

## **Peace without Peace: Metaphor without a Method in the 'State of Exception' Called 'North-East India'**

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This paper aims at discussing the political techniques of production of peace and conflict in the geopolitical space of North East India. In doing so, the paper explores the methods employed in securing such peace, the truth of which often turns out to be a direct anti-thesis to peace. Apart from the usual experience of suppression, psychological warfare and biopower of the hegemonic structures like State and Market/Capital, mobilization of the symbolic order of popular and public discourses seemingly are parts of a method to achieve what is 'defined' as peace. Method here could be distinguished from means: method is an employment of a scheme of action not just to achieve definite ends, but it is a totality of dispositions that determine the agency. Means only are the supplementary ways that implement the agency. Further there are definitive divergences between method and means. The divergence lies in choosing those means that give rise to conflicting ends. Method, on its part, aims at guiding the means-ends relationship, but often it is subverted by developments that lead to disjointed conception of 'politics' that remains immanent in any act-counteract kind of mechanism.<sup>1</sup> The limit of method

lies in this possibility of an originary effacement of method in the very act of knowing the method. That method of peace cannot privilege knowing over acting and that acting can't be privileged over the affect of the act leads us to formulate the very idea of peace in the sense of "work" as Heidegger would employ it. Worlding the bad subjects of violence and conflict with the performative always defers peace, but that is only a metaphysical deferment. What I would rather speak of is how peace enters by force by an originary effacement of force within the metaphysics of violence. Distinctively, peace works through conserving and annulling the opposition between war and peace, between terror and confidence, sometimes on the borderline: sometimes on the uncriticized conceptuality, sometimes by putting a strain on the boundaries, and working toward deconstruction in a setting-to-work mode. This means peace as an end is always deferred, it is peace without the concept of peace, a peace that is always and ever a yet to be, an ontological drift, the roadmap of which is cut off in the world to come.

Given this historicized rendering of the very working of the concept of peace, what we can at best do for the Northeast is neither a pathological diagnosis of what went wrong nor a discreet attempt of recovery, as both these moves would entail a sense of deciding, which actually suspends the performance of peace to its opposite 'that is' quietism or violence. Hence, how peace should be achieved depends on how it is worked out. While it is being worked out, it remains in a state of suspension and when it is believed to have been achieved, it is asserted thinking that it has been achieved. In other words, peace does not admit an exception to itself, whichever conditions facilitate it are twisted once and for all with only one end of achievability or success. Solicitation of peace presupposes its success; therefore, what is ruled out is the *failure* of peace. Can violence fail the peace? The answer to this question comes with a performative force, as violence cannot negate peace, as peace is unnegateable, therefore it assumes infallibility.<sup>2</sup> This meaning of peace cannot be objectified in assertions of peace and it remains superassertible even in the case of absence of peace. One can hazard saying that peace exists as a qualia that cannot be relativized in the concrete, nor can it be made abstract by operations of politico-moral decisions, as peace

would defer itself from such matters of dimension. Peace involves rather an equivocation that provokes a return to the normal or a recovery from the sickness of flesh.<sup>3</sup>

### **Peace as Transitional and 'Reverse Gratitude'**

The situation in contemporary Northeast India does not allow a new clamour for peace moving away from the dominant paradigm of building block theory — rather it constructs pre-emptive moves in a terrain of struggle and neutrality. As a method, the assumption of guilt versus responsibility propels this move in projections — Asian corridor or a liberated NER. Both undermine the efforts of gaining strength from each other's predicaments. What some theoreticians such as Rawls or Kant envisaged in terms of 'lasting peace' or 'perpetual peace' is based on the idea of a morally justifiable peace enforcing means. In concrete epistemic terms, it can be understood as a second order appraisal of evidences such as self and other perceptions, injustices and responses. Without such second order appraisal, it is not possible to make peace in a situation of conflict that hinges necessarily on some form or other revision of belief. Most of the times there is an epistemic warrant of action that surpasses the predicaments of morality in believing and justifying those acts. Emerging alternatives like a Grand Asian Integration of Northeast India or a liberated Northeast are both epistemically warranted without much moral justifications. Discussions on global integration of the region in terms of ADB-WB funded vision is much on the horizon that articulates a neoliberal peace regime that conflates settlement with reconciliation<sup>4</sup> and aims to foster a 'transitional politics' that looks upto post-conflict reconstruction of polis and a new order. The argument shifts the premises of an inductive reasoning (that of from conflict to peace) to a deductive settlement of a new order based on an external-global post-conflict benefit of settlement. The immediate pragmatic behind such neoliberal overstepping of historicity of conflict lies in an easy bargainable redistribution of goodies that follow a given scheme of settlement. Instead of a second order epistemic appraisal of possibilities of meeting that arise from scenes of dyads of conflict, it emphasizes a pragmatic notion of community that 'pieces together' differentially structured ethnic and cultural groups. This further implements a project of

