NIAS Multi-disciplinary Debate

Conflict and Post Conflict Societies in South Asia

Defining “Peace”  
A Poli-so-phical Approach

An interaction with Dr SS Meenakshisundaram, Prof Narendar Pani and Prof Sangeetha Menon

International Strategic and Security Studