

**National Seminar: Centralisation, Democracy and Dissent: The Role of the  
Media in Contestation and Reconciliation  
Organiser: North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati  
May 28-29, 2018**

There is a feeling among some analysts that a “one language, one religion, one culture” policy seems to guide the political class today. Such analysts also ask “do the mainstream media the world over tend to take sides in favour of one of the factions? Is much reporting conditioned by this bias?” They also feel that, a small minority of media persons express their dissent from this “mainstream” tendency and explore the possibility of using their journalistic skills for peace and reconciliation amid what looks like polarisation. Some may try to become direct peace journalists while others attempt to expose the vested interests behind social, political and economic conflicts. A few may find other means for peace with justice.

Is this binary true also of India today? Conflicts are not uncommon in the country. Some old conflicts are natural resource related such as the water war between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu or between Punjab and Haryana. A few of them are linked to social and economic power, for example the caste wars in Gujarat. In some cases old issues take new forms such as the fight for autonomy and identity in Jammu & Kashmir or Naxalism giving a new twist to resistance to land loss as in Chhattisgarh or struggle for resources that are already in short supply turning into ethnic conflicts in much of Northeast India. What happens when these issues get entwined with questions of identities of individuals, communities and even the Nation? What role do institutions of state and non-state power play in this scenario? How do media, journalists and social commentators negotiate this tightrope and contribute to shaping popular opinions?

Some media persons may join, reproduce and endorse the mainstream logic while some others may dissent from it. Do the actions of the media persons and houses, whatever their ideology, facilitate a debate on the issues at hand? That would be important for a democratic society. Attempts to suppress dissent in the media go against the democratic pillars of our society. What is the role of the media in our context today? How do certain individuals continue to forge ahead in their efforts to expose the wrong doings or work for reconciliation amid this chaos? What can we learn from their experiences?

This seminar tries to bring together media persons and a few other thinkers who are involved in a search for alternatives to conflicts emanating from it. Some of them have worked on issues around conflicts in the Northeast, some have tried to understand Naxalism or the situation in Jammu & Kashmir, some have been in the forefront of anti-communal stands, a few have been looking at the world from the side of the rural poor, dalits and tribals, or have been trying to understand the issues that result in nationalist struggles or ethnic conflicts. The e-newspapers that some of them run are testimony to their spirit of dissent and contestation of the “mainstream” effort of uniformity and suppression. The objective of the seminar is to provide a platform for the youth and peace activists of the Northeast to know more about the thinking of such persons and to encourage activism in favour of peace and pluralism in the Northeast as well as in other conflict regions of India.

We have suggested some themes. The invitees may like to add some of their own. They are requested to send by 20<sup>th</sup> March the theme on which they would like to write, get an abstract of their thinking ready by the end of March and by mid-May write a 5,000 word paper for publication. The paper may be revised later. The venue of the seminar to be held at Guwahati, will be notified later.

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North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati

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Seminar Moderator