Search for Peace with Justice

Issues Around Conflicts in Northeast India

Edited by Walter fernandes

North Eastern Social Research Centre

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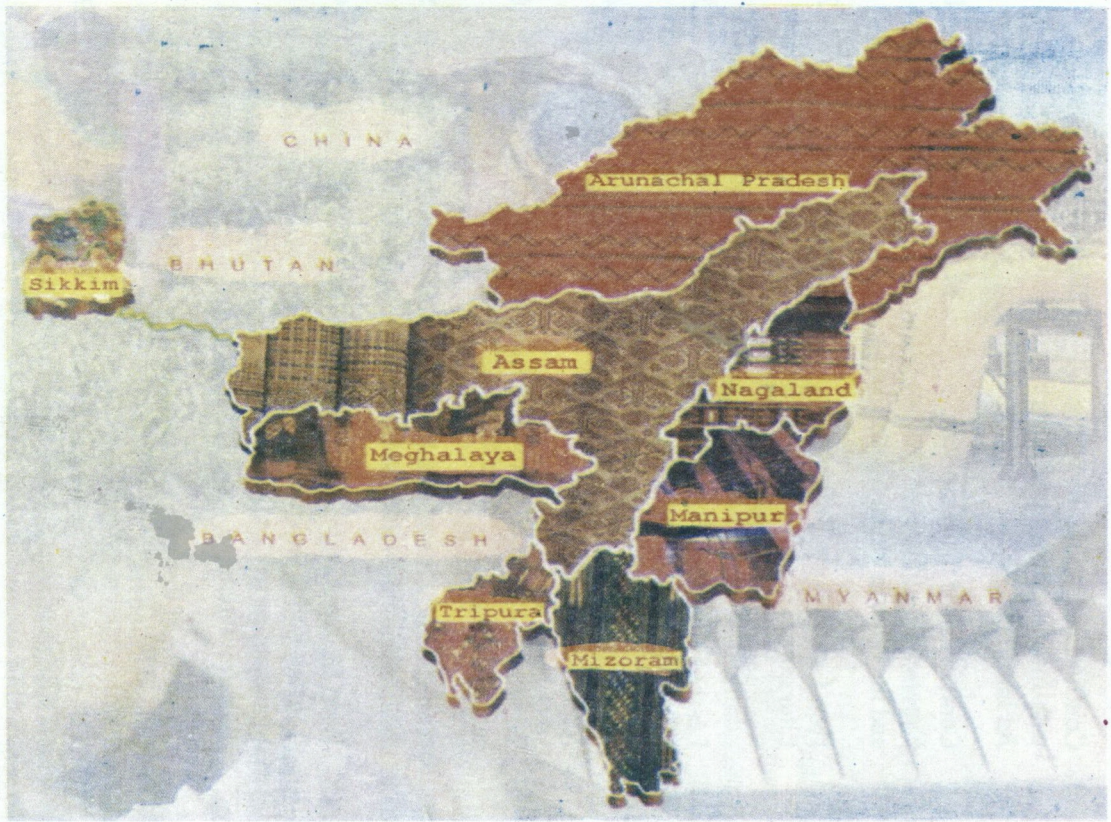
Table of Contents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1. Conflicts and Search for Peace with Justice in Northeast India: An Introduction

Walter Fernandes

While in the rest of India the Northeast has the image of being a zone of conflicts, within the region one witnesses a search for peace, a concept whose interpretation changes according to the stakeholder. The state and non-state armed groups think of peace only as the absence of armed conflict, but most people of the region perceive it as a new society based on justice. Such a new society cannot be achieved without understanding the causes of conflicts and attempting a solution to them. That is what the present book attempts to do. Some authors try to identify the causes of conflicts in the region and others analyse the processes required for peace and possible actors in them. They also point out the pitfalls in the search for peace which is a long process of experiments with alternatives to the causes of conflicts.

