Samir Kumar Das

Governing India's Northeast

Essays on Insurgency, Development and the Culture of Peace

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and the Culture of Peace

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Preface

The monograph—a collection of three recently written essays—focuses on the nature and complexities of social transformation in India's Northeast particularly since the early 1990s. While governance is the thread that runs through these three essays, it at one level addresses the challenges of governing in global times a region historically marked by acute violence, interethnic conflict, and insurgency and at another traces macro changes in the very forms and technologies of governance. These essays seek to break new grounds insofar as the three crucial issues of insurgency, development, and culture are sought to be understood through the lens of governance.

Ideas contained in these essays were shared with many others on various occasions. An earlier version of Chap. 2 on the 'Production of the Insurgent Subject' was presented first to the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Gauhati University, Guwahati on 19 October 2011 and then to the Symposium on 'Development, Democracy and Governance' organized by the Centre for Community Organizations and Development Practices (CODP), Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai) on 1–3 November 2011. A part of Chap. 3 on 'Shifting Strategies of Peace' was presented to the international conference on 'Cultures of Peace and Governance in Europe and India' organized by Malaviya Centre for Peace Research, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) on 17–18 March 2012, while the idea of 'new citizenship' was initially floated in my public lecture on 'Immigration and the Quest for New Citizenship' delivered to the Department of Politics and Public Administration, University of Pune under the UGC Centre for Advanced Studies Programme on 22 February 2012. Chapter 3 is a thoroughly revised version of an earlier draft that came out under the occasional paper series on 'Policies and Practices' by Calcutta Research Group under the aegis of the programme on 'The Role of Governance in the Resolution of Socioeconomic and Political Conflict in India and Europe' (CORE). This chapter is based on research carried out for the CORE project funded by the Socio-economic, Sciences and Humanities in the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement number no. 266931.

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some of the earlier versions with great care and attention and offered their valuable comments. I also take the opportunity of thanking two anonymous referees who took the trouble of thoroughly reading the manuscript and offered their valuable comments. I am particularly indebted to Samita—who although coming from a completely different disciplinary background and consistently refusing to read any of my writings—generously lent many of her ideas that actually went into the making of this book. Unless otherwise stated, translations from original non-English sources are mine. Needless to say, lapses, if any, are also mine.

Darjeeling, January 2013   Samir Kumar Das

Contents

Abbreviations

AAGSP	All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad
AAGSU	All-Assam Grokha Students' Union
AANLA	All-Adivasi National Liberation Army
AASU	All-Assam Students' Union
ABSU	All-Bodo Students' Union
ACF	Adivasi Cobra Force
ACMA	Adivasi Cobra Militant Army
ADC	Autonomous District Council
AFSPA	Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958
AGP	Asom Gana Parishad
AISSM	All India Shanti Sena Mandal
AJYCP	Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chhatra Parishad
APA	Adivasi People's Army
APLA	Assam Peoples' Liberation Army
ASS	Asom Sahitya Sabha
BAC	Bodo Autonomous Council
BCF	Birsa Commando Force
BLT	Bodo Liberation Tigers
BNLA	Brachin National Liberation Army
BPAC	Bodo Peoples' Action Committee
BPF	Bodo Peoples' Front
BTAD	Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District
BTC	Bodo Territorial Council
BTF	Bodo Tigers' Force
BW	Black Widow
CCYM	Chirang Chapori Yuva Mancha
CWU	Chothe Women's Union
DHD	Dima Hasao Daoga
FGN	Federal Government of Nagaland
GOI	Government of India
HPC (D)	Hmar People's Convention (Democratic)
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

IPC	Indian Penal Code
KLA	Kuki Liberation Army
KLNCHLF	Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front
KMSS	Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti
KRA	Kuki Revolutionary Army
KWA	Kuki Women's Association
LWU	Lamkang Women's Union
MDONER	Ministry for the Development of the North Eastern Region
MNA	Mizo National Army
MNF	Mizo National Front
MSS	Mahila Shanti Sena
MSUA	Muslim Students' Union of Assam
MWU	Mayan Women's Union
NAPM	National Alliance of People's Movements
NBCC	Nagaland Baptist Church Council
NDFB	National Democratic Front of Bodoland
NEC	North Eastern Council
NISASEA	Northeast India, South Asia and South East Asia (as a single region)
NMA	Naga Mothers' Association
NNC	Naga National Council
NSCN I-M	National Socialist Council of Nagalim (earlier Nagaland) Isaac-Muivah
NSCN-K	National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang
PCG	People's Consultative Group
PCPI	People's Committee for Peace Initiatives
PM	Peace Mission
PREPAK	People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak
SHG	Self-Help Group/s
SJA	Sanmilit Jatiya Abhiwartan (United National Convention)
SSNS	Subansiri Sanrakshak Nari Santha (Women's Organization of Subansiri for the Protection of Women)
STF	Santhal Tiger Force
SULFA	Surrendered United Liberation Front of Assam
SVIPF	Subansiri Valley Indigenous Peoples' Forum
TAGS	Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangha (Tamulpur Organization for the Donation of Villages)
TMPK	Takam Mishing Paring Kebang
TSL	Tangkhul Shanao Long
UKDA	United Kukigam Defence Army
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Assam
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Committee
UNLF	United National Liberation Front of Manipur
UPDS	United People's Democratic Solidarity

Chapter 1
Governing India's Northeast: An Introduction

Abstract India's Northeast consists of the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura—known popularly as the 'Seven Sisters'—and Sikkim—the last to have become a member of the North Eastern Council. The colonial and early postcolonial policy of governing the region by settling 'nomadic' and 'unruly' groups in clearly marked-out spaces they could claim as their 'homeland' has led to a history of bloodbath and homelessness in the region. On the other hand, the new policy of trumping conflicts by development pursued since the 1990s has triggered off many an anomaly and contradiction, particularly in recent years. Officially initiated peace processes hardly take into account the hitherto existing locally based micro-traditions of peace and coexistence. These traditions continue to make living in ethnically mixed villages and neighbourhoods possible. The introduction focuses on the three issues of insurgency, development and culture in the region through the lens of governance.

India's Northeast traces its formation as a region to the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 and the reorganization of international borders that immediately preceded and followed it. As a result, it remains tenuously connected with the rest of India through a narrow corridor, the 'chicken's neck' or 'Siliguri Corridor'—as it is popularly known—in northern West Bengal, with an approximate width of 33 km on the eastern side and 21 km on the western side. This constitutes barely one per cent of the boundaries of the region, while the remaining over 99 % of its borders are international—with China to the North, Bangladesh to the South West, Bhutan to the North West and Myanmar to the East. Presently, the region comprises seven Indian states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura—also known as 'Seven Sisters'—and Sikkim being the youngest to join the North Eastern Council (NEC). With the exception of Nagaland that became a state in 1963, most of the states in the region were reorganized between 1971 and 1987. These states cover a total area of over 255,088 km^2 (about 7.7 % of the India's territory) and, according to the 2001 Census of India, a population of 38,495,089 persons (roughly 3.74 % of India's population). The region accounts

for one of the largest concentrations of tribal[1] people in the country—constituting about 30 % of the total population—though with a skewed distribution of over 60 % in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland taken together. With the only exception of Kerala outside it, three states of the region—Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya contain an overwhelming majority of Christians (90.02, 87 and 70.03 % respectively). The region is characterized by extraordinary ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, with more than 160 Scheduled Tribes[2] belonging to five different ethnic groups and over 400 distinct tribal and sub-tribal groupings speaking about 175 languages, and a large and diverse non-tribal population concentrated mainly in Assam and Tripura.

While the Ahoms were successful in gradually consolidating a greater part of the region under a single political unit in course of their rule (1228–1826), court chronicles of the Kacharis (1515–1818), the Jaintias (1500–1835) and the Manipur Kings (1714–1949), etc., point out how it had historically retained varying degrees of independence into the nineteenth century when the British took over the region. Colonial rule that began with the Treaty of Yandabo signed between the British and the Burmese in 1826 took nearly a century to finally annex the entire region and exercised its control over the hills primarily as a loosely administered 'frontier' area thereby separating it from the 'subjects' of the otherwise thickly populated plains.

While the Northeast has historically served as the eastern gateway for the passage of people, commodities and ideas between India and her eastern neighbours, its emergence as a separate region bounded nearly on all sides by the territorially defined nation-states brought the historically existing continuities and interrelations to an abrupt halt—if not in practice, at least in theory. The region has been one of the world's greatest migratory routes cutting across such countries as Tibet/China, Nepal, Myanmar, Thailand and Bangladesh. As a result, this has, according to the cultural historians of the region, provided a veritable meeting ground of many races and communities throughout history. The imperative of territoriality of the newly formed nation-states has, almost by default, created the Northeast as a separate and closed region and led to the rather abrupt severance of its historically existing ties with its neighbours.

The region, viewed from outside, looks both homogeneous and distinct from the mainland in geographical, economic, cultural and political terms; although, from within it represents one of India's most diverse and heterogeneous of all regions. It did not form part of 'Muslim India' despite several consecutive Mughal invasions, and the Ahoms—one of the region's longest reigning dynasties (1228–1826)—were by and large successful in integrating different parts particularly of the valley into one single kingdom. Many communities living here continue to harbour and maintain social, cultural and even economic (trade) affinities with the people across the borders more

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[1] A term used freely both in official circles and in popular parlance in India without any of its necessarily pejorative connotations.

[2] A schedule of tribes entitled to enjoy seats and posts reserved respectively in State-run or State-aided educational institutions and government offices is officially maintained as per the provisions of the Constitution of India.

than with those of the mainland. Still, a significant part of agriculture, particularly in the hills and terraces, is characterized by *jhum* or swidden (slash and burn) cultivation and extremely low productivity. The region even in this age of globalization is relatively poor and backward in terms of both industry and communications and most of the states in the region rank poorly in terms of human development index in India. A report on the region published in August 2004 (*India Today* 2004: 37–40), for example, shows Assam's rank as 15 among 20 'large' states and with the exception of Mizoram, all other states of the region rank the lowest 5 among the 10 'small' states of India. The indigenous people (freely described as 'tribes' in both popular and official parlance without necessarily any of its pejorative connotations) of this region unlike in, say, the predominantly tribe-inhabited central India, mostly belong to the Mongoloid stock. British annexation of India, including Northeast India, was nearly complete by the beginning of the twentieth century, culminating in the establishment of frontiers and frontier outposts. It is only since then that many groups and communities, claiming themselves to be 'native' to what they perceive as their 'homeland', started to feel alarmed at the rapid influx of 'outsiders' migrating from outside it. It is this mortal fear of either being in a minority or being reduced to one in what one imagines as one's homeland that has inaugurated a new era of ethnic politics in the region.

Earlier migrations, as Srikanth argues, "at times" generated religious and racial conflicts, but as far as livelihood was concerned, "nature had enough to give to everyone". Migrations that took place during the British period, according to him, apart from creating the ground for cultural and linguistic conflicts, generated competition among different groups for new economic and political opportunities thrown open to the public by the colonial rule (Srikanth 2000: 4119). With the discovery of tea in the region in 1821, the demand for plantation labour was met by encouraging immigration of mainly tribal people from the Chota Nagpur plateau of central India. Then, as colonial rule was established in 1826, clerks and officers acquainted with the English language and the running of the administration were brought into the province particularly from neighbouring Bengal. Marwaris (from Rajasthan in western India) and the Biharis (from Bihar in eastern India) in smaller numbers started trade and business mainly in Assam because of the opportunities created as a result of the economic expansion under colonial rule. A section of the Assamese political leadership felt alarmed at the incessant immigration from outside and as an essential first step, a 'line system' was introduced in 1916 to curb illegal immigration flows into tribal areas. An imaginary line was thereby drawn in order to segregate areas where new immigrants could settle from those that were declared to be the 'exclusive preserve' of the tribes. In spite of all this, Mullan (1931/1987: 298), a British Census Commissioner, commented in his census report of 1931 that "immigration is likely to alter permanently the whole future of Assam and to destroy more surely than the Burmese invasion of 1820 the whole structure of Assamese culture and civilization". The Assamese leadership, however, sought to achieve its objective by endeavouring to reduce the immigrant population by demanding their detection, disenfranchisement and deportation. In simple terms, immigration remains at the heart of many of the conflicts in the Northeast. As B. P. Singh puts it:

> It is essential to realize that the widespread identity crisis in northeast India has been caused by the large-scale migration of population from outside the region during the past one hundred years, and the total dependence of people on the land and the States' apparatus for a livelihood. The phenomenon has made the local population feel outnumbered and swamped by people of different cultural origins. The failure of various sections of the migrant population to adapt themselves to the local language, customs and traditions has further accentuated the identity crisis (Singh 1987: 162).

While immigration remains at the heart of most of the conflicts in the region, the transformation of these conflicts into insurgencies, particularly in such states as Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam and Tripura coincides with a radical reinterpretation of their respective histories in which the Indian State is considered by the insurgents as an 'external' agency—often a 'colonial power'. Such insurgent groups as Naga National Council (NNC) and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim Isaac-Muivah (NSCN I-M), Mizo National Front (MNF), United National Liberation Front of Manipur (UNLF), United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), etc., notwithstanding the differences in their understanding of the relation between the 'external' and the 'colonial', seem to be one in accord on this point. For some, including the ULFA, the Indian State's 'colonial' character is incidental to its 'external' and ethnically exogenous nature, with the implication that transfer of State power to the people living in Assam (*Asombasi*) would end the 'colonialism' of New Delhi. For others, like the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), based in Manipur, the State is considered to be 'external' precisely because its rule is of a colonial nature. As we will see, the NNC was the first in the region, if not in Asia, to have declared 'independence' against India on 14 August 1947, a day before India became independent, and they were closely followed by the MNF that issued a statement on the Declaration of Independence in 1966. Although the ULFA was born in 1979, it initially acted more as a partner of the forces that spearheaded the six-year-long anti-foreigner upsurge (1979–1985) organized with the threefold demand of detection, disenfranchisement and deportation of 'foreigners' settled illegally in Assam. The movement was directed not so much against the State per se as much against 'foreigners'. ULFA's independentist course became increasingly pronounced by the late 1980s, and it distanced itself from the widely prevailing popular xenophobia against the 'foreigners'—mainly Bangladeshis—and in a pamphlet issued in 1992 described the latter as "an integral part of Assam" (ULFA 1992: 1, 5).

The colonial anxiety of having to govern the region with a continuously moving population and with violence and insurgency largely endemic in it also persisted in the minds of the political class that took over after Independence. While at one level the same, old forms and technologies of governance continued to be deployed with only minor modifications in some cases, at another level, anti-immigrant xenophobia has become much more widespread and intense now as violence and insurgency have changed their character. A brief reference to the recent spate of violence in lower Assam[3] (July–November 2012) may help to illustrate this point.

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[3] The otherwise spread-eagled map of Assam is usually classified in popular parlance into *ujani* or upper Assam and *namoni* or lower Assam. As one moves from the west to the east across Assam, one slides down towards the so-called 'Indian mainland'. The district of Nagaon is where upper Assam is said to merge into lower Assam.

1.1 Governance: From 'Farce' to 'Tragedy'

In his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* published first in 1852, Marx argues that history repeats itself only twice—first as tragedy then as farce. Little did Marx anticipate that history in India's Northeast repeats—not once or twice—but endlessly and *ad nauseam*, perhaps not following the same time sequence as had been underlined by him in the book. For, the old colonial policy of settling the otherwise nomadic and 'unruly' groups and communities within territorially enclosed homelands continued to be followed even after Independence and turned into a 'farce' particularly by the early 1990s when groups and communities in Assam were generously conferred 'homeland status' of various kinds—some of them even without asking for it. Homeland turned into what Subir Bhaumik calls an 'ethnic football'[4] for everyone to try their feet and kick—government, bureaucrats, the political class, ethnic militia and the middle class elite and even their rank and file—to score brownie points over others on a turf that was kept delightfully open for everyone's grabbing. The policy, followed since colonial times, received a boost when after the Bangladesh war of 1971 states of the region were reorganized in quick succession during 1971–1987 (barring Nagaland that was formed in 1963). The Inner Line[5] was allowed to continue, the Sixth Schedule[6] acquired a constitutional status and traditional institutions and customary laws were accorded official recognition. A homeland of these forms and varieties is essentially based on the threefold principle of settling a community within an enclosed space, protecting mainly the hill tribes from 'outsiders'—particularly people from the plains—and vice versa, and investing them with some form of autonomy. A new middle class took its shape within almost each community across the Northeast—benefitting primarily from the homeland status that was accorded to it and taking advantage of the autonomous institutions—if only by ossifying them in ways that serve as instruments of gender and other forms of

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[4] http://www.hueiyenlanpao.com/headlines/item/1412-national-seminar-on-india-myanmar-china-relations-editor-seven-sisters-post-and-other-present-papers-on-2nd-day accessed on 6 February 2013.

[5] The Inner Line is a continuation of the old colonial policy of drawing a line separating basically the hill tribes from the people living in the plains. While the colonial policy was intended to protect the 'subjects' living primarily in the plains, official policy in post-colonial India is the other way around—intended more to protect the hill tribes, their land, language, culture and tradition from the migrants from those of the plains.

[6] The Sixth Schedule was added to the Constitution of India on the recommendation of a subcommittee appointed by the Constituent Assembly and headed by Gopinath Bardoloi. Also known as Bardoloi Committee, the Committee recommended, among other things, the establishment of separate Autonomous District Councils in the tribal-inhabited areas of the Northeast. As per the recommendation of the Subcommittee, the Schedule provides for the establishment of autonomous district councils having the authority of making and implementing laws on such subjects as land and customary laws, etc., listed there and managing tribal affairs in a way relatively independent from the state legislature that is likely to be overwhelmed by the dominant ethnic and linguistic majority in the state.

discrimination and repression. As we will see in this chapter, by the 1990s the notions of homeland and autonomy lost much of their edge as a technology of governing the region.

That there cannot be a homeland solution to a homeland problem became amply clear when it was realized that the Northeast as a region is too demographically complex to offer ethnically homogeneous spaces for each of the groups and communities living there. For one thing, smaller ethnic groups and communities (like the Anals, the Chirus, the Noctes, etc.) are in a perpetually fluid state—articulating, fragmenting and coalescing in a variety of ways and often conveniently shifting their allegiance between such large tribal coalitions as the Nagas and the Kukis with ramifications for all of them. For another, while the ethnic majority suffers from the chronic anxiety of being reduced to a minority in no time (as evident during the Assam movement of 1979–1985), ethnic minorities (like the Bodos in Assam) are in no mood to accept the domination of the ethnic majority. Both the anxiety of the ethnic majority and the stridency of the minority help create in their combination a potentially lethal situation and have actually sparked off many a tragic riot in the region. Riots and violence are stirred by the incredibly powerful and albeit impossible imaginary of 'creating' a homeland of one's own by cleansing and exterminating the ethnic *other*. Governance today is thus caught in a homeland bind and history repeats itself in the Northeast with a vengeance—no longer as farce but as tragedy—and a stark and endlessly unfolding tragedy at that.

The recent spate of violence in Lower Assam has once again brought the issue of governance to the centre of Northeast's public discourse. While the clash began on 20 July, by 26 August 2012 the death toll shot up to 86. When P. Chidambaram—the then Home Minister of the Government of India—came to visit two of the camps in Kokrajhar in Lower Assam, the camp inmates made the demand for the dissolution of the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC). The BTC as an autonomous institution was established in the wake of a tripartite Bodo Accord (2003) reached amongst a section of Bodo militants represented by Bodo Liberation Tigers, the Government of Assam and the Central government. The Muslim Students' Union of Assam (MSUA), claiming to represent the predominantly Bengali-speaking, minority Muslims, regards the BTC as the root of all violence for its allegedly anti-minority stance against the non-Bodos, including such smaller groups as the Muslims, the Rajbangshis and the *adivasi*s (literally, original inhabitants) like the Santhals, etc., living within the jurisdiction of the Bodo Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD). True to the majoritarian principle—widely celebrated otherwise as one of the major hallmarks of democracy—Chidambaram clarified that the Bodo Accord is a 10-year-old accord and the Bodo Peoples' Front (BPF) that bagged 11 out of 14 seats of the BTC, is still in command. On the other hand, several 'Bengali' organizations during the mid-1980s released a map of 'Bangalisthan' (literally, land of the Bengalis) with some of the bordering districts of both Bangladesh and Assam as a sovereign homeland for the Bengali-speaking, immigrant Muslims of Assam. The desire of being in majority or becoming one in the near future ironically coincides with attempts at partitioning space in a way where one is assured of one's homeland and can establish

oneself as a majority. The majoritarian principle of democracy feeds into home-land politics and vice versa.

The violence that broke out on 20 July temporarily subsided by the end of August only to resurface in November 2012. As many as 10 persons lost their lives between 10 and 17 November. This is not the first time that history has repeated itself as tragedy here. The Bodo region has witnessed successive cycles of vio-lence in the recent past since the late 1980s. While the accord of 1993—the first of its kind with the Bodo Tigers' Force and Bodo Peoples' Action Committee—aimed at creating the Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC), the Government of Assam excluded more than 1,000 villages from its jurisdiction on the plea that the Bodos did not form a numerical majority in them—one of the qualifications set forth by the terms of the accord for villages to be included in it. A section of Bodo militants then went and 'cleansed' those villages of the non-Bodo population in a bid to 'create' a majority in them. The rest is history, with successive rounds of mass killings and violence in 1989, 1993, 1995, 1996 and 2007 and so on with alarming regularity.

The recent incidents of violence in 2012 marked a departure from the earlier ones on at least two counts: One, insurgent violence especially in the aftermath of Independence was more organized and coordinated in the sense that it used to be targeted predominantly against the security forces and the uniformed men repre-senting the State. The NNC-led Naga insurgency, particularly in its early phase, according to Misra (2002), observed exceptional restraint in this respect. The civil-ians by and large remained unharmed and did not have to bear the brunt of planned attacks by ethnic militants. By contrast, ethnic violence since the 1980s has become anomic in character—inasmuch as targets are now randomized with the effect that there is widespread fear in the society that anyone and everyone could be a potential target and the conflicting parties organize and perpetrate attacks against unarmed civilians as part of their strategy. The riots of 1980 in Tripura[7] may be regarded as the beginning and Nellie[8] and other riots of 1983 fol-lowed in quick succession in Assam. If the Tripura and Assam riots set forth a new trend, the same trend continues unabated with the Naga-Kuki clashes during 1992–1993 in the hills of Manipur, the occasional Karbi-Dimasa clashes in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, violence in the North Cachar Hills (now renamed Dima Hasao) and in other parts of the Northeast in the new millennium.

While each community in the Northeast identifies itself with a particular tract of land that it claims as its homeland, the forces and processes of globalization make it imperative for people to work outside their homeland in keeping with the

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[7] In 1980, a series of riots between the numerically dominant Bengalis and the tribes rocked parts of Tripura. According to unconfirmed sources, the riots of Mandai in 1980 alone accounted for about 3,000 lives.

[8] Assam witnessed one of the worst riots in early 1983 Ethnic militants claiming to repre-sent dominant Assamese majority and a section of the indigenous people on one hand and the Bengali-speaking immigrants on the other. The Nellie riots, as they were called, took a toll of about 1,700 lives in just less than a day according to sources.

changing demand for labour in the rest of India, if not of the world. The new burgeoning middle class of the Northeast amongst the Assamese, Bodos and others seems now to have arrived. Many of them are employed as security guards or call-centre employees in Bengaluru (Bangalore), Hyderabad or Pune, work in groups in glass factories and dairy farms of Mumbai while many others are involved in similarly low-to-middle ranking jobs in the rest of India, including such cities as Chennai, Chandigarh and Delhi.

Migrants outside their homelands become easy targets of attack everywhere. Baruah (2005: 165–176) argues that as the first-generation middle class from the Northeast comes out, they become objects of racial profiling—if not direct hate attacks in the rest of India. In other words, this represents a paradox. At one level, the geographical mobility of some of the communities from the Northeast has increased exponentially in recent years thanks to globalization and the rising demand for labour in other metropolises. But at another level, as they move out and announce their arrival, they become objects of hate attacks. They are catapulted as it were into unfamiliar terrains and alien spaces. These cities may be their work spaces but never become their home. The newly emergent national, regional and global networks, as Hardt and Negri (2000: 45) argue, produce both identity and difference—not only homogenizations but also heterogenizations albeit within a global 'imperial order'. The low-to-middle ranking labour from the Northeast may have become part of the world labour market—'imperial order' as they call it—but they are also not a part of it.

Unlike the Bodos, the Muslims—not necessarily Bengali-speaking Muslims—are present everywhere in south India albeit as a minority in varying numerical strengths. But 'Muslim reactions' have cut across Bengalihood and Bengali identity and that is why they spread across the rest of India and even outside it. On 11 August 2012, a 'Muslim protest'—as Wikipedia puts it[9]—against the riots in Assam and attacks on Muslims in Burma—was held at Azad Maidan in Mumbai. The protest was organized by Raza Academy and was attended by two other groups, the Sunni Jamaitul Ulma and Jamate Raza-e-Mustafa. In another incident, a bulk SMS was reportedly sent in the old, southern city of Hyderabad near the Charminar area on 10 August 2012, where the majority of the city's Muslim population resides. It may not be important to know whether this was actually sent or for that matter who sent it—but what is important is that the message had gone around that unless people from the Northeast left Bengaluru by 20 August they would have to face dire consequences. There were stray cases of hate attacks and biased reprisals in some of the southern states. The government on its part blocked as many as 250 websites well after the administration was taken aback by the suddenness of the violence. Investigators traced the source of these hate messages to Islamist groups such as the Popular Front of India, Harkat ul-Jihad al-Islami (HuJI), Manita Neeti Pasarai and the Karnataka Forum for Dignity. The SMS campaign was designed to create panic among people from the Northeast, forcing

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[9] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raza_Academy accessed on 9 February 2013.

them to flee. The result was massive return migration. According to an estimate, 15,000 people, including students and employees, left Bengaluru by 17 August 2012 and the Divisional Railway Manager informed that during 16–17 August, a record 9,718 tickets were sold from Bengaluru to Northeastern destinations, while on an average only 300 tickets are sold per day. *Pratyahik Khabar* (2012: 1) notes that about 30,000 people left the State of Karnataka by 17 August 2012.

If the anomic nature of violence has set forth a new trend in insurgent violence in the region, homeland claims seem for the first time to be reciprocated by the obligation imposed by others on homeland enthusiasts to remain confined to the region—if not to one's own 'homeland'. While xenophobia is not uncommon in Assam and in other parts of the Northeast, this is for the first time that 'the Assamese have been facing opposition, and have been forced to return from other states' (Sen 2012: 4). Earlier, too, this has happened but on a much smaller scale when for instance trainloads of Assamese youth were attacked in Bihar in protest against reported attacks on young jobseekers from Bihar for railway recruitment in Guwahati, supposedly organized by the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU). This is for the first time that Muslim politics vis-à-vis the Northeast transcended homeland imaginaries and eventually became inserted into the more powerful, 'universalist' imaginary of religion that transcends the boundaries of homeland, state and ethnicity. Neither the Assamese nor the Bodos had ever experienced this on such a large scale. With the fear and violence spreading across south India, history repeated itself not only as tragedy but as one that makes a travesty of homeland demands.