turning bases of social and political imagination into a real lived community in terms of territorialization such that it mimics an experiential reality in order to claim for preferred territorial-temporal-spatial re-imagining of a reconciled non-conflictual self-definition.<sup>5</sup> Peace acts as an apriori objective correlative of procedural reconciliation without reframing the questions of deprivation, discrimination and injustice. This is a negotiated and politically organized violence free domain of 'instituted peace' that rules the marginalized and the deviant and thereby brings them back in the mainstream, a mainstreaming without a mainstream. The Post-Bodo accord elections in 2004 and the recent support of the Cong(I) Government by Mohilary faction of Bodo legislators are instances of such 'instituted peace' guided by post-conflict benefits. Post Mizo accord mainstreaming of M.N.F in Mizoram is also represented in not being able to accommodate Hmars and Brus within that 'mainstreaming'. It is rather a play of the memory and the imagination over the real that ultimately sustains the lived moments of struggle and not institutional mechanisms of settlement through accords.<sup>6</sup> Such a method of sustenance of political struggles in the symbolic realm re-institutes logic of exclusion of others or refashions it in terms of consensus or agreement. From a strategic enactment of peace treaties, such a demand of consensus becomes an easy instrument to achieve a hegemonic power over others. Bodos demand such a consensus from Non-Bodos in Bodoland area, which is no exception, just as dominant nationalities like Assamese or Manipuris demand it from constituents whom they accept to be Assamese or Manipuri. Responsibility here becomes a reverse payment of gratitude to a supposedly host community by remaining quiet about one's own aspirations as well as by giving consent to what the dominant proposes for the sake of unity or integrity of a territory or area. This is a method of peace based on reverse gratitude that satisfies the confessional constructionism of identity by the dominant. Even the talk of deprivation assumes a form of dominance that is confessional and that reduces the other to a subsumable entity. Although most of the times the symbolic realization of such consensus is not supported by cultural systems, it looks for external means of gratification. Peace is achieved through such external gratifications and most often by sacrificing the aspirations of others. But ideologically the whole process is posited in a reverse way: as if to live in

peace one needs to follow the commands of the dominant. It is ironical that those who demand such allegiance to peace to gratify their confessional identities often have to abandon their own planks and stand open to such reverse payment of gratitude to others. The question is, can peace be bought by gratitude or by gratification? Such complex issues of identity get intertwined with political, institutional and cultural peace. But it could be interpreted as how communities in Northeast methodically construct their experience in the configuration of meaning and institutional mechanism that shapes their reality constituting activities. As a method of peace such activities are meant to do away with binaries of conflict, but such binaries remain implicit in the inflexible structures of domination amidst the gestures of friendship and cessation of hostility. Peace as a successful goal confirms the cultural stereotypes by reinvoking subjective preferences over some than others. Thereby peace produces subjectivities that are tied to each other by way of an exchange of positionalities and not remaining above board in an absolute sense. Rather there is a narrative re-structuring of peace as a state of peace with others on the condition that others agree with the agenda of one's own side. This is a reduction of a multiple and potentially diverse terrain of peacemaking to a moral party of the two, a cautious response to risks of disagreement and difference.

### **Does Reductionism Work?**

Insights into the lives of those who claim peace for themselves and for others often give rise to much simpler methods of peace than the way institutions work it out. Conflict looked upon as created out of 'collective fear and needs' based on rational calculation of power and interests<sup>7</sup> need to be necessarily institutional. But at a much simpler level, conflicts developed out of 'objective and ideological differences', the escalation of which result from subjective factors such as mistrust, misperception or exaggerated threat<sup>8</sup> could be taken to a resolution by way of controlling such subjective factors. What reductionism does is to turn the situation of difference and subjective ambivalences into a direct and reciprocal closure of evaluation of one's acts by the other without leaving a space for understanding how the other evaluates those acts of one. In lieu of sharing the perception of the other about oneself,

conflicts move to the level of finding a spot of blame in the other. It can be argued that such an environment of conflict occurs between groups that are proximate and groups that are goaded by each other in a space of relationality but without mutual and reciprocal recognition of each other's perceptions. Put in Nietzschean terms it could be interpreted as the 'triumph of the weak as weak' without succumbing to a master discourse of power and law. In Nietzsche's inimitable words,

For every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering, more exactly, an agent; still more specifically a guilty agent who is susceptible to suffering — in short, some living thing upon which he can on some pretext or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy (...), This constitutes the actual physiological cause of resentment, vengefulness, and the like: a desire to deaden pain by means of affect (...) secret pain that is becoming unendurable, and to drive it out of consciousness at least for the moment, for that one requires an affect, as savage an affect as possible, and in order to excite that, any pretext at all.<sup>9</sup>

Ressentiment in this context of conflict is a triple function: it produces an affect that overcomes the wound of existence, it produces a culpable enemy outside one's own and it produces a site of redemption that produces a reverse place of infliction of the same wound from which the sufferer suffers. William Connolly conceives such a method of production of a site of redemption as 'anesthetic' *pace* Nietzsche.<sup>10</sup> Such a site paradoxically helps negotiation with the other in which the spot of blame can be transformed into a site of redemption. Most of the ethnic mobilizations in Northeast region, of course, cannot go up to the historical consequence of turning the blame spot into a balm, rather it perpetuates the resentment without redemption.

### **State of Exception**

North-East India as a stranger to the Nation-State of India has been what Agamben has famously called 'perpetual state of exception'. Colonial modernity created localized spaces of exclusion in the form of 'excluded area', 'partially excluded area' and 'inner

line area'. The Post-colonial Indian state has merged this colonial space of exclusion with the project of inclusion of its internal other as a part of a pathology of the dominant centre that simultaneously constituted conditions of suspension of sovereignty as well as conditioned the interminable biopolitical presence of the Indian State in an alien and hostile territory like Northeast. Any reasoned analysis of everyday resistance to such overpowering presence of biopower of the State is abandoned in favour of paradigmatic offensives by the armed forces and the police by subjecting the laws of liberty to the discretionary rules of governmentality. The Indian State here enacts courts that are no court, laws that are no laws and a process that is no process. Further, the Indian State gets itself embroiled into a proxy war by declaring the Northeast as a disturbed area whose population is supposed to be 'disloyal'.<sup>11</sup> The Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 applied to Manipur, Nagaland and parts of Assam brings out this suspension of an usual exchange between the Northeast and the rest of India, against which there was a strong mass movement in Manipur in 2004.