About the Book

The nine papers in the book are arranged in three sections. The first part has four short theoretical papers on conflicts and peace. M. N. Karna gives a theoretical framework by identifying the historical experiences of the peoples of the Northeast that have led to the present-day conflicts. David R. Syiemlieh takes a global view of the processes that have resulted in conflicts and discusses the two World Wars and the Indian freedom movement before focussing on the Northeast. Ethel Syiem studies the conflicts in the Northeast and in other societies in transition as presented in literature and analyses the role of the spoken and written word in the peace process. Lucy Zehol gives the theoretical background of ethnic conflicts as found in anthropology with special reference to

Manipur. From that vantage point she studies some more specific areas of conflict, particularly the immigration issue.

Then follow three cases studies on conflicts and their causes in the Northeast. Nani Gopal Mahanta studies the situation of conflicts in Assam and asks why what was an identity search has turned into an armed conflict turning Assam into a state of ongoing conflicts. He ends his paper by pointing out the pitfalls in the search for peace and advocates the involvement of many more stakeholders, so that the solution to the conflicts might move beyond mere absence of violence and address the root causes of hostility. Walter Fernandes presents land alienation as the main cause of conflicts in the region and studies the immigration and developmental issues within that perspective. Binalakshmi Nepram Mentschel analyses the role that small arms play in perpetuating conflicts.

Finally two writers look at the possibilities of peace. At present negotiations are between the two armed adversaries i.e. the state and the militant groups. Such negotiations can at best achieve a temporary truce. A lasting solution requires a movement towards a just society. To achieve it the authors show the need for the involvement of more stakeholders. Thomas Menamparampil speaks on the role of religious leaders in the process leading to peace. Rita Manchanda discusses the role of civil society in preparing the ground for the negotiations, in pressurising the armed adversaries not to abandon negotiations and to make their communities an integral part of the search.

The Background of Conflicts

The first step in the search for peace is an understanding of the processes that lead to conflicts. That is what the four authors do by providing the theoretical framework. In his brief analysis of the historical experience of marginalisation in the Northeast, Karna refers to the danger of one region or community or country declaring itself the mainstream, thus reducing others to the status of sub-

streams. That seems to have happened in the Indian effort to build a nation-state on the basis of one dominant region. Forgotten in this effort is the distinction between the people who form a nation that gives the community or individual an identity and the state that is a legal entity with a territory and confers citizenship on the people. As R. N. Datta (1990: 41) said two decades ago, the danger in India is the tendency of national leaders to speak of "one State, one nation" and "to take the degree of Aryanisation as the measure of Indianisation." One of its results is that the identities of the regions that are considered sub-streams tend to become submerged in the "mainstream". Karna studies this process in some regions of the Northeast, particularly in Nagaland, Assam and Meghalaya. By taking a look at the two World Wars, Syiemlieh shows how minor events can lead to a major conflagration. Once a conflict begins, the warring sides overestimate their own strength and underestimate the possibilities of a conflict being prolonged beyond their expectations. The German soldiers left for the front during the summer of 1914 with the hope of returning before Christmas. But the war continued for four years. The aftermath of these two global wars shows how the warring sides are not ready to abandon the conflict till the enemy is vanquished and accepts the humiliating terms that the victor imposes on him. This approach results in more wars. For example, the unjust peace treaty imposed on Germany and other losers after World War I could not but lead to World War II.

That lesson does not seem to have been learnt even today, as the behaviour of the dominant world powers shows in Iraq, Georgia and elsewhere. The interests of the strong dominate the decisions to begin wars. Those who impose a war on the weak also ensure that it ends with the surrender of the loser. One sees that process also in the Northeast: nationalist struggles of communities that are searching for an identity are considered secessionist, as such are put down with extreme vigour, with no concession made to them. Ethnic conflicts are based on the exclusive rights of one community

over a region. Amid the shortage of land and other resources caused by the encroachment on their land by immigrants from both within India and from other countries, acquisition for development projects, alienation of tribal land to non-tribals, lack of productive investment, and the perceived or real attack on its identity, every community of the region tries to establish its indigenous status and asserts its exclusive rights over an area whose first inhabitants it clams to be, to the exclusion of all other ethnic groups (Bhaumik 2005: 150-152). This intensifies the conflicts. A possible way out of this apparent dead end is the one that Mahatma Gandhi shows. His struggle for Indian freedom was marked not merely by its non-violent nature but also by his efforts to involve the masses and to reach a solution based not on the rights of one side but on the possibility of all the groups being beneficiaries.

