

EDITORIAL

Conflict in South Asia: Causes and Consequences

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Conflict can be looked at as a natural/normal process of evolutionary history, be it in the non-human or human realms of the natural habitats of the planet earth. The book *Psychodarwinism* (Christopher Badcock, 1994) in many ways outlines the kinds of conflict generated tensions that give rise to the progression of life itself on the planet. This region specific analysis of the conflict vs peace processes has a history and has a future, be it in terms of the past impinging on the present or in terms of the present remolding the past as the ongoing narratives, meta-narratives and cross-narratives manifest.

The conceptual clarification of the conflict ridden decade and more of the south Asian reality as intended in the conceptualization of the seminar itself created a tussle between the notions of 'consequences' and 'implications.' It was intended to be understood as the 'cost factor' and the 'penalty factor' of a happening. In turn, as these get reported, there emerge insinuations, allusions, and further repercussions of the happening. The underlying tension has been partly resolved in re-conceptualizing the title as 'causes and consequences' of the conflict situations in the region. In other

words, to 'whatever is', or, 'whatever could be' there are causes and consequences: things that bring about the situation to be what it is; the net outcome of the fact or situations leading to something different from what things are and where they are; sometimes, it could even be by inaction - by sheer dint of entropy or atrophy.

In today's ideological warfare for the battleground itself, there is a conflict: the definition of the past and its role for the future is wherein this conflict is couched. Do we define the past with the understanding modernity has provided us, or interpret the modernity itself as an aberration of the inability to retain the past and its heritage. This binarising of the east-west, modernity-tradition dynamics of knowledge itself is a 'site of conflict'. Resolving it in either way does not offer the solution, but gives room for the conflict to persist. Instead we need to look for a synchronic view of the process and discover the simultaneity of the process itself. It is necessitated by the fact there were aspirations for modernity within the cultural past, and equally, one could see within the recovery of the very same cultural heritage at its best the promise of a new modernity itself. The definition of the future as spatial conceptualization of the present in terms of a globalizing monolith versus the narrow cultural-nationalist hegemonies making a return in sinister ways are the non-options, to be thwarted.

In the region of Assam where the seminar took place, of which the outcome are the articles of this issue, the arrival of the Ahoms as dominant powers in a way side stepped the hill chiefs attempts to make inroads into the plains. This dynamics was replicated with the arrival of the colonial agents in terms of land acquisitions for the developmental projects - be it tea gardens for an industry, railways for a spatial, mobility and communication enhancing network, or, missioning for education as a means to transform an inheritance based (ascriptive) society into a semblance of appreciation for the acquisition (subscriptive) model of society it could become. These ventures had the 'intent-to-civilize' ideologies supplying the motivational force and justifying the expansionist strategies. These business and ideology combined interventions for the land settlements probably sowed the seeds of the conflicts that play out

even today. The business related relocation of populations from central India into the plains of Assam, with the negation of their right to be named as indigenous people (ST) also sowed the seeds of dissent and discontent, persisting to date. Similarly, the migrants or labour force welcomed from the East Bengal (Bangladesh) plains simmers into the present with their citizenship under question.

Conflict is a perennial feature of nature and even human relationships. The psychodarwinist view, as mentioned earlier, of the process of evolution would bring home the truth that new life emerges as a result of systemic internal conflict. The mother's survival versus the survival of the newborn taking shape in her womb is an example. The self destruction of ant colonies when the number increases beyond sustainability is another example. The differences in the character of siblings in a family is yet another example. The issue in hand looks at some of these conflict situations and their histories from diverse angles with an intent to understand deeper the layers and strands that make up the South Asian reality of contemporary times.

The Naga armed conflict is one of the oldest conflicts in the world. Dominic Khanyo, in the opening chapter, revisits its history and looks for possible ways to bring it to an end. The pre-colonial to colonial and post colonial transition of a polity and its consequences are very visibly manifested in the case of the Naga peoples identity and state formation issues. The aspirations of people have been subjugated for the sake of national or pan national interests and the tribes and peoples in their care have not been satisfactorily contained or made to understand the advantages of being part of a larger nation of people. The article delineates the history of this conflict, the nuanced and meandered stages it has gone through, and, proposes a possible solution within the constitutional frame, while keeping the Naga demands for an extra constitutional status in mind.