The self-image of various communities of the Northeast is overdetermined by this biopolitics of the Postcolonial State, within which the agency of self-description undergoes a transformation. Like Negri and Hardt's multitude, their sense of belonging is threatened by the very Postcolonial and Neoliberal constitution of fuzzy identities, but they do not resist these shifts in their ways of affiliation and filiation. The homeland claims of various generic identities such as Nagas, Assamese and Mizos follow a pattern of inversion of the core-periphery relation by constituting an other in Indian identity. *But this inversion gets internally subverted as their own internal others play a politics of resistance to the hegemony of the dominant.* The rise of several nationalist movements among smaller ethnic communities like Hmars, Bodos, Garos, Koch-Rajbangshis, Komrem, Zeliangrong present resistance to everyday traces of colonizing power relations on a formal Postcolonial plane. The overlapping and criss-crossing between nationalist and ethnic aspirations defer the formation of a fixed identity at the same topological plane as the postcolonial State. Frameworks of explanations undergo a complete *aufhebung* in this process of deferring to an other context of identity politics that articulates itself against an outside. One can think of this outside only by

way of considering categories of self-description as pronominal that inscribes a sense of difference without alterity. I name such identities as 'potential'<sup>12</sup> (pace Agamben) nations-from-below.

The idea of potentiality as elucidated by Agamben hinges on the conflict between law and life, which never allows a full expression of 'force without significance' in a state of exception. If we affirm that a morally indifferent law must be upheld in order to stave off an unbearable moral of responsibility, can we be certain that the law has any force apart from any religiosity? Agamben precisely contrasts this inevitability of an overpowering law in the lifeworld by exposing potentiality's preference for 'potentiality not to' and thereby producing subjects within a metaphysical aporia. Agamben claims that it is here that metaphysical aporia shows its political nature. As Jacques Rancière explains, "The traditional question "For what reasons do human beings gather into political communities?" is always already a response, and one that causes the disappearance of the object it claims to explain or to ground — i.e. the form of a political par-taking that then disappears in the play of elements or atoms of sociability."<sup>13</sup> Rancière stands in the same shoe as Agamben in facing this aporia between 'to be' and 'not to be', as subject proper to politics disappears in the non-relation between par-taking and potentiality. The state of exception in the case of Northeast India is the form of life that has become Agambian 'Form of Law' that calls for an ethical immoralism. As Rancière explains,

Politics is a specific rupture in the logic of arche. It does not simply presuppose the rupture of the 'normal' distribution of positions between the one who exercises power and the one subject to it. It also requires a rupture in the idea that there are dispositions 'proper' to such classifications.<sup>14</sup>

This context of Northeast represents a field of multiple counterhegemonic fronts of struggle as the so called rebel groups struggle against the perceived other, be it foreigners or the Indian State. This itself is a questioning of the pre-disposition or the arche through which the subject proper to politics takes part in contraries and forms a community that practices a responsible ethical immoralism. This is also a struggle to make them heard from the labyrinth of alienation and isolation. Both sides turn the other into

a faceless entity as the self and the other do not have an immediate connection, rather they occupy poles of a divided spectrum without any derivation of the one from the other. This blurs the very distinction between violence and right as the other always is objectified as an enemy and not as a friend. The face of the other enacts the rites of passage from citizen to non-citizen, law to non-law. The disused right of the other returns to the self as it converts them as the entitlement of the self, an inversion of the ethics of the face.

A dialogue with the other in the sense of co-sharing needs a complement of materiality of the sensible in its everydayness. Does the state of exception and the suspension of sovereignty of the multitude allow this re-configuration of the sphere of the sensible in the context of NE-India? The self-suppressing politics of homogeneity and misrecognition of the sensory produce an other as a subject in relation to politics. First of all such an other needs to be recuperated in acts of justice and then re-placed back into a locale that is politically intelligible.

### **Reconstructing the Domain of the Sensible**

An alternative understanding of Insurgency in NE India contrary to descriptions such as 'secessionists' or 'extremists', can be from the point of view of non-representation in terms of rights and in terms of ethnic, national and cultural identities. While claims of Rights such as right to employment, education and livelihood constitute civic and political rights; it signifies a broad democratic configuration of forces beyond cultural affiliations. Non-representation in any aspect of such civic and political right, therefore, requires an extra dimension of a politics of affiliation. One could clearly demarcate these differences between kinds of Rights and its associated claims in two distinct camps of contemporary insurgent movements of NEI. The left liberal ideologies speak the language of Universal Rights and uphold the claims of those who are denied of these Rights. Left liberal politics calls for struggle against hegemony and dominance that requires a broad based democratic mobilization. The other camp, constituted by non-left, right and often conservative and neoliberal elements propagates the idea of group Rights against Universal Rights and champions the cause of ethnic and cultural formations in a context of contest

between groups over rights that are universal. This distinction between the camps enables us to place various insurgent organizations within a framework of political and ideological struggle. At the level of strategy the distinction manifests in claims of legitimacy on the basis of norms and claims of authenticity on the basis of cultural and historical episodes.