Absence precisely of that approach is seen in the behaviour of the armed parties to the conflicts, as Syiem's overview of literature shows. Temsula Ao's account of the events in Nagaland shows the inhuman level to which the parties to a conflict can descend. On every side, some persons benefit from the conflict and develop a vested interest in its perpetuation. Literature can expose this selfishness and play a role in working towards peace as the Khasi oral literature shows. It also means that peace negotiations should go beyond the warring parties to the masses. Literature can play a role, though limited, in helping the people to internalise the ideology of peace as well as of war. How one deals with it depends on whether one is moving towards a conflict or peace.

Zehol continues this discussion in her presentation of the theory of ethnicity. The development of this thought is closely linked to the historical context of a given moment. For example, studies show a close link between the colonial context and the growth of anthropology. That shows the need to begin with the data presented in the past but to move away from the interpretation given in that context (Mbilinyi and Vuorela 1982: 310-312). Zehol substantiates her contention of science responding to a historical

moment by analysing the link between the historical context and the identification of the tribes in some areas of the Northeast, particularly Manipur. The identity that an ethnic group acquires—or is imposed on it at some point of history—does not remain static but keeps changing. Some tribes merge and attain a new identity, as those inhabiting the Naga Hills did at the beginning of the 20th century when they formed the Naga Club (Sanyu 1996: 115-116). Some other groups may separate from the body to which they were attached earlier, as the Thadou and the Kuki did in Manipur in the 1990s.

The Domination-Dependency Syndrome

In this context Zehol asks "Do we have a right not to accord them recognition when a group that wants to consider itself distinct from another with which it had identified itself earlier?" The Kuki, for example, were a conglomeration of many groups. But the mainstream/sub-stream or nation-state dynamics that has been discussed above in the interaction of the Northeast with the rest of India became visible at the local level as well, in the Kuki-Paite conflict of the 1990s. One group dominated that alliance and tried to impose its language and leadership on the rest. That attempt became the source of conflicts and the groups that felt dominated tried to find an identity of their own by separating themselves from the alliance and joining another religious denomination (Haokip 2008a: 189-191).

Integral to these ethnic issues is the question of immigration. As Zehol and others point out, in this debate focus has been on Bangladeshi immigrants because of the difference in their religion and nationality. However, Mahanta and Fernandes add that, the threat to the land of the local people remains real whether the immigrants are "illegal Bangladeshis" or are from Bihar or Nepal. All of them occupy land and prosper. All of them move out because of the same push factor, namely the feudal system, poverty and low wages in the region of their origin. The pull factor is the fertile land in the Northeast, especially the Brahmaputra Valley, and the

legal system that makes encroachment with impunity possible.

As a result, land has become a major component in the domination-dependency syndrome as well as in the ethnic and territorial conflicts in the region. To most communities of the Northeast, land is not merely an economic asset but also the centre of their culture, social systems and identity. As a result, an attack on their land is a threat not merely to their economy but also to their cultural and social identity. Because of this central role of land, many leaders of the struggles are able to present the conflicts as defence of their society, culture, political autonomy and identity. That is one of the reasons why in the Northeast the struggles combine the political, cultural and economic components into one (Datta 1990: 40).

Zehol takes up the suggestion made by some leaders that the "illegal immigrants" should be expelled from Assam. She considers this suggestion both dangerous in concept and impractical for implementation. Immigration from the erstwhile East Bengal is not recent. It began with the British policy of 1891 to encourage peasants from East Bengal to settle down in western Assam and cultivate what they considered wastelands. In reality what the colonial land laws treated as wastelands was the sustenance of the Boro and other tribes of the region. But the law that continues to be in force even today, recognises only individually owned land and treats community owned resources as state property (Ramanathan 1999: 19). Much of the land in Assam and in the rest of the Northeast continues to belong to the communities that sustain themselves on it but the law considers it state property. This makes it easy for the immigrants to encroach on it. As Fernandes says, it also makes it possible for the state to acquire tribal land in the name of development and for non-tribals to occupy tribal land.

