

Call for papers on Role of Religion in Peace and Conflict Processes



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This is an invitation for papers.

Concept Note of the Seminar

Role of Religion in Peace and Conflict Processes in Northeast India

Organiser: North Eastern Social Research centre, Guwahati

15th - 16th November 2019

Venue: Seminar Hall, Jagriti 3rd floor

Religion occupies an important place in the life of human communities as a powerful constituent of cultural norms and values. Because it addresses profound existential issues of human life, it is deeply implicated in individual and social conceptions of peace. However, during the last few decades in India as a whole the main religions, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam have been playing an even more important role than in the past in people's day-to-day lives. In the popular mind some religious actors are commonly associated with extremism and conflict between communities. Many other dimensions and contributions of religion, in particular in relation to peace building processes, are less known, or may be misunderstood, if not entirely neglected. What is said of India as a whole is equally true of the Northeast. Nationalist struggles and ethnic conflicts around land, identity and political power are often given a religious interpretation as being initiated or supported by one religion or against another. This stand diverts attention from real issues.

It shows that religion can be used or mobilised to promote conflicts as well as peace. When there is a conflict in its name religion is rarely its principal cause but is only presented as such. In events such as the Sikh pogrom of 1984, the destruction of Babri Masjid and the communal riots that followed in 1992, the present phase of majoritarian nationalism and in other events, religion has only been used as a contributing factor. It will probably be used in conflicts also in the future. In the Northeast the Naga and Mizo nationalist struggles are presented both by its proponents and opponents as Christian-backed. The conflicts in Tripura and Manipur around land and identity are presented by some extremists as attacks on Hindus. In Arunachal Pradesh, the fundamentalist forces of the major religions are in competition to get adherents. In Assam the NRC that emerged from the urge to protect land and identity is being presented as a conflict caused by the influx of a certain religious group or as an effort to exclude them. The Citizenship Amendment is presented as an alternative. Some present the Mizo-Bru conflict around land and identity as a Buddhist-Christian conflict.

It shows that whether in its own right or as a proxy for political battles, religion can be instrumentalised or become a mask for violence that hides other political and economic interests. Within this context, a conversation around religion becomes a controversial subject. The focus today is on the divisive nature of religion. On the other side religious actors have also made attempts in peacemaking. This side of religions in conflicts is often ignored. Peacemakers have, therefore, to work within the political process but remain external to it. They operate on the margins during the initial stages of conflicts but later assume key roles in the political transition or sometimes have worked to exert pressure from the outside. The seminar aims to bring together the conflict aspect of religion that may be hiding other interests. Presentation can also discuss the reconciliatory part of religion and its use as a means for initiating a dialogue. Focus in discussion around conflicts has been on the divisive role of religion. The effort in the seminar can be on its role of bringing people together and of collaboration in the highly controversial religion-political arena.

We invite scholars and activists who work or are closely associated with religious institutions or those who are engaged in grass-roots organisations or mere citizens who want to express their views and opinions to present their views. We also invite people with stories of either being witnesses to conflicts or peace in relation to religion for a special story sharing session at the seminar. We invite papers on the following themes:

1. Conflicts around identity and other markers to which religion is linked
– Religion as a source of conflict
2. Religion and citizenship/nationalism – Identifying the citizen
3. Religion, peace building and faith-based grass-roots organisation

4. Religion, women's organisations and peace and conflict process

5. Religion as a means of dialogue

Apart from the suggested themes, the invitees may like to add some of their own. People interested in participating in the seminar may send their abstracts and/or stories they would like to share not later than 20th September and their papers by 20th October. Those who send their abstracts will be informed by 30th September whether they are accepted for presentation. The venue of the seminar is the seminar hall of Jagriti, 3rd floor.

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