These two styles of insurgent mobilization in NE India presents a fairly hybrid and plural context of legitimacy and power. Sometimes goals of legitimacy and power run over the claims of such movements, thereby reducing movements to an instrumental means. The code of these movements is often compromised in pragmatic means of attaining visibility and power. The Left liberal camps, skeptical of such ends do not foresee the desired end but mobilizes all its energy in means of contesting what they perceive as sources of dominance. Contrastingly, the political correctness of movements claiming ethnic and cultural Rights end up by attaining those means in their hands that was used to deny them those Rights.

The subversive symbolism of insurgency undercuts the monologue of state and market interpretations of Rights. The Indian state considered the claim of Naga nationhood as illegitimate and therefore directed its discourse towards subsumption and dissolution of the Naga claim. The Manifesto of the N.S.C.N. aims at subverting India's attempt to subsume the Naga nation as it says,

The world is for the monster and not for the people. This view represents the mentality of the lower nature of man, especially when taken over by an aberration. It makes the existence of human society meaningless .... The strong make might their resort. They are more easily prone to the use of force in settling problems. They are able to do much harm and can even annihilate many of the weak and win battles; but it is perseverance and the act of undaunted confrontation with eventuality of death for the truth that one knows that win the war in the long run.<sup>15</sup>

This futuristic and moralistic vision about the possibilities within struggle is neither fantastic nor fanatic. But it is a will or determination to dispel gradually the overarching strength of the hegemony of the Indian state. Again this is more attached to the

Maoist line of protracted warfare. Just as LTTE is trying to defeat the Sinhalese dominated Lankan state, the NSCN (I-M) is committed to overcome the undermining policies of the Indian state. Such an attempt on the part of an insurgent outfit like NSCN (I-M) is an appropriation of the history of injustice that inspires securing of group rights by way of denying transcendence from the bounds of a narrow historical context. Ex-colonial states like India and Sri Lanka, although, have emerged out of struggle against colonialism by asserting a liberated conception of national identity, they seem to be the worst perpetrators of violence on any claim of national self-determination. One can locate a predominance of territorial interest over recognition of national rights. Such an abstract notion of 'national interest' by a supposedly democratic state marks an increasing centralization of nationality rights in the hands of a few dominant nationalities with the exclusion of others from the space of state and culture. To recover its self-identity from the already appropriated space of nation and state, the N.S.C.N. followed a policy of war without bloodshed in terms of historical resistance mixed with preparedness for war. Isak Chisi Swu, in particular, makes it clear that attempts at establishing peace are in no way a submission to intimidation by the Indian state, nor could it be a sell out of the idea of freedom in return of 'development packages' of the state. He sees peace 'in terms of freedom' which is the inalienable 'possession for a people, great or downtrodden'. Freedom is the entangled objective of peace in the context of realization of the Naga nation and Isak Swu's repeated caution that peace can't be bought or cannot be attained by throwing the weight that simultaneously expresses the resistance to any manoeuvre as well as acts as a determination to fulfill the yearning for freedom. Swu argued, 'Thank God we are able to break gradually the sphere of Indian influence. The issue is no longer in the shade; India can no longer run down, as she did in the past, the reality of the Nagas.'<sup>16</sup> He further said, 'On our part, we believe in political solution ever since the very inception of the problem. And we do not permit this point of sincerity to be questioned on whatever pretext. At the same time we won't have any policy from the Indian government that flies off at a tangent.'<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, one can see here a simultaneous resistance to the forces of repression and an affirmation of acceptable solution through understanding. This double-voiced mode of discourse of

the N.S.C.N. subverts the monologue of law and order. It clearly brings out the issues in a holistic way and desires their resolution, it assumes a potency to reduce any conflict and opens up the discourse for reconciliation. It contests the claim of superiority and authority of the Indian State expressed through forcible domination and replaces it with the objective of political solution. At the level of an attempt of reconciliation by the Indian state, there is no subversion, but what it subverts is the attempt to dominate. The subversive aspect of the N.S.C.N. discourse centres itself on events such as 'capitulation by enemies within', attempts to silence the national movement by the state and the melancholy of atrocities and brutalities. The subversive symbolism does not express offensive affronts, but merely charts out a counter-attack. The approach is not to intimidate the state, but to produce subversion in its function at the political sphere, which is to send the message across that their voice be heard. This kind of pre-emption devises the strategies of insurgency and especially, fights against the repression of the state assumes a guerrilla form. The theory of 'protracted warfare' is an interpretive strategy of sending messages of rebellion through acts of violence and disturbance, but all these never ensure a decisive victory over the enemy. Therefore, the subversive symbolism of insurgency is constituted more by way of vigilance, calculations, memories of horror and desperation and not by a passion to kill as in the case of Naga national struggle, all of which present a pre-emptiveness to act. Such pre-emptions are more fortuitous than mere speculative victories in the course of their 'protracted warfare'. The approach of the State to repress this whole process of subversion and secure its functioning leads to determined and targeted extermination by both sides of State and Insurgents with an already legitimized interpretation.

This brings into focus a contest over claims of citizenship versus claims of sovereignty as the matter to be settled includes a greater recognition and reconciliation over specificity of an ethnic formation. The sobering character of an accelerated process of reconciliation does not go without profanization of the all that is holy from the point of view of the State such as sovereignty. Also from the point of view of the insurgents it is possible to transgress the set limits of discourse by unbounding the subjectivity of the struggle. Consider the case of Assam. One wouldn't be apocalyptic in saying that a renewed definition of Asomiya identity in terms

of 'Swadhin Asom' is not just a passing phase of history but a painful transition to liberation of the body politic. What these processes of transition imply is simultaneously a reification of the insurgency as well as a regeneration of some of the unaddressed contours of resistance. One can further identify these movements of ambivalence to resistance and vice-versa in transformations that happened within the movement. AASU's marginalization during the first AGP Government could be understood as a kind of strategic collaboration between AASU and AGP, while AASU's critique of AGP during 1996–2001 on account of non-implementation of Assam accord and secret killings is a re-statement of its agenda of nationality Rights now reflected in AASU's intervention for securing the indigenous people of Assam. Further, one could see AASU's strategic distancing from AGP by way of championing the cause of 'Asomiya' as an indigenous formation. Further in a deliberative mode, the new stance of AASU includes migrants before a certain cut off date as the legitimate seekers of those rights that AASU claims for those who are indigenous to Assam.