That, as Mahanta says, makes the nature of encroachment and the type of immigrants irrelevant. The conflicts emanating from the legal system cannot be solved without dealing with the basic issue of land. Conflicts are bound to continue as long as this issue

is not taken seriously because land is an economic asset as well as the centre of people's culture and identity. However, the state facilitates its alienation by imposing the individual-based formal law on the traditional community-based system. These two systems are based on two different worldviews, but the state imposes its own worldview on the tradition of the people. That turns the land and other laws into a symbol of another type of a domination-dependency syndrome. The formal law of colonial origin is the "mainstream" with which the traditional laws that are the "sub-stream" have to be assimilated.

Mahanta adds that, Assam has become a state of ongoing conflicts. One of its main reasons is that the state experiences both types of the domination-dependency syndrome, not merely at the legal but also at the cultural and political levels. On one side Assam feels dominated by Mainland India. As a result, the United Liberation Front (ULFA) began as an assertion of Assamese identity against the Indian "mainstream". However, while the identity issue is important in the conflict, the economic factor cannot be ignored. Mahanta's interviews with the former militants show that unemployment has today turned into a major cause of the cadres joining the militant outfits. The leaders began the struggle around issues of identity and autonomy, but slowly the economic component took the centre stage. But this has not become exclusive: political and identity issues continue to play a role because many militants continue to view the economic situation through the prism of autonomy and identity.

On the other side, as the history of the last four decades shows, the minority linguistic and cultural groups in the state feel dominated by the majority ethnic Assamese. In their case the ethnic Assamese are the mainstream with which the minority sub-streams are expected to merge. That thinking is reflected in the debate on "Who is an Assamese?" Do the Assamese include all those inhabiting the territory of Assam, or only the ethnic Assamese and who speak the language? *The Official Languages Act 1960*

signalled to the tribal and other non-Assamese speaking communities that they had to be assimilated into the Assamese "mainstream".

The minority communities considered this law a threat to their identity and reacted to it. The Lushai were already resenting what they considered neglect by the central and state governments during the bamboo famine of 1959. The *Official Languages Act* added to their feeling of being a sub-stream that was not respected by the "mainstream". The Mizo revolt that began with it culminated in the Mizo Accord of 1986 and the formation of Mizoram in 1987 (Sen 1992). The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference, composed of the hill tribes of the present day Meghalaya, N. C. Hills and Karbi Anglong, was revived and resulted in the formation of Meghalaya in 1972 (Sangma 2008: 211). All the ethnic communities of Assam joined the Anti-Foreigner Movement 1979-85 but the Assam Accord of 1985 gave importance only to the ethnic Assamese. The resentment this caused among the Boros (Roy 1995: 32-33) and some other non-Assamese speaking communities is one of the reasons for intensified internal conflicts and the formation of militant outfits linked to each ethnic group.

Searching for a New Society

Genuine peace has to be based on justice for all. That objective can be achieved only by dealing with these and other causes of unrest. By and large the state treats the conflict as a law and order issue alone. The fifty-year old *Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act* is one of its living examples. The state and non-state armed stakeholders involved in the peace negotiations do not follow the norm of dealing with the causes. As a result, most negotiations end with an accord that makes some territorial concessions to the militants or becomes a power-sharing arrangement between the state and the elite that leads those militant movements. These agreements ignore, for all practical purposes, the masses whose aspirations the conflicts raise and whom the leaders claim to represent. Mahanta reminds the

readers that there cannot be lasting peace without dealing with the causes of conflicts and moving towards a just society. When that step is not taken, some group that is dissatisfied with the accord starts another militant outfit and the conflict continues.

Since land alienation is the major cause of conflicts, the goal of a just peace cannot be attained without tackling this issue. With that in view, Fernandes analyses the link between conflicts and land alienation. Land loss takes three main forms, the first being encroachment by the immigrants. The immigration issue has been already dealt with above. Its push and pull factors have been analysed. It will not, therefore, be repeated except to say that this form of alienation cannot be taken in isolation, but has to be seen in the overall context of the local economy, culture and identity. One has also to emphasise that a solution to the problem has to be based on the principle of peace with justice for all.