1.2 Trumping Violence with Development

Many scholars have attributed the recent violence in Lower Assam to underdevelopment and 'neglect' that the region has suffered since the colonial times. This is however in line with the tenor of a more general argument that development is the key to 'good governance' and only developmental governance has the capacity of turning the table around and trumping violence and insurgency that has come to stay in the region particularly since Independence. Since the early 1990s, as we propose to argue in Chap. 3, the political class has started veering to the new realization that the old forms and technologies of governance would not do and have become incapable of even addressing—let alone resolving—the changing nature of violence and insurgency in the region. A recently posted e-article, for instance, advocates:

> The hope, that greater economic connectivity between Southeast Asia and Northeast India would help address armed ethnic conflicts, is not impractical. Leaders and cadres of major armed ethnic groups like the National Socialist Council of *Nagalim* and the *Dima Halam Daogah* in the Northeast have revealed that most armed cadres, ranging between ages 14 and 24 (sic), had joined armed groups for lack of alternative livelihood opportunities. Therefore, providing such alternative economic avenues supported by the "look east" policy would offer lasting solutions to the armed ethnic violence in Northeast India (Goswami 2012).

Never before has development been posited as a technology of governance and solution to insurgency and violence as it has been now. Globalization with all its accompanying instrumentalities may have contributed to significant economic growth in the rest of India, but not in the Northeast. While India's economic growth has picked up after the initiation of economic reforms in the early 1990s to about 6 %, Assam, for instance, missed the opportunity again. Statistical evidences point towards a 'long run stagnancy' in growth rate in the gross domestic product (GDP), at around 3.5 % per annum. Describing it as "a worrisome feature", the *Assam Development Report* advocates that "quicker economic progress would help control insurgency since economic scarcity generates more social tension and fuels insurgency" (Planning Commission of India 2002: 4). In simple terms, while economic growth is what is likely to trump insurgency and violence in the region, economic reforms that work for 'mainland India' are unlikely to work for the Northeast, unless accompanied by institutional reforms specific to the region. The idea of trumping insurgency and violence through economic growth and development is new and marks a paradigmatic shift in the thinking about governmental forms and technologies in the region. If the Northeast lacks the dynamism to develop on its own, "the way forward", as a recently published book puts it, "is to expose the North East to the international value chains, with technology support, institution strengthening and policy change" (Rao and Brunner 2010: 105). While the rest of India could consolidate the gains of globalization, why has Assam been singularly unsuccessful? For, developmental governance in the Northeast is understood to be more of developing governance than of governing development. The same document prepared by the Planning Commission of India, for instance, explains:

> … [A]s long as the taxes that the government waives are collected by others (in an obvious reference to the insurgent organizations indulging in extortions in the name of collecting "taxes", the author) these incentives would not be effective. If the problem of governance can be solved, Assam should now be an attractive place for many industries… It is critical to develop institutional mechanism particularly to provide accountability and to shake up non-performing governance systems (Planning Commission of India 2002: 3).

While recommending a new development strategy for the region as a whole, Rao and Brunner echo the same point:

> … [D]evelopment requires capacity development of the people as well as institutions, and here, education and skills development will be cornerstone of Vision (for developing the Northeast, the author). Another important element of the strategy will be the creation of an enabling environment for market-based development, the important component of which will be establishment of peace, law and order and an institutional framework for ensuring property rights. Equally important is the need to provide state-of-the-art infrastructure, especially connectivity both within the region and with the rest of the world, to open up markets and increase mobility. The fortunes of the people of the region are increasingly intertwined with those of the people of Bangladesh, and there is much to be gained by removing trade barriers to enable access to seaports and inland waterways. Many of the problems of the region stem from weak governance, which has contributed to rent-seeking, 'easy-money' culture, and created a law and order situation which has deterred investment (Rao and Brunner 2010: 85).

Development, to be accomplished through the threefold strategy of tapping the region's natural resources (like water, coal and other minerals, etc.) for more

profitable use, initiating radical institutional reforms and establishing economic connectivity with the neighbouring countries, has also triggered off a new concern for *life*. Thus, to cite an instance, at a time when exploitation of natural resources is considered to be essential for development to take off in the region, dams are said to provide a source of cheap hydroelectric power in an otherwise energy-starved country and an antidote to floods and other natural disasters. Over 200 dams are going to be established in different parts of the Northeast in the near future. A series of anti-dam movements have been organized particularly in upper Assam under the leadership of such organizations as Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) and others that view dams as a direct threat to the 'security of human life' (*jiwanar suraksha*). In a society where everything is or is sought to be governed, including violence and insurgency, development—and as we will see—the culture of peace, and life per se in its totality becomes the object of governance, and many a social movement is marked by a heightened concern for life. It is important to theorize this concern for life and bring it to the centre stage of political inquiry.

As the end of the first phase of violence and insurgency seems to have rendered the older forms and technologies of governance increasingly redundant, new developmentalism since the 1990s has not only sought to redefine the existing range of social relations but has brought in its wake a new political subject into existence—an insurgent of an altogether different kind—one who is constituted as a collective self by sharing her concern for life with others and engages in politics for fear of death like never before, articulates and highlights life issues in hitherto unknown ways. Today's development, as we argue, seems to work against this mass fear of death. The insurgent as a political subject today has become relatively de-ethnicized and raises demands that are couched in a language distinct from that of autonomy. We describe it as the rise of a new citizenry, especially in Assam. The book makes a quest for reconstructing the figure of the insurgent as a political subject, particularly from the spate of anti-dam protests in upper Assam.

Insofar as threat is perceived as 'real' by all of them, dam and development strike at the *physical body* that exists as 'the tabernacle of *dynamis*, its potential' and is 'not yet objectified' (Virno 2004: 82, italics in original). The body refuses to make itself available for the forms and technologies of developmental governance as it fears death and develops a stake in the practice of life. The potential of the body as a living organism never completely exhausts itself by surrendering to the call of death, but constantly interrupts the forms and technologies of developmental governance. Never before in the history of the Northeast has the physical body become so much of a security concern for the people as it is now. This is not to say that the physical body has never been under threat in the region's history. The recent violence in Lower Assam (July–November 2012) points out how physical existence particularly of the common people is under threat. But the important point is that for every life lost in interethnic violence, an epitaph is written by the particular community that loses its member and therefore there is mourning and pledge to revenge for her death. Processions were reportedly taken out with the dead bodies of those who lost their lives in the ethnic violence of 2012. The dead are remembered as martyrs. But when a dam bursts and washes out communities and groups, life is lost 'without being sacrificed' and remembered. As dams are

perceived to threaten physical survival, developmental governance does not "realize the potential, but contradicts it and puts it to death" (Neilson 2004: 75).

1.3 Peace as a 'Culture Industry'

If with a certain shift in deployment of the forms and technologies of governance, 'autonomy' shows signs of giving way to 'development' without completely phasing it out, peace turns into what the Frankfurt School theorists would have described as the 'culture industry'[10] and an object of governance. Prolonged conflicts have a tendency of accreting into what is called a 'culture of violence' and of engulfing and in the process wiping out the civil society institutions—widely held as the last bastion of peace and peace-making in the Northeast. Prolonged conflicts for decades gradually get routinized and institutionalized with the effect that everyone learns to come to terms with it albeit for various reasons, and a degree of pacification is achieved insofar as people too 'assimilate' their 'aspirations' for peace with the 'reality' of conflict and war. This, to borrow a phrase that Marcuse has used in a completely different context, "militates against the emergence of a new subject" (Marcuse 1964: 252). Violence and insurgency, in other words, not only take a toll on human lives and property as they actually did in Lower Assam, but threaten to erode the very foundations of civil society institutions existing in the region. At a time when Gujarat was burning (2002)[11] and civil society intervention became all the more necessary, Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram remained closed for days for fear of attack and all political parties across board staged demonstrations against Medha Patkar's (an eminent social activist of the Narmada Banchao Andolan fame) visit to the Ashram for consoling 'the grieving Muslims'. As a columnist raises the question in anguish: Why is Gujarat, the most industrialized state in the country and with a long tradition of civic culture, so divided along religious lines? (Wariavwalla 2012). If religious lines have divided the society in Gujarat like never before in 2002 preventing civil society institutions from playing any effective role in bridging the distance between the Hindus and the Muslims, ethnic divisions are far more pronounced in the Northeast where civil society institutions seem to undergo a process of ethnicization much in the same way as many ethnic groups effectively serve as overground civil society institutions with the

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[10] Adorno and Horkheimer (1993) of the Frankfurt School coined the phrase in order to understand the process of 'standardization and mass production' of culture. Similarly, peace has become an object of standardization—as we will see in Chap. 4—and is meant for 'mass production' with devastating consequences for cultures of peace already existing in the society.

[11] The Gujarat violence of 2002 refers to a series of incidents starting with the burning of a train in the hamlet of Godhra and the subsequent communal violence between Hindus and Muslims that followed it. According to an official estimate, 1,044 people were killed in the violence—including the ones killed in the Godhra train fire. Another 223 people were reported missing, 2,548 injured, 919 women widowed and 606 children orphaned. The unofficial death toll however estimates it to be close to 2,000.

effect that in situations of interethnic conflicts ethnic lines become reinforced—instead of being crossed.[12] In the Northeast—as we will have occasion to see in Chap. 4—the otherwise well-known distinction between the ethnic and the civil becomes dangerously thin—if not already blurred.

Governance, again, is believed to have the magic force that can catalyse the transition from a culture of violence to a culture of peace. The importance of percolation, circulation and dissemination of a culture of peace is nowhere more aptly realized than in the UN declaration of the first decade of the twenty-first century as the 'Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence'. Such a culture of peace introduced from without makes for what Kellner, summarizing the contributions of Frankfurt School theorists, calls a "totally administered society" (Kellner 1989: 83). Such total administration of culture, we argue in Chap. 4, kills the moral person who might prefer conflict to compromising with the moral principles she has reasons to value if these two ever conflict with each other; strives for trumping conflict through development, instead of resolving it; and saps and isolates the traces and micro-traditions of peace, still thriving in marginalized forms in the culture of different societies of the Northeast, from the dominant culture of peace. These traces and traditions find it hard to survive in the face of prolonged conflict. Even at a time when violence was at its peak in July–August 2012 and the relation between the Bodos and the Bengali-speaking Muslims in Lower Assam had recorded another low in the recent past history, ethnic affinities and intercommunity solidarities continued to survive and revolve around conditions of material culture. As Akhil Ranjan Dutta observes:

> The common Muslims who have been living in present day BTAD for decades together are mostly hard working peasants. There have also been migrations of Bengali origin Muslims (sic) to the BTAD, particularly to Kokrajhar from the *Char* areas of the neighboring districts who are displaced every year by flood and erosion. There may be post-1971 migrants among these Bengali origin Muslims. However, all these migrant labourers cannot be labeled as Bangladeshis. The economy in BTAD has evolved a dynamic of interdependence between the Bodos and the Muslim peasants. Most of the migrant Muslim settlers work as cultivators in land owned by the Bodos and also as domestic help with them. This has happened in the historical process of the emergence of a middle class and also with the increase of organized political activism within the Bodo community. When large number of the youths is involved in political activism or gets themselves involved in petty business, it is natural that it invites migrant labourers to work in the paddy fields. Many of the Bodo families have started informal leasing out of land to these migrant labourers. Once number of such leasing out increases more and more migrant labourers enter in these Bodo villages. Under such changing situation there has evolved a unique pattern of villages in some areas inside BTAD where adjacent to the Bodo villages the migrant Muslim labourers have settled down and gradually evolved into villages. The Bodos in such villages even indulge in advance sale of fruits of their homestead gardens to these Muslim settlers. The Muslim peasants also work as petty marketers in such villages (Dutta 2012, mimeo).

If the recent past bears the scars of the cascading clashes between Bodos and Muslims, between Bodos and *adivasi*s, etc., much of our written history refuses

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[12] For an elaboration of this point, see Das (2007).

to recognize the political economy of the culture of peace—of what Dutta (2012) calls "the dynamic interdependence" between these communities. We are in desperate need of a historian who will rewrite the history of this space and unearth these micro-traditions and appreciate their dual role of interrupting the culture of conflict and synergizing the unofficial peace process within a given area, a locality or a neighbourhood. There is hardly any scope for romanticizing these traces and traditions, pieces and fragments of the culture of peace, for they are facing a crisis in the face of an invasive peace hermeneutic spearheaded by the State and sponsored by powerful international and multilateral agencies. But it is important to discover how they survive by way of engaging in a serious battle of sorts with not only the culture of conflict but also with the dominant culture of peace.

1.4 About the Volume

Drawing on historical evidences since the colonial times and a minefield of carefully conducted case studies, Chap. 2, the first essay, shows—contrary to the commonplace argument and belief—how these forms and technologies themselves have contributed to the production of insurgent consciousness and the region always proved to be governors' nightmares. No other region of India has been subjected to so much experimentation with forms and technologies of governance as this has historically been.

The second essay (Chap. 3) shows how the new developmentalism initiated since the 1990s and embodied in such policy clusters as 'Look East', 'Vision 2020' and many others has only been instrumental in triggering off many an anomaly and contradiction in the social and political landscape. The essay points to not only how governance is designed to produce peace but how peace itself is sought to be governed. The new developmentalism marks a paradigm shift in the forms and technologies of governing the region. The essay concludes with a reflection on the complex ways of how developmental governance leads to the emergence of a new citizenry particularly in Assam in the wake of a series of new social movements on such issues as flood and natural disaster, riverbank erosion, food security, tenancy right and right to resources and livelihood, corruption, and so on and so forth cutting across otherwise conflicting ethnic groups and communities.

The third essay (Chap. 4) seeks self-reflexively to explain why, notwithstanding the strong presence of the 'unofficial' cultures of peace (including Gandhian interventions) that have evidently made peace and social coexistence in ethnically mixed villages and neighbourhoods possible, the forms and technologies of governance seem to have prevented them from making any significant headway in the 'official' peace process; that is to say, in the process in which the State or any of its parties is involved in making peace with the insurgent leaders and organizations.

The three essays, together, point out how changing forms and technologies of governing insurgency, development and culture do not remain mere instruments of peace, but define the very nature and content of both peace and conflicts and their interrelations.

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Chapter 2
Production of the Insurgent Subject

Abstract While insurgency in common parlance is attributed to lack of (good) governance, the chapter, contrary to the commonplace belief, traces how insurgency in India's Northeast has its roots in the very modes and processes through which the region has been sought to be governed from time to time. Being located in the frontier and inhabited mostly by the 'fierce and savage tribes', the region has always been the source of any governor's nightmare and has been a sort of laboratory for experimenting with various forms and technologies of governance since colonial times. The early colonial policy—continued even in post-colonial times— of governing the region by profiling the groups and communities in terms of some 'distinctive' physical and psychological features, settling them within a relatively enclosed homeland, and subjecting them to an economy of care has often triggered violent competition amongst the political subjects for benefits provided by the state. The initiatives of trumping insurgency and violence by development introduced to the region since the early 1990s tend to create on one hand a subject who has an almost limitless desire for development. On the other hand, these initiatives have also deprived large sections of people of access to critical and life-bearing resources and turned them into a new insurgent collective driven by an acute concern for livelihood and physical survival. India's Northeast is going to be a new theatre of such biopolitical struggles by these sections of people in the near future.

Northeast India is stereotyped as being a region marked by violence, civil war and insurgency—'durable disorder' as the title of Baruah's book (2007) puts it—making it one of the world's most volatile and politically unstable regions.

This chapter seeks to find out how the insurgent as a *political subject* emerges, develops and—as it is claimed in recent years—fades out and with what effects. Our focus in a sense is restrictive insofar as it concentrates only on policies and policies by all means are only one of the many instrumentalities of governance. In common parlance, governance is viewed as a solution to the problem of insurgency—than a problem, per se—and is believed to be extraneous to governance. We, on the other hand, propose to trace (a) how various forms and technologies

of governance—instead of being merely a response—contribute to the production of insurgent subjectivities in a way that—as we will have occasion to see later in this chapter—is far more complex than is commonly understood; and (b) how changing forms and technologies of governance introduced to the region from time to time in history also lead to *changes* in the nature of insurgent subjectivities. Viewed in this sense, the chapter will be a historical-theoretical exercise in the production of the insurgent subject in the Northeast.

In the existing literature on the Northeast, insurgency is viewed predominantly as a *lack*—that of 'good governance'—if not governance per se. Had the Northeast been governed at all—leave alone well governed, as it is argued, it would not have encountered and suffered the problem of insurgency far too long. This view situates governance outside the ambit of insurgency and vice versa. Governance is cited as the cure that is expected to bring insurgencies to an end. The chapter does not seek to mitigate the chasm by making an advocacy for redesigning policies, which is incidentally a policy-making enterprise,—as much as it traces how different forms and technologies of governance introduced since the colonial times have in complex ways contributed to the production of insurgent subjects. In a sense, the chapter prompts readers to critique these forms and technologies with the anticipation that a certain self-awareness of this sort may help us in making further experimentation with the newer forms and technologies thereby bringing in newer subjectivities as well.

2.1 Routes to Violence

This chapter draws its theoretical cue from Foucault's famous essay on 'Governmentality' published in English for the first time in 1991 (1991) and some of his other writings on the same theme. Although short span of this chapter does not leave scope for any detailed discussion, it will be useful to restate some of his theoretical assumptions as our point of departure. Foucault reads Machiavelli's *The Prince* as "a treatise about the Prince's ability to keep his principality" and makes the theoretically crucial distinction between "keeping one's principality" and governing it by possessing what he calls "the art of government". While Machiavelli's sole concern was to carefully enhance the Prince's ability to keep and retain his principality, according to Foucault 'the art of government' since the 17th century has more to do with the administration and management of social and material relations—between 'things' including natural objects and concrete human beings with their demographic size, health, hygiene and wellbeing, and so forth and how they can be fashioned to form an 'order'. He further argues that the 'order' thus set up is meant for the 'convenience' of the 'things' to be administered and governed and does not stand in opposition to them. In simple terms, the antinomy between the governors and the governed so eloquently emphasized in the political theory of his time was effectively demolished by Foucault. He defines 'the art of governance' as "a right manner of disposing things so as to lead …

to an end that is 'convenient' for each of the things that are to be governed". It consists in "partitioning everything into smallest fragments" and "subjecting it to meticulous control". His idea of government will have to be read together with his notion of 'discipline' that according to him "increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility)" and "diminishes the same forces (in political terms obedience)" quoted in Foucault (1991: 87–104).

Foucault's contribution lies in pointing out that 'political subjects' are produced through 'the art of government'. In *Discipline and Punish*, he in fact draws our attention to what he describes as 'positive economy'—an order of relations through which subjectivities are articulated within a social order. In his words:

> Discipline … arranges a positive economy; it poses the principle of a theoretically ever-growing use of time: exhaustion rather use; it is a question of extracting from each moment, ever more useful moments and from each moment ever more useful forces. This means that one means that one must seek to intensify the use of the slightest moment, as if time, in its very fragmentation, was inexhaustible or as if, at least by an ever more detailed internal arrangement, one could tend towards an ideal point at which one maintained maximum speed and maximum efficiency (Foucault 1977: 154).

The question is: If political subjects are produced through governance and are disciplined into 'docile bodies', as the bricks and mortars of a social 'order', how does oppositional subjectivity—which by definition creates *dis*order and erupts through violence, insurgency and civil war—articulate itself and come into existence? The correlation of violence and insurgency to governance is neither direct nor simple.

The insurgent is located inside as well as outside the system of governance and therefore poses an opposition from both within and without. On the one hand, insurgency is believed to be part of what Foucault calls the 'positive economy'. The nexus between insurgency and government is nowhere more sharply illustrated than in the writings of such commentators as Sahni (2001), Sahni and George (2000) and Nag (2002). Political leaders and the insurgents do not run parallel to each other—but are in league with each other eventually sustaining an efficient albeit 'illegal' political economy of insurgency in the region. Their collusion makes it impossible to break the nexus and escape its influence.

On the other hand, it is argued that the insurgent subjectivity is too powerful to remain confined to the rules and institutions of governance although it has its roots in it. Insurgency by its very nature 'renders delirious' that 'interior voice that is the voice of other in us' (Chakravorty Spivak 1988: 271–313). The violence that insurgency involves is a means of cleansing the insurgent self of the effects of governance—the effects that have been so deeply entrenched in her so much so that they have come to define her very self. Violence, in that sense, is born out governance, but at the same time bears the possibility of turning against its grids and institutions not as an everyday affair but as an 'event' as Fanon argues. More than improving governance (ensuring 'good governance' as the global multilateral agencies would have put it) that it might eventually ensure, violence has a therapeutic impact on the insurgent self with one part fighting against the other that overwhelms it. Being a fight within, it looks 'delirious'. Insurgent subjectivity, one adds, is not singular, but collective and it involves social bodies.

Much in the same manner, insurgent subjectivity is viewed as being only con-stitutive—and most importantly—not as a constituted one. An insurgent is one who has *somehow* been able to escape the effects of governance. She stands in a relation of "non-correspondence" with the dominant reality that confronts her (Samaddar 2010: 15–16). Insurgency and violence, according to this line of argu-ment, is located outside the ambit of governance. While it holds that violence as practice or what is called 'the sovereignty of action' prefigures the subject and insurgent subjectivity is formed through the practice of transgressing the rules and protocols of governance.

This chapter asks how the inside and the outside of governance come into play in a diversity of ways and produce different kinds of insurgent political subjects in the Northeast. It focuses predominantly on three moments while understand-ing the dynamics of production and transformation of insurgent subjectivity in the Northeast. We define 'moments'—not as stages in the linear progression of his-tory, but as specific configurations of forces—as Hegel would have put it—which will help us in understanding these dynamics. One, during the colonial times, the insurgent is considered as the other who remains not only beyond the pale of gov-ernance but as ungovernable and therefore needs to be kept apart from the imag-ined body of loyal subjects. Two, it is only with Independence (1947) that a certain realization dawned on the nationalist political elite that the insurgents are 'part of us' and hence need to be brought back to the nationalist 'mainstream'—although a sense of regret that this region had been one of the worst victims of Partition by getting landlocked on almost all sides marks this era. Three, the new developmen-talism promises to set the region on the move since the early 1990s. This seems to have produced a new kind of insurgent subjectivity and the very early signs of its emergence are slowly being cast in the horizon.

2.2 Governance in Colonial Times

While the term 'Northeast' is widely used both in official circles and in popu-lar parlance, there has hardly been any serious study of how the idea of the 'Northeast' has come into being in the first place and acquired wider currency. It is true that in scholarly circles Northeast continues to be dismissed as 'an illu-sive construct'—with its wide divisions and remarkable differences that refuse to give unto themselves any generic and pan-regional character while emphasizing at the same time that the region too shares many a 'commonality' with the so-called Indian mainland.

This chapter seeks not so much to deconstruct the term as much to draw the implications of 'the Northeast' as a construct for governing the region, for, it emerged primarily as an administrative category. One has to acknowledge that the term—notwithstanding its illusive nature and wide heterogeneities—refuse to go and continues to be invoked, used and deployed as a category in official and popu-lar circles. The chapter argues that its persistence as a category has its roots in the

way the region has come into being and is governed today and the morphology of 'political subjects' that such modes of governing have produced over the centuries. The brief canvas of this chapter does not however allow us to reflect on the changing modes of governance and the production of political subjects in the Northeast in any greater detail. Its main objective is to trace the implications of these changing modes—most importantly from the colonial to the post-colonial—and their implications for the production of political subjects. While the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial—as we will see later—may not have the significance that we are often led to believe—a new technology of governance has started being introduced to the region since the early 1990s—thanks to the attempts at inserting the region into the global economy and the launching of the 'Look East' policy.

Colonialism took about a century to establish its stranglehold in the region. Established first in the year 1826 when the Treaty of Yandabo was signed between the Burmese and the British, the colonial rulers found it difficult to establish its rule and by all indications resolved to spread their rule albeit unevenly across the hills and the plains of the region. If one were to study carefully British administrative records, one is surprised to discover the plethora of categories that they had devised in order to govern parts of the region that they themselves considered as ungovernable.

2.2.1 Governing as Frontier

While the Northeast has always been and indeed continues to be the rulers' nightmare, the colonial policy of *governing* the Northeast since the beginning of the 19th century is issued from the twin imperative of keeping the subjects who have submitted to their authority from those who do not, by way of making the latter a part of 'frontier administration' and of enumerating in detail those who have submitted to their authority and settling them in their respective 'homelands' so that nomadism comes to a complete stop and they become beneficiaries of settled administration. The British by all accounts had had a mortal fear of the wandering people—people who do not settle and constantly move about—for they found it difficult to bring them under any form of settled administration.

Settling the wandering population and eventually making them part of a political order has to do with fixing the borders and confining them to their respective homelands. Border and order have historically proven to be only complementary to each other and of late there has been a burgeoning literature on their interlinked nature. One of the fundamental changes that has taken place in the politics of settlement in the modern (Indian) State has been from 'frontiers' to 'boundaries': "… [F]rontier is an area, often a zone of transition, not only between groups but also between geographic regions, a boundary is a line drawn on the ground and on a map" (Embree 1989: 68). It is interesting to note that the colonial rulers did not so much seek to establish their direct rule over most of the Northeast as much as they decided to rule it as frontier—remaining outside its direct rule, for, it, according to

them, consisted of people most of whom could not be governed—the ungovernable from whom they were required to protect the governed—their subjects. The Northeast, in Embree's words, represented a wide frontier tract of an indefinite nature on the borders of Tibet and China in colonial times.

It is interesting to see how the British administrative ethnography started to set up the 'frontiers'—only *vaguely* separating their subjects from the ungovernable outsiders. The frontiers unlike the borders never make the distinction in any neat and precise terms. While the outsiders are always regarded as a threat to the security of the insiders, there is nevertheless a vast tract of land—and not a thin line—that separates the governable subjects from the ungovernable tribes. Viewed from either side, the frontier—known at that time in British parlance as 'Eastern Frontier'—constitutes a relatively inaccessible and loosely administered land that is inhabited by largely secluded, autonomous and self-ruling communities who do not belong to either side. They are usually called 'the frontier tribes'. This vast tract of land is technically called the 'frontiers' and predominantly the tribal people[1] inhabiting them cannot be called either the outsiders or the insiders. They are the people who need to be kept under constant vigil through suitably conducted punitive expeditions in order to keep them at arm's length so that the insiders do not have to suffer from the frequent raids organized by them. The safety and the security of the body of subjects have been one of the key running themes of the colonial administrative discourse that developed on the frontiers of the Northeast. Frontier defence in colonial times was basically a matter of keeping the 'primitive tribals' at arm's length by way of constantly repulsing their raids and conducting occasional punitive expeditions. Frontier, in colonial administrative thinking, is always regarded as a means not only of separating the insiders—that is to say, the colonial subjects—from the outsiders living across it but also of defending and protecting them from the marauding outsiders. The British frontier discourse notwithstanding its limitations seems to be driven by the colonial concern for the wellbeing of its subjects.[2] All the punitive expeditions of the colonial administrators against the tribal raiders were, as the colonial administrative ethnography informs us, inspired by the abiding concern for the wellbeing of the subjects living inside the frontiers and the nagging fear from the primitive tribal groups and communities living beyond the line that separates them.