The Bodo Territorial Council Act 2003 generated a lot of dispute on the north bank of Brahmaputra. Sammilita Janajatiya Sangram Sangstha (SJSS), All Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union (AKRASU) and Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association (AATTSA) and other public bodies of non-Bodo communities aired their concern about being reduced to second class citizens in Bodo dominated areas. The question is how a political settlement with one of the struggling groups allows space for others within its ambit? Similarly, the non-acceptance of Koch Rajbongshis and Bodos within 'Asomiya' identity is a question of doing justice to community aspirations, which is possible only if space is allowed through negotiation and acceptance. Ethnically divided insurgent movements ironically demand such a space from its 'other' while the 'other' cannot respond because of its own ethno-cultural compulsions. This is the metaphysical aporia that politicizes on the basis of a phronesis by creating a contradictory move within the interpretation of sociality. That such contradictoriness is actually produced by an ontological weakness towards the other is somehow thwarted in the moves of reconstructing an epistemology of self-defintion. Looked from another angle, the problem of accommodation gets further complicated when claims of rights deny a similar place for others. The case of Adivasis now euphemisti-

cally called tea tribes has not been so far considered either as tribe or as a recognizable community. Further, the outbreak of ethnic clashes between Karbis and Kukis in Karbi Anglong district and Dimasas-Hmars in North Cachar and Cachar districts centre around claims over land resulting into displacement of one community by the other. It is quite an ironical consequence of an insurgent movement when it only succeeds in displacing the other community without achieving much of its own and thereby losing on account of claims of Right as well as the solidarity with its immediate *others*. Is it that the discourse of specific identity creates positions of mutual displacement performing only a task of negation? Such a consequence demonstrates an exclusivist understanding of social justice when the language of Rights cancels out each other's inherent autonomy. Theoretically speaking, the State plays around all such incommensurable claims of identity as a means of repression and it selectively provides a reified and marginal space by indulging into a preferential treatment to some of the groups at the cost of the other. This prepares the grounds for neo-liberal interventions that radically undermine any claim of specificity. Therefore, identity assertions and correlated insurgencies tend to generate a clash of tribalism and undermine its own potential. This posits a problem of locating the community as 'community' in a multicultural context or in a context of contest that makes it lose its singular meaning in the confrontation between several discourses: Implicit, explicit, silent and absent.

### **Insurgencies and Intransigencies**

Insurgencies foster localized claims of territoriality and 'intra' and 'inter' group rivalry. The conflict over location of Dima Halam Daoga's ceasefire camp within the Hamren sub-division of Karbi Anglong had emerged as a bone of contention between the Karbi outfit called United Peoples Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) and DHD (Nunisa) resulting into blood bath in Karbi Anglong district of Assam.<sup>18</sup> In a slightly different vein, the Southern Districts of Manipur are currently witnessing politics of shifting affiliations by schools located within Manipur to Nagaland Board of Secondary Education. This is acting as a side drama of the larger issue of inclusion of Naga dominated Southern districts of Manipur in the NSCN (I-M) proposed Nagalim. One would also remember the

distribution of questionnaire by officials of Assam Rifles among the Kukis of Senapati district seeking their opinion on inclusion in Nagaland acting at the behest of Central Government. As soon as the press brought it to the notice, Assam Rifles issued a prompt denial.<sup>19</sup> The whole situation could be summarized as a disablement of political liberty in a strictly defined territorial power of an insurgent group, which causes harm to others when such territoriality is surpassed by presence. For example, the presence of Nagas within territories of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh provide the ground for staking a claim over territory in the form of homeland. In fact such homeland claims are justified by various insurgent groups in terms of a procedure that can right the wrong committed to them. Ensuring the rights and liberty of one's own community in one's own homeland entraps such movements in proving their 'first right' over others, which ironically gets undercut by the hegemonic presence of others outside such territorial claims of superiority. The recent skirmish between UPDS and Meghalaya Police in the bordering area between Karbi Anglong and Block-I of Jaintia Hills district is a case in point. UPDS claimed that it does not interfere in affairs of Meghalaya as it is concerned only with Karbi Anglong.<sup>20</sup> Such ethnic militias suffer heavy casualties outside their territorial affiliation, as they need to operate from outside, sometimes from international bases outside their own jurisdiction. So the legitimacy of a narrowly defined territorial sovereignty often runs counter to operational strategies of insurgent groups. It is for this reason that the Indian State tries to take on them outside their own territories, most often along international borders. The offensive against ULFA in Bhutan, or by the Burmese army against NSCN (K) and (I-M) from time to time exposes the limitations of strategic capabilities on the part of the insurgents. Contrarily, as a strategy for simultaneously weakening the insurgent outfits as well as for scoring over them, the Indian State utilizes the strategy of containing them outside its own territory. Most often such a strategy results into involving other States into diplomatic and military alliances, tacit and open by the Indian State. Such a strategic alliance further gives rise to campaigns against Northeast insurgent outfits as 'agents' of foreign countries, but such campaigns create a scope for these outfits to shift the strategic balance between India and other foreign countries to their benefit. NSCN(I-M) campaign against the