How is one to attain this objective? As Zehol says, the immigrants cannot be expelled from the country without doing them injustice and causing massive bloodshed. But also the families that lose land to those immigrants have a right to justice. Injustice has been done to them by the pull factor of fertile land that is managed under an outdated legal system. In Tripura the law was even changed in order to make land transfer to the immigrants possible. However, the indigenous families that lost their land to the immigrants have not been able to get it back even when the tribunal ruled in their favour, because the plots that belong to them are right in the middle of the immigrant colonies. Their life would be in danger if they occupied it again (Shimray 2006: 14).

This situation shows that a change in the legal system is essential but inadequate in itself. Its implementation requires a social and economic base to support change in favour of the land losers. Moreover, immigration is not the only cause of land alienation. The state uses the same legal system to acquire community land by declaring it state property. Laws have been changed to make alienation of tribal land to non-tribals easy. So

change in the laws to ensure security of tenure to the cultivators essential but it inadequate in itself. A renewed social infrastructure is required to ensure their implementation.

The Role of the Civil Society

That brings one to the stakeholders in the march towards peace. Lasting peace is not possible unless the masses feel involved in it. Obviously the negotiations themselves will have to be between some representative groups, but which do not necessarily have to be only the state and non-state armed stakeholders. The civil society has to be involved in the negotiations, probably not directly but by becoming intermediaries between the people and the negotiators. The civil society cannot appropriate to itself the role that has to be played by the negotiators or the masses. It has to play a specific role between the two. On one side it has to give feedback to the negotiators and encourage them not to abandon their effort. On the other side, as Mahanta says, all the people cannot be involved in the negotiations. The civil society, as intermediaries, can keep the lines of communication open and help the people to feel involved in the negotiations.

Religious leaders are a major component of the civil society and Menamparampil discusses their role in the peace process. They cannot any more be satisfied by preaching only an individual-based morality of adherence to social norms, obeying the law and paying taxes. In their preaching the religious leaders have to bear the welfare of the whole society in mind. They have to take a stand on moral issues such as corruption because these abuses do not affect the individual alone but destroy the very moral texture of a society. Religious leaders have to play their social role also by exerting pressure on the elected representatives to observe the social norms of honesty and serving the people who have elected them. Collaboration with other religious and social leaders is essential. No religious or social leader can claim a monopoly of knowledge of the peace process.

Menamparampil also emphasises that peace can be attained only through a search for the middle ground. Religious leaders have to avoid all extremist religious or social positions and all forms of fanaticism. Their role is to be the rallying point for people of all convictions. They have to interpret events in favour of unity and peace and invite people to think about the stands they take and thus take the process forward. They cannot tell people what they should think but have to encourage them to reflect on issues and events and move towards a new society based on justice and absence of conflicts. Discussing the lessons of history, the author states that peace is not a unilinear event but is a long process. The leaders who are involved in the peace process have to be ready for ups and downs because peace comes only after much effort.

Victory of one side does not necessarily lead to peace. As shown in the post-World War I peace treaties that resulted in World War II, the terms that the victor imposes on the loser can, far from leading to peace, result in a demand for revenge. That is the result of extreme positions based on the thinking that the only way of ending the war is the defeat of the enemy. As Syiemlieh has shown above, such an attitude cannot but lead to a feeling of revenge in the vanquished. As a large number of revolutions in Europe during World War I show, a prolonged conflict can also strengthen the longing for peace. Religious leaders have to encourage such aspirations and work towards a new society that can ensure a lasting peace based on justice, not merely on the absence of war.

Manchanda continues the discussion on the role of the civil society that includes religious leaders as well as others like social agencies, student bodies and women's organisations. The involvement of the civil society is essential for lasting peace, especially in South Asia which has a history of "divide and rule" even in peace initiatives. The state negotiates with one of the warring parties and comes to a power-sharing arrangement with it. Among several examples in the Northeast are the Assam Accord that responded to the needs of one community, the peace accord

with the Bodo Liberation Tigers that excluded the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), and the ceasefire in Nagaland with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland IM to the exclusion of its rival led by Khaplang.

