Premises of Peace building and Governance Structures in India
(With particular reference to the Northeast and Bihar)

Ranabir Samaddar
Calcutta Research Group
ranabir@mcrg.ac.in

1. The political premises of peace building in India are (a) the state is strong, and administrative and police measures work; (b) therefore conflicts may be allowed to linger; (c) suitable time must arrive before peace building measures are initiated; (d) the adversary of the state must be softened up enough through a mix of strong responses and almost deliberate delay in addressing demands; (e) peace accords work; (f) limited grant of autonomy is the best solution; (g) upholding constitutionalism and rule of law is the main plank to retain stability; (f) faith in the effectiveness of a policy of territorial reorganisation including methods of partition and boundary-making exercises towards reinforcing control; (g) and finally the classic governmental assumption that struggles for justice are in essence inter-group conflict for parity. These are assumptions for the operation of post-colonial governmentality as a mode of managing conflicts. Premises and processes are mixed. In fact we should not look too much for premises, that is, in originary motives or moments, but examine processes closely.

2. Equally significant are the colonial foundations building up such premises. The colonial history of peacekeeping, pacification (colonial origins of extra-ordinary legislations), limited franchise, techniques of negotiations, divide and rule, borders and boundary-making exercises, and finally constitutionalism (recall the history of Morley Minto Reforms to 1935 Act) tells us the premises of peace building. We have inherited a colonial constitutional culture that does not mitigate conflicts or encourages dialogues, but gives a long rope to arbitrariness. Equally this colonial history tells us how the lessons of managing Irish dissent was implement in India by colonial officials, and vice versa; similarly Indian lessons in the colonial era were taken to rule Kenya.

3. The post-colonial governance structures are built on these premises. Also the processes of governance carry a logic of their own, which exacerbates the division between those who rule and those who are ruled. In this situation, available forms of self-government (franchise, limited autonomy, decentralisation, public hearings, etc.) also become sites of contentions and the next round of the perennial conflict between those who govern and those who are governed.

4. One of the chief casualties of this style of governance is the dialogic culture of society. The Indian society, like all societies, has dialogic aspects of its culture of conflict resolution. However these dialogic aspects are not institutionalised in governance structures, or are to only limited extent. If we take up the need for legal pluralism (say in matters of common property resources or uniform civil code), we can see the need for research in this field in the interests of conflict resolution. Society needs legal pluralism, while the governmental recipe may be PESA with regard to CPR. Or, let us take the theme of peace accords, one of main features of the conflict resolution scenario in India, which form the middle ground in a no-war-no-peace situation. These sites of dialogues need to be thoroughly investigated. Also we need to study how peace accords become a part of governing tool. It is the other of what Charles Tilly had said, namely "war making as part of state making exercise". Here on the contrary we have to see, how peace making becomes the other part of state making agenda.

5. Given this background, we can see how for instance in Bihar over the years issues of land, migration, floods, access to natural resources, caste domination, indigenous people's rights – all these that have produced conflicts have been handled. Likewise, one has to see how these ways of managing conflicts have given rise to the next round of conflicts. We can trace the history of conflict in Bihar from the sixties onwards in this sort of *long duree* point of view and see phases of conflict as alternating scenarios of insurgency and pacification aided by various counter-insurgency methods. Elections, administration of caste relations and conflicts, deployment of private armies to quell insubordination are parts of this alternating scenario.

6. In the Northeast these assumptions become clearer. We may say that North East is the laboratory where counter-insurgency or pacification measures are first conceived, tested, and shaped. One can get a sense see of this by having an overview of the series of governing measures – territorial reorganisation, peace accord, limited autonomy, protracted ceasefire negotiations, regrouping of villages, extensive para-police volunteer force raising, privatisation, money laundering and deliberate measures to encourage corruption, elections at gunpoint, accompanied with rational modes of governance with expansion of banking, government offices with nothing to govern, recruitment in army and para-military services, ethnic management, anti-migrant measures, etc. With these one can say that Northeast has seen already two phases of insurgency and their "resolution". The first phase started in 1947 and ended roughly in 1975 with Shillong Accord. The second phase started roughly in 1979-80 (ULFA was born in 1979 and NSCN in 1980) when it began spreading in many places has now ended. The point to see will be: what were the governing measures that tackled these two phases of insurgency? And what comes after?

7. Once we examine these assumptions, the research agenda becomes clear. The research has to be then into the processes and structures of governance – *the science of governing conflicts*. In the development of this science there is a mix of global trends and local particularities. For instance, the policies of development aimed towards curbing social unrest are built around global models. Similarly restoration of government machinery has also a global model, though a huge failure globally. The discourse of anti-terrorism again is a global discourse. Even thirty years ago, governments used to acknowledge poverty, inequality, and injustice as causes of conflicts. Now all insurgents are terrorists, all agitators are enemies of development, and all dissenters are enemies of national integration. Visits of counter-insurgent experts are regular features. In this sense governance policies today carry the mark of globalisation of politics. Yet it is also true that civil societies network; they too learn from each other; rebellions too learn, and alternative policies of friendship too are a mark of time. We have in the sub-continent the case of Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Friendship (PIPFPD). But the fact is that the divide between the world of dialogues and that of rule is too much. Governments rarely learn from dissents.

8. This divide is as true of India as of Europe. There is in that sense, no classic "European" archetype, as possibly no "Indian" archetype. Diversity of conflicts and diversity of approaches (think of two different approaches to the Balkan problem and the Irish one in Europe, and the two different approaches to conflict with regard to Maoists and Hindu fundamentalists in India). Yet it is true that these diverse approaches finally feed into a grid of power exercising through what is known as "democratic channels". This is where we may find commonality, namely studying how democracy manages and governs conflicts.

9. In sum, the task for this workshop is to examine the assumptions by which a democracy faces conflicts. Democracy thinks that conflicts are alien to the spirit of democracy, and therefore they are inimical to democratic spirit. Neither can a democracy accept the fact that democracies can be violent nor can it accept the fact that democracy is always yet to come, that democracy must constantly aspire to be democratic. Thus nurtured in colonial mode, elections are held by applying violent methods, and the usual logic is that resistance to the so called representative system must be ill-intentioned. Thus all calls for a plebiscitary culture and for permanent dialogue are frowned upon and rejected (Recall therefore the arguments of Jayaprakash Narain and the time of Emergency). The assumptions are both cultural and political. These assumptions lead to a securitisation of democracy.

10. In clarifying the assumptions mentioned above and drawing the basic lessons there from I can see where I stopped in two of my previous works, hugely relevant for this programme, namely *A Biography of the Indian Nation, (1947-2000* (Sage, 2001) and *The Politics of Dialogue – Geopolitical Histories of War and Peace in South Asia* (Ashgate, 2004). There are other works equally important. We need a workshop of ideas on post-colonial governance and conflicts as a specific area of reflection.

11. Two of the relevant arguments I made in those two books are: First, the Indian nation is constantly mutating by changing forms, re-forming, and renewing. This is possible because of new inclusionary and exclusionary strategies. Second, Indian democracy is marked by a grey theme of no war no peace.   These two observations still hold true. But more importantly, these two features of the Indian situation suggest a necessary agenda for further research into conflict and governance.