military offensives by the Indian State in various International forums has yielded moral support from influential lobbies in US and UK. Such support often makes the Indian State recalcitrant towards the insurgent outfits. For example, the Govt. of India had deported David Ward, a Briton living in Nagaland on charges of breach of national security.<sup>21</sup> Recent reaction of Govt. of India (GOI) on NSCN(I-M) sending its emissary to a Britain based organization called Parliamentarians for National Self-Determination (PNSD) and also to China expressed concerns about NSCN (I-M)'s demand for third party intervention.<sup>22</sup> What all these portray is an increasing internationalization of issues pertaining to 'Right to Self-Determination' by the insurgent outfits of Northeast India. This also means how the claims to territoriality seek normative resolution of conflicts by moving beyond the narrow polity management strategies. In fact one of the prominent goals of various insurgent groups of Northeast is to establish their claims at the international level, which also is an outcome of global 'consociality' about right to self-determination. For example, it is reported in August, 2003 that NSCN (I-M) had established its office in Washington DC near White House.<sup>23</sup> Insurgent movements join voices from other contexts and other groups in order to contest the authority of their respective States. This also contradicts the idea of sovereignty of the State in terms of national or ethnic sovereignty. This dimension of reclaiming of the past or lost sovereignty has been very much a part of NSCN (I-M) or ULFA in Northeast India and the national sovereignty of India is interpreted as a loss of agency under the will of a different people. In concrete political and economic terms, it is considered as 'internal colonization'.

Inner group rivalry between factions of insurgent groups had been a major source of inter-group killings. For example, the use of force and brutality by a section of Surrendered United Liberation Front of Assam (SULFA) cadres on ULFA had resulted in a large number of secret killings during the Prafulla Mahanta regime throughout 1996–2001. The ongoing clashes between NSCN (I-M) and NSCN (K) have claimed hundreds of lives. Especially the recent retaliatory killing of NSCN (I-M) cadre at Tizit subdivision of Nagaland and the declaration of 'self-forfeiture of trust' by NSCN (I-M) on NSCN (K) are a set of grim developments in the midst of peace talks. NSCN (I-M) is expressing apprehensions about the supply of arms to NSCN (K) being allowed by the

State even during ceasefire and the outfit is equally critical of the indirect support to the NSCN (K) by the GOI. The NSCN (I-M) is asking, 'why the GOI is playing up NSCN (K) against the united Naga interest and why it is still making such assertions as, 'Nagas are divided in factions?' Such factionalism and inter-tribal 'intransigence' are based upon territorial affiliations and areas of influence.

The Role of the State from Manorama Devi incident to Kakopathar incidents also followed the same trajectory of repression and assumption of special powers. Centre's decision not to withdraw the Armed Forces Special Powers act from Manipur and other parts of Northeast is a clear indication of the skepticism of the GOI which is supposed to be more responsible and supposed to be more interested in peace than the troublemaking outfits! The lack of confidence in the GOI on the one hand and on the other, its' insistence on Army operations are fostering the conditions of mutual intransigence between various outfits in a rigidly territorialized and demarcated space of conflict zones. Is it part of a strategy of dampening the insurgencies by ground level factional fights? Also is it a part of the preparedness against the possibilities of any perceived offensive by the armed outfits? The situation shows a kind of indetermination of peace, especially when peace talks cannot achieve grounds of peaceful understanding between the State and the insurgents. None of the peace talks as yet could move beyond the strategies of containment that almost took the form of following a 'Suspect Strategy' in the context of Northeast.

### **The Suspect Strategy**

One tends to formulate a critical perspective on these contours of contrariness within the formulated peace process. The name 'suspect strategy' best applies to indiscernibility of political moves as part of containing the other side by means of institutional, legal and military manoeuvres. Peace, therefore, turns out to be an outcome of manoeuvres. This is also a way of making it evident that conflicts do not get transformed by negotiations and by way of 'forget and forgive' practices. Especially the contexts that preserve mutual distrust and negative interaction between the parties do not find an easy democratic solution in spheres of politics or economics. In other word conflicts develop the strength of potentially subverting measures of rapprochement. Most of the

Northeastern conflicts convey this inherent message of encoded suspicion and distrust. This makes moves for peace indiscernible as if the conflicting parties re-inforce an embodied presence of distrust in an appearance of friendship. There is a broadening of fronts of conflict through negotiations without deepening the roots of transformation and transcendence. For example, an apparent resolution of the Bodoland issue threw up new areas of conflicts between Bodos and non-Bodos in terms of sharing of equal rights. Although reconciliation has taken place between Bodos and non-Bodos, but Bodo-Adivasi conflict is still to be settled in terms of satisfaction of both sides. In case of GOI-ULFA talks, there had been lot of hiccups created by blasts and killing of ordinary citizens, killing of ULFA cadres by the Army and finally there is a ray of hope in bringing ULFA and GOI to direct talks. But what has to be learnt from these strenuous developments is the operation of strategies of containment.

