshop (26-27 February 2013) Concept Note

1. This meeting is being organised by the Calcutta Research Group (CRG) as part of its research work in the last two years on conflict, governance, and peace building, done in collaboration with some European Universities and research institutions. It will be held in Guwahati in collaboration with the OKD Institute, Guwahati. The aim is to discuss the following themes in the context of India's North East.

- (a) The question of mode of governance and its relation with conflict management and the issue of peace;
- (b) Peace processes and peace accords;
- (c) Territorial reorganisation in different forms and peace building;
- (d) Political economy of development, social governance, and peace building;
- (e) New subjects of developmental governance – women and other subjects

2. Modern governance structures emerged in India as parts of the broader imperative of colonial peace-building, simply because the society that was to be governed was ridden with conflicts and contradictions and thus was marked with an absence of social peace. Governing here meant governing conflicts. Thus from the beginning the main challenge was in finding adequate forms of coping with various reactions and responses of the suppressed groups in society, who faced the problem of power of an alien Sovereign. Bereft of legitimacy and representative character, the sovereign power had to always find a model of governance, which would have military efficacy, yet would retain civilian character. The main features of such a model of governance have been: (a) The state had to be strong, with indivisible sovereignty, and armed with administrative and police measures; (c) It meant that conflicts could be allowed to linger till the proper mixture of the civilian and the repressive measures produced peace; thus the adversary of the state had to be softened up enough through a mix of strong responses and almost deliberate delay in addressing demands; and this was the way in which all negotiations between the colonial state and the nationalist movement went. Thus, the assumption that suitable time must arrive before peace building measures were initiated; (d) Limited grant of autonomy was the best solution; that was the main message of the India Act of 1935; the Act provided two more messages as norms of governance - constitutionalism and rule of law were planks to retain stability of rule, and faith in the effectiveness of a policy of territorial reorganisation including methods of partition and boundary-making exercises towards reinforcing control; and finally (e) the colonial experiences of statecraft also resulted in the classic governmental assumption that struggles for justice were in essence inter-group conflict for parity.

3. There are of course discontinuities and new developments in the field of governance and conflict management and resolution. The post-colonial history of conflict management shows that social governance is always accompanied or preceded by peace accords, which form one of the main features of the conflict resolution scenario in India, the middle ground in a no-war-no-peace situation. Such a ground needs to be thoroughly investigated because on one hand it represents the desire for peace in society, on the other hand it shows how forms of peacemaking are governmentalised no sooner are they invented. These peace accords become, barring some exceptions, the occasions for the next rounds of conflict. Characteristic of such dialogues are the inevitable legal shackles on discussion between the two adversaries, top level presence of government leaders and officials giving an appearance of state recognition of the adversary, prolonging ceasefire without conceding anything substantive from the government side, grant of limited autonomy, and introducing various interim arrangements that take a life of their own and continue without ever giving over to a resolution of the question. These structural features of post-colonial government of peace show why maintaining middle space and engineering ways of continuing dialogues on justice are the two most challenging tasks of peace building, because the fate of these determines the shape of the peace to come. The lessons of the peace talks also pose the question: Does the adversary of the state engaging in a particular dialogue take a maximal position or a minimal one? These talks are, in brief, instances of the dual nature of the dialogic act: dialogic act as part of conflict and war, and second, its contingent nature. In its usual juridical form sovereignty appears as indivisible; therefore logically it cannot allow dialogue. Yet dialogues take place between state and its adversaries, who also often raise the question of sovereignty

4. Of these measures two have been of special importance: territorial reorganisation and introduction of limited autonomy in the Northeast. The autonomous arrangements have reorganised the states internally while the North East Reorganisation Act externally reorganised the states. Possibly of greater importance has been the introduction of autonomy as a result of the peace accords. The autonomous arrangements influence the pattern of conflicts; they give an idea of the governmental resources to be available for cornering and sharing, the size of the territory to control,

and the volume of population to govern. They enable the elites of different ethnic groups to influence politics in a specific way... Yet more important was the way in which each major military operation was followed by major administrative measures of territorial reorganisation and regrouping of villages. It was held that for the improvement of the condition of the indigenous population cluster villages were being formed. In the second phase, there was a deliberate policy to introduce panchayati raj, and more importantly, territorial autonomies along ethnic lines were granted throughout the last two decades within the region. Likewise new forms of local volunteer groups and vigilante armies were raised. Policies to encourage and ensure surrender of the armed cadres of the underground became crucial in this stage of peace making. Security, pacification, and commercialisation of forestry went hand in hand.

5. In this period there has been greater coordination of governance as well as of military measures in different states of the Northeast. All these have resulted at times in a stronger civilian administration, which will not resolve conflicts by addressing issues of justice, but will have stake in continuing low-key unrest that will bring in money for it, while the insurgent *underground* (we are speaking of a phenomenon only and not any particular movement) has to co-live with civilian life and governance thus developing multiple ties with official politics. There is a separate Northeast window in almost every Ministry in Delhi, and above all is the Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region (DONER) to coordinate various welfare schemes, developmental programmes, and to guide the decisions of the Northeast Regional Council. In both the phases of insurgency and conflict, however, impunity of government officials and the counter-insurgency forces has remained the main guarantee of the success of counter-insurgency. Social governance in the Northeast is based on a three-pronged strategy: (a) raising surrendered militants groups as armed units of counter-insurgency operations and conferring general impunity on counter-insurgency forces, and (b) encouraging what can be called at best “marketisation of economic relations”, and at worst, “crony capitalism” in the region, and (c) increasing policy attention to “social sectors”.

6. The scramble for resources has led to a revision of government’s strategy of peace building that was earlier conceived only in terms of conventional pacification measures in the military mode. These measures of course continue to large or small degree. However projects and funds have become the key words in the game. Projects linked with natural resources such as water have become significant as well as controversial. Enclave economy coupled with local power in an autonomous area has also produced a distinct politics of security, a game that makes the immigrants quickly the symbol of insecurity. A discourse of security co-habits today with a discourse of retarded development, economy, and internal colonialism. Indeed, political economy and politics of security have always gone hand in hand. This situation produces cynicism, and a strange combination of what we can call the co-existence of an evolving architecture of macro-security with micro-insecurity continuously hovering below the structure of macro-security. On this, the conflict in Bodoland in Assam is instructive. In this complex scenario, the critical factor has been the expansion of government in the last two decades, thereby marking again a different story of globalisation and neo-liberalism in India. While part of this expansion is due to inevitable political reasons, such as expansion of the electoral system, the instrument of budget too has played a big role. The idea of development has taken the place of insurgency, though this development will create and is already creating the ground for the next round of conflicts. The new style of governance may however credit itself for having solved the insurgency question in the once frontier lands, as new rent economy and new extraction model will pacify some, enrich some, corrupt some, and dispossess some.

7. Social governance arrives not only on the basis of the market-money-finance network, but also by promoting what is termed as “participatory governance”. Thus in the Northeast we can see proliferation of the non-governmental organisations, media, and various watch bodies, besides the conventional arrangements of participation in governance through the panchayati system and autonomous arrangements. A study of the governmental moves to expand the participatory base of the rule will lead us to the significant question of the subject positions under social governance, which is at the heart of the government of peace.

8. In the perspective outlined in the previous paragraphs the two day workshop will discuss the five themes mentioned in the first paragraph. There will be three panel discussions on each of the two days – plus an introductory session and a concluding session. Each panel discussion will be facilitated by a short discussion note.