The governable–ungovernable divide also coincides with the dichotomy between those who are 'civilized' and those who are not. The British rulers realized that the degree of governability was unevenly distributed across their territory.

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[1] The term 'tribe', far from being politically incorrect in any way is freely used in official circles as well as by the tribals themselves.

[2] The analogy of the colonial project of vaccinating and inoculating the subjects against such fatal and contagious diseases as cholera, plague and malaria, etc. easily comes to mind. Since there is a considerable body of literature on this issue, we refrain from referring to any of them. The same concern for the wellbeing is also reflected in the postcolonial Indian state's zeal in pursuing the pulse polio campaign particularly vis-à-vis the reportedly reluctant Bengali-speaking Muslims of contemporary West Bengal.

Accordingly they differentiated between different tribal groups and communities, for instance, between the tribes of the hills and the plains. The Nagas of the Manipur Hills and those of the Naga Hills were not considered as the same to be ruled and governed in the same manner. Dunbar having the enviable record of being associated with frontier defence both in the Northwest and also the Northeast of India refers to the insiders as "the natives". Beyond the frontiers lie the uncivilized and the primitive people. Writing in 1932, he describes the tribal outsiders as "an intensely interesting primitive people" (Dunbar 1932/1984: 9) and the Naga as "a fine upstanding savage" (ibid.: 153). But not all of them are wild and savage to the same extent. The "tribes of Nagas dwelling in the mountains south of Sibsagor and Jorhat", were, according to Shakespear, "much less warlike and aggressive" (Shakespear 1929/1980: 47). Dunbar credits the tea industry established in the mid-1850s for having given the "comforts of civilization" to Assam. Troops of the British East India Company moving up to Sadiya in upper Assam in 1838 and subsequently 'occupying' it in 1842, according to Dunbar, brought in "peace and prosperity ever since" (Dunbar 1932/1984: 75) by way of putting an end to the prolonged spell of anarchy in Assam with the disintegration of the Ahom rule and the frequent Burmese raids. Frontier administration thus becomes synonymous with the civilizing mission. The British never regarded the tribals of the hills civilizable and never thought of establishing their direct rule over them. Referring to the various clans of the Abors, Dunbar writes:

> Up to now, most of what I have learned of the hill-men had been among the Galongs, as far as the arts of peace are concerned. The friendly Pasi clan, the Minyongs whom we had been fighting and the Oanggi, who were unspeakably dirty (even their women never seemed to wash), were the only Abors I had seen, and they did not compare well at all in appearance with the Galongs further west; while their fields were wretchedly poor after the Siemen Valley, let alone the fertile country about Kombong. We were, of course, among the Abors who had dealings with the Plains. Nor do I think that the contact a primitive savage makes with the outside world does him much good (Dunbar 1932/1984: 195).

The frontiers were conceived by the colonial ethnographers, as the means of keeping the tribal raiders at bay. As Dunbar puts it:

> … Assam has hill tribes on the border, and although these people cannot be called warlike or particularly enterprising, the border tracts have always needed protection from what might otherwise be frequent petty raids (Dunbar 1932/1984: 76).

The Assam Rifles—formerly known as the Military Police of Assam—was raised precisely with the purpose of "border defence among strange wild tribes" (Shakespear 1929/1980: 1). The frontier administrators almost unequivocally felt that punitive expeditions while the only means left open to them in order to tackle the problem of tribal raids, are not enough to completely stop raids from taking place and that such raids are almost inevitable given the nature of the terrain and the 'habits' of the tribal groups conducting such raids. The British administrators seem to be constantly experimenting with newer technologies of governing the frontiers. Dunbar, for example, felt the necessity of raising a mobile column of border police trained in "transborder warfare at a few hours' notice". In 1911, the frontiers of Balipara and Sadiya were put for the first time under separate political officers.

2.2.2 Governing by Differentiation

Colonial frontier administration depended substantially on the management of the ethnic communities living in it without in any way interfering with their affairs. The British were not interested in the 'complete annexation of these areas or even direct economic exploitation'. As Choudhury observes: "The real purpose seems to have been to follow a policy which would cost the least to the administration and at the same time provide a measure a security to the plains from tribal attacks" (Choudhury 1986: 115). The British by all accounts continued with the erstwhile Ahom policy of constantly expanding their administration towards the western plains of Assam and of protecting the subjects from the tribal raiders of the hills in the east. The Ahom administration seemed to have been predicated on a fairly clear-cut distinction between the tribals of the hills (like, the Nagas, the Lushais, etc.) and those of the plains (like, the Koches, Kacharis, Morans, Barahis and Chutiyas, etc.) and reserved force and coercion in order to tame and intimidate the 'primitive' tribal groups of the hills. Most of them with the exceptions of the Jaintias and the Khasis were in the words of Lakshmi Devi, "outside the civilizing influence of the plains and consequently retained much of their primitive instincts intact" (Devi 1968: 4–5). The Jainitias and the Khasis have not been known as 'rapacious raiders' and were in fact involved in regular trade and market exchange with the people of the plains. As one reads through the pages of Devi's wonderful account of the Ahom-tribal relations, one gradually gets the impression that the mightiest dynasty of the Northeast thought it wise not to extend the administration beyond the sphere of "civilization and Hinduism" (Devi 1968: 5). The boundary was implicitly recognized by almost all the Ahom kings in their nearly 600 years of reign in Assam. Little effort was made during the long rule of the Ahoms to extend the administration towards the hills. Only intermittently some parts of the hills particularly those that presently are part of Arunachal Pradesh came under the rule of the Tibetan chiefs. On the contrary, the Ahoms tried to keep the tribals outside their administrative sphere by way of implicitly acknowledging their entitlement to the resources of the foothills. Most of the tribes were deficient in some of the necessities of life (including women and slaves[3]) which compelled them to commit raids in the plains below in order to fill up their deficiencies. Ahom King Pratap Singha understood the situation, allotted to the Naga Chiefs small plots of revenue-free land called 'Naga-Khats' along with retainers (or *bahatiya*s) to be managed by Assamese agents called Naga Katakis, for the benefit of the Naga tribes. Some of the tribes were assigned fishing waters too. This sprang from the greater recognition that the hill people have a share in the produce of the fertile land of the plains. In return, King Pratap Singha made the Naga chiefs (i.e. Khunbaos) acknowledge the supremacy of the Ahom King by regularly paying annual tribute with their hill products. The hill tribes under this exchange were to

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[3] See, Majumdar (1963: 1037).

refrain from attacking the Assamese villages. The exchange was known as the *posa* system. Its introduction, according to Lakhimi Devi, was "very successful specially in the area between Disang and Dikhow rivers" (Devi 1968: 48). But once the rules of exchange were violated, the Ahom kings would undertake punitive expeditions against the violators. Thus, a very indirect system of frontier administration was followed by the Ahoms. Governing is always reserved for the governable: those who prove to be cultural aliens and therefore cannot be governed need to be kept at arm's length through defence and punitive expeditions or as the British would eventually have it, 'loose control'.

The British policy in other words was one of noninterference with the affairs of certain groups of tribal communities especially of the hills. British authorities enforced the Inner Line regulation in 1873 by which it sought to keep the administrative districts of Assam on the northern valley of the Brahmaputra out of its limits. The Inner Line was a limit up to which the district officer's regular jurisdiction ran and up to which they were supposed to maintain law and order.

It was only towards the end of the 19th century and more particularly in 1911 that the British started following the 'forward policy' of exercising 'loose control' over the tribesmen so that they do not have the impression of being left in larch in their hours of need and distress and as a means of repulsing growing Chinese attacks. This has been described as "the policy of controlling the tribes from within" (Majumdar 1963: 1036). This was done in most cases by way of appointing British superintending officers in those areas. In March 1936, the King in Council passed necessary order to declare Northeast Frontier (Sadiya, Balipara and Lakhimpur) together with Naga, Lushai and North Cachar Hills as Excluded Areas of Assam. In 1937, the affairs of the tribal areas were transferred to a newly created establishment called the Governor's Secretariat and the Chief Secretary of Assam was relieved of the Tribal Affairs Department. The Political Officers of the Eastern Frontier were thus placed under the immediate authority and direction of the Governor of Assam as a delegate of the Governor-General of India. During the Second World War a necessity to bring the Frontier Areas under more direct control was felt and a new post of Advisor to the Governor of Assam. The Frontier Tract Regulation of 1880 as amended in 1884 and 1888 was revised in 1945 to accommodate the changes that took place in the 20th century.

In 1884, Alexander Mackenzie made a plea for interventionist policy. As he writes:

> With the establishment of Chief Commissionership in Assam and the immediate subordination of the Assam Administration to the Supreme Government, the views of the local officers began to carry to greater weight, and the advocates of a forward policy obtained a more favourable hearing; until in 1877, both the Government of India and the Secretary of State came finally and resolutely to the determination to advance the headquarters of the Political Officer to the Naga Hills to a central and dominating position in the midst of the warring Angami clans—and to do away absolutely and for ever with the state of tribal anarchy that disgraced the so-called Hills district, and formed a standing menace to the peace in Cachar, Seebsaugor and Nowgong. Those of us who long ago contended that in no other way could permanent security be won, may rest content with the eventual triumph of their views; but we may perhaps be pardoned a passing expression of regret that

so many lives should have been lost and so many valuable years been wasted, while the vain endeavour was being made to shirk the full burden of responsibility imposed on us by local circumstances and by the high necessities of our paramount position. Even now it cannot be Safely assumed that the arbitrary line which bounds our present jurisdiction to the sphere of our direct control not a few tribes of Nagas, who may prove troublesome to both hills and plains; and I for one believe that we shall only find permanent peace when we have brought under our sway the whole of the Naga border up to the very summit of the great water-pent, which bounds the British territory to the south of the Assam Valley (Mackenzie 1884/2004: 372).

The British authorities were aware of the necessity of making the subjects capable of defending themselves. Defence for them was not to be externally provided. While the British rule looked upon itself as providential—invested with the moral responsibility of providing defence to the subjects—the subjects were always sought to be made a part of frontier defence. Part of the civilizing mission of the colonial authorities lay in training the primitive and uncivilized the art of self-defence. They regretted for example, that the Assamese were by nature vulnerable and incapable of self-defence. Their estimation about the capability gradually crystallized into ethnic stereotypes that are still in circulation in our time. The Assamese, according to Dunbar, are not capable of defending themselves. For him, "neither Bengal nor Assam show (sic) any enthusiasm to do anything in their own defence" (Dunbar 1932/1984: 75). As he argues: "The people of Assam are not by nature conspicuously hard-working" (Dunbar 1932/1984: 76). Shakes pear, a soldier himself, showed how the Assam Rifles in the initial years also inducted the native conscript levies (like the Cachar Levy, the Rangpur Levy, etc.).

The role of the First Gorkha Rifles in repulsing the tribal raiders from Pakistan in Kashmir immediately after the Partition led the ruling Congress Party to believe that they were "no longer the British mercenaries": "… it recognized that it could in their loyalty as the British had done, their value as front-line soldiers in both internal and external wars would be inestimable" (Gould 1999: 305). The tripartite agreement that was signed in Kathmandu among Great Britain, India and Nepal in 1947 provided that "in all matters of promotion, welfare and other facilities the Gurkha troops should be treated on the same footing as the other units in the parent army so that the stigma of 'mercenary troops' may for all time be wiped out" (Gould 1999: 308). The treaty also provided that "the Gurkha troops should not be used against Hindu or any other unarmed mobs" (Gould 1999: 310). Border management is essentially the management of interethnic composition of the border forces. Even when the British inducted such ragtag conscripts as the Cachar or Rangpur Levy into the Assam Rifles, they would never deploy them against their own men. The point was first recognized by a stream of military historians and sociologists and subsequently recognized by Stephen Cohen (1971). Thus, it is not surprising that a majority of the Assam Rifles men are drawn from the Gorkhas and are deployed against the tribals of the Northeast. In the words of K. K. Muktan: "In the Eastern frontier of India the Gorkhas played a crucial role in the task of unification, consolidation and reconstruction of what is known today as the northeast region" (2003: 130). Although the policy of isolating the Gorkhas from the Indian soldiers is no longer followed now, they are usually deployed in order to quell troubles and insurgencies

predominantly in the Northeast, particularly of the Nagas and the Mizos. While it is always dangerous to use and deploy the soldiers of one class or religion against another, according to Stephen P. Cohen, "the Gurkhas with few ties in India except Dehradun were extensively used in civilian riot control" (Cohen 2001). The 'mutiny' of a section of serving Sikh officers after Operation Bluestar in 1984 is a case in point. It, according to Cohen, led to a certain "weakening of the overall integrity of the Indian army" (Cohen 1988: 137). The induction of the military for aiding the civilian administration and their deployment against 'our own men' are therefore always fraught with danger. If frontier defence was the key to the emergence and consolidation of the Northeast as a region, then Gorkhas certainly were the builders of the post-colonial Northeast.

2.2.3 Governance by Settlement

The colonial policy of enumerating the subjects in course of Census operations, or through the instrumentality of preparing gazetteers sought on the one hand to fix and freeze certain physical, mental, social, economic and political 'features' by way of clearly demarcating them from others on the basis of the same parameters and at the same time establishing their 'resemblances' with the people of the same stock, and on the other hand by way of settling them in clearly demarcated areas, which would be recognized as their homeland as distinguishable from those of others. In 1903 Sir Bampfyde Fooler, then Chief Commissioner of Assam, proposed and the Government of India sanctioned the preparation of a series of monographs on the more important tribes and castes of the region. Thus, the Khasis as C. J. Lyall writes in his Introduction to Gurdon's monograph on the Khasis that the anthropological work developed on them points out that the Khasis are "isolated" from "the encircling population" (Lyall in Gurdon 1906/2002: 19). Khasi 'matriliny' for obvious reasons becomes the defining feature of the Khasis. Grierso's linguistic survey is another instance where the language differences are said to be at the root of the classification of the tribes and castes.

British anxiety of keeping each of them confined to its respective homeland was to say the least acute. Thus, Anderson while introducing Endle's monograph on the Kacharis (Bodos), for example, writes: "The book is primarily a monograph treating of that branch of Kachari race which lives in scattered hamlets along the foothills of the Himalayas in Northern Bengal and Assam, intermixed now with Hindu people who have intruded into what was once their undisputed home" (Anderson 1997: 15). The British ethnographers had articulated the homeland sentiment long before the Bodos did.

The British were primarily responsible for consolidating the margins of their empire by settling different communities in what they would consider as their respective habitats. The verbs used widely in British ethnographic records were significant—to 'occupy' or to 'inhabit', etc. Resource utilization goes hand in hand with settlement. Indeed, most of the hills are referred to by the names of

the tribal communities and clans, such as, Aka Hills, Dafla Hills, Miri Hills, Abor Hills, Mishmi Hills, Khamti Hills, Singpho Hillls. Settlements emerged out of the greater necessity of keeping these communities to their restricted geopolitical spaces and never allowing them to organize raids outside their habitats. Indeed, raids are always thought of as incursions or unlawful infiltrations into the territories of the British subjects. That they have been predominantly migrant communities for the greater part of their history has been recognized by the British. But once they are surveyed and enumerated by the Gazetteer or census authorities, they are boxed as it were within the territories designated by the British for them. The Singpho case is quite interesting. They have migrated to this part from highland Burma and are still in the process of migration. Yet, they are the 'inhabitants' of the Singpho Hills. As Allen et al. point out:

> A tract of hilly country lying to the south-east of Lakhimpur district, Assam, inhabited by the Singphos, or Kachins as they are called in Upper Burma. Their original home seems to have been near the sources of the Irrawady, but they have gradually moved southwards, crossing the Hukwang valley and the Patkai range, and have entered the valley of the Brahmaputra. The Singphos first settled in Assam towards the end of the 18th century, their villages being located on the Buri Dihing and on the Tengapanni east of Sadiya. By degrees they assumed a state of semi-independence, and offered some resistance to our troops when upper Assam came under British rule (Allen et al. reproduced 1979: 151–152).

Settlement, in other words, is the act of freezing a tribe within a 'homeland' and making it forget the prehistory of its migration and stopping it from further moving away much in the way it has been throughout its unrecorded history. Once this is done, the tribal community takes it to be its homeland and builds up an imaginary that turns a blind eye to their history of constant migration and 'unification' with others.[4] British policy, in other words, contributed to further tribal fragmentation.

2.3   The Colonized and the Rebel

Colonial rule everywhere produces the colonized. In the Northeast, however, the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized was far more complex than what it was in other parts of India. For, the colonial rule in this region left a large body of the frontier tribes outside its ambit and made only limited and calibrated attempts at bringing about some semblance of order in the midst of chronic 'tribal anarchy' and instability. This was considered necessary not for these tribes themselves for they were too 'primitive' and 'savage' to be brought under any form of settled imperial order, but for the protection of their own subjects who had 'submitted to their authority'. Whatever the colonial rulers did in the far-off frontiers of the Northeast—while ordering and stabilizing the frontier tribes—was informed by the deeply ingrained sense of colonial responsibility on their part towards their own subjects.

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[4] Suan has discussed the point with reference to the Zo tribe. See Suan (2011: 157–187).

The colonial policy of differentiating the subjects from the frontier tribes accordingly produced two very distinct kinds of subjects or more often than not a veritable mix between them: On the one hand, there was the widely known 'docile body' of subjects predominantly living in the plains to whom the colonial rule remained beholden out of what we describe as the deep sense of responsibility and whose desire it was to be as firmly ensconced in the framework of the colonial rule as others at that time (like the Bengalis) were and reaping the benefits and advantages that colonialism had promised in its wake. Thus, if a good part of the 19th century Assam was mired in the language controversy sparked off by the introduction of Bengali by the colonial rulers in 1836 as the language of educational institutions and law courts, the argument in favour of reintroducing Assamese was aimed at removing the handicap that the Assamese youth were to face thanks to the colonial language policy. The handicap, according to the eminent public intellectuals like Anandaram Dhekiyal-Phukan and others, put the Assamese boys and girls at a perennial[5] disadvantage vis-à-vis their Bengali counterparts in matters of education and employment. What is important to note in this connection is that the plea for reintroducing Bengali as the official language was never issued from any malice or vitriol towards the Bengalis as a community or their language. Dhekiyal-Phukan, in fact, underlined the importance of learning Bengali independently and admired the contributions that Bengali poets and novelists have made towards their literature.[6] Thus, with the establishment of the colonial rule in the Northeast there emerged the colonized as a subject filled up with the irresistible desire of reaping the benefits and advantages of colonial rule—by getting as much close to it as possible, by beating others in this strange competition for catching the attention of colonial rulers.

On the other hand, there was also the irrepressible rebel in the figure of the colonized—a rebel who could never be fully subsumed and brought under colonial rule and was therefore considered as ungovernable. Although parallel to each other, the figure of the rebel was only complementary to the 'docile body' of the subject, for, the body of the subject could be rendered docile as much as the image of the rebel was rendered ungovernable—filled with fierceness and ferocity, its unruly and extremely unreliable nature, nearly irrepressible capacity of undermining the colonial promise of settled administration with its accompanying benefits and advantages—'the renaissance' of the 19th century. The fear from the ungovernable created in the inverse proportion the desire—indeed the pleasure of being governed. Both fear and desire prompted many a subject to become 'docile' and submit to the British authority.

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[5] Assamese boys and girls, according to him, would never be able to master Bengali as efficiently as their Bengali counterparts would.

[6] I have touched upon the point in my paper, Civil society and the language movement of Assam (Das 2008, mimeo).

2.4 Post-colonial Governance

While referring to the transition that the decolonization has signalled for the hith-
erto 'ungovernable' tribal Communities of India's Northeast, V. P. Menon—widely
considered as one of the principal architects of contemporary Indian State—has,
for instance, observed: "With regard to the tribes located on the northeast frontier
there were no formal treaties and engagements: the Government of India's policy
has been *merely* to extend gradually to those areas the benefits of settled adminis-
tration" (Menon 1956: 407).

The Independent Indian State during the initial years took pains to adjust itself
to the prerequisites of the newly drawn borders. Tripura for example was more
open to the then East Pakistan than to India. In the words of Menon: "The first
task was to build a road from Tripura to Assam, and another within Assam itself to
provide a connecting link with the rest of India" (Menon 1956: 345). The concern
as would be evident from this case is not only different from the colonial rule but
the opposite. It is to connect the far-off places with India as fast as possible. The
British concern on the other hand was to keep them isolated so that these could not
pose any threat to the subjects of British India.

Why was Manipur 'taken over' by India? The words 'taken over' used by
Menon—one of the key architects of the integration of the princely states in
India—are highly significant. Menon offers the explanation:

> Manipur is bounded on the north by the Naga district of Assam; on the east by Burma; on
> the south by Burma and the Lushai hills, and on the west by the district of Cachar … In
> view of its position as a border state and its undeveloped character, it was decided to take
> over Manipur as a Chief Commissioner's province (Menon 1956: 346).

In simple terms, Manipur's interests were hardly of any concern here. The only
concern was the security of India and defending her borders.

The case of Manipur is quite interesting. The constitutional reforms initi-
ated by the Maharaja governing this tiny princely state since 1946 were primar-
ily aimed at "associating the people of my state more closely with my government
and so far as possible make that government popular and responsive to the general
will of my people". Four days before India achieved Independence, the Maharaja
signed a standstill agreement with the Government of India according to which the
Government of Manipur transferred the administrative responsibilities of defence,
currency, external affairs and communications to the domain of New Delhi. It seems
that the Maharaja was ready to part with a part of his authority to the new politi-
cal dispensation but was eager to retain the rest with him and his people. As part of
the promised reforms, Manipur State Constitution Act was enacted in 1947 and elec-
tions were held in 1948, though of course the representatives of the people came to
power on the basis of limited franchise. When the Maharaja was invited to Shillong
by the then Governor of Assam, Sri Prakash, a rumour was doing the rounds in his
state that he was going to sign a treaty that would lead to the merger of Manipur
with the Indian Union. In fact, a report to this effect was also published in some of
the local newspapers. On the basis of this information, Tiankam—the then speaker

of the Manipur Assembly wrote a letter to the Private Secretary of the Maharaja in which he inquired about the objective of the proposed visit. He was probably the first to impress on the Maharaja the necessity of discussing the matter first in the Assembly if such a treaty were to be concluded by the Maharaja (Singh 2002: 174–194). The Assembly never subsequently ratified the treaty. One of the local newspapers—the *Bhagyavati Patrika*—in fact took a leading role in voicing its dissent against the merger. In an editorial published on 20 September 1949, it "urged upon Maharaja Bodh Chandra Singh not to surrender the dignity and honour of the Manipuri nation" and pleaded for the 'protection of Kingship'. Dhabalo Singh, President of Praja Shanti Sabha, which was the ruling party of Manipur at that time, expressed in a memorandum to the Maharaja on 17 December 1948 that "Manipur is to remain as a state and autonomous unit enjoying responsible government with His Highness the Maharaja of Manipur as the Constitutional head with her sovereignty undisturbed." The All-Manipur Students' Union (AMSU) also dubbed this agreement as "invalid, unfair, unequal treaty and done under duress". All the insurgent groups operating in Manipur—notwithstanding their ideological differences—derive the legitimacy of insurgency from their critique of the merger agreement (Tarapot 2004: 165–175). They felt that the Maharaja was forced to sign the treaty at 'gun point'. This illustrates once again how the presumption of a 'pre-political community' could remain oblivious to these political developments and the constitutional reforms initiated by the Maharaja in a bid to gradually transfer political power to his people or at least making them a part of his government.

The united National Liberation Front of Manipur (UNLF) similarly alleges that the agreement that was entered between Maharaja Bodhachandra Singh on the one hand and V. P. Menon, Advisor to the Government of India, Ministry of States and Sri Prakasha, Governor of Assam on 21 September—otherwise known as 'The Manipur Merger Agreement', was signed by the Maharaja under duress outside his kingdom. The Maharaja reached Shillong—the then capital of Assam, on 17 September reportedly on an invitation from the Governor of Assam. He was pressurized by his Dewan, planted allegedly by the Government of India to exert pressure on him for getting him to agree with Manipur's merger. The Maharaja wanted to go back to his kingdom and consult the issue with his people, particularly with the council of ministers elected by the people in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution of Manipur framed in 1947. His proposal was 'turned down politely' at the instance of the instructions of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the then Home Minister of India (Tarapot 2004: 164). As a document published by the United Committee, Manipur proclaims:

> … much to the agony of the people of Manipur and in gross violation of democratic norms the then Government of India merged Manipur state within Indian Union by virtue of a document called Manipur Merger Agreement … on 15 October 1949. Unfortunately His Highness Maharaja Bodhachandra Singh signed this document by his own authority and without the authority of the State Council of Ministers. The democratically elected Manipur State Assembly never ratifies the agreement (United Committee, Manipur 2003: 3).

It may be noted that the State Council of Ministers was never dissolved and according to the Supreme Court of India (Dr Ram Manohar Lohia vs. V. S.

Sundaram, District Magistrate of Manipur, AIR 1955, Manipur 41 v. 42 c. 9 Dec.), Manipur State Constitution Act has not lost its validity with the signing of the Merger Agreement. Besides, Manisana, a rebel leader, has been responsible for reviving in recent years the *satjel*, the army of freehand boxers who were banned by the British for their 'declaration of Manipur's Independence' before they had left India and re-christening it with the new name of Universal Friendship Organization. Manisana, addressed as the Thengourou—its leader by his followers, asserts: "The merger of Manipur was unacceptable as it was done without the consent of the indigenous people, the reason why we celebrate our own Independence Day".

The integration of the Naga Hills—then a part of undivided Assam—offers a case in point. Nehru never thought that the integration of Nagaland was either contingent or provisional. Benjamin Zachariah—one of his contemporary biographers—informs us that even before Independence, Nehru was aware of the uneven spread of nationalism to these areas. After Independence, he believed that these areas "ought to be part of India and Assam" for which he was prepared to concede as much "freedom and autonomy" as possible. Zachariah discovers a "patronising attitude" in Nehru's "understanding" of the situation. It was this belief that seemed to have goaded him to build the nation in these areas "by force of arms with the Indian 'defence forces' in culturally alien territory indulging in large-scale killing and rape". In his words: "It was in the northeast of India that the Nehruvian vision took on its most brutal and violent forms" (Zachariah 2004: 210–211). Not all cases of integration are of equally violent nature. The Khasi Hills for example enjoyed a large measure of autonomy through the institution of District Councils while assuaging their fear of losing out their "traditions and customs" through the "outright merger with Assam" (Menon 1956: 356).

As large-scale insurgency broke out in certain parts—particularly in the then Naga and Mizo Hills, such a policy of integration needed in due course to be backed by a host of state measures aimed basically to address it. In the first phase of insurgency lasting till the end of the last century or even thereafter, state measures predominantly consisted of (a) counterinsurgency campaigns including full-scale military operations, village grouping and driving a wedge between different sections of people, etc.; (b) responding to the independentist demands of the insurgents by way of granting some degree of autonomy [ranging from statehood within the Indian Union to the formation of an Autonomous District Council (ADC) and conferment of recognition on the traditional institutions, and so forth]; (c) initiating development by creating dependency of the insurgency-affected states through grant of doles and subsistence and recognition of their special category status.