It could be observed that any consensus arrived at between conflicting parties by way of avoiding those contexts that potentially subverts attempts of rapprochement is based upon deliberate forgetting of fundamental causes of division and difference. Interpreting certain contesting identities merely as contingent and applying certain strategies independent of the way in which they are constituted, one can build up a counterargument to the dominant peacemaking strategies that *exclude* troublesome contexts from its fold. Such troublesome contexts exist in the gap between contractarian notion of peace and the shifts of norms in dealing with dissenters and deviants. The political value of dissent as an overriding concern that varies according to social and historical conditions makes those troublesome contexts possible. One can imagine a political culture in which dissent overrides consensus in terms of reasonableness and *it is there that no strict generalizable principle of peace could be arrived at*. In the absence of such generalizable sphere of interests, the domain of political action gets divided between *participation* and *observation*. Participants are constituted by those categories of interpretation that justify their current preoccupations/engagements with a certain political program, while observers are constituted by a sense of juridicality and authority. The justificatory moves of shortcuts to peace designed by mobilization of relevant political support, mostly by the use of force to establish political will raises the possibility

of violence by the state. The particular type of peace regime identified by the conflicting parties incorporates moves that are violent and moves that ensure political support for a particular kind of peace action. For example, participation of Peoples' Consultative Group in GOI and ULFA talks is based on a proposal to understand each other's 'initial positions' and this would only act as a facilitator of dialogue and restraint without much of resolution of outstanding issues.

The rejection of the recommendation of the Justice Jeevan Reddy Commission for withdrawal of Armed Forces Special Powers act as it is applied to Manipur ostensibly is on the ground that the Army involved in operation does not want its dilution.<sup>24</sup> This is quite similar to what Army expressed after two rounds of talks with Peoples' Consultative Group (PCG): the army wanted to go ahead with its operations against ULFA. Finally it is Assam Police that issues covert warning to those who support ULFA by reiterating that those who had been active in the aftermath of Kakopathar killing of Sri Ajit Mahanta are supporters of ULFA.<sup>25</sup> Such statements definitely create an atmosphere of suspicion and select targeting of individuals and groups by the Police, which only adds up to the prevailing suspect strategy. It grimly reminds one of the roles of various agencies of the State during secret killings. In fact no action had been yet taken on any of these cases. The strategy that is employed by the State is often a lengthier procedure of inquiry that finally results into inaction, as far as justice is concerned. The progress of the inquiry by Justice K.N. Saikia Commission inquiring into secret killings have registered only 20 cases and so far it is only collecting evidences to fix the responsibility on anyone alleged to have masterminded such killings. In the same vein, Apunba Lup, a conglomerate of organizations that spearheaded movement against Armed Forces Special Powers Act in Manipur had criticized GOI's ambivalence on the recommendations of Jeevan Reddy Commission by pointing out that it seemed to be a ploy to hoodwink the people of Manipur.<sup>26</sup> In effect, the intervention made by the civil society is often dubbed by the State as covert support to insurgency and various human rights groups are targeted by the State. In this context, it is not understandable why a Government that constitutes a commission of inquiry does not go by its recommendations and why the GOI

listens to those wings of the State that are implicated by such Commissions.

How justice gets subverted in cases against the army or the State is also a matter of concern from the initiatives of peace. As most of the insurgent organizations of the Northeast are seeking some form of justice from the State, it must take a greater responsibility of acting in accordance with principles of Justice. Various wings of the State need to be regulated in their response to situations of insurgency, especially by restraining them from acts of human rights violation.

### **Conflict as Instruments of Dominance**

Adaptation of conflict as a method of peace is evident from the kind of peacemaking regimes that are currently in vogue in the Northeast. Mediated peace acts as runaway peace that prolongs instability. Often peace denigrates into inter-ethnic conflicts and human rights violations. The axis of manipulation in terms of ethnic divide fails to work in case of inter-ethnic conflict. In case of assertion by smaller ethnic identities, it is not just repositioning themselves as ethnic elites, but it is also re-articulation against the dominant. Shouldn't peace process take into account this overcoming of the dominant in ideological and political terms? Moving beyond affiliation, it sets a domain of articulation, a way to meet demands of democratization. Those who lose their non-representative power see it as an attempt of the 'other' to reposition themselves. Therefore they respond from a carefully designed strategy of ensuring their own power. The fear is that if it is once given in, there will be other such occasions of those raising their voice who had hitherto remained away from such assertions. There is an expressed helplessness on such occasion from the rulers that be. It is at this moment that re-invoking old faultlines that is now blended and blurred by new alignments and break offs is a strategy of maintaining a potentially collapsing ideological hegemony.

The dominant social group "satisfies" its political access and power at the cost of other social groups by playing a politics of marginalizing them and keeping them out of equal access to power and resources. As a result, the dissatisfied social groups are frustrated and feel (more and more) marginalized and excluded from the social, economic and political participation. In the context of

peace process, such dissatisfied groups clamour for their specific rights, but such clamours are delegitimized as suspects as they question the dominant distribution of power and resources. In other words, clamour against political and economic inequality could be ideologically suppressed by the dominant and this is what acts as the counterproductive mechanism in disarticulating the very peace process that is initiated at a given situation. Apart from such 'peace regime' types, the knowledge of peace assumes a distinct historical and cultural form. The knowledge is constituted phenomenologically by way of bracketing the non-textual connections with ground reality, which almost borders on an unrecognized ethnography of peoples of the region. Knowledge from such an ethnographic context holds the secrets of many ethnic conflicts, which peace regimes overlook. This produces a paradox: the more democratic a State is and the more accommodative the state is to specific claims of communities and ethnicities, the more belligerent it is in establishing a peace regime. Another paradox is that more a state has a history of inflicting traumas on dissenters and the more it practices norms of democracy, it is more likely that it is more aggressive in peacekeeping. The crux of such paradoxes lies in the identity of the actors in double playing the internal dichotomies of a regime type such that one side of the dichotomy invariably calls for the other side. Cases from North-east India present a host of such peace regimes with associated support structures. Dialogues with Naga underground suggest a peace regime based on 'suspect strategy', where key issues of political sovereignty and territorial integration are treated as suspect grounds for the sole purpose of suspension of troublesome contexts. On issues like rights of the migrants and refugees in Assam, Arunachal and Tripura, the peace regimes advocated by the dominant communities and the state assume the character of 'deligitimization of suspects'. Within the larger democratic and liberal set up of the Indian state, such a deligitimization of suspects ironically gives rise to a legitimating legal principle that contradicts normative aspects of justice and fairness. Regimes of this type construe embodiment of illegality on others and legality on the self. In the case of territorial autonomy, the peace regime becomes *appropriationist* as it necessarily subsumes the other. Further insurgencies grow out of a historical consciousness of