Such accords cannot but continue division among the people, though they can give temporary respite to the state and the militant outfits. That is where the civil society can facilitate unity and keep up the pressure on the state and the militants not to abandon negotiations. The civil society has to move towards the middle ground which both the state and the militant groups try to capture for their own objectives. This effort is important because peace building is a long process but the initiative is in the hands of the state. It decides when negotiations can begin and tries to capture the middle ground. Also the negotiators from the militant groups try to monopolise the process.

This shows the need for the involvement of the civil society, but it cannot be treated as a homogenous unit. Civil society is a conglomeration of various bodies and interests. The author discusses a few such partners. Taking examples from Nagaland, she shows how the church groups took initiatives to bring solace to the bereaved families in the early 1990s when the morning found dead bodies strewn on the roadside. They thus asserted the human right of everyone to death and burial with dignity. Once the ceasefire was signed, other civil society groups, particularly women, played the role of getting the general public involved in the process of continuing negotiations and of putting pressure on the negotiators not to abandon the movement towards peace. Women's groups even tried to get the warring militant factions to work together for peace though with limited success. She also discusses some student bodies that came together at the North Eastern level to convince one of their units to halt the road blockade since it was going against the rights of another community.

One has also to be wary of the pitfalls, the first of which is division within the civil society. The second is the danger of the

state or non-state armed group trying to co-opt the civil society groups. At the grassroots level there are examples of women from opposing sides negotiating peace between their communities. But in many other cases women's, students' and other civil society groups have functioned as representatives of their own community. As a result, those who should be searching for the middle ground tend to take an extremist position. For example, there are human rights organisations that limit their work to one community. One can ask whether one can speak of Naga, Khasi, Meitei or Kuki human rights, or does one stand for the rights of every human person? Fourthly, the state tries to denigrate the groups searching for peace and presents them as representatives of the terrorists. For example, when some older women staged a "nude protest" at the entrance of the Assam Rifles camp after a young woman was allegedly raped and killed by the defence forces, the state representatives spread the rumour that those women were paid by the terrorists to bare their bodies. The mainline media swallowed this version unquestioningly and many civil society groups, even of women in the Northeast, accepted it. The lessons of these strategies of denigrating persons working for peace have to be learnt in the effort to bring peace with justice.

Search for Alternatives

It is clear from the discussion in the book that genuine peace is much more than absence of armed conflict. It is the search for a just society. Certainly that search has to deal with the causes of the conflict, many of which have been analysed by the authors. Some causes are political, others are cultural or are linked to the identity of a community and still others are economic. One or the other gets priority in a given situation. As Mahanta says, the leaders of ULFA began with the political and cultural issue of Assam being treated as what Karna calls a sub-stream. Moreover, others like the hill tribes had the same thinking as the starting point of the conflicts. The next generation of their cadres do not ignore these

questions but are conditioned more by the economic issue of unemployment that arises from a lack of development.

None of these issues can be ignored in the search for peace. The identity and nationality issues were predominant in the Naga and Mizo struggles. That is one of the reasons why the accord between their militant outfits and the Government of India resulted in the formation of new states and recognition of their customary laws that these and other tribes consider intrinsic to their identity. However, one cannot exclude the possibility that these accords have been between the elite of these tribes and the State and a majority of the people were not involved in them. The dissatisfaction among the Nagas and the failure to arrive at a permanent solution is an indication that such accords cannot succeed without the involvement of the community they claim to represent. The same can be said about the Assam Accord of 1985. It seems to have become an agreement between the leaders of one community and the Centre to the exclusion even of the elite of the remaining communities of the state.

These and other agreements show that involvement of the community as a whole has to be the first alternative in the peace process. Prolonged nationalist or other struggles cannot continue without some type of mass support, nor can lasting peace be achieved without involving the same masses. One has, therefore, to search for methods of involving the people but one cannot speak of a single mode of doing it. The involvement of the civil society is one possible mode of arriving at it. There are other modes of doing it. Whatever the approach, one has to begin with the conviction that people's involvement is a sine qua non for lasting peace.

That involvement has doubtlessly to deal with the issue of political autonomy but that, too, has not been defined. Some think of sovereignty as secessionism. But as the tension around the presence of the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh and of the immigrants in Assam shows, the identity issue cannot be ignored (Chakraborty 2002: 162-164). Local people can be roused to action

with the fear of a massive demographic change and the consequent loss of their identity. However, the experience of the Assam movement and of Meghalaya state formation also shows that people come together against the common enemy but once the goal against this adversary is reached, internal division begins around economic issues. At this stage the economic, political and cultural aspects merge into one.