In short, the state sought to address the problem of insurgency and violence in post-colonial India through what may be called a series of pacification campaigns consisting essentially in an intelligent mix of all or any of the above mentioned components. Intense pacification campaigns more often than not developed difficult anomalies in almost all the states of the Northeast to a varying degree. First, in both Assam and Mizoram—particularly in Assam—military campaigns are accused of having routinely violated human rights. While in Mizoram the issue of human rights was yet to emerge as a public discourse—although by all accounts

it turned the Mizo masses against the state, in Assam examples of people and human rights groups protesting against such violations became more vociferous particularly during the 1990s. Indeed, as we have seen, the rise of a more militant form of politics in Assam since the beginning of the 1980s may at least in part be explained with reference to such routine violations of human rights especially during the closing years of the Assam movement (1983–1985). Such protests definitely cut into the legitimacy of military operations.

Second, each case—where autonomy is granted or promised to a particular group in preference to others—encourages others to voice their resentment against the majority community and press for some form of autonomy for them. While the Assam Accord (1985) that brought the 6-year long Assam movement to an end called for the protection of the language and culture of the 'Assamese' people (Clause 6), the Bodos were the first to fall out in Assam—followed closely by such other minorities as the Ahoms of upper Assam, Dimasas, Karbis and others in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. In Mizoram, almost all the other communities (including the Hmars) living there remained an integral part of the Mizo movement but subsequently walked out and formed their respective militant organizations. The autonomy logic is carried to an extreme where it looks not only impossible but bizarre to push it farther. Defending autonomy resembles the process of peeling an onion.

Autonomy triggers off what I call 'minority syndrome' (S. K. Das 2009: 199–216) insofar as the minority politics acquires a certain stridency and the minorities refuse to be treated as minorities notwithstanding their numerical status as minorities. The minorities in almost every part of the region seem to be striking back particularly since the last two decades. Most importantly, minority syndrome is also shared by the majority in as much as the majority too suffers from the chronic fear of being reduced to a minority in no time—thanks to immigration, changing demographic balance, growing incidence of homeland demands and a host of other factors. The Assam movement (1979–1985) reflects this insofar as it was driven by the Assamese anxiety of having to lose their majority status in their own land.

Third, doles and assistance not only have contributed to the overdependence of the states on the Centre but, as we have already mentioned, have eventually fed into the insurgent coffers and their economy. The vicious circle explains the mechanism of how money earmarked for development gets siphoned away to the insurgents. The literature that has recently developed on insurgency in the region—otherwise rich and expanding—touches only cursorily on the political economy of the nexus between state-initiated development funds and insurgency.

2.5 Politics of Care

Post-colonial governance has been instrumental in introducing a new rhetoric of governance in the Northeast. Insofar as the entire region was sought to be brought under the ambit of Indian administration, the figure of the rebel was considered as

our own—long lost partly because our own indifference towards them and partly because of the wedge that the colonial rulers were successful in driving amongst us—but who should be brought back to our fold with great care and affection (Das 2007: 47–63). It resembles a reunion of sorts—for the figure of the rebel now becomes the figure of the potential citizen whose potential needs to be actualized with care and endeavour. The State has a responsibility of helping them in actualizing this potential. Frontier tribes of the yesteryears now turn into potential subjects who need special care for being brought back at par with other citizens of the country and who also deserve care—for the British have consistently kept them outside the ambit of colonial administration.

India's Northeast viewed from so-called 'mainland India' is a part of India *without* really being a part. Northeast's exceptionalism constantly pulls it back from becoming a part of India. A fiercely diverse and heterogeneous region is conveniently bundled in official circles into one whether under a North Eastern Council, a Ministry of Development of Northeast Region (DONER) or a composite economic package, etc. or any combination of them. The region right from its formation in the wake of partition (1947) of the subcontinent and consequent reorganization of international borders with the immediate neighbours, has been a source of India's twin security anxiety—for being her 'soft underbelly' (Das 2002) and its underdevelopment—its perpetual inability to 'take off' from the prosperity of the booming plantation economy during colonial times and catching up with the rest of India (G. Das 2009, mimeo). Surrounded nearly on all sides by powers not always too friendly to her, hordes of people living here are often found to be at best pre-national and at worst volatile and easily give themselves to the strategic machinations of foreign powers.

Anxiety calls for care. Now that India is poised up for 'looking east' as part of her 'big leap' forward, Northeast has become a particular object of care and protection from the Indian nation. "To whom, or for whom, do you have a policy?" asks philosopher Mrinal Miri who hails from the region. In India's thinking about the region, "the people of the Northeast" are always made into "an object of policy" (see Miri 2002). In this twin anxiety of security and development, 'Indian nation' seems to be the key missing term. For, it is the 'Indian nation' that needs to be secured and the Northeast always holds it back by becoming the hub of insurgencies. For, it is the 'Indian nation' that surges ahead with its furious pace of economic development particularly in recent years—but the Northeast does not. The presence of the Northeast is a sore reminder of the nation's deep and nagging anxiety. It is through the door of anxiety that the Northeast makes its entry into the nation's imagination. The region is precariously perched as it were on a slope—always threatens to slide down from India. Anxiety constitutes the Northeast as much as it marks the Indian nation. Indian nationhood and its anxiety about the Northeast (and Kashmir) are born twins.

Security and development are emblematic of how much the Indian nation cares for the Northeast or Kashmir. But it points to two very different ways of caring for them. Kashmir is the 'emerald crown' of India—reflecting her secular and national identity. The presence of Kashmir as India's only Muslim-majority state

characterizes India's secular nationhood. India cannot be imagined without her. It defines so much part of her nationalist self that the Kashmiri insurgents cannot be regarded as potential insiders. They are either 'Pakistani infiltrators' or al Queda operatives or any chemistry that might obtain between them and the security forces are expected to appropriately deal with it. The nationalist self will have to be protected from them. Parts of the Northeast on the other hand although are potential insiders, yet continue to remain outside. Nehru understood it properly when he described the Naga separatism as 'normal' immediately after his maiden visit to the Northeast—thanks to the activities of Christian missionaries and indifferent attitude of a section of Indian bureaucrats. As the army operation codenamed 'Rhino II' begins in early 2007, the army is briefed, as General J.J. Singh informs us, 'to bring ULFA to the negotiating table' instead of finishing it off. The insurgents continue to be branded as 'our boys' and 'our sons'. Indira Raisom Goswami—the key person to have attempted lately and albeit unsuccessfully to bring the Government and ULFA to the negotiating table, still feels the necessity of understanding the minds of 'our sons' and appreciate why they have taken up cudgels against the Indian State—instead of launching an all out military action.

Their transformation into an object of protective policies particularly since India's independence has created what Foucault called, a 'hermeneutic of subject' (Foucault 1994: 93–106)—a new 'Indian nation' set in motion by the very anxiety-producing processes that also shape its views about the 'troubled peripheries'. The peripheries do not constitute any 'exception' to what India stands for—her society, economy and polity; it defines her very being.

The caring subject constructs the object in a way that calls for such care and protection and in its turn privileges itself as a caregiver—if not the sole caregiver wielding a monopoly of caring *its* object. The State thereby establishes its monopoly over the *power* to give care. Care is thus enmeshed in power and vice versa. In the process, it quietly sends into oblivion those who do not deserve such care and repudiates the claims of rival caregivers. The spotlight never falls on those who do not seek or even have the guts of denying nation's care. The hermeneutic of care also rules out those who do not have the desire to be cared for, for, they in effect challenge the very claim of the caregivers to give care. In the eyes of the State, they simply do not exist. The State is called upon to make them appear as nonexistent. Objectification of the Northeast is also accompanied by what Giorgio Agamben calls 'sovereign violence'—the ultimate power of making and unmaking an object (Agamben 1998: 142). Thus, all those who refuse the care and protection from the nation are subjected to brutalities and violence. In Agamben's famous phrase, they are killed without being 'sacrificed', remembered or mourned. Human rights for example do not pertain to those who do not qualify as human beings in the first place. The human rights discourse only revolves round those who are recognized as human beings. The discourse accordingly imposes on the people of the region the onerous obligation of being constituted into human beings. Draconian laws (Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958 is only one of them) are clamped suspending the 'normal' operation of the rule of law; Assam Rifles and Rashtriya Rifles are deployed to put down insurgencies; in Sanjib Baruah's famous metaphor—'Generals into Governors'. While the

executive power prevails over the legislative power, the civil is overpowered by the military. Power accretes in proportion as we move deeper into the 'troubled peripheries'. Permanent exception indeed becomes the rule and first of all sets the ground to which the rule of law might apply. The process immobilizes the peripheries and seeks to deprive them of the power of 'striking back'. Peripheries are condemned to care from the nation.

If the hermeneutic of care produces a subject, it also subjectifies the 'object'. Thus, the objectification also implies Northeast's transaction with the Indian nation as its vassal—ever so weak-kneed and dependent and constantly in need of care and protection. Both the subject and object reproduce the same 'hermeneutic' of care and protection. Northeast too feels 'neglected' (Sharma 1991) and intently waits for being cared for and protected. As Pushpalata Das—a former freedom-fighter—for instance observes:

> Lovely Assam, in the depth of her heart always cherishes the tender hope and the fond feeling that the great nation of which she is Proud to be an integral part will fully understand her hopes and fears, her smiles and sobs and her problems and possibilities. She knows the warmth of the nation will remove her pangs, the Benign touches will make her dreams break into flower (Das 1980: 97).

Indeed, the wait has been too long and patience at times runs out resulting in occasional outbursts and insurgencies. Deka (2006: 199) calls it, 'neglect syndrome'. In this feeling of 'neglect', there is always the overriding expectancy of care and protection.

2.6 Governing in Global Times: Developmentalism of the 1990s

The 'mainstream' economic literature on India's Northeast attributes its backwardness to what is often sarcastically called 'the neglect theory'. The economic backwardness of the region is believed to be a product of the 'neglect' of the region by the Central Government right from the days of Independence as much as the Central Government is called upon to make good the 'neglect' done to it through some means of special protection. Guruswamy and Abraham (n. d.) in a recently written paper argue strongly in favour of continuing with the same policy of special protection to the states of the Northeast. While making an elaborate case study of Assam, they accuse Central Government of having 'neglected' the Northeast in general and Assam in particular. In the political sphere, it implies reproduction of the homeland regime. Indian policy in the Northeast right from the colonial days has been governed by the imperative of protecting the locals and autochthonous population groups from the outsiders whether from within the rest of India or without. Inner Line/Special Area Permit, Excluded/Partially Excluded Areas, Sixth Schedule, etc. are only some of the legally and constitutionally approved instrumentalities of privileging the natives over and above the outsiders. In the economic sphere, it means providing special assistance to the states so that they can catch

up with the national average in terms of their gross domestic product, per capita income, literacy and such other conventional indicators of economic development. Most of the states in the region are unable to generate their own revenues in order to meet their expenses and fall into the Special Category States depending upon central assistance. Even the performance of the Northeastern states in terms of their human development records is not encouraging. A report of August 2004 for example, shows Assam's rank as 15 among 20 'large' states and with the exception of Mizoram, all the other states of the region rank the lowest 5 among the 10 'small' states of India.

The 'neglect theory' seems to be facing criticisms in recent years. At one level, it is now argued that the so-called 'neglect theory' does not hold water insofar as the Central Government's per capita expenditure in the Northeast has been one of the highest—if not the highest in India since Independence. At another, it is also argued that none of the states in the region has the capacity of 'absorbing' the huge Central expenditure much of which simply gets dissipated through fiscal indiscipline, abysmal corruption, extortion and insurgency. What is therefore necessary is—as one of our colleagues—has put it 'a blotting paper economy' for the Northeast.

On the other hand, the case for a regime change in policy has been advocated by a host of scholars and activists, journalists and policy analysts particularly in recent years. While this region had had living linkages almost throughout history both on the east as well as on the west, it was only with the Partition of India and the reorganization of international borders that it turned into a 'sensitive border region' precariously connected with India with only a narrow 21 km-long Siliguri corridor popularly known as 'chicken neck'. Northeast's connection with the Indian mainland has been 'expensive and regressive'. But the region has about 4,500 km of border with China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. Now that production of goods and services and their marketing take place on a global scale—thanks to the forces and processes of globalization—borders tend to 'distort'—if not 'destroy', the basic institutions of free market, which are now regarded as the locomotive of economic development (Sachdeva 2005: 191). Various policy regimes of special protection that have been put in place in the context of the Northeast have eroded the basic institutions of free market. Thus, outside capital is unwelcome and xenophobic reactions against the cheap and outside labour employed in low-paying occupations have contributed to the shooting cost of production. The idea is to 'soften' and 'open' the borders in a way that can counter the destructive effects of border control regime and organize production and marketing on a grandly global scale. Borders are seen in the existing policy literature not as boundaries but as gateways to opportunities and of international trade and commerce (Verghese 2004: 15–23).

It is in this context that India's Look East policy becomes very relevant. Border control regime has already become anachronistic—'a cure worse than the disease'. As Sanjib Baruah puts it: "… India's Look East policy—the overtures since the 1990s toward Southeast Asian countries—holds promises of historic proportions for transnational region-building in the area" (Baruah 2004: 19). While India's Northeast, South and Southeast Asia might have remained politically

separate—thanks to the Partition of the subcontinent, political borders that otherwise keep them separate have also to adjust themselves to the changing economic realities and form a composite region of 'Northeast India, South and Southeast Asia' (NISASEA) much in the same manner in which say the European Union (EU) has taken shape over the last one and half decades. The economic integration of the Northeast with Southeast Asia will enable her to (a) counteract the disadvantages of Partition and liberate the Northeast from its presently landlocked status; (b) to reap the economic advantages that will follow on its being linked up with the 'powerhouses' of the Southeast Asian countries.

No region of India has been subjected so much to such dense and unprecedented policy interventions as the Northeast has been in recent times. Since I had had the occasion of writing rather elaborately on the Look East policy, in this chapter I propose to confine myself to an analysis of primarily two major policy documents, viz. *Northeast region: Vision 2020*, volumes I and II prepared by the Ministry of the Development of the Northeast Region (MDONER), Government of India; and *Natural resources, water and the environmental nexus for development and growth of Northeast India: Strategy report* prepared by the World Bank.

Although the first document traces the Northeast's present status as "one of the most backward regions of the country" to its "history and geographies", it holds such factors as "frustration and disaffection from seclusion, backwardness, remoteness and problems of governance" responsible for breeding "armed insurgencies" (MDONER 2005: 2). While it identifies "weak administrative capacity" as the single most important factor, this is what makes armed insurgencies highly profitable and yield "high rates of return" (MDONER 2005: 9). The problem is not so much that violence and insurgencies mark the region's politics but very much that violence and insurgencies yield 'high rates of return' so much so that it becomes difficult to break the vicious cycle and end them.

"By 2020", as the document declares, "they (the people) aspire to see the region emerge peaceful, strong, confident, and ready to engage with the global economy" (MDONER 2005: 9). Its objective is to steer the economy and help the region develop in a way that invests it with the ability to compete in the global economy. While most of the Northeast is as much peaceful as the rest of India, the region has been a victim of bad publicity and newspaper reports reproduce the image of the region as one afflicted by chronic insurgency and extortion. Insurgency and extortion have been a "major deterrent" in holding back "private sector initiatives in economic activities". Insurgency is viewed in this document as an aberration for having "taken a heavy toll on economic progress and people's happiness in the region". As it states: "The people of the Northeast would like peace to return to their lives, leakages to cease and development to take precedence" (MDONER 2005: 18). The document in other words creates the impression that insurgency has no real basis in the society and economy of the region and will come to a stop once development and economic progress are undertaken. Although it feels the necessity of 'dealing with the issue of insurgency where it exists in a spirit of accommodation, pluralism and subnationalism' (MDONER 2005: 16)—most significantly without elaborating on it, the underlying economism that runs through the vision should not escape our notice.

The Vision Statement highlights that attracting private investment in the region needs a shift from the current protective policies of assistance and subsidies to more market-friendly policies of incentives, easy credit facilities, tax holidays, export promotion parks and capital investment subsidies. The inflow of private capital is directly related to responsive administration and governance, availability of critical inputs like power, connectivity and other infrastructure, access to markets and well-defined procedures to ensure accountability, transparency and good governance. The natural and human resources of the region, in other words, need to be mobilized in a way so that it can be "an asset for economic returns" (Bhattacharya 2011: 164).

"Enabling conditions" must be created so that the region's economy becomes competitive and can engage with the global economy. This first of all requires "protection of people's property rights". While development and economic progress are left to private sector initiatives, such initiatives can thrive only when the inalienability of property rights is guaranteed. Insurgency and violence are considered by it as a direct threat to such rights. The headway that tourism in Sikkim could make in recent years is "due to the lack of any insurgency in the State" (MDONER 2005: 164). The whole idea is to trump insurgency and violence by rapid economic development that can make good the lost time and help resolve the crisis. The document calls for massive public investment in order to attract and encourage private enterprise in this context:

> Public investment alone will help in the creation of a critical mass which will facilitate private investment from outside the region. Thus, the role of the State would be to ensure certain basic minimum prerequisites: free and unhindered mobility of goods and services (infrastructure) across the region as well as within the region, well-defined property rights; and law and order and security of life such markets can function and reflect the true scarcity costs for goods and factors (MDONER 2005: 327).

In simple terms, it envisages a critical turnaround only by putting the region's economy on the fast track. The idea is to tap the resources of the region in a way that these can be marketed by way of improving connectivity and ensuring institutional reforms particularly with the twin objective of opening the region to the 'powerhouse' economies of Southeast Asia and securing private property. While marketization of resources is expected to make the economies of the region competitive, so long as prices are determined in the global market, poor and backward hill states of the region have "no role to play in determining them" (Chakraborty 2010: 15).

By contrast, the World Bank report views reestablishment of community ownership and control over such resources as forest and water as the means for solving the problem of insurgency. As it points out:

> The demands of local communities to retain control over their natural resources are typically supported by more than 20 armed insurgent groups that reject national efforts to exert control over indigenous areas. Effective efforts to develop a conservation area network in that region will necessarily be required to involve these cultural communities as "owners" of the land, rather than following a North America model of State-sponsored and managed national parks and wildlife areas (World Bank 2006: 94).

By all indications, the introduction of newer technologies of governance in the second phase of peace does not address these larger questions of rights, justice and democracy. Strangely enough, the newer attempts at setting the region free from

its present landlocked status by way of linking it with the 'powerhouse' economies of Southeast Asia are likely to make many groups and communities of the region vulnerable to further isolation and primitive accumulation. This, as I argued, is likely to set off a fresh series of conflicts in the region (Das 2005: 65–69).

Peace in the negative sense of managing conflicts and pacifying the society has indeed run the full circle in the Northeast. But unless the larger questions underlined here are addressed, the gains of pacification will not take time to get dissipated and a new series of insurgency might ensue. The peace that has 'arrived' is likely to be fragile and is constantly haunted by the threat of conflict and war.

2.7 Emergence of the New Citizen

It is now being increasingly realized that each of the measures adopted during the first phase of insurgency and already mentioned above has its snowballing effect on violence and insurgency in the region. The Assam/Bodo problem is a case in point. As we will see in Chap. 3, pacification and the democratic idea of justice seem to move in opposite directions. While peace accords and autonomy arrangements set off ethnic consolidation and homogenization, the democratic agenda of justice highlights the necessity of reconciliation by way of recognizing difference amongst individuals and communities. Justice elementarily does not consist in what one claims it to be but in how diverse claims are called upon to address and mitigate each other. The agenda of justice has to do with, as Plato puts it, 'giving one one's due'. The task involves incorporating these claims and counterclaims into an integral whole—an order that is considered as just by those who are its constituent parts. While division-based ethnic accords seek to do the impossibility of ethnicizing and homogenizing the space in a region that is irreducibly plural, justice seeks to 'give them their due' by making them an integral part of a just social order that includes many others. Justice therefore is not what one considers as just—it implies transcendence of many such singularities. The binary between the self and the other that has hitherto defined many a social movement in the Northeast is slowly giving way to the movements of a different kind—movements that supersede the self–other opposition and work towards justice. In the movements against injustice, the other plays a crucial role. As Balibar argues:

> The experience of injustice (which of necessity is a lived experience, which is not to say a purely *individual* experience: on the contrary, it must involve an essential dimension of "mutuality", sharing, identifying with others, and witnessing the unbearable in the person and the figure of the other), is a necessary condition for the *recognition* of the reality and existence of the institutional injustice (Balibar 2008: 33).

All of us know how the Naga Reconciliation Process ended up in a fiasco.[7] These fail not because of any innate social division in the society—but because

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[7] See for details, Das (2007: 22–35).

claims to self-determination are too sharp to be reconciled with each other and hence outweigh the imperative of mitigation of these claims. The civil society institutions that get involved in reconciliation are unwilling and/or unable to prevail over the claimants to exclusivism and extreme self-determination. The macabre violence watched during the Naga-Kuki clashes that took a toll of human lives and property in Manipur Hills in 1993 is a case in point. The post-accord society in Mizoram is often identified as 'Mizo society' and self-determination claims of other non-Mizo communities (like the Hmars, the Chakmas, the Chins and the Rohingiyas, etc.) refuse to subscribe to such a simple identification. Similarly, the Assam Accord (1985) was signed without the Assamese and the Bodos—otherwise comrades-in-arms during the Assam movement—coming to terms between themselves.

While insurgencies in the Northeast are based on the claim to some form of exclusivism and self-determination, this claim is officially responded to—by conceding to these claims *only if* these become unmanageable and cross a certain threshold. In our understanding of peace this concept of threshold is very important. Peace accords in Nagaland (1947, 1960, 1975), Mizoram (1986) and Bodoland (1993, 2003) are illustrative of the point. In other words, claims and responses reinforce each other and hit what I prefer to describe as *homeland bind*. The post-accord scenarios in Mizoram, Assam (1985) and Bodoland are a case in point. If the Assam Accord intends to protect the language and culture of 'the Assamese' (Clause 6), the Bodos feel threatened as much as the cycle of violence continues unabated taking a toll on the lives and property of such non-Bodo groups as the Bengali-speaking Muslims, the Santhals, etc. after the Bodo Territorial Administrative Districts (BTAD) despite provision for non-Bodo representation came into effect in 2008.

The struggle for justice as evident in a spate of new social movements for transparency and accountability in governance, movements against displacement of people induced by development projects, etc. seems to have brought about a mitigating—if not unifying—impact on the otherwise conflicting communities. Now that internal pacification is nearly complete and the State has been able to establish its hegemony over the body politic—thanks to the subsidence of insurgency all over the Northeast—the agenda of rights in the region seems to have shifted from citizenship being defined in contradistinction with the outsiders, say, in course of the Assam movement (1979–1983) to a new citizenship being defined as people's right to equality and equal opportunities and right over natural resources (like oil, coal, forests, etc.). The new citizen is constituted as the new agent of peace in the Northeast. Peace too seems to have shifted its constituency from the so-called NGOs and voluntary organizations masquerading as civil society organizations to new citizens fighting for their rights mentioned above. These new issues are going to relegate the ethnic issues of homeland, territoriality and autonomy into the background and likely to bring the otherwise conflicting communities together. According to this new notion as evident in the series of movements led by Akhil Gogoi and his Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) established in 2005, the presently established 'centralized control over resources' must go. Besides, the people also raise their voice of protest against the government's inability to protect

them against such natural calamities as floods and droughts, against man-made disasters like massive population displacement induced by so-called development projects and dams. Fight against corruption has developed into a popular movement. People's right to tenure over land and control over forest resources is high on the rights agenda. All this highlights the failure of the government in providing 'civic governance' and the success of the popular movement in "shaking off self-absorption and melancholia associated with radical dissent in Assam" so far (Barbora 2011: 22). In the context of Assam, the rights are increasingly being perceived as ones pertaining to not just *an* ethnic community or as being exclusive to any group of them to the point of depriving others of it. Today rights are being claimed for the entire 'public living in Assam' (*Asombasi Raij*). The KMSS stands for the *ganadebata* (the public as the God)—as Akhil Gogoi—its leader—calls it.

Assam's 'new voice of dissent' intends to bring a new citizen into existence—a citizen who makes a departure from the earlier citizenship movements in the region on at least two counts: One, unlike in the anti-foreigners' upsurge', today's citizen harbours a concern for the moral basis of her own self. Citizenship has become more inwardly directed than it had hitherto been. The citizen today is unhinged from the obligation of being pitted against an *other*. It is less about how and what others should be deprived of and more about what we succeed in achieving for ourselves while becoming what we want to become. Never before in the recent past history has the imaginary of citizenship been invested with so much of self-reflexivity and inspired by the project of making of the self. The new citizen, in sum, is self-critical. Two, citizenship is not simply a matter of Constitution, body of laws and judicial pronouncements—as Roy and Singh (2009) make us believe when they point to Assam's reversion to a more narrow and ethnicized version of citizenship, but it over and above is about people and their struggle for a new agenda of rights. Citizenship is defined not by the laws, not even by the judiciary that is called upon to protect their sanctity but by people's movements that continuously aim at widening its scope.

By all indications, the Northeast is quietly undergoing a regime shift towards a new citizenship that is yet to arrive but is continuously announcing its imminent arrival. To say that it is a shift towards global citizenship is premature; yet the signs of the region's uneasiness with the older version of citizenship are only too discernible.

The new citizen as the political subject is caught somewhere between these two extremes: On the one hand, she refuses to accept that parliamentary democracy with all its representative institutions is the be all and end all of democratic politics. The majoritarian argument has lost much of its edge. Justice is not necessarily expressed through the rule by the majority, that Tocqueville so eloquently points out. Contemporary popular movements in the Northeast are only a pointer in this direction. On the other hand, resolution of conflicts depends neither on pacification nor on rapid economic development through a heavy dose of public investment, but by bringing into existence a social and political order that is considered as just not by one community but by the society as whole. The Northeast is showing very early signs of the emergence of a new citizen who, instead of belonging to any particular ethnic community in exclusion from another, longs for situating herself within an irreducibly plural social order consisting of many groups and communities.

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Chapter 3
Shifting Strategies of Peace

Abstract This chapter makes a distinction between peace being achieved through defeating an adversary and therefore being threatened constantly by the spectre of conflict and war, and peace based on the triadic foundations of rights, justice and democracy. The first kind of peace serves only as a deterrent to the achievement of the second kind of democratic peace. The chapter makes a detailed case study of the history of peace talks with one of the major insurgent groups particularly since the early 1990s, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), and argues that peace-making in Assam may have led to peace of the first kind—but not enhancement of rights, justice and democracy. The study shows how peace becomes an object of governance. While the new citizen too is sought to be governed and brought under the ambit of governance, peace constituency in the Northeast faces the threat of becoming a part of governmentality. The quality of peace is likely to depend on the outcome of the tussle between the forces of governance and new citizenry.

We live in a time when conflicts are sought to be resolved through governance and a new policy gaze is cast on forms and technologies of governance. No other region in India has been subjected to such constant experimentations with govern-ance as the Northeast has been since colonial times. In simple terms, the Northeast has always turned out to be the governors' nightmare. This chapter studies the changing forms and technologies of governance as a means of addressing, if not resolving, the conflicts that have hitherto marked the region. In the larger scheme of governing the region, neither peace by pacification nor even peace informed by such principles as rights, justice and democracy was ever considered as important. Peace was considered to be important insofar as it served as a means of govern-ance. Hence, more than peace to be accomplished through governance, peace itself is turned into an object of governance—an object that needs to be governed. The chapter takes this point a step further by arguing that governed peace might be, and indeed is, a stumbling block to peace with rights, justice and democracy.