questioning the appropriationist discourse of subordination and subsumption under the political, cultural and legal framework of the State and the Capital that attempt to introduce legitimate forms of structural relations of appropriation. The questioning takes the form of resistance and counter-appropriation. It builds up a logic of critique of the structure: the way structure develops into a mechanism of extraction of surplus by way of negating the role of the sovereign as the 'subject' is reversed into a field of struggle that either tries to change it or appropriate it. To put it formally, governance in NE-India does not alone depend upon the civil society but it needs the consent of the underground in some form or the other. Two questions are imminent here: one, does the subjugated nationality or people somehow become the collaborator to subjugation and two, do the insurgents themselves become another consensus building hegemony in their own strength? In both cases, insurgents come to a parity of strength with the State, but it is only contingent in advancing and achieving the end that such insurgencies themselves envisage. The ends of insurgencies are constituted by a combination of ideological and political components: ideological in so far as it resists the dominant ideology and political in so far as it aspires for self-determination. The ideological component expresses itself in the form of an alternative nationalism, a kind of 'non-state nationalism', while political aspirations for self-determination not only means state power but full decision making capacities in social, economic, cultural aspects of life. The political component derives its strength by countering the interventionist strategies of the State and devising a path of 'development' open to needs of the community. Such positions of insurgency draw the communities of the region into its fold as there is not much of a democratic space between State and the civil/political society to negotiate the claims of redistribution and recognition. In the absence of such a space, what happens is that State tries to mediate between contesting claims of identity and share of resources without strengthening the communities. Put in another way the actors of various movements are looked upon as people to be won over without placing them in the context of decision-making, as also the political achievement of such movements are either benumbed or capitalized by the state machinery for its own ends.

## NOTES

1. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "In the Name of Politics": Sovereignty, Democracy and the Multitude in India in *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 23, 2005. Chakrabarty argues that India has not seen production of sovereignty that is necessary for construction of a "society" amenable to disciplinary power and its politics.
2. Field dependent performance of some epistemic acts for peace involves an induction of the kind called logical type jumps. See, Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964, pp. 36 and 135.
3. Equivocality is a sense of a metaphor completely other than what communicates the metaphor.
4. John Burton, *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990, pp. 76-77.
5. Chandan Kumar Sharma, *Asomiya Kon? Ek Rajnaitik Samajtattvik Abolokan* (in Assamese), Guwahati: Span Publications, 2006. Sharma proposes a 'uniqueness paradigm' (p. 13) of formation and evolution of Assamese nationhood that finally solicits a consensual meaning of self-representation in the sphere of the political and the cultural for a 'United Asom' (pp. 86-87).
6. The recent renovation work of the statue of Laldenga at the treasury square of Aizwal (2003) and bringing of remains of Mizo warriors from a small Burmese hamlet of Rakan to be interred at martyr's cemetery at Luangmual of Western Aizwal show the mobilization of memory.
7. Herbert C. Kelman, "Social-Psychological Dimensions of International Conflict." in I. William Zartman and J. Lewis Rasmussen (eds.), *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods & Techniques*, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, 1997, p. 194.
8. Ronald J. Fisher, "Social-Psychological Processes in Interactive Conflict Analysis and Reconciliation." In Howon Jeong (ed.), *The New Agenda for Peace Research*. Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999, p. 85.
9. Fredrick Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. F. Golfing, New York: Garden City, 1956: 127.
10. William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiation of Political Paradox*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996, pp. 21-7.
11. Sardar Ballavbhai Patel's letter to Nehru on 7th November, 1950 cited in A. Bimol Akoijam, "Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958: Disguised War and its Subversions" in *Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, p. 14, where Akoijam quotes part of the letter.
12. Grigorio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed and trans. D. Heller-Roazen, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999):159.
13. Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics", trans. by Rachel Bowlby and Davide Panagia, Edited with an Introduction by Davide Panagia, *Theory & Event* 5:3, 1999. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/tae/toc/index.html>
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Manifesto of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland* (Oking: N.S.C.N.)
16. Isak Chisi Swu's Speech, *NE-Sun*, 1-14 April, 1997:9.
17. *Ibid.*

18. "Blamegame after Monday mayhem" in *The Hindustan Times*, Guwahati, Oct., 21, 2005, p. 3.
19. *The Telegraph Northeast*, 29th July, 2005.
20. *The Telegraph Northeast*, 22nd June, 2006.
21. *The Telegraph Northeast*, 8th August, 2004.
22. *The Telegraph Northeast*, May 21st, 2006
23. *The Asian Age*, Aug. 19, 2003
24. *The Shillong Times*, 11th June, 06.
25. *The Telegraph Northeast*, 15th June, 2006.
26. *The Telegraph Northeast*, 15th June, 2006.