As a result, lasting peace requires the type of economic development that also responds to the cultural, political and social dimensions. A political response of state formation, autonomy, territorial adjustment or the Sixth Schedule can bring temporary relief. Treating militancy only as a law and order issue and repression of unrest through laws such as the *Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958* can bring about the peace of the cemetery based on the absence of external violence. But lasting peace requires a solution to the problems that cause the conflicts.

Land is one such issue. Encroachment by the immigrants, acquisition for development projects and alienation of tribal land to the non-tribals have caused conflicts. That problem has to be solved. However, while moving towards a solution one cannot ignore the fact stated by more than one author, that land is not merely an economic asset but also the centre of people's culture and identity. In the traditional rural system land is not a commercial commodity for cultivation or construction. It is the sustenance of all those who depend on it, its owner, those who work on it without owning legally or provide other services as merchants, barbers etc (NCHSE 1986: II).

Some demand that the land be restored to the original owners. The Tripura experience shows the difficulty of doing this. Moreover, merely restoring land to the original owner can satisfy those who own land, but will not solve the problem of the rest whose sustenance it was without owning it. More than one writer has also pointed out the near impossibility of expelling all the "illegal immigrants". The killings of the Biharis shows that even

Indian immigrants cannot be sent back to their land of origin without massive bloodshed. A solution has, therefore, to be found that prevents further alienation. That requires a change in the laws that make encroachment on the common land easy. Implementation of existing laws has to be enforced in favour of the land losers.

That is only the first step. One has to go beyond it to create a new economy based on the land that is still left in the people's hands. That also requires a history that is different from that of a single crop in which the people of the region live because of the *zamindari* (landlord) system, *eksonia* (temporary) *patta* (land ownership document) or *jhum* (shifting) cultivation. The type of economic development that is being envisaged for the region is based on more land acquisition than in the past without even replacing the jobs lost because of it. 48 major dams are being planned that will destroy much of the people's livelihood without replacing it. For example, the detailed project report of the proposed Lower Subansiri Dam in Arunachal Pradesh states that only 38 families will be displaced and that they will be provided land for land. It ignores 12 more villages that are expected to be submerged and others that will be partially affected. It does not mention that these 38 families will lose more than 900 hectares of land but will be given only one hectare each of irrigated or two hectares of unirrigated land (Menon forthcoming). It does not include among the affected persons the estimated 5,000 persons living in the area that will be turned into a wildlife sanctuary to compensate for the one that will be submerged partially by the dam (Rina 2006). Because of mechanisation and the high cost of creating jobs, the proposed projects cannot create jobs for those who will lose their livelihood to them.

A solution to the land issue has to be based on an understanding of these and other issues and not merely on the prevention of further alienation. A new economy required for it demands a history away from that of a single crop. Production in the remaining land has to be geared to the creation of new types of

jobs to solve the problem of massive unemployment. People have to trained to produce new commercial crops that they can grow, without encouraging further monopolisation of land or increasing people's dependence on technologies coming from outside. New crops alone are inadequate without processing and marketing because the biggest exploitation is in marketing. One cannot give here all the details of this new economy. One can only add that this economy has to be a tool of rebuilding the people's economy, community, culture and an identity meant for the present.

Conclusion

This chapter has summarised the nine papers that give the background of conflicts in the Northeast and some indications of possible steps towards peace. A common theme in all of them is that conflicts cannot be taken in isolation and treated as a law and order problem alone. The cultural, social, economic and political causes of the conflicts have to be understood and dealt with. It also means that peace cannot be achieved only through negotiations and accords between the state and non-state armed stakeholders. The people affected by the above causes have to be involved in the negotiations. It may be done by involving the civil society or other groups. Whatever form it takes, internalisation of the peace process by the whole community is essential because most of its members have also internalised the real or perceived grievances that result in the conflict. To achieve peace one has to go beyond a law and order approach to the conflicts and view negotiations as movement towards a just society.