Since the chapter focuses mostly on post-colonial times, much in line with Chap. 2, its basic contention is that there has been a shift in the art of governing

the region particularly since the 1990s. The earlier means of governing the 'troubled periphery' by deploying such hard counterinsurgency measures as military operations and grouping of villages, albeit with a heavy flow of cash being liberally showered by the State thereby keeping large sections of people dependent on them and granting of autonomy in such forms as formation of states, autonomous district councils and recognition of customary laws and traditional institutions, etc., have by and large been successful in *pacifying* the region so much so that we can now conclude that as India moves into the new millennium the first phase of insurgency is almost over. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) that keeps a continuous count of the incidents and casualties in India and the neighbouring states, the number of killings has come down significantly in the State of Assam particularly since 2009. In 2009, 126 persons lost their lives in terrorist violence while 196 were injured. The corresponding figures for the year 2010 were 51 and 42, respectively. In 2011, the figures further declined to 36 and 13.[1] Now that the incidence of violence and insurgency in the region has touched an all-time low, it is poised up for 'development'. As we have already pointed out in Chap. 2, a new set of governing technologies—which we propose to describe generically as *developmentalism*—is being introduced to the region since the early 1990s. The transition from the first to the second mode of governance has of course triggered off new contradictions and anomalies. In both these cases, peace is sought to be governed—more than resolving conflicts. While in the former, peace is governed through pacification, in the second it is primarily through the developmentalism of the 1990s. This chapter therefore focuses not so much on peace per se but on the quality and kind of peace that is produced through the deployment and circulation of various forms and technologies of governance.

'Governed' peace, instead of completely ruling out conflicts and war, makes a 'convenient' mix of war and peace—convenient to all the parties and stakeholders involved in such conflicts and war. Peace per se does not have any intrinsic significance. It has its significance insofar as it has the potential of being used as an object of governance. Peace is not an end in itself but a means—the very site of governance. Peace that is achieved through governance thus stands in an entire range of relationships with conflicts and war. It obviously goes against the commonplace assumption that peace is the absence of war and vice versa. Governance in other words complicates the otherwise simple relationship between war and peace thereby making a deeper understanding of the nature and kind of peace all the more necessary for researchers.

India's Northeast in general and Assam in particular has been in peace mode, particularly since the late 1990s. The Government of Assam has already announced the suspension of operations against various insurgent groups including the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), Black Widow (BW), Dima Hasao Daoga (N), Adivasi Cobra Force (ACF), Birsa Commando Force (BCF), Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF) and Pro-Talks

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[1] http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/data_sheets/majorincidents.htm accessed on 20 August 2012.

Factions of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and ULFA, led by its chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa. The anti-talks faction of the NDFB has, however, announced a unilateral ceasefire. As recently as on 24 January 2012, 676 cadres belonging to eight rebel organizations[2] 'laid down' their arms in Guwahati.

One can of course argue that peace prevails in the region in the sense that the incidence of insurgency—in terms of both the number of incidents as well as the loss of human lives and property—has come down significantly in the first decade of the new millennium compared to what it was, let us say, in the 1990s. The region has been pacified with a reasonable degree of success—and as one perceptive commentator puts it "mainly through force" (Ganguly 2009: 62). But the peace that is said to have returned to the region—particularly in such hitherto insurgency-affected states as Nagaland, Tripura and Assam—is hardly accompanied by any resolution of the conflicts underlying those insurgencies.

Peace achieved mainly through pacification, that is to say, without any resolution of conflicts is constantly haunted by the spectre of war. The story of arms surrender mentioned above and albeit widely celebrated in public—particularly in official circles—needs also to be demystified. The number of arms surrendered on the eve of the Republic Day in 2012 is only 201—all of which are said to be "locally made".[3] Some of the outfits are reported to have 'laid down' their arms for the second time after they had done the same a few years back—implying thereby that they make it a ritual to be observed at regular intervals with much fanfare. Many of the rebel leaders threatened to go back to the jungles—if their demands were not met—although the Government did not give any written assurance to them in this regard. On the same day, Assam's Chief Minister issued a tough warning to the Anti-Talks Faction of the ULFA, asking them to come to the negotiating table or else face stern measures. Talks between the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCM-IM) and the Government of India have been continuing since 1997 without any solution in sight while there have been reports that the relations between the two parties have 'run into rough weather' on the eve of the state assembly elections in Manipur (*Seven Sisters' Post* 2012: 1). One has to take note of the fact that there are different kinds of peace[4] and peace achieved through pacification 'mainly by force' and peace based on some durable solution to conflicts, respecting the triadic principles of rights, justice and democracy are certainly not the same—although there is no denying that one may be the precursor to the other.

The incidence of insurgency and violence may have come down but this chapter strikes a somewhat discordant note. It (a) examines how prolonged and chronic conflicts acquire newer forms in course of their evolution; (b) closely studies the nature and quality of peace and pacification in the Northeast that has returned to

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[2] These eight organizations are: Adivasi People's Army (APA), All-Adivasi National Liberation Army (AANLA), Santhal Tiger Force (STF), Adivasi Cobra Militant Army (ACMA), United Kukigam Defence Army (UKDA), Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), Kuki Liberation Army (KLA) and Hmar People's Convention (Democratic).

[3] A report telecast on the Frontier TV channel on 24 January 2012 mentions this.

[4] For a theoretical review of various kinds, see Das (2004).

the region in general and Assam in particular and finds out how older and traditional modes of managing conflicts and governing conflict resolution by the State have been rendered redundant and the newer technologies of governing the region are being introduced, explored and experimented with since the 1990s; (c) finds out how peace processes in the region at the same time push continuously out of circulation many a concern for rights, justice and democracy and, finally, (d) focuses on how all this has brought the agenda of rights, justice and democracy into the centre of today's peace agenda. For reasons of convenience, this chapter drives home the above arguments by studying the case of Assam, with only occasional reference to a few other states of the Northeast.

Accordingly, the chapter is divided into three parts: The first makes an attempt at studying the insurgency in Assam. The second seeks to present the main arguments of the case study within a wider, comparative framework. The third seeks to draw our attention to the newly emergent concern for rights, justice and democracy in the Northeast and how this has been playing a critical role in triggering off a series of new social movements in the region, particularly in Assam. Insofar as the public agenda is being redefined, a new citizen seems to be surfacing in the region—a citizen who harps less on her distinctiveness from the outsiders or the foreigners as seen in course of the Assam movement (1979–1985), and more on the three key issues of rights, justice and democracy. The process is likely to be a trendsetter for peace in future—although it is highly unlikely that it will not face any reverses—given that the region has until recently been a standing witness to ethnic schism occasionally erupting into acute xenophobia, violence and insurgency. The chapter ends with a brief recapitulation of the findings reached in all the three parts.

3.1 The First Phase Comes to an End

By all accounts, the Ganga-Meghna-Brahmaputra basin of the once-undivided subcontinent had had a long history of peasant migration since the pre-colonial times. Assam was considered as one of the most favourite points of destination of the migrants—mainly the peasants—by the end of the 19th century. On the one hand, the population explosion in the eastern part led vast masses of land-hungry peasants to migrate to Assam and settle there. On the other hand, Assam had had much to offer to them whether in terms of surplus land and abundance of resources or in terms of land fertility and its alluvial nature. Although, according to Guha (1977), middle class Assamese intellectuals woke up to the problem only at the beginning of the 20th century and not before that, large-scale immigration continued unabated even after their protest and resistance in varying degrees. Immigration became a problem only after the international borders were reorganized in the wake of Partition (1947) and the large-scale migration started being perceived by the natives as a threat to the fragile ecological and demographic balance of the region, their language and culture, their land and livelihood resources. Immigration in Assam is believed to have: (a) created pressures on land; (b) caused unemployment to the

'Assamese' people claiming 'native' to the region; (c) caused their percentage decline vis-à-vis the immigrants and, as a result, (d) fomented social tensions and often sparked off ethnic and communal riots (Das 1993: 165–175). This, according to some, poses a threat to the democratic setup of the state. As a result of the population movement from Bangladesh, out of 126 Assam Assembly constituencies, minorities are said to be a deciding factor in as many as 40.[5]

There is hardly any authentic estimate yet available to us on the actual number of 'foreigners' settled in Assam. The census practice of enumerating population according to their place of birth every 10 years serves only as an unreliable pointer. In his report to the President of India in 1998, the Governor of Assam assessed the growth rate of Hindu population at 41.89 % and that of the Muslim population at 77.42 % in Assam during 1971–1991. The Muslim growth rate is more than the national average and was found to be disproportionately larger in districts bordering Bangladesh. Dhubri—as the report notes—has already become a Muslim-majority district. This could not have been possible without the immigration of a large Muslim population from across the borders.

The six year-long Assam movement (1979–1985)—one of the longest in the history of post-Independence India—was focused on the threefold objective of detecting, disenfranchising and deporting foreigners settled in Assam. The organizations involved in the movement were not in complete agreement on the question of the exact number of foreigners settled in Assam. All the estimates made during the movement ranged between 4.5 and 5 million. The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) that emerged out of the movement and formed the government in 1985 did little to deport 'foreigners'. Its performance, as I have put it elsewhere, was "dismal" (Das 1998: 122–126). The AGP government during its tenure of office (1985–1990), according to official figures, could only deport 157 persons (ibid.).

Immigration continues to haunt the minds of the Assamese. They make claims to preferential policies in jobs. As recently as in early 2005, the Chirang Chapori Yuva Mancha (based mainly in Dibrugarh, upper Assam) launched a campaign asking the Assamese not to employ 'illegal migrants', not to sell land to them and not to use vehicles owned or driven by them. The campaign was so successful that an estimated 10,000 Bengali-speaking persons were believed to have fled upper Assam as a result.

Intense police and army atrocities during the Assam movement—particularly during its closing years from 1983 to 1985—led a section of its leadership and ideologues to embrace a more militant course. In fact, there were many precursors to the ULFA in the form of such organizations as Brachin National Liberation Army (BNLA) and Assam Peoples' Liberation Army (APLA). Violence and repression seem to have persuaded them to believe that, in the face of massive repression and atrocities committed by the security forces, a resort to violence would be necessary to realize the objectives of an otherwise non-violent movement. This at one

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[5] Reported in *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 27 September 2000.

level led BNLA to emphasize the importance of building solidarity across the region while putting up a unified struggle against 'New Delhi'. The term 'Brachin' highlights the conjunction between the two rivers of the Bra(hmaputra) in the Northeast and the Chin(dwin) in Burma. But at another level, the growing resort to violence also prompted them to question the monopoly of the State over the legitimate instruments of violence—in short, the State's sovereign power. There is reason to believe that the ULFA did not view sovereignty as an end in itself; for it, sovereignty was a means to the end of establishing a State free from repression and exploitation. An ULFA document reproduced verbatim in the weekly *Budhbar* in 1990 unambiguously points out:

> … [O]ur objective … is to create a society which is devoid of any exploitation; we are not for Sovereign Assam for the sake of it. We shall have no compunction to give up the demand for separation if we can establish exploitation-less society within India (*Budhbar* 4 March 1992).

In simple terms, the twin issue of pan-Mongoloid solidarity cutting across the Northeast and Burma (now Myanmar) and Assam's sovereignty (contingent, however, on India's failure to meet the demand for an 'exploitation-less society') provides the template of insurgency in Assam after the Assam movement. Eventually, a more militant fringe of the movement broke away, drawing from alleged police repression of the movement enough justification for setting up a separatist group called the ULFA on 7 April 1979.

Although the ULFA was born in 1979 as a fringe of the Assam movement, it seemed to have distanced itself from the Assam movement when in the early 1990s it brought out a pamphlet emphasizing that people from erstwhile East Bengal (present Bangladesh) were 'an indispensable part' of the Assamese community. As the Assam movement reportedly ended up in a fiasco with detection, disenfranchisement and deportation of foreigners remaining a distant 'dream' and only few of the estimated migrants could be detected, Nagen Saikia—the former president of Asom Sahitya Sabha that provided intellectual leadership to the movement—criticized ULFA for its turn in these terms:

> One vital question that erupts (in the mind) of every conscious person of Assam today is how much ULFA itself is independent – the organization that wants to make Assam sovereign by armed struggle… It is most unfortunate for the Assamese people that ULFA which emerged form the anti-foreigners' Assam movement (against the Bangladeshis) is now taking shelter in Bangladesh … the whole world knows that Pakistan stands nowhere vis-à-vis India's military might—not to talk about Bangladesh. In such a situation, can any militant organization even dream of liberating Assam with the help of Pakistan's military might and the population of Bangladesh? If that unthinkable ever happens, whose Assam will be this? In that case, Assam will be an extension of Bangladesh!… What an erosion of self-respect and dignity! (Saikia 2005).

By all accounts, it was not until 1983 that the ULFA surfaced in the public arena and people became aware of its presence in Assam politics.[6] It started as a

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[6] This is only a brief summary of an otherwise detailed biography of the ULFA from 1979 to 1991. See Das (1994: 68–89).

more militant stream of the Assam movement mentioned above and gradually broke away from the moderate forces that were associated with it. In a book written in 1994, I described ULFA's intervention post 1983 in Assam's economic, political and cultural life as "decisive" (Das 1994: 51). The ULFA first came to the limelight when it joined hands with the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) combine in enforcing the boycott of the 1983 polls till the names of illegally settled 'foreigners' were struck off the electoral rolls. The first four years may therefore be regarded as the period of silent consolidation. But the ULFA shot into prominence by organizing exceptionally daring bank banditries, or initiating rural development works (particularly in areas where the presence of the Indian State was only cosmetic), or conducting retributive killings and meting out summary justice in those areas or any of their combination. There is reason to believe that the State for whatever reasons did not come down heavily on the insurgents. As one ULFA leader subsequently acknowledged, they had no idea that this could be such a cakewalk for them: they asked for little but they got more than what they had asked for (cited in Ray 1991: 74). For one thing, the ULFA was declared illegal only As late as on 27 November 1990. For another, the ruling AGP regime that came to power in 1985 as a legatee of the Assam movement was reportedly "hand in glove" with them (Hazarika 1994: 175) and "most of the ULFA cadres were drawn from the ranks of AASU" (Misra 2000: 134). Bhadreswar Gohain, for example, who was the first Chairman of ULFA, was actively associated with the Assam movement and became the deputy speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly as an AGP nominee. Although—as we have already pointed out—they were both organizationally and ideologically distinct, many of the ULFA cadres were, according to some, personally very close to a section of ministers and leaders across party lines and were indirectly instrumental in bringing them to power both in 1985 and in 1996 (Das 1998: 1–18).

3.1.1 Peacemaking Sans Peace

While the history of peacemaking is as old as that of conflict, the peacemaking process has ironically eluded peace in Assam. While the act of making peace is always sought to be subjected to the rules and protocols of governance, governed peace defers perpetually peace that ensures rights, justice and democracy. We propose to make a distinction between peace through governance and governed peace and argue in the section that these two are continuously in tension with each other and peacemaking is neither peaceful, nor does it necessarily result in peace with rights, justice and democracy. We make a brief reference to the history of peacemaking with the ULFA particularly since 1990. The year 1990 marks a watershed as it was in this year that the ULFA was declared illegal; an army operation—the first of its kind codenamed 'Operation Bajrang'—was launched against it and it was invited by the Government of India to come and join the peace talks. The history of peace with ULFA therefore is as old as that of war. The ULFA shot down

the offer as "a clever means employed by the capitalist groups and the State of disarming ULFA" and of creating "rift within its ranks".

Again, in 1991, when the second military operation was in full swing, the government and the ULFA were reportedly engaged in dialogues with the help of mediators consisting mainly of locals from the Central services and the journalists. It seems that by the middle of 1991, the ULFA was clearly divided on the question of whether to enter into dialogues with the Indian State. According to *Budhbar*, it was possible to identify the 'moderates' and 'extremists' on this crucial question (*Budhbar*, 30 October 1991). In an interview with *Budhbar*, Raju Baruah, the then chief of ULFA's Nalbari unit, observed: "There has been no change in our position on (the issue of, the author) freedom (*swadhinata*). The struggle will continue. The question of compromise with the treacherous State or its representatives is absurd" (*Budhbar*, 8 January 1992). On the other hand, there were reports that five ULFA leaders under the leadership of Arabinda Rajkhowa acquiesced to the Constitution and signed what Parag Kumar Das termed "a treaty of compromise" with the Government of India (*Budhbar*, 22 January 1992).

In early 1992, immediately after the military operation was over, a section of the ULFA leadership was involved in peace talks, which however, broke off when one of its delegations led by Arabinda Rajkhowa decided to withdraw due to "the pressure from his uncompromising 'commander-in-chief' Paresh Barua" (Misra 2000: 139). Baruah is said to have expressed his "dissatisfaction" with the "unconditional surrender of arms" and "one-sided acquiescence to the Constitution of India" (Misra 2000: 139). Rajkhowa subsequently walked away from the talks, describing his compromise-seeking colleagues as "Government revolutionaries". Finally, on 22 July 1992, a full-house general body meeting of the ULFA was held at an undisclosed place in Bhutan. The meeting was attended by Arabinda Rajkhowa, Paresh Baruah, Anup Chetiya, etc. All the 18 district units, including that of Karimganj, took part in it. The meeting arrived at a "unanimous decision" that the question of "falling into the trap laid by the Indian State through deceit and treachery in the name of discussions does not arise" (*Budhbar*, 29 April 1992). The meeting also prepared a list of compromise-seeking leaders, described them as 'counter-revolutionaries', but did not assign to itself the responsibility of punishing them. It resolved that the people would 'judge and punish' them. It seems that the hardliners prevailed over moderates in that meeting.

In a signed statement issued by Mithinga Daimary, its publicity secretary in July 1996, the ULFA again extended an offer of peace to the government and set a somewhat abstractly drafted immediate stoppage of 'the forceful Indianisation of the people of Assam' as one of the preconditions. The organization reiterated that the talks would centre on the issue of 'Assam's sovereignty' and be held in 'a third country' under UN supervision.[7]

Again, in 1999, a section of surrendered ULFA cadres—popularly known as SULFA—reportedly sent 'feelers' to government circles expressing its willingness

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[7] The ULFA has more or less consistently stuck to these three conditions since 1992 until recently.

to enter into some form of peace negotiations with the Central government. Immediately after the operations in Bhutan that led to the busting of its head-quarters and killing of a number of its top-ranking cadres in December 2003, an offer of peace was made by the organization, although the same issues of 'sovereignty of Assam' and 'venue of third country' were set as preconditions by Paresh Baruah. The Government of India's response was very cautious in the sense that it accused the ULFA of trying to initiate peace talks with a view to regrouping itself usually after any army operation.

The late Indira Goswami, a highly respected Asomiya litterateur based in Delhi, in her letter to the Prime Minister in November 2004 urged New Delhi to take steps to hold talks with the insurgents. Arabinda Rajkhowa—the outfit's chair-man—had also expressed his willingness to begin dialogues provided the ULFA received a formal invitation on "the Government of India's letterhead with a sig-nature and office seal". In an e-mail message to the media, Rajkhowa made a case for holding a plebiscite on the contentious issue of 'sovereignty' of Assam, as 'sovereignty', according to ULFA, rested with the people of Assam.

The need for initiating an ULFA-Centre peace process was highlighted in a Jatiya Mahasabha (national conclave) held in Guwahati. Organized under the aegis of the People's Committee for Peace Initiatives (PCPI), the two-day conclave urged the Centre to start talks with ULFA on the issue of Assam's 'sovereignty' or hold a plebiscite. The Assam Government, however, rejected the demand for plebi-scite. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi rubbished it as a futile exercise on the ground that the question of plebiscite did not arise since elections were held democrati-cally and the people had been exercising their franchise despite calls for boycott of elections by various outfits including ULFA. ULFA seems to have moved a step ahead by dropping the first two conditions and Paresh Baruah had reportedly agreed to come over to New Delhi or Dispur to attend such talks. In a statement issued in August 2004, he pointed out: "Sovereignty is the core issue for us and we are willing to sit for dialogue anywhere if this is discussed".

On 16 November, 2004, Indira Goswami met Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh (who happened to be an ex-colleague from the University of Delhi) and handed over a memorandum drafted in consultation with academics from the uni-versity. The Government of India was reportedly consulting legal experts for an interpretation of 'sovereignty' and its place in the Indian Constitution. She also consulted Soli Sorabjee—the then Solicitor General of India. *The Telegraph* (2005) commented on the draft in the following terms: "Legal opinion seems to be that there could be various kinds of sovereignty, some of which are not against the Constitution. Economic sovereignty is a possibility, for instance".

The Prime Minister, however, put to rest any speculation of talks and said in Guwahati on 22 November 2004 that "if they shun violence, then I will invite them for talks but violence and talks cannot go on simultaneously". Responding to Singh's categorical rejection of ULFA's 'sovereignty' demand on 22 November, ULFA's 'commander-in-chief' Paresh Baruah said, "The commitment made by the PM was not unexpected and not different from that made by his predecessors. It is evident that the Centre's colonial policy will continue".

Sometime in early 2005, Goswami again met the Prime Minister, requesting the start of a dialogue between ULFA leaders and the government. An 11-member People's Consultative Group (PCG), consisting mainly of well-known civil society activists, was set up by ULFA to conduct negotiations with the government. This is the first time that ULFA inducted civil society persons into the peace process. The Prime Minister met them in late November 2005 and the members of PCG expressed satisfaction over their first meeting with him.

Talks broke down abruptly when both sides got involved in armed engagement. Military operations against the ULFA in the Dibru-Saikhowa forests of Upper Assam were enough to jeopardize the peace process. While according to one estimate at least 13 rounds of talks were held between the Government of India and the PCG, no less than 36 ULFA cadres were killed by bullets of the security forces. The ULFA too went on a rampage and claimed responsibility for the carnage that killed over 70 'Hindi speakers'—most of them Bihari brick kiln workers whose families, as subsequent findings bear out, had migrated to and settled in Assam more than 100 years ago. The ULFA's attacks were meant mainly for avenging the alleged death of five ULFA cadres in Kakopathar (Assam) in early January that year by the Bihar Regiment deployed there.

Although 'deadlocked' from September 2006 with the resumption of army operations on 24 September 2006 and the PCG backing out from talks, the government never ruled out the possibility of holding peace dialogues even at the height of army operations. Even in early January 2007, Dr. Manmohan Singh offered safe passage to ULFA leaders, should they come for direct negotiations. After the recent army operations began, V. K. Duggal—the then Home Secretary to the Government of India, for example, observed: "Let them (ULFA) come for talks". He also dismissed a question of whether there was lack of will on the part of the Centre to open talks with the ULFA. The war game is clear from the army brief— the objective of which this time is to exert pressure on the insurgent outfit to give up violence and come to the table. The Army chief J. J. Singh pointed out: "The Army has been given an assignment to perform. If we can compel them to come to the negotiating table and abjure violence, the peace and prosperity will come back to Assam".[8] Peace, according to this understanding, can be achieved only by completely defeating the ULFA.

The ULFA's 28th Battalion—the pro-talk group—made the offer of peace talks in 2007. This is the first time that one of ULFA's fragments came up with an offer of peace. Inner schisms within the ULFA were increasingly becoming evident. The A and C companies of the battalion under the leadership of Mrinal Hazarika, Mrinal Dutta and Prabal Neog declared cessation of war on the security forces. The battalion went on record saying, in the following terms, that it did not subscribe to the ULFA's demand for *swadhin Asom* (free Assam):

> … [W]e the pro-talk ULFA group looking at the (a) global political and economic situation, (b) continuous threat from the neighbouring countries surrounding Assam, (c)

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8 news.webindia123.com/news/ar_showdetails.asp?id...cat=&n, accessed on 6 April 2013.

possible terrorist attacks in Assam by anti-Indian religious and fundamentalist groups, (d) age-old religious and cultural ties with India have adopted a resolution in favour of Full Regional Autonomy instead of Independent Assam as a pragmatic approach (The Pro-Talk Group 2009: 1).

The cadres of the battalion after their surrender have been living in the designated camps of upper Assam and the pro-talk group started popularizing its agenda in order to create appropriate conditions for peace by way of holding workshops, seminars and contributing newspaper articles, etc. It seemed to have brought back the issue of immigration. As the group puts it in its letter to the prime minister of India:

> … [I]t is the prime duty of central and state government to protect and safeguard the interests of the citizens from foreign invasions and check infiltration. By performing this duty a state can maintain its territorial integrity and safeguard the interests of citizens. We believe, Sir, you will agree with our painful observation that in the last 61 years, the government of Assam has failed miserably to discharge responsibilities sincerely. Sir, nowhere in the world, it has been witnessed that, for preserving and protecting the regional language, building up refineries, Tea Auction Centres, roads and bridges, sealing of borders, protesting against the illegal migrants; has the youth started movements and thousands of youth have laid their lives fighting for the above causes.… Sir, we sincerely believe that, full autonomy to the State of Assam will not only remove the fear and insecurity from the minds of the indigenous people and will provide safeguards to land, language, economy and right to self-determination. This will reduce the resentment towards the Indian government and will help to refrain from hostile activities. (The Pro-Talk Group 2009: 1).

The major initiative was undertaken by the Assam Jatiya Mahasabha which organized its first national convention on 24 April 2010. More than 109 organizations, activists and intellectuals across the state gathered in Guwahati on this day to meet and chalk out the modalities of possible talks between the Government of India and the ULFA. The draft resolution of the convention made a plea to the top leaders of both the Government and ULFA for sitting together to resolve all issues: "All core issues of the ULFA, including the issue of sovereignty, can be discussed. However, both the government and the ULFA should shun violence".

It is interesting to note that many organizations representing communities other than the Assamese like the Bodos, the Dimasas, the Mataks and the Morans did not participate in the Convention. The All-Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) did not participate on the ground that they considered it as too ULFA-centric a forum to allow the ventilation of their concerns. The Matak-Moran leaders considered it as an attempt at isolating Paresh Baruah, who is a Moran. They urged Professor Hiren Gohain, the President of the Convention, to play a proactive role in bringing Paresh Baruah to the negotiating table.

Indeed, there is a difference between the PCG, which was appointed by the ULFA in 2005 and the Gohain-led National Convention (*Sanmilit Jatiya Abhiwartan* or SJA). Whereas the PCG looked upon itself as a facilitator bringing only the rivalling parties to the negotiating table, the SJA actively evolved a framework for developing certain ground rules for talks. The PCG did not give up the idea of sovereignty of Assam. But the SJA categorically set 'sovereignty' aside as the main demand. Second, the PCG did not urge either the ULFA or the State to shun violence, whereas the SJA categorically pointed out that violence and talks could not go together.