Konsam Jenny's paper is a timely reminder of the dangers lurking in the human-nature relationship that has traversed a long way from the pre-modern to the post colonial times. She brings out

succinctly the contrast between an international market in search of exotic food and an indigenous market that has by custom and necessity relied on the bush meat (wild life). Both expressions of human consumption, necessity based as well as luxurious, pose a threat to a number of wild animals across the world. This contrast in the legal provision, restricting on the one hand and being encouraged as part of the local customary laws on the other, making agents act due to and in spite of the legal measures in place is what she poses as a paradox in the paper.

Romana Lepcha takes on the trafficking of children in south Asia, especially between India and Nepal and looks at the prevailing legal provisions to contain them through more effective measures of execution or implementation of the legal provisions. A porous border coupled with unequal development on either side draws the vulnerable citizens into the nets of the illegal trafficker. Those attempting to rescue them need to be empowered and strongly supported in a more concerted manner by the state through legal provisions and stringent implementation of prevailing laws is the suggestion.

Tiatula Ozukam reiterates forcefully the well known fact that learning requires a conducive and peaceful atmosphere. She achieves this through a contextual interview based narration of how a conflict zone became a counterproductive ambience for genuine learning. Yet under the narrations of pain and fear, anxiety and anger there is a hidden will that turns towards solution and better focus of life within individuals and communities.

Luhish Lushai in his study of the historical novel deals with the ability of fictionalizing history as a tool to heal memories of hurt and pain not only for the author but the reader as well. A virtual reliving of the past and the multiple voices that are recorded offers the possibility of 'telling the truths' that were once subjugated. Retelling and narrating anew in a new literary mold helps overcome the stranglehold of fear. It helps recover from the trauma of the past living on as memory. Though the descriptions could have been

more elaborate he does make the point that healing does effect through retelling.

Saket Bhardwaj and Uttam Pegu carry forward the above issue of dealing with human trafficking by suggesting a proactive role on the part of media substantiating and building on the state initiatives in this regard. Mitigating the problem calls for an understanding of the causes on the one hand and identifying the agents who can meaningfully and critically intervene to ameliorate the problem. It calls for a micro level study of the nuanced aspects of the issue in any given context, where it is prevalent as in the case of Sontipur in Assam Tea Garden district and its surrounds. The study has a significant contribution by way of localized knowledge being disseminated for the benefit of the policy makers as well as activists and local institutions.

The relationship between drinking water availability, cleanliness of toilets and the learning environment in schools has been brought together by Salomy and Leander in their study on the Golaghat District of Assam. The Governmental initiative to improve the quality of schools through 'Gunotsav' and the NGOs in the region coming forward to estimate the impact of Swatch Bharat Abhiyan provides the immediate backdrop to this paper. Relying on the available census data, and the survey outcome on the quality and extent of water available, toilets in schools, the awareness campaign by the SBA in the schools the study makes an assessment of the impact these have had in the adjoining villages. This study is significant in terms of the reach the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals have had in the district, but provides a statement on the prevailing mentality with regard to health and hygiene, education and wellbeing. The findings provide impetus for further concerted action in one of the most resource rich State and yet having a high percentage of poor people, especially in the Tea Garden districts.

The Rohingya 'debacle' as Uttam Pegu and Subhajit Paul calls the refugee crisis is the most glaring conflict situation South (East)

Asia witnessed in the recent decade. The article deals with the legal options that India has conveniently taken to stay away and not commit itself. This distancing is being critically viewed by the authors as not in keeping with the hegemonic aspirations of India in Asia and the world. The state reaching out to non-state or stateless people shows the extent of soft power and hard muscle that a nation is willing to put forward to further its own cause as well as genuinely care for those in difficult situation as to mitigate the crisis from escalating.

The author of the final piece in this issue carries with him the authority of having been a grassroots peace activist for over 4 decades and his own analysis of the broader flow and ebb of civilizations and cultures, kingdoms and nations. This authority of a moral perspective on the issue of conflict and invitation to peace through dialogue and sense of belonging is where we would intend to leave the reader of this issue. The invitation as extended by Menampambil is to be a part of the 'think tank' for the preservation of peace on the planet earth, beginning from the site where one is located.