Now that much of Assam has returned to peace mode, many ULFA cadres who are on the run are said to be holed up in the neighbouring countries. It is important to note that India has been able to take initiatives in flushing out the ULFA rebels from some of these neighbouring countries—thanks to the fact that in many of them power is seen to have been transferred to regimes apparently friendly to India. In a recent paper (Das 2011), I pointed out that the government's twin strategy of getting Bangladesh to detain and hand over the ULFA leaders to Indian authorities subsequently to arrest them and release them on bail on condition that they promise to sit for peace talks might not help at least on two counts: First, there still remains a not-too-insignificant section of leaders under Paresh Baruah, its commander-in-chief, who are yet to join peace talks if not completely opposed to it. Second, the pro-talk leadership that, according to its own admission, has 'not surrendered', might run out of steam if it does not develop some synergy and come to terms with the larger social body that comprises many other stakeholders. Society in Assam has changed beyond the recognition of its cadres since the ULFA was banned and they went into hiding.

An eight-member ULFA delegation led by its chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa met the home minister and home secretary in February 2011. Although this was regarded as the first round of talks held for the first time directly with the ULFA leaders, there is no denying that it was more of an attempt at breaking the ice. The first round is expected to be followed by many more such rounds in the near future. However, by all indications, 'informal talks' with the ULFA, according to Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, are being held on a 'positive note' almost on a regular basis (*The Times of India* 2011a). Talks are reportedly being held without Paresh Baruah, who is still at large and the Chief Minister makes it clear that they "would not wait for him for an indefinite period".

It is interesting to note how the ULFA's original demand for 'sovereignty of Assam' got translated into 'sovereignty of the People of Assam' within the framework of the Constitution of India. As Sasadhar Choudhury, the ULFA's foreign secretary, points out in an interview given immediately after the first round of talks:

> We want to explore the viability of protection and enforcement of the sovereignty of the people of Assam in all its dimensions within the flexibility of the Indian Constitution as proposed by the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh (Deb 2011: 20).

The ULFA emphasizes the need for exploring the option of 'full autonomy' within the purview of the Constitution of India. While elaborating on the idea, Pradip Gogoi, the ULFA's vice-chairman, informs Swati Deb in an interview: "We want (to put) utmost stress on the true federal structure of the Constitution. This has to be worked out. Ethnic reconciliation is needed in Assam and that can be ensured only through genuine Constitutional mechanism" (Deb 2011: 19).

On the occasion of ULFA's 32nd anniversary in April 2011, Arabinda Rajkhowa, its president, in his address to the people of Assam welcomed the promise of a "respectable and acceptable solution" that he claimed to have received from the Government of India and argued:

Although the United Liberation Front of Assam harbours an armed resistance programme in Assam, it wants a peaceful political, solution to the Indo-Assam conflict. Any military solution to the conflict is a position opposed to ULFA's principles and Constitution (Sanjukta Mukti Bahini 2011: 24).

While strongly disputing that they have ever relinquished their demand for *swadhin Asom*, he highlighted the importance of discussion and negotiation in order to find out a 'durable solution to the question of Assam's existence' (ibid.: 18).

On 7 May 2011, a National Convention was organized in Guwahati and a voluminous document containing the charter of demands was produced. The Convention described it as a letter of advice (*paramarsha patra*) to the ULFA. An abridged version of 37 pages of this otherwise voluminous document was circulated through the local press. The document revolves around the demand for 'full autonomy' (*purna swayattasasan*). The Constitution of India does not have any provision of 'full autonomy', although it has its provisions for Sixth Schedule and local self-government institutions. If the demand for 'full autonomy' is to be addressed, it is important that the Constitution is appropriately amended. The demand for 'full autonomy' is modelled on Article 370 that applies to the state of Jammu and Kashmir—although a concern is expressed that the provision might not work if what is granted by the Constitution is taken away through frequent presidential interventions.

The document significantly does not regard "political independence" (*rajnaitik swadhinata*) as the key to the solution of all of Assam's problems. It, for instance, makes the point that "political independence might not make development possible". It also states that "Assam and the people of Assam may achieve its right to control its destiny even without political independence". The document makes a distinction between political independence and political power and argues that "political power is necessary for the enjoyment of economic independence".

According to Sabhapandit, the ULFA took up arms without seeking any guidance and advice from any national convention. But if it were to be in the 'national interest' (meaning in the interest of Assam and the Assamese), then the guidance and advice from the National Convention presently set up are more than necessary (Sabhapandit 2011: 13).

What if the talks fail and the pro-talk leaders fail in achieving what they intend to do? One may get a hint from a comment made by Jiten Dutta—one of ULFA's top-ranking leaders—in 2009:

We will not say now what we will do but we will take some decisive steps. The government has turned a deaf ear towards the issue. Despite repeated requests to clear its stand, there is simply no response from the government. This will be our final meeting with the government as we want to clear the air once and for all (quoted in Barman 2009: 110).

On 5 August 2011, ULFA leader Arabinda Rajkhowa submitted the charter of demands, which ULFA hardliners completely rejected. Their patience seemed to be running out. Paresh Baruah reportedly refused to join the peace process saying no talks could be held unless the issue of sovereignty of Assam was discussed. On 6 August 2011, Arunoday Dohutia, in charge of the hardliners' publicity wing, pointed out: "ULFA does not recognize the charter of demands that has nothing

to protect the rights of the indigenous people of the state" (quoted in *The Times of India* 2011b). Their stand may dash the hopes of pro-talks faction led by Arabinda Rajkhowa and his associates.

3.1.2 Peace as Deterrent to Democracy

While insurgency and violence are only more congealed and hardened forms of conflict along a scale offered for measuring the intensity of such forms, these acquire certain momentum in the sense that the cause/s that are said to have inspired them are gradually being pushed into the background without consequently resolving them. The irony of peace in today's Northeast is that peace has returned without the issues and problems being addressed, let alone solved. Earlier, I made a distinction between peace that is fragile and constantly haunted by the spectre of war and peace that is durable in the sense that it seeks to address the triadic concerns of rights, justice and democracy (Das 2004: 19–31). I have shown how conflict everywhere in the Northeast exists as a 'complex cacophony' of voices and how all these voices get finally articulated and funneled into a mega-conflict, in the process rendering many other voices hitherto involved in the cacophony silent. Prolonged violence and insurgency are seen to requisition newer 'causes' in order to sustain themselves or these are simply rendered silent and eventually dry up. Sanjib Baruah designates the process as the "disappearance of conflicts". Few conflicts in world history, as he puts it, get resolved—most of them get marginalized over time (Baruah 2008: 46–48). The point is, silent voices do not simply 'disappear'—these may remain hidden and marginalized but constantly interrupt not only the final articulations of conflicts but also the peace that is made to address them. Peace being made bears the traces of these conflicts that are sought to be silenced through it and are constantly pushed into the margins.

The insurgency in Assam spearheaded by the ULFA illustrates how the 'original' objective of driving out the foreigners was redefined: how the way the government sought to resolve the conflict by signing the Assam Accord (1985) catalysed a new set of conflicts represented by the politics of the ULFA. One has to take note of the protean nature of conflicts in the region to appreciate the need for dynamic solutions.

Peace that is made or is sought to be made, as we emphasize, is not the end of conflict. Indeed, as we argue in this chapter the way peace is brought about produces newer conflicts. Peace and conflict form a continuum and their distinction gets blurred as is evident in almost all the peace processes now underway. For instance, the very way peace talks are conducted plays—perhaps more than any other factor—a key role in influencing and shaping the outcome of such talks. In simple terms, peace defined as an end of war acquires a dynamic of its own and often poses an obstacle to the realization of the agenda of rights, justice and democracy peace talks are designed to culminate in. Peace is understood here as a strategy adopted by the State for disarming the militant non-State actors and

pacification of the society. Or it may serve as a means deployed by the armed groups that are on the run—of regrouping and reinvigorating themselves. Peace in the limited sense of pacification becomes an obstacle to the realization of rights, justice and democracy. While peace talks with the ULFA have been as old as the war that broke out between the ULFA and the Indian State, peace continues to be a chimera. Peace talks have only perpetually deferred peace.

The pro-talks faction is facing a problem. Many of the cadres seem unwilling to go back to the jungles and undergo the same pain of fighting the battle; the people in general have developed an enhanced stake in the peace that emerges after the war has more or less come to an end. But this enhanced stake does not mean complete eradication of the roots of disaffection. The dream of bringing 'colonial rule' to an end still eludes the cadres. Their movement could not so far spark off any major institutional reforms by the State. The dilemma is that the insurgents are not all too comfortable with the peace that exists after the guns have largely fallen silent but are too unwilling to return to jungles and resume the warfare. Unlike peace that presumably is of more durable nature, I propose to describe it as 'pacification', that is to say, peace that is constantly visited by the spectre of conflict and war.

A survey conducted in 2001 on a sample representing such background variables as religion, geographical distance, demographic composition, literacy rate, caste, etc., of as many as 29 of Assam's 126 Assembly constituencies as part of a pre-election survey indicated the declining support base of ULFA. Most (91.23 %) of the respondents were of the opinion that the ULFA's support base did not exist any more and 76.40 % refused to give credence to the view that Assam is not part of India as claimed by the ULFA (*The Sentinel* 1–5 May 2001). A more recent survey (Barman 2009: 103) conducted on a fairly representative sample drawn from across the people of Assam points to the flagging support base of the ULFA. A whopping 87 % does not lend support to the ULFA's concept of '*swadhin Asom*' while a significant part of the sample sympathizes with the issues of "neglect" and "colonial extraction of Assam's economy" highlighted by the ULFA. One problem with these surveys is that they do not shed light on the question of whether the declining support base of the ULFA necessarily implies swelling support for the State.

We introduce the concept of *peace impasse* in order to capture the heart of this dilemma that marks much of the pacification campaign whether in Assam or in Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The concept is helpful in understanding how peace might turn out to be a stumbling block to the trinity of rights, justice and democracy.

3.2 Into the Second Phase

Much of the theoretical literature on international relations in general and conflict resolution in particular is based on the commonplace assumption that peace emerges from out of mutually hurting stalemates. In the Northeast, however, peace talks began to be held when the asymmetry between the Government of India and insurgent organizations was at its highest. Former rebel leaders of the Mizo

National Front (MNF), whom I had the opportunity to interview recently, pointed out to me that their objective was never to win a war against India but to make the country negotiate and listen to them.[9] In other words, peace talks are not held unless the enemy is softened, if not completely defeated. Peace talks start when the war ends and by the time insurgents join the peace talks they are as it were militarily defeated. The same story was repeated, as we have already noted, when the army was briefed to bring ULFA leaders to the negotiating table or, as in more recent times, captured ULFA leaders were bailed out of prison only on condition that they would join peace talks. As a commentator puts it, this is peace "at the point of a gun". Pacification unlike peace is only a continuation of war.

In the first phase of insurgency, State measures consisted predominantly of (a) counterinsurgency campaigns, including full-scale military operations, village grouping and driving a wedge between different sections of people, etc.; (b) responding to the independentist demands of the insurgents by granting some degree of autonomy (ranging from statehood within the Indian Union to the formation of an Autonomous District Council—(ADC), conferment of recognition on traditional institutions, so on and so forth) and (c) initiating development by creating dependency of the insurgency-affected states through the grant of doles and subsistence, recognition of their special category status and doles and subsistence eventually feeding into the insurgent coffers and their economy.[10]

Such pacification campaigns have, as I have noted in Chap. 2, developed certain anomalies in both Mizoram and Assam. First, in both cases, particularly in Assam, military campaigns are accused of having routinely violated human rights and sparked off often intense public protests. Second, in each case autonomy granted or promised to a particular group in preference to others led others to voice their resentment against the majority community and press for some form of autonomy for them. The State's policy of slowly conceding to autonomy demands only after they turn violent and unmanageable ties it to what may be called *a homeland bind*. It was due to these anomalies that hitherto practised counterinsurgency measures lost much of their edge and effectiveness.

The region today is poised for a new mode of governance. The developmentalism of the 1990s, as I have noted in Chap. 2, comes with the promise of a critical turnaround by putting the region's economy on the fast track. The idea is to tap the resources of the region in a way that these can be marketed by way of improving

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[9] Pu. Rualchhina in an interview on 3 December 2010 in Aizawl told me: "Ours was a national army—its task was to defend our people rather than anything else." In an interview held in Aizawl on 4 December 2010, Pu. Tawnluia, formerly the chief of Mizo National Army (MNA) pointed out: "We were sure that we could not win but what we definitely could was inflict some casualties".

[10] G. Das has shown how development and insurgency form a nexus and how the nexus has actually tied the economies of this region down to a "low-equilibrium trap" (G. Das 2009, mimeo). Chakraborty shows how increasing dependency of the hill states on the Centre cuts into the states' ability to spend—particularly on the social sector, and foments "movements for autonomy, exclusive ethnic homelands and right to self-determination in order to attract more share of the state expenditure" (2010:14–15).

connectivity and ensuring institutional reforms particularly with the twin objective of opening the region to the 'powerhouse' economies of Southeast Asia and securing private property. While marketization of resources is expected to make the economies of the region competitive, so long as prices are determined in the global market, poor and backward hill states of the region have 'no role to play in determining them' (Chakraborty 2010: 15). By all indications, the introduction of newer technologies of governance in the second phase of peace does not address these larger questions of rights, justice and democracy. Strangely enough, the newer attempts at setting the region free from its present landlocked status by way of linking it with the 'powerhouse' economies of Southeast Asia are likely to make many groups and communities of the region vulnerable to further isolation and primitive accumulation. This, as I have argued, is likely to set off a fresh series of conflicts in the region (Das 2005: 65–69).

Peace in the negative sense of managing conflicts and pacifying the society has indeed run the full circle in the Northeast. But unless the larger questions underlined here are addressed, the gains of pacification will not take time to get dissipated and a new series of insurgency might ensue. This peace that is 'arriving' or is said to have 'arrived' is likely to be fragile for it is constantly haunted by the threat of conflict and war.

3.3 Governing the New Citizen

Governed peace, as we have seen, makes a judicious combination of war and peace—a combination that becomes convenient to all the parties and stakeholders involved in the war. During the first phase of insurgency, almost consecutive military operations organized since the 'Operation Bajrang', the first of its kind launched in 1990, were meant for softening and weakening the armed might of the ULFA as an organization. But it was a victory that was not seen as one. For, it was also 'convenient' for both of them to ensure that the weakening and softening of the ULFA were not to be construed as its straightforward defeat. Viewed from the State's perspective, victory cannot be claimed against 'one's own people'. The founding of India as a 'democratic republic' with the introduction of the new Constitution also brought about a change in the official perception of the rebels and insurgents of the Northeast. Gone are the days when the British would organize punitive raids in order to keep the 'savages' and 'primitives' at bay. While in colonial times, they were seen as 'savages' and primitives' posing a threat to 'subjects' of the colonial authority, with Independence (1947) the clock seems to have turned a full circle and these people are regarded by the post-colonial State as 'our men' who were misguided by the outside forces, including ecclesiastical organizations and foreign forces, who need to be brought back to the fold of the nation with great care and affection (Das 2007: 47–63).

This is obviously in keeping with democracy's eternally unfulfilled promise of incorporating everyone within its ambit. In fact, democracy in theory cannot thrive

without keeping this promise alive and without celebrating itself.[11] This at the same time renders the promise perpetually unfulfillable. Post-colonial democracy in principle has room for everyone—including the insurgents and rebels within the territory. So the weakening and softening happen with the view of bringing them to the negotiating table. The ULFA, as we have seen, is constantly pushed into a position where it is forced to negotiate. Democracy is fated to privilege dialogue and negotiations over war and conflicts and the conflicting parties are equally destined to make peace between them. Democracy comes with the heavy tag of peacemaking. Peacemaking, however, has no necessary connection with peace per se. In fact in the Northeast it has been the other way round—insofar as peacemaking is subjected to the norms and institutions of governance, it perpetually defers peace. If one refuses to dialogue and negotiate, democracy forces one to do it. It has to be a dialogue anyway in a democracy. In a grotesque caricature, democracy's infectious myth of leaving nothing outside it only hits it back.

So, it is 'our men' who have taken shelter outside—in the neighbouring countries—who need to be brought back. Diplomacy becomes a tool of governing rebels. They must be arrested—and kept inside prisons till they agree to make peace. They are bailed out on condition that they will sit around a negotiating table. Demands for self-determination need to be calibrated in a way that they do not violate 'the order of things'—in this case the system of States in South Asia.

The call for negotiation gives the ULFA the route that would not make the end of the first phase of insurgency appear as 'defeat' for it. Dialogue is to be distinguished from the appearance of a dialogue. Democracy is committed to this *appearance*—the appearance that is necessary for fulfilling its otherwise unfulfillable promise—not so much dialogue per se. The appearance and enactment of a dialogue are convenient for both parties in order that the conflict and war can continue 'through other means'. Several examples in this chapter sharply point out how conflicts and war often refuse to be subdued under the threshold of norms and institutions of peacemaking through dialogue and negotiation in order that the opposition feels much greater need for peace and negotiation and is nudged to give way. This only shows that the threshold norms and institutions per se are not important, but are important only insofar as they help in governing rebels and insurgents. Democracy forces one refusing to dialogue to do it much in the same way as Rousseau makes it imperative to force one to be free in a democracy.

While the ULFA has always looked upon civil society as one of its force multipliers (the PCG being reported as an instance) in its battle against the Indian State, it is only very recently that civil society has largely been able to pitch itself between the conflicting and warring parties. Civil society may have come of age in Assam in that sense, but it has turned out to be a tool of governance. The SJA—unlike the PCG—insists that the parties need to shun violence as violence has no place in democracy and the ULFA, most importantly, must distance itself from its demand for sovereign Assam. The civil society in our neoliberal age—perhaps

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[11] Badiou describes it as the "egoism" of democracy and its "desire for petty enjoyments" (Badiou 2010: 5).

more than the State—has a stake in maintaining and preserving 'the order of things'. The new developmentalism has led to the governmentalization of civil society in Assam.

Most importantly, 'governed' peace results in blunting the sharp edges of claims and counterclaims that keep the conflicting parties apart. The pro-talks faction of the ULFA seems to have irreversibly relinquished its claim to sovereign Assam. As we have pointed out, since sovereignty—more than being that of Assam now belongs to the people—needs to be connoted and denoted by the people. If the mission of 'ending the colonial rule' can happen in a way other than establishing a sovereign Assam then, as it feels, the demand for sovereign Assam cannot be regarded as sacrosanct and non-derogable. Secondly, if the Constitution of India can guarantee power to the people of Assam, then 'sovereignty' is not to be construed as a necessary condition for realizing the mission. Governing, in other words, makes the people develop a stake in the development of the region that is now underway and it becomes clear from the instances cited above that the ULFA has developed such stake.

In a sense the new developmentalism of the 1990s has brought about certain anomalies and contradictions relating to forced migration and displacement, of ownership and usufruct of the common property resources, of marginalization of women, ecological disaster and environmental degradation, so on and so forth. These issues seem to have bound people across ethnic communities hitherto fighting among themselves under one common front—and galvanized them into the force of Assam's new citizenry. By speaking for the rainbow society that the Northeast—particularly Assam—represents the new citizen becomes the new vanguard of peace in the region. For, she (the citizen) is generously invested with the critical potential of crossing the ethnic divide by highlighting the issues that commonly affect all of us. Now it is for the society to face the challenge of following the new citizen and articulating itself into a wider peace constituency.

The new citizenry has become the potential vanguard of peace in the region in at least two relatively divergent senses of the term: On the one hand, peace-making no longer remains a proud preserve of the State. Now that peacemaking becomes a common concern, the State turns into only one among many such agencies—although there is no doubt that the latter continues to be looked upon as the prime agency. On the other hand and with the rise of a multiplicity of peace-making agencies in the society, there has also developed a concern for the kind and quality of peace. For many of these agencies, peace per se may not be as important as peace with rights, justice and democracy. While the new citizenry holds the key to democratic peace in the Northeast, there is little within it that stops it from becoming subjected to the rules and protocols of governance. If peace has started being informed by a concern for rights, justice and democracy, there are also attempts at devising appropriate forms and technologies for governing it.

The imperative of governing the new citizen runs against that of establishing peace on the strong foundations of rights, justice and democracy. Viewed in this sense, what we call the emergence of the new citizen in Chap. 2 is always slow and uncertain and is unlikely to be irreversible. Thus, to cite an example, the

struggle against displacement induced by the establishment and commissioning of dams and hydroelectric power stations in a region as ecologically fragile and seismically prone as the Northeast is, has acquired some momentum during the last 10 years, particularly in Assam. The Subansiri Valley Indigenous Peoples' Forum (SVIPF), one of the earliest to voice its protest against the proposed construction of the Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project, was formed in Gogamukh on 2 February 2003. It called for the public hearing of those who were going to be displaced and for compliance with the guidelines of the World Commission of Dams. The Commission guidelines, it was argued, were meant for protecting the rights of the indigenous people and the ecology of the particular region. The Forum drew its support from such ethnic students' organizations as the Takam Mising Paring Kebang, All-Assam Gorkha Students' Union and many others. Subansiri Sanrakshak Nari Santha—an all-women's organization—also lodged its protest against the construction of big dams. The participation of women, not unknown in the other ethnic movements in the region, was completely new and unprecedented insofar as anti-dam protest is concerned. Most of the organizations at the forefront of the struggle are locally based, often representing particular ethnic groups more often than not their students' wings, although they fight for issues that cut across communities and groups across the board. The Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chhatra Parishad (AJYCP) is one such organization claiming to represent the interests of the Assamese. It was at the centre of the Assam movement and has become very active in recent years in protesting against the construction of big dams. The Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) consolidated myriad groups and organizations into one, helped in lending to the movement—as Kamal Kumar Medhi, its publicity secretary calls—a 'nationalist character' ('*jatiya andolanar rup*') and worked hard to make it 'a progressive and democratic movement' (Medhi 2012: 4). He designates it as a 'movement by the people living in Assam ('Asombasi') for restoring their control over the water resources of Assam' (Medhi 2012: 4). The special issue of *Asom Bani* on big dams published in February 2012 is replete with letters of support extended to the movement by the leaders of almost all the ethnic organisations of Assam and in some cases outside.[12]

While at one level this is true, at another level it is doubtful whether the same organizations claiming to represent their respective ethnic interests would like to share Assam's resources with the people of other states in the region. Transcendence too has a limit. The official strategy has been to keep the peace constituency localized and fragmented so that it does not pose any concerted challenge to governance. Besides, it is still not clear whether these movements and struggles are issued from an ecological concern or a concern for exercising ethnic ownership and control over resources that a group or a community claims to be its own. The ecological concern has so far remained in the background—it becomes relevant only to the extent that it addresses the ethnic concern. In other words, at the back of any such ecological movement, the ethnic concern remains

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[12] All those whom I had interviewed irrespective of ethnicities and communities unequivocally acknowledged its non-ethnic character.

nonetheless very strong. In a paper written long ago, I described the phenomenon as 'ethno-ecologism'—an ecological concern that is issued from the deeper ethnic concern of establishing its command over critical and life-bearing resources (Das 1997: 21–35).

It is through the tug-and-pull between the imperative of mixing peace with rights, justice and democracy on one hand and that of subjecting it to ever-newer forms and technologies of governance on the other, that the future prospects of its kind and quality are negotiated and determined—and that too only contingently.

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Chapter 4
Governing Cultures of Peace

Abstract Civil society as an instrument of peacemaking has largely been unable to make much headway in the Northeast where prolonged conflicts have created an entrenched culture of violence. This chapter makes a study of three cases of Gandhian interventions for peace: the Peace Mission in Nagaland (1964), the Shanti Sena in Kumarikata (Assam) since the early 1960s, and the legendary fast of Irom Sharmila since 2000. The new peace culture that is being sought to be introduced by the State and other global multilateral agencies as a technology of governance in the new millennium saps these peace interventions of their social power and effectivity. The chapter argues that none of these interventions has had any significant impact on ongoing peace processes: The Peace Mission fell through due to the strong moral commitment of the Gandhians who preferred conflict to its resolution through immoral means; the peace agenda in Kumarikata was displaced by its overemphasis on economic development at the local level; and the socio-political impact of Sharmila's fast for over a decade hardly shows signs of spreading across new social constituencies.

This chapter focuses less on conflicts per se but more on *prolonged* conflicts. Prolonged conflicts are not only long and 'durable'[1] when measured against a linear time scale, but are, as we will have occasion to see, of a different *kind*. Such conflicts associated with violence, as they necessarily are, become 'intractable' and 'institutionalized' partly because they are prolonged but in a large measure due to many other factors making them far more complex than what they initially are.

Conflicts and violence of prolonged nature in most of India's Northeast turn out to be intractable so much, so that consecutive efforts of making peace do not seem to bear any fruit—at least not immediately. The history of insurgency is as old as that of peace-making in the region. In Assam, for instance, as we have seen in Chap. 3, peace-making initiatives of various forms have been underway since 1991—the same year when the first-ever army operation codenamed 'Operation

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[1] In Sanjib Baruah's famous coinage this is "durable disorder" (2007).

Bajrang' was launched against the ULFA, the largest insurgent group in the state. Even after more than two decades, peace-making with the ULFA is yet to culminate in any peace accord—let alone enduring peace. To cite yet another instance, one of the factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (now Nagalim)—that of Isaac-Swu—has been in ceasefire mode with the Government of India for well over one and half decades now while fratricidal warfare between the factions has not come to an end. Nor does the prolonged ceasefire show any sign of leading to resolution of conflicts at least in the short run.

For one thing, prolonged conflicts gather momentum of their own so much so that they are seen to outlive the 'original' issues that trigger them.[2] New issues get added up, at times even discarding the older ones, further complicating and more often than not intensifying these conflicts. Prolonged conflict situations seem to requisition newer issues—often resulting in significant transformations in their form, nature and character, redefining the battle lines and even reconfiguring the parties involved in them. In philosophical terms, subjects do not precede such conflicts, but are produced by them. I have shown elsewhere how subjectivation has been an integral part of such prolonged conflicts whether in Assam or in Nagaland (Das 2012).

For another, prolonged conflicts leave a deep and perhaps indelible impression on public memory and create what Bar-Tal (2009) calls its "socio-psychological repertoire". The accretion of conflicts and violence into a repertoire makes it difficult for the society in question to mitigate and resolve them and make any further headway towards peace. Drawing on the studies conducted on some of the world's worst ever Conflict zones, he remarks: "The repertoire serves as a foundation for the evolved culture of conflict, and control mechanisms ensure that the repertoire developed in conflict will not change" (ibid. 364). Insofar as conflicts and violence turn into a repertoire and *culture*, peace continues to elude these societies.

This understanding of violence as culture particularly in prolonged conflict situations has called for a paradigm shift in the literature on peace and conflict studies particularly in recent years. On one hand, a sense of despair and despondency marks the writings of many of us who have so far pinned our hope in the instrumentality of civil society in making peace. The hope is prompted by a certain 'weakening' of states and the rapid erosion of its capacity particularly in our age of globalization.[3] The culture of conflict stands in the way like a gigantic stumbling block eating into the vitals and vibrancy of civil society. It is now being increasingly realized that like the State, civil society as an agent of peace-making too has its limits. As Chandhoke observes:

> … [V]iolence cannot always be thought of as an alienable *property,* attached to errant groups or to the state. For it may well be employed generically to *constitute subjects and identities* in civil society.… Institutionalized violence within the state has led to the

[2] The Centre for Security Analysis, Chennai and Delhi Policy Group, New Delhi have undertaken a project on 'Internal Conflicts in South and South East Asia: Internal and External Effects' in this direction.

[3] For a recent explication of this line of argument in the context of South Asia, see Paul (2010).

breakdown of dialogue, rendering civility and toleration distant dreams. If civil society
has to realize its own potential and its own promises, members of the sphere will have to
address the phenomenon of violence and the attendant intolerance even hate that has come
to impinge the domain of collective action. This may be to demand too much because civil
society constitutes the other of violence, as much as civility constitutes the other of incivil-
ity. The notion of civil society is premised upon a peaceful world which is marked by the
spirit of dialogue, negotiation, compromise, and coordination. But whereas dialogue means
recognizing the other in a conversation, or validating the moral standing of the other, vio-
lence is premised upon obliterating the other and reducing the other to anonymity. Violence
is not spatially distant from civil society; it rapidly intrudes upon this world and subordi-
nates civility and conversation to its own relentless logic (Chandhoke 2007: 42).

In short, an unbridgeable chasm is thus created in societies ridden by prolonged
conflicts between society and civil society—the former continuing to reel under
conflict and violence and the latter sermonizing peace *ad nauseum* without any
significant impact on the society as a whole.

On the other hand, there has already been a search for a new hermeneutic that
would make the transition from a 'culture of conflict' to a 'culture of peace' pos-
sible. It is widely recognized that this transition is not going to take place on its
own—howsoever strong India's culture of peace has historically been—replacing
that of conflict. The culture of conflict, in other words, is so deeply embedded in
the society that its replacement requires "reciprocal planning and active efforts
that can overcome obstacles and facilitate its (peace's, the author) solidification"
(Bar-Tal 2009: 365). Much of this chapter, however, makes a critique of this new
hermeneutic and argues that the latter is yet another attempt at governing and engi-
neering culture, subjecting it to the institutions and protocols of governance and to
borrow a term that Foucault has introduced to us—by 'governmentalizing' it.

4.1 Hermeneutic of Peace

The search for a new peace hermeneutic prompts scholars to rediscover continui-
ties with India's past, constantly invoke, highlight and celebrate them, make them
part of contemporary public agenda and finally translate them into public policies.
Upadhyaya, for instance, in one of his recent papers calls for 'reconnecting and rein-
terpreting the continuing resonance of India's otherwise distinct stream of composite
cultural values and traits in her contemporary policies' (Upadhyaya 2009: 71). While
at one level, such exercises are welcome for they help us in tracing the thread of jus-
tification for the peace policies that are being officially pursued—in his case—vis-
à-vis other states, at another it does not at all address the tangled question of power
relations—whether and how far such translations are successful in inscribing a new
hegemonic principle percolating into the depths of our body politic and circulating
through the larger social body. The realization that peace-making calls for cultural
transformation—more than mere signing of the parchment of peace accords—is new
and has compelled many of the scholars to shift their attention away from consoli-
dating the civil society to the production of a new peace hermeneutic.

The importance of percolation, circulation and dissemination—in one word hegemonization—of the culture of peace is nowhere more aptly appreciated than in the UN declaration of the first decade of the twentyfirst century as the 'Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence'. The UN General Assembly declares:

> … [T]he creation of the United Nations system itself, based upon universally shared values and goals, has been a major act towards transformation from a culture of war and violence to a culture of peace and non-violence … which consists of values, attitudes and behaviors that reflect and inspire social interaction and sharing based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, all human rights, tolerance and solidarity, that reject violence and endeavor to prevent conflicts by tackling root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation and that guarantee the full exercise of all rights and the means to participate fully in the development process of their society (United Nations 2011).

In simple terms, what is called the 'culture of peace' does not remain out there—but, according to this line of argument, will have to be brought about not only by respecting the triadic principles of rights, justice and democracy but by translating them into a *universal* culture. This particular variety of the culture of peace that UN has privileged through its Declaration, as I will argue, is produced only by subjecting culture to the imperatives of governance, that is to say, by *governing* culture or, as Tiwari (2012) puts it, 'cultural governance'. The imperative of governing culture emerges from the larger realization that culture is too serious a business to be left out of the ambit of comprehensive governance and thus allowed to either drift apart or be eventually hardened into a culture of conflict.[4] The imperative of establishing a culture of peace is to be read and understood *together* with the implicit plea for governing culture.

Such a plea for establishing a culture of peace by means of governing it has its problems—three of which may be mentioned at this point: One, while it is widely believed that peace as a normative order should be predicated on the triadic principles of rights, justice and democracy,[5] historical evidences from the recent past on the other hand suggest that claims to rights, justice and democracy spark off—not peace but 'contentious politics'[6]—politics that divides the body politic into conflicting groups and communities correspondingly making conflicting claims, instead of unifying and holding them together. The connection between the establishment of what we call the triadic principles on one hand and peace on the other is, to say the least, only tenuous.

Two, to argue that the connection is tenuous is not to make an advocacy for establishing peace *by any means*. In Chap. 3, I made a subtle distinction between peace through pacification and peace established by way of upholding and

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[4] In a different context, Tiwari designates it as 'cultural governance' (2012: 247–268).

[5] While introducing a collection of essays on peace-making in the Northeast under the title of *Search for Peace with Justice*, Fernandes observes rather categorically: "Genuine peace has to be based on justice for all. That objective can be achieved only by dealing with (the) … causes of unrest" (Fernandes 2008: 8).

[6] Charles Tilly et al. (2009) have made this phrase famous.

celebrating the triadic principles. These two processes produce two very different kinds of peace. Peace, as we are reminded, has been established in the Northeast with the turn of the new millennium 'mainly through force' (Ganguly 2009: 62) or pacification. While the claim that a particular group makes is likely to be informed by its own sense of justice that it finds reasons to value and fight for—howsoever unjust it might appear to others—any attempt at institutionally privileging any of these claims in terms of distribution of rewards, preferences and opportunities has its obvious implications for the society at large. Redistributive policies are known to be of divisive nature. Unless there is scope for dialogue and negotiation in the society amongst various claimants and contenders, groups and communities making the claims, peace will remain a far cry.[7] The road to the establishment of rights, justice and democracy is always contentious—albeit a slow and long haul.

Three, the new peace hermeneutic introduced by the UN and other multilateral agencies promises to translate the triadic principles of rights, justice and democracy into a culture and not the culture into these principles.[8] Governing culture is sought to be accomplished by establishing the hegemony of these principles and the culture they accompany particularly in the West over the larger body politic—through means that Bar-Tal and his associates have so eloquently pointed out in their works. The role of civil society in promoting peace education can hardly be exaggerated in this regard. The commonplace plea made in favour of the new peace hermeneutic refuses to acknowledge that culture/s of the Northeast are too varied and resilient to be swallowed by and reduced to any monochromatic culture of conflict and bear the heterotopic traces of peace that

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[7] The problem with most of the contemporary theories of justice including that of Rawls is that they tend to set forth certain procedures that if followed are expected to ensure and guarantee justice. Viewed in that sense, these are not to be called substantive theories. These theories do not address the fundamentally political problem of how to make these procedures and the outcomes they produce—acceptable to the various cross-sections of the society—particularly of those whose claims are either compromised or denied and ruled out. These theories completely miss out the *politics* of justice.

[8] Since the relation of triadic principles of rights, and justice and democracy to peace is only tenuous, any attempt at introducing them from without is fraught with dangerous consequences—as most of the abortive peace processes sponsored by the State in the Northeast since Independence (1947) seem to bear out. Elsewhere I have shown how the disjunction between the official peace process and the micro-traditions of peace has not only thrown the official initiative out of gear, but deprived the latter of the social power to exercise any influence on the official initiative (Das 2007). The history of peace processes in the Northeast teach us that peace can seldom be brought about from without, but will have to be developed tirelessly and arduously by investing the still-thriving albeit marginalized peace traditions with social power and constantly interrogating the official peace processes and subjecting them to scrupulous peace audit however, with varying degree of success. Hence, the distinction between peace by way of introducing a new hermeneutic of rights, justice and democracy at the behest of the State and global multilateral agencies and peace developed in symbiosis with these newly discarded micro-traditions is not one of time sequence but of *kind* with major strategic importance for the practice of peace in the region.

continue to be part of its living tradition. These traditions find it hard to survive the hegemonizing influences of the new peace hermeneutic, but are seldom seen to completely give way. It is important that we conceptualize culture of peace as a contested terrain—a terrain where the micro-traditions of peace are required not only to encounter the culture of violence but the invasion of the new universalizing influence of peace by the global multilateral agencies. It is not only an encounter between conflict and peace but also one between two very different—and contesting—kinds of peace. Peace, in other words, cannot be established merely by 'reconnecting' with India's past—far less romanticizing it. We posit peace instead as a form of politics, contentious politics at that or what Clausewitz might call "war continued through other means". It helps us in recovering from the long lost history of how the culture of peace has gradually given way to that of conflict, and thereby has been sought to be silenced and pushed into oblivion.

4.2 Culture as Contested Terrain

The main aim of this chapter therefore is to critique—if not invert—the new hermeneutic of peace propagated and recently made famous by the UN and other multilateral agencies. The heterotopic traces, as Foucault reminds us, never disappear completely but in this case remain as elements of 'subjugated knowledge' always interrupting the culture of conflict and the newly introduced culture of peace, and therefore remaining constantly vulnerable to the double assault by both of them. 'Reconnecting' the new culture of peace to the hoary past and tracing the lineage of the presently followed policies to what Upadhyaya calls 'Indian thinking' could otherwise be a welcome philosophical exercise—but obviously fails in explaining the underlying politics of the hermeneutic, that is to say, why notwithstanding a strong and hallowed tradition of peace and non-violence conflicts and violence do occur in India and occur persistently, have therefore come to stay and get hardened into a culture in many parts of the Northeast. These hermeneutic exercises, though important in their ways, do not seem to address the essentially political question of whether these heterotopic traces in their fragments and pieces would ever be able to combat the hegemonic influence of a potentially universalizing peace culture. These fragments and pieces—discarded and dismembered thanks to the prevailing culture of conflict and the introduction of the new peace culture—do not simply add up to weave a culture on its own while replacing them, but refuse resolutely to be dissolved into either of them. The challenge is to appreciate their potentially critical nature and turn them into an integral part of what Gramsci calls 'popular culture'. The culture of peace does not descend from the top, but develops from below in a way that it becomes a perennially active fountain of 'social power'—a form of power that is sustained by the will of the people insofar as they discover on their own the continuity of peace with their living tradition and culture (Das 2007: 56). The principles of rights, justice and democracy per se

are unlikely to bring about peace.[9] Instead of imprinting the principles of rights, justice and democracy in culture, it is important that we rediscover these hetero-topic traces of peace already implicit in the cultures of the Northeast and slowly work towards the realization of these principles. 'Good' theories of justice are unfortunately 'bad' theories of peace.[10]

Such an inquiry is based on the premise that there is a critical disjuncture between the culture of peace that is sought to be established by signing accords as part of the global agenda and the fragmentary forms of the culture of peace that continue to persist in the region albeit in a dormant form and make it possible for millions of people to live together even under most difficult conditions of fratri-cidal warfare. I described it as the unofficial peace process for it is never allowed to play any role in the official process in which the State is seen to be involved in making peace with the armed group/s (Das 2007: 1–5). Every culture has by defi-nition peace built in it and there is no way we can discredit a culture by simply branding it as 'violent'.[11] It is important to find out how cultures of peace get fur-ther marginalized with the introduction of the new peace hermeneutic and with what effects. Violence and peace are not to be taken as given attributes of a cul-ture, but are politically negotiated and determined. Governing culture is like a huge cleansing operation in which the surviving traces of peace are constantly pushed into the margins with varying effects. These surviving traces remain as dis-tant heterotopias in the backyard of history and public memory only to return and interrupt the culture of conflict but are never allowed to synergize the official peace process. It is important to unearth these micro-traditions and appreciate their dual role of interrupting the culture of conflict and synergizing the unofficial peace process within a given area, a locality or a neighbourhood.

This chapter, in other words, seeks to locate culture of peace within a contested terrain in which contending claims to peace and peace-making are constantly being made and negotiated. This obviously goes against the very grain of the dominant understanding of culture that posits culture (of peace) as a homogeneous and un-differentiable body and its conduct is 'regulated' by 'a set of reflections, techniques and practices' that exist in the society (Bratich et al. 2003: 8). I have argued that within a society as diverse and heterogeneous as the Northeast, there exists a plural-ity of such 'reflections, techniques and practices' that seek to regulate the conduct of human conduct in a plurality of ways (Das 1998: 13–43). The conducts they sanc-tion stand in a hierarchical relation to each other, often fiercely competing—if not contesting—with each other and thereby making it impossible for any one of them to establish its unbridled hegemony.

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[9] The writings on post-conflict reconciliation attest to the impossibility of establishing justice particularly in the context of the experience with truth and reconciliation in South Africa. Since the literature is vast, I refrain from referring to it here.

[10] Writings on the experience of 'truth and reconciliation' in South Africa and other states endorse the point.

[11] Colonial ethnography, as we have seen in Chap. 2, is replete with many such examples.

This chapter seeks to refer to three cases of Gandhian peace interventions at the local level in the Northeast and to understand the forces and processes that on one hand contribute to their continued marginalization and on the other often compel them to subject themselves to what Foucault calls the 'science of government', its 'reflections, techniques and policies'. Each of these cases serves as a pointer to how culture is sought to be governed—but significantly in three very different ways.

4.3   The Gandhian Approach

A brief discussion on the Gandhian approach to peace may not be out of place in this context. The approach is significant for it emphasizes the organic connection amongst culture, peace and morality. Although Gandhi's approach to peace and conflict resolution is widely considered as a normative approach—criticized at times for being too normative to be followed in any concrete, real-life situation—Gandhi himself was of the firm opinion that whatever he wrote was intended to provide practical solutions to practical problems. In other words, he regarded culture as part of one's own living tradition. However, it has to be kept in mind that his approach was by no means a mere problem-solving exercise; it was over and above an exercise in solving problems in accordance with certain moral principles, which one considers as dear to one's own self and therefore non-negotiable. His was certainly not a managerial solution to conflicts.

Gandhi would not mind continuing to suffer the conflicts than trying to solve them by flouting and violating what he would postulate as basic moral principles. For him, means will have to be as much moral as the ends are. Gandhi's, in simple terms, was essentially a moral approach to peace and conflict resolution. As Thomas Weber observes: "… Gandhi clearly states that living within rules required for successful satyagraha (literally love for truth, the author) is the type of life that is worth living" (Weber 1991: 14). In that sense, his approach is distinct from the contemporary one that underlines the necessity of cultural governance and engineering it for peace. Before we begin, it will be useful to remind us of some of the basic principles that distinguish the Gandhian approach from others:

1. Peace is desirable but certainly not at any 'price'. Even conflicts are preferable to peace that is achieved at the expense of rights, justice and democracy. As Weber tells us: "While self-suffering was quite likely to be a consequence of altruism, Gandhi was firmly convinced that to suffer wrongs was less degrading than to inflict them" (Weber 2006:173). Peace—more than mere cessation of hostilities—must be based on the principles of rights, justice and democracy. His approach enables us to appreciate the distinction we made earlier between peace by pacification and peace that is established by realizing the triadic principles of rights, justice and democracy. Gandhi after all would have preferred to suffer the conflicts than to resolve them in ways that violate the normative principles that he held so dearly throughout his life. Sufferance of conflicts per se is

not a failure but as Gandhi would have us believe, is a step towards the resolution of conflicts. For it is likely to melt the hearts and minds of others including the enemy.

2. Gandhi felt that truth and non-violence were more powerful than any instrument of violence including the atom bomb. No amount of violence can conquer our moral commitment to truth and non-violence. For Gandhi, registering moral protest, howsoever unsuccessful it might eventually become, itself marks victory. He always asserted superiority of moral force to physical force.

3. The strength of moral power is capable of winning the hearts and minds of enemies. As Gandhi argued: "It is not enough to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business."[12] Satyagraha means the discovery of truth and working steadily towards it, thus converting the opponent into a friend. In the words of Weber: "There is ideally no threat, coercion or punishment. Instead, in Gandhi's scheme, the idea is to undergo 'self-suffering' in the belief that the opponent can be converted to seeing the truth by touching his or her conscience, or that a clearer vision of truth may grow out of the dialectical process for both parties" (2006: 146).

4. Violence breeds violence and triggers off chain reaction. Besides, we cannot distinguish between justified violence and unjustified violence. For both imply brutalization of human nature. He had an abiding faith in human nature: 'An eye for an eye eventually makes the world blind'. As Gandhi argues, we must hate sin and not the sinner. While violence is an alluring game that tempts us to apply it, it leads us nowhere. Resolution of conflicts presupposes changing the rules of the game altogether. He would believe that finally good will win over evil.

5. Conflict resolution may require the mediators who help in reaching an agreement between the conflicting parties. But in order that they are accepted as mediators, it is essential that they wield the necessary moral authority over the parties involved in conflict and enjoy their trust. They cease to serve as mediators as soon as they lose their credibility and trust.

This chapter, as we have already pointed out, makes three case studies on the role of the peace mission in Nagaland in 1964, that of the Shanti Sena of Kumarikata (Assam) since the early 1960s and the legendary fast of Irom Sharmila Chanu in Manipur since 2000. These three case studies represent three very different moments of Gandhian 'peace' intervention in the Northeast. The Peace Mission dissolved as soon as Jayaprakash Narayan, one of its eminent Gandhian members, tendered his resignation on the ground that he thought he had lost 'trust' and credibility in the eyes of the conflicting parties. While peace process broke off as a result, resulting in fresh rounds of bloodbath and violence, it becomes evident that

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[12] All quotations from Gandhi in this chapter are so widely known that I refrain from referencing them here.

an ardent Gandhian like Jayaprakash Narayan found it moral to withdraw from the official peace process once he felt that he had lost trust in the minds of the contending parties. At a time when peace was sought to be established by killing the moral person, Jayaprakash Narayan privileged personal moralism over peace—even at the risk of exposing the society to macabre violence. Compared to it, the Shanti Sena's intervention had an enduring impact though in a large measure has been ineffective in saving Assam from several consecutive orgies of ethnic and communal violence including the one in July–August 2012. Its role as an agency initiating rural reconstruction and self-employment for the villagers somewhat turned its focus away from conflict resolution to development. In an age when developmentalism has become the new mantra of conflict resolution (see Chap. 2), Shanti Sena's newfound accent is emblematic of governmentalization of peace. Irom Sharmila's fast, on the other hand, points to the resolve and unwavering determination of an unusually strong lady—while at the same time being stonewalled by the ultimate intransigence of the State. This long and hitherto ineffective fast again shows how such a dangerous play with human body could become an object of governmentalization—in this case by successfully sealing it off—preventing it from exercising any influence on official policies and policy making.

4.3.1 Killing the Moral Person

The Nagas consisting of a number of subgroups with languages and dialects often unintelligible to each other and living in different parts of the region as well as Myanmar have been the first to challenge the Indian State and declare their 'Independence' a day before India became Independent on 15 August 1947. The British policy towards the hill tribes[13] in general and the Nagas in particular was inspired by the imperative of exercising 'minimum interference' in the pattern of life of the Naga tribes and keeping the outsiders from entering the tribal areas.

    On the eve of Independence, Angami Zapu Phizo—the father of Naga insurgency—through the Naga National Council (NNC) submitted a memorandum to the British Government for establishing an interim government under the 'guardianship' of India for a period of 10 years, at the end of which the Naga people could be left to form a Government of their choice. When the Advisory Committee on Aboriginal Tribes of the Constituent Assembly visited the Naga Hills in May 1947, the NNC maintained that the Nagas retained the right of deciding their future at the end of this 10-year period. In 1956 and with the completion of the 10-year period, the NNC announced the formation of the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN). The NNC rejected the provisions of the Sixth Schedule and held a plebiscite on the question of Naga independence. Almost all Nagas (99.9 %),

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[13] Such terms as 'tribe' and 'tribal' are freely used both in official circles and in popular parlance without necessarily any of their pejorative connotations.

according to NNC sources, cast their vote in favour of 'independence outside India'.

Thus began an era of conflict and hostility. As hostility intensified, there were attempts at making peace. In the early part of 1957, a meeting consisting of church leaders from Kohima and Impur (of Naga Hills, then a part of undivided Assam) sent out an appeal for peace. Its main objective was to oppose violence and win over the rebels. A breakaway group of the NNC—a section of moderates, wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru—the then Prime Minister of India—to settle the problem within the framework of the Indian Constitution. A Sixteen-Point Agreement—popularly known as the Delhi Agreement—was reached in July 1960. The Agreement paved the way to the formation of a separate state of Nagaland within the Indian Union. Like Article 370 relating to the autonomy provisions for Kashmir, the Agreement also provides that no act and law passed by Indian Parliament relating to (1) religious and social practices, (2) Naga customary laws and procedures, (3) civil and criminal justice concerning decisions according to Naga customary law and (4) ownership and transfer of land and its resources would have any legal force in Nagaland unless specifically applied by a majority vote in the Nagaland Legislative Assembly. On 1 August 1960, Nehru announced the proposed formation of Nagaland as a separate state comprising the then existing district of Naga Hills and the Tuensang Area, although Phizo denounced the pact from London on 30 July 1960. Nagaland however, became a state in 1963.

The role of the Peace Mission deserves special mention insofar as it involved direct intervention by at least two very well-known Gandhians (Jayaprakash Narayan and Bimala Prasad Chaliha) in the resolution of conflicts. With a spurt in the hostilities between the security forces and the underground forces immediately after the formation of the separate state of Nagaland, the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) held a convention in Wokha from 31 January to 2 February 1964. This convention unanimously resolved to request the Government of India and the underground FGN to negotiate with a peace mission that it formed with members comprising B. P. Chaliha (the then Chief Minister of Assam), Jayaprakash Narayan and Rev. Michael Scott (a British missionary). After hard work, a cease-fire (technically 'suspension of operations' by both sides) was reached between the Naga underground leaders and the Government of India on 15 August 1964.

After at least five rounds and four years of deliberation, the mission finally came out with a proposal and urged on both the warring parties to 'flexibilize' their otherwise 'rigid' understandings of 'sovereignty and independence' and called for the "union of Nagaland with India with certain distinct characteristics that are absent in the case of other states". Rev. Scott observed: "I plead with the Indian Government for a liberal interpretation of the terms 'sovereign independence', and with the federal Government or a more realistic understanding of the terms 'sovereign independence'" (quoted in Lasuh 2002: 321).

The Peace Mission's proposal was intended to reach a middle ground. The Naga Federal Government refused to accept the constitutional status of the state of Nagaland within the Indian Union while its assertion of the right to self-determination and the demand for a sovereign Nagaland State was not acceptable to the

Government of India. To overcome these conflicting positions, the peace mission came with the proposal that

> … the FGN could on their own volition decide to be a participant in the Union of India and mutually settle the terms and conditions for that purpose. On the other hand, the Government of India could consider to what extent the pattern and structure of the relationship between Nagaland and the Government of India should be adapted and recast so as to satisfy the political aspirations of all sections of Naga opinion (Lasuh 2002: 323).

It was felt by the members of the Mission that the resolution of conflicts, according to the Gandhian approach, can take place only when the conflicting parties meet themselves halfway on their own volition.

The proposal was not found to be acceptable to anyone. The Government of India welcomed the first part of the proposal in which it urged the NFG to participate 'on their own volition' but understood the second part in terms of providing greater autonomy to Nagaland. The FGN wanted to keep it open and asked for holding a plebiscite supervised by a neutral body and the Naga people through the plebiscite would decide on the future according to 'their own volition'. The Tatar Hoho, the highest legislative body of the FGN, for example, maintained: "It is always the desire of Tatar Hoho to settle our problem through peaceful means with the Government of India and once our right to self-determination is recognized, we shall seek friendly relationship with India" (Lasuh 2002: 317). Thus, no agreement could be reached between them.

While the peace mission was flooded with complaints of violation of ceasefire from both sides, Jayaprakash Narayan pleaded his helplessness. As he pointed out:

> The Peace Mission has no machinery to enable us to go into these complaints; we work merely as a Post Office, however sufficient grounds to conclude that one of the terms of the agreement, namely the personnel of the Naga Army will not move about in villages in uniform and/or with arms, this to a considerable extent is not being implemented (quoted in Lasuh 2002: 282).

It is a candid admission on the part of Narayan that their moral authority could not succeed in prevailing upon the military prowess of either the State on the armed group. Michael Scott too reiterated the same point (Lasuh 2002: 297).

The Peace Mission was, however, keen more on continuing with the talks than breaking them off for it felt that it would be immensely difficult to resume them all over again once they hit a deadlock. Y. V. Gundevia, the then Foreign Secretary of India directly involved as the chief delegate in many of these negotiations, for example, in a letter dated 21 January, 1965 to B. P. Chaliha, the eminent Gandhian and a member of the Peace Mission, pointed out:

> … [W]e welcome the conclusion which the Peace Mission has arrived … that a peaceful solution of the Naga problem can only be found within the Indian Union, by Nagaland continuing to remain within the Indian union (Lasuh 2002: 315).

To this Jayaprakash Narayan reacted in the following terms:

> The GOI (Government of India) attaches an utterly wrong meaning to the proposals in that, while the PM (Peace Mission), conceding the Nagas' right to self-determination, had invited them *on their own volition* to become participants in the Indian Union, the Indian

chief delegate's letter said that the PM had come to a conclusion that the final solution of the problem of Nagaland can only be found within the Indian union by Nagaland *continuing to remain within the Indian union*. The phrase 'continuing to remain within the Indian union' destroyed completely the principle of voluntary participation which was the heart of the PM proposals (Lasuh 2002: 316, italics mine).

While Narayan desperately wanted the Government to show this 'openness' which he thought would have given the otherwise abortive talks a new lease of life, he was sure that it would have taken very little for it to rock the boat and break them. As he argued:

If the Nagas decide to participate in the Union, the effect would be not the beginning of balkanization, but further consolidation and strengthening of the Union. If, on the other hand, they refuse to be participants, there would be no commitment on India's part to accept separation of Nagaland, which the GOI would be free to resist in the manner it chose (Lasuh 2002: 317).

Indeed, the problem also lay squarely with the rebels who found last part of his statement unacceptable. Jayaprakash Narayan was the first to resign from the Peace Mission. Explaining his resignation, Ao observes:

The Nagaland Peace Mission was fortunate to have a person like him. Very unfortunately, he was the first person who resigned and left the Mission, when the underground protested against one of his alleged pronouncements: '[I]f the government of India desires, she can liquidate the Naga rebels'. Because of this … [H]e immediately withdrew his membership from the Peace Mission just after the first meeting with the Indian Prime Minister on the ground that the federal leaders had no confidence in him. It was in February 1966 (Ao 2002: 84).

Did Jayaprakash Narayan's resignation from the Peace Mission help improve the Indo-Naga situation? In fact, the conflict turned from bad to worse as the Peace Mission collapsed as a result of Rev. Scott's dismissal and the consecutive resignations of Narayan and Chaliha not of course on the same ground. The FGN leaders rejected any offer short of 'complete Independence and Sovereign Nagaland'. It was at this point that Naga underground was seriously afflicted by factionalism within its ranks. The change in NNC leadership also brought intertribal rivalry (particularly between the Angamis and the Semas) to the fore and triggered off a series of assassinations and murders organized by both sides. A revolutionary group called the Council of Naga People emerged in 1968 and the two factions indulged in fratricidal warfare throughout the 1970s.

Narayan perhaps knew that his resignation would not save the situation. But then what was at issue for him as a devout Gandhian was the loss of confidence and trust that he thought he had suffered in the eyes of the conflicting parties and he came to realize that it was absolutely immoral on his part to force him into the Mission even after the conflicting parties had expressed their reservations against him. He seemed to have preferred his identity as a moral person to his role as a peacemaker in the society. For him it was better to continue with the conflict and suffer it than impose a solution on the parties unwilling to accept his moral authority. While he considered this act of resignation as a prerequisite for establishing his identity as a moral person, in a heightened conflict situation like this his personal moralism did not

succeed in 'changing the hearts and minds' of either side and producing its exemplary effects that Gandhi would have expected of it. In the absence of any ripple effect that could have gone a long way in addressing—if not alleviating—the violent conflict, Narayan's intervention in the ultimate analysis turned out to be a tragedy.

If governing peace faces the ultimate destiny of murdering the moral person, for Jayaprakash Narayan however his survival as a moral person was much more important than establishing peace in Nagaland. It aptly points to the limit of governmental rationality—what it cannot achieve and fully appropriate, notwithstanding best of its efforts. The culture of peace as practised by Gandhi and his followers may have been part of our living tradition as they would argue, but that does not mean that it will be equally effective in influencing the official peace process.

Gandhi would have wanted this personal moralism to have been translated into a form of social power by way of inspiring and mobilizing masses of people around the moral principles that one stands for and seeks to embody in one's person. For Gandhi moral principles and the moral person—embodying them literally in one's person—are one and the same. But, what does one do when the moral acts of moral persons that are otherwise expected to turn 'life' into 'message' to others are unable to produce their desired effects in a society characterized by deadly and perpetual conflicts? Does this call for any public action and mass mobilization *in addition to* and not in lieu of the innumerable acts of setting forth examples before others that others are not apparently interested in appreciating, let alone following? Perhaps by the mid-1980s Jayaprakash Narayan too realized the importance of public action and mass mobilization when he became deeply involved in students' movements in Bihar. The second case study reflects on the dilemma of whether public action in the form of rural reconstruction opens up the possibility of governmentalization. Or in a completely different vein, does this call for an even more intense refocusing on one's person and sourcing the failure in eliciting the desired impact to one's own inadequacies and frailties as a moral person and subsequently 'cleansing' one's own self? The third case study proposes to dwell on this dilemma.

4.3.2 Governing Through Development

Other than the Kasturba Memorial Trust that acts with an expanding network, there are only a few leaders in Assam who subscribe to and have been working with the Gandhian theory and practice of peace building and conflict resolution. In 1962, in the wake of the China war, Vinoba Bhave recommended that Sarvodaya workers should prepare the people of the Northeast for facing the Chinese aggression with non-violent means. Responding to his call, such eminent Gandhian leaders as Rabindranath Upadhyay, Hem Bhai, Harish Bhai and Natwar Thakkar among others came to the region at a very young age and settled there. Upadhyay worked in the Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangha (TAGS) at Kumarikata in the Baksa district of Assam for about five decades.

The aftermath of the China war in 1962 left a deep scar in the minds of the people of the region. They felt alienated and demoralized particularly when they had listened to what is now known as Nehru's 'farewell speech' to the people of Assam. As Chinese troops marched through Bomdila and were about to reach Tezpur in upper Assam, Nehru—then the prime minister of India—apprehending the imminent fall of what then was known as undivided Assam literally bode 'farewell' in one of his addresses to the people of the Northeast. The fear that the people of this region are vulnerable to such attacks from across the borders and will be left in the lurch without any help and assistance from the Indian State, in case such attacks take place in future, continues to grip the minds of various cross-sections of people even in the new millennium (Das 2002: 108–127). The All India Shanti Sena Mandal—the brigade without arms—was formed a week after the war had begun—with Jayaprakash Narayan as the president and Narayan Desai as the secretary in order to address and alleviate this deeply rooted feeling of alienation.

Gandhi stipulated the preemption of violence as the main task of the Shanti Sena. The duty of the Sena (peace soldier), as he would argue, is to bring the plight of the poor to the notice of the rich (in order to win their sympathy so that they would voluntarily want to do something to alleviate it), to provide personal service to the sick, to try to increase productivity in the village and arrange for education so that the root causes of violence are eliminated. But once violence breaks out, their task will be to contain it and extinguish the flame. While for Jayaprakash combating and containment of violence through active resistance is the key to peacebuilding and peacekeeping, Vinoba underlined the importance of self-sacrifice on the part of the Sena members with love in their hearts, and a readiness to lay down their lives, if necessary. Unlike that of Jayaprakash, most of Vinoba's attention was focused on peace building through personal moralism to the point of expressing individual dissent and spiritual awakening, with Shanti Sena being one of the chief instruments to achieve this.[14]

Upadhyay along with nine other volunteers came to Assam in 1962 at the age of 39 years to organize Sena work. Their initial task was to travel from one village to another in this strategic area bordering some not-so-friendly countries and train the villagers in peace. They also spoke of other Gandhian principles like Gram Swaraj, non-violent resistance, national security and the need for Gramdan—all considered as indispensable components of peace building in the region.

Upadhyay set forth the three-pronged agenda of *gramdan* for democracy, *khadi* for development, and Shanti Sena for defence ('GKS for 3 Ds'). He was vested with the responsibility of forming the Shanti Sena in Assam. He based his activities in Kumarikata—a small, non-descript *mauza* situated in the village of Bahbari under the Tamulpur subdivision of Baska district bordering Bhutan—that now comes under the jurisdiction of the newly formed Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD). The primary objective of Shanti Sena activities

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[14] The difference in accent has been discussed in Weber (2006).

here was to promote friendship and cooperation amongst the people of various groups and communities. Under his leadership, TAGS has been carrying out a variety of constructive activities during the last 50 years.

Upadhyay is popular for his famous Angarkata Satyagraha. Angarkata is the name of a cluster of villages near Kumarikata and it used to be a traditional grazing reserve. The area of the reserve is about 12,000 bighas, or 2,400 acres. Hindu refugees and Santhal and Hajong tribals from erstwhile East Pakistan after the Partition of 1947 and because of increasing population pressure on land plains tribals like the Bodos, the Kacharis and the Oraons along with Nepali cattle-raisers have been encroaching on the land. Matters came to a head when the Government of Assam made several attempts at evicting people who were otherwise poor and solely dependent on grazing as a means of their livelihood. It was in March 1967 that elephants were brought in, to demolish their huts. However, the people who had collected in thousands under the leadership of Upadhyay stood undeterred and government personnel were forced to back out. The last attempt made in December 1968 was similarly foiled through non-violent resistance. Now that they reside in the area without any interruption, they are treated as de facto permanent settlers with no further eviction attempt carried out since 1968. In a sense the success of this satyagraha emboldened the people and added to his popularity.

The formation of Mahila Shanti Sena (women's peace corps) set up in 2001 may be considered as a significant contribution to the region's peace arsenal. The Mahila Shanti Sena of Kumarikata presently has the formidable strength of 700 women workers and urges on the peace soldiers not to discriminate between people on the basis of caste, region, religion, ethnicity or gender etc. The Rapid Action Force (RAF) created from amongst the members of the Mahila Shanti Sena is aimed at instantly responding to any form of violence that might break out notwithstanding the attempts at eliminating its root causes. Wherever there is information of any possible surfacing of tension on the basis of caste, religion or ethnicity, the RAF immediately takes steps to diffuse it. If violence has already broken out, it tries to reach the site immediately and prevent it from spreading out to the neighbouring areas. Information gathering is an integral part of this exercise. For this, the Sena takes the help of the local women who are not necessarily its members. If the tension is too severe to be tackled by the local unit, it is obliged to immediately report to the higher ones.

The activities of the Mahila Shanti Sena are ideally suited for addressing the post-conflict situation whether by healing and spreading the message of goodwill and peace to the traumatized villagers or by providing relief and rehabilitation to the victims or a combination of them. Thus, the victims of the Nellie massacre were provided relief by TAGS during the tumultuous days of 1983. More recently, TAGS has provided relief to the victims of ethnic violence that broke out between the Santhals and the Bodos of the nearby Kokrajhar district. As the clashes broke out between the Assamese and the Bihari (Hindi-speaking) communities in 2004 in upper Assam, the Mahila Shanti Sena marched through the roads of Kumarikata and neighbouring areas, carrying banners and spreading the massage of peace

across the communities with a view to prevent violence from engulfing its operational areas in lower Assam. It plays a key role in the area by volunteering to work for peace building and resistance to violence in the neighbourhood.

Unlike the Peace Mission intervention, the activities of the TAGS are of more enduring nature. Gandhian initiatives could not survive the dissolution of the Peace Mission. Jayaprakash completely withdrew from the scene and violence reached a new high with the collapse of the Peace Mission. On the other hand, the TAGS's emphasis on initiating development at the rural level is primarily meant for making its peace building activities sustainable. Economic development whether by establishing a common granary (*poonji*) that one can draw on at the time of severe food crisis against a nominal service charge in kind or by generating rural employment or both is central to the constructive programmes that it initiates and undertakes. Heavily indebted persons whose land has been mortgaged are provided with easy loan for freeing their land from the hands of the private moneylenders. The Mahila Shanti Sena has also taken an active role in setting up self-help groups (SHGs), and so far 97 such groups have reportedly been set up.

In spite of all its activities, the role of the Shanti Sena of Kumarikata is obviously of very limited nature. For one thing, its activities have understandably failed in preempting conflicts and violence. Although located in lower Assam and forming part of the Bodo Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) jurisdiction—the flashpoint of many an ethnic conflict in Assam that is still simmering and has so far taken a toll of more than 80 human lives—its role in arresting successive rounds of acute violence is, to say the least, only limited. Notwithstanding the across-the-community ties that it could successfully build and establish at the local level, these ties have understandably very little bearing on the macro-dynamics of conflict and violence in the ever-volatile BTAD area. For another, although it is seen to be involved in significant relief operations once the ember of violence dies down and its contribution in this regard can hardly be exaggerated, its work in the field of permanent rehabilitation by way of settling those who have been displaced by ethnic conflicts and violence has been considerably restricted—given the limited resources that it has at its disposal.

Governance nowadays consists essentially in depoliticizing peace building exercises and trumping them up by developmental activities. As we have already noted, developmentalism—more than development—is also a syndrome that creates in people across the board the illimitable desire for more of it and therefore is taken as politically neutral. In simple terms, these local level interventions—significant though they are in their own ways—do not necessarily add up to constitute a macro-level intervention for peace in the state as a whole or even in lower Assam—its primary area of operation. The cycle of violence in lower Assam erupts and subsides with alarming regularity independently of whatever the Shanti Sena thinks and does. Thus, Bhuyan's comment that "… the Kumarikata project is a glaring example of how disputes can be resolved in a non-violent way, generating social capital across groups and communities" (Bhuyan 2006: 22) is to be taken with great care. One must keep in mind that the 'disputes' it resolves are only local ones and the 'social capital' that it generates has virtually little or no impact on the

official peace process organized or conducted at the state or regional level.[15] While the TAGS has bartered peace away for development, developmentalism does not seem to hold the key to peace. Development that was initially perceived by the TAGS as a gateway to peace has now become an end in itself and is zealously pursued even at the expense of peace. Insofar as TAGS has subjected its peace agenda to the imperatives of development, its role in peace-making and conflict resolution becomes severely limited.

4.3.3 Governing by Separation

Irom Sharmila's fast in Manipur has by now become legendary. Her decision to go on indefinite fast since 2 November 2000 followed what is now known as 'the Malom Massacre' referring to the killing of 10 unarmed civilians while waiting at a village bus stop in Malom allegedly by the Assam Rifles personnel. She was a standing witness to the entire incident.

It may be interesting to see how her protest against a massacre occurring in a small hamlet that many of us have not even heard of was translated into her lonely, yet resolute battle against the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA) that has been in force in different parts of Manipur since 1980. Massacres of this nature are neither new nor unprecedented in the Northeast and take place with impunity thanks to this Act. For, the Act vests the armed forces personnel including the non-commissioned officers with the unlimited power of opening fire on civilians to the point of causing their death and grants final impunity to them. It, in other words, gives the armed forces almost a free run in areas wherever it is enforced. Article 4(a) of the Act, for example, states:

> Any commissioned officer, warrant officer, non-commissioned officer or any other person of equivalent rank in the armed forces may, in a disturbed area—if he is of opinion that it is necessary to do so for the maintenance of public order, after giving such due warning as he may consider necessary fire upon or otherwise use force, even to the causing of death, against any person who is acting in contravention of any law or order for the time being in force in the disturbed area prohibiting the assembly of five or more persons or the carrying of weapons or of things capable of being used as weapons or of fire-arms, ammunition or explosive substances.

Article 6 keeps such acts from the purview of judicial scrutiny—except in certain circumstances:

> No prosecution, suit or other legal proceeding shall be instituted, except with the previous sanction of the Central Government, against any person in respect of anything done or purported to be done in exercise of the powers conferred by this Act.

While Sharmila's early socialization and human rights background led her to take this course of action, Gandhism—as she confesses in many of her

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[15] For further exploration into the divergence between the official and non-official peace processes, see Das (2007).

interviews—provided her with the ultimate resolve and strong moral force by lending to her protest its distinct form and character. She is the youngest of the nine children of a family coming from the suburbs of Imphal. Her personality and spiritual outlook shaped through her daily reading of *The Gita* and practice of yoga and her human rights activism in the light of her long association with the human rights movement (she participated in the Justice Suresh public tribunal in Imphal in October 2000) and her direct experience of the plight and trauma of Mrs. Mercie Kabui of Lamdan, who was reportedly raped in front of her father-in-law by the security forces—all this made her into a great fighter against the violations 'condoned' by the AFSPA. She decided to continue her fast unto death and was prepared for ending her life for the cause. At that time, she was only 28 years.

All this began without much ado immediately after the 'Malom massacre'. She took the decision on her own, and sought her mother's blessings without revealing her intentions, reportedly saying: "Ima (mom, the author), I am going to do something for the whole nation…" Her mother gave her blessings with the tacit understanding that she would not meet her daughter till the vow is fulfilled. Sharmila evidently has the nerves of steel. As she maintains in one of her interviews: "When the Armed Forces Special Powers Act is withdrawn, I will eat. I will break my fast by eating rice gruel from my mother's hands." The Act, according to her, symbolizes the death of democracy and freedom. Life without the moral principles of democracy and freedom remaining in force, as she maintains, is not a life worth living for.

The State does not treat Sharmila's fast as a lawful act and has arrested her on the charge of attempting to commit suicide under Article 309 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Although during most of the past decade she has been in judicial custody, a section of security establishment recommends tougher action by way of sending her to jail for having committed a heinous 'crime' in violation of law. The State keeps her alive by force-feeding her through a painful process of intubation; but has so far refused to respond to the issues she has raised by way of resorting to indefinite fast.

Most importantly, Sharmila explicitly invokes Gandhi in course of her protest: when she was brought to Delhi in October 2006, she went straight to Gandhi's Samadhi at Rajghat, and paid her homage. She subsequently proceeded to Jantar Mantar, Delhi's famous site for staging *dharna* (public protest). Her fast bears out twofold significance for Gandhian theory and practice: At one level, it reflects her strong personal resolve and unwavering moral commitment to what she perceives as the absolute and completely non-negotiable principles of our collective existence. Democracy and freedom, she believes, represent two such core moral values. It is true that she looks upon herself as part of a larger whole—the collectivity that she calls the 'nation'[16] and is willing to undergo any form of suffering in the interest of this larger body without of course harbouring any expectation that other members will follow suit and what she calls the 'nation' will instantly rally behind her cause en masse. As she has reportedly pointed out: "… How shall I explain it,

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[16] Her invocation of the term 'nation' is problematic. It does not necessarily refer to the 'Indian' nation.

we all come here with a task to do. And we come here alone." Years before Sharmila has made this observation, Jayaprakash Narayan too realized the tragically personal nature of our ethical and moral commitment while tendering his resignation from the Peace Mission. In other words, her fight for what she considers as 'truth' will not stop till she succeeds in winning the hearts and minds of her adversary. The fight for truth, as Gandhi postulated, can be excruciatingly lonely—but lonely sufferance even to the point of embracing death while attempting to vindicate truth does not take away from the 'truth' its truthfulness. It is fight that one simply cannot afford to lose. That the State is yet to be persuaded by the fight that she has undertaken all by herself only reflects that she is an unworthy communicator of the truth—the moral principles of democracy and freedom—that she fights for. It only steels her resolve, leads her to further introspect, turn it on her and discover what goes wrong with her own self. Thus begins an endless journey into one's self. As she puts it: "I have not succeeded so far in my aim. It means that I have to purify myself. God is experimenting with me… I have to cleanse myself first." Cleansing as a technology of self is meant for continuously perfecting oneself till one proves to be a worthy medium of the message of truth.

At another level, she seems to deploy her body as a mode of protest by way of deliberately depriving it of the essential means of sustenance and wherewithal. The body that needs regular feeding and upkeep is subjected to illimitable sufferance by an act of sheer will, which militates against the universal human nature and our survival instinct. As Mehrotra (2010: 10) observes: "She speaks out resistance, literally through every pore of her being". This calls for a certain recoding of the body, pressing into the service of yet a new and higher self that can transcend the sufferance without any visible trace of pain marked on the body. Thus the suffering body is transcreated into a new self—a self that is also in blissful command of the body. The body does not pull the self down by way of compelling it to perform the daily ritual of feeding it and providing it with the means of its survival. The self is freed from the obligation of bearing the body. The self instead lifts it up by way of redefining its rules of survival.

One of the eight *vrata*s (vows) that Gandhi has identified for cleansing or self-purification is *aswad* or exercising control over one's palate. Irom Sharmila's fast is an exercise in *aswad*—depriving the body of food—the essential means of its sustenance. These *vrata*s, as Gandhi tells us, are closely interlinked: Insofar as she abstains from food she overcomes the fear from physical harm or death. One's triumph over starvation also signifies one's conquest over death or more aptly the fear of death. The *vrata* of fearlessness or *abhaya* is only complementary to *aswad*. As Sharmila puts it: "I do have hope. My stand is for the sake of truth, and I believe truth succeeds eventually. God gives me courage. That is why I am still alive through these artificial means …" In an interview taken about five years ago, Sharmila emphatically argues that what she was doing was certainly not like committing slow and prolonged suicide, but an active protest that cannot be cowed down by the threat of imminent death constantly lurking behind her. In simple terms, this is an indefinite fast that is not waiting for death, but celebrates a form of life worth living for, a life that also establishes the twin moral principle of democracy and freedom. Gandhi believes that while one's 'inner voice' tells one to follow the truth and fight for it, one

cannot be afraid of the adverse consequences that follow upon one's albeit solitary fight for it. In following her 'inner voice', she becomes an 'outlaw' in the eyes of the prevailing law and that is why she is under 'judicial custody' and is force-fed through an artificial process. While the authorities treat her fast as an infringement of law, she perceives AFSPA to have infringed the higher law of democracy and freedom.

After she began her fast, thousands of citizens, women's groups and human rights activists expressed their solidarity with her cause; many of whom had been struggling against AFSPA for years. The National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), a network of over 200-odd movement groups in India, led by Medha Patkar has extended support to her cause. In March 2007, the United Nations Committee for Elimination of Racial Discrimination pleaded that the "draconian" legislation of 1958 be replaced with "a more humane act". The United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) has noted that AFSPA is not in consonance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) that India has ratified back in 1979. In May 2007, citizens of Gwangju, South Korea, conferred the award of Gwangju Human Rights Award on her. She used the prize money to set up a foundation for peace-building work, called 'Just Peace Foundation'. At the local level, along with Meira Paibis[17] and Apunba Lup, a network of 32 civil society organizations, Irom Sharmila is at the centre of people's movements for peace and justice in contemporary India. On 10 December 2008, celebrated as International Human Rights Day, the women of Manipur began a continuous relay hunger strike in Imphal, rallying around the slogan, 'Save Sharmila, Repeal AFSPA', coordinated by the Sharmila Kanba Lup (Save Sharmila campaign).

On 10 March 2009, a delegation submitted a memorandum to the Governor of Manipur demanding that Sharmila's life be saved, AFSPA repealed, and peace and harmony returned to the state. Ima Janaki, Convenor of Sharmila Kanba Lup, announced that along with the continuation of the relay hunger strike, their movement would be intensified with street corner meetings, posters and pamphlets. The demand for removal of AFSPA from Manipur was broadened to include its removal from the entire Northeast. Every day 30–50 women reportedly fast at the site, the PDA Complex, Porampat, near Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital where Irom Sharmila is housed. The women come from different places of Manipur. This is a symbolic demonstration of public opinion, and united action by thousands of peace-loving citizens and human rights activists. On 4 November 2009, marking the beginning of the tenth year of Irom Sharmila's fast, hundreds of sympathizers gathered at the site included writer Mahashweta Devi from West Bengal, lawyer-activist Dayabai from Madhya Pradesh, Father Augustine from Kerala, filmmaker Kavita Joshi from New Delhi and many others.

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[17] Meira Paibis literally meaning the torch bearers refer to the women's groups exercising vigilance over their localities and neighbourhoods against alcoholism, army atrocities and other social and political vices etc., and marching through the streets at night with torches in their hands.

According to Mehrotra, Sharmila's fast was successful in creating a public uproar against the Act and "helped people acquire more confidence, feeling that perhaps they, too, can speak" (Mehrotra 2010: 227). While at one level this assessment might be true, Sharmila's fast has so far very limited impact precisely on two counts: One, those who have so far supported and sympathized with her cause happen to be *the already converted* human rights community. Apart from strengthening the resolve and trying to convert the already converted, it could hardly cut any ice across the rivaling ethnic communities and nationalities of the region. In simple terms, it could hardly consolidate the protests of the Nagas and the Meiteis and other groups and communities of the region and brought them together under one common human rights platform against an otherwise draconian legislation. Over the past few decades, virtually every ethnic group has developed its women's organization—Naga Mothers' Association, Kuki Women's Association, Lamkang Women's Union, Mayan Women's Union, Chothe Women's Union, Tangkhul Shanao Long, and so on. These groups are considered as active guardians of their respective communities and campaigners of their women's rights. Notwithstanding all this, there was hardly any concerted challenge to the AFSPA. Interethnic rivalries and hostilities continue to mark the region.

Two, the Indian State has hitherto remained unfazed and unmoved by Sharmila's fast and any of the demonstrations of solidarity organized in her favour. Justice Jeevan Reddy Commission that the Government of India instituted in the aftermath of the brutal murder and killing of Thangjam Manorama and 12 women baring themselves and protesting against the atrocities of the 17 Assam Rifles in front of the Kangla Fort in Imphal unanimously recommended for the repeal of this Act. But nothing has happened so far and even the report is yet to be tabled in Parliament. In the words of Arambam Lokendra: "These sacrifices and incidents of fatalistic activism was (sic) a reaction to the sheer intensity and ferocity of state violence over its citizenry, which provoked unusual, extreme responses from individuals and groups" (Lokendra 2002: 362). Irom Sharmila's example shows the tragic ineffectuality of the struggle for democracy and freedom through Gandhian means. It could not melt the heart of the State during the last 10 years. In effect, her protest and the state's counterinsurgency measures run in two parallel trajectories. The deadly play with the body has been turned into a public spectacle allowed to draw crowds of sympathizers, but never to influence policies—an object of government by way of neatly separating it from the policymaking process.

4.4   Concluding Observations

Although catalysed by the leaders and practitioners of Gandhism—these three interventions mentioned above have limited impact mainly because (a) they thought that they had been suffering from trust deficit and lost the moral authority to mediate in the eyes of the conflicting parties; (b) their interventions remained

too local to have been able to arrest the alarmingly regular cycles of violence even in their core operational area and made little impact whether on the macro-configurations of conflicts or on the official peace process and (c) even visible and prolonged self-sufferance of the extreme form fails in evoking the kind of response that it was expected to from the bulk of the society outside the human rights community and from the State. All these three interventions, in other words, met so far with very little success.

Success per se, for Gandhi, is no measure of moral action and intervention. But, there is no denying that interventions described in the above three case studies failed in breaking the cycle of violence in Nagaland, the BTAD and Manipur, respectively. Eminent Gandhians like Jayaprakash Narayan and Bimala Prasad Chaliha walked away from Peace Mission on the ground that they thought they had lost trust reposed on them by the conflicting parties. Individual interventions were called off on moral grounds. By contrast, the case of the TAGS in Kumarikata is instructive in this respect. For, it was at least successful in making its intervention long and enduring by nature. But, it too turned out to be ineffective insofar as it remained too local to arrest the conflicts whether between the Bodos and the Santhals or between the Bodos and the Rajbangshis, or between the Bodos and the Muslims so on and so forth. Its interventions remained by and large post-conflict in character. Besides, its role as a civil society actor in building peace was never acknowledged in the officially conducted peace process with the Bodos. Eventually, its accent on development turned its focus away from peace-building. The sufferance of Irom Sharmila in Manipur had the effect of converting the already converted within the human rights community and made little impact on the mainstream Indian society and the Indian State.

As we have already seen, peace-making per se is incapable of establishing the moral principles of rights, justice and democracy, and often necessitates the death of the moral person. A devout Gandhian like Jayaprakash Narayan, however, would better live as a moral person than strive for establishing peace in the Northeast at any cost. The collapse of the Peace Mission exposed Nagaland to fresh rounds of violence the effects of which continue to linger till today. Like an equally staunch Gandhian and true to the tradition of Jayaprakash Narayan, Irom Sharmila's legendary fast reflects her uncompromising stand when it comes to the question of observance of moral principles. The State in the latter has been by and large successful in quarantining her protest and keeping it confined to a select human rights constituency without allowing it to leave any mark on the counterinsurgency measures that it chooses to adopt and employ. Thus policies and protests run along two parallel streams—each distinct and distinguishable from the other. While the first symbolizes the refusal on the part of a moral person to be inserted into the grids of governance and in a sense therefore the failure of governance, the second underlines a mix of counterinsurgency policies and protests that turn out to be mutually 'convenient' to one and all—the State that does not feel threatened by the now routinized fast, the human rights community that is never prevented from expressing sympathy with it, the rebels who find in her a public spectacle to remind people of the wrongs that they have been fighting against, the general

people who suffer the wrongs and so forth. As I have argued, even a fast that implies a deadly game with human body turns into an object of government and hence part of the governmental rationality. The TAGS experience in Kumarikata, on the other hand, points out how governmentalization redefines—if not displaces—the peace agenda, by way of shifting the focus to rural reconstruction. Its experiments with rural reconstruction—successful as they have been in addressing poverty and hunger—do not seem to have any visible role in building peace in an otherwise turbulent region—let alone preempting conflicts. In this case, experiments with rural reconstruction and conflicts of extraordinarily violent nature run parallel to each other. Governing culture calls for boxing each of them—protest and policy, conflict at the macro-level and village reconstruction at the local level within its limits without seriously affecting each other. Insofar as culture of peace is sought to be governed albeit with a varying degree of success, peace and conflict work in tandem while weaving and casting the intricate web of governmentality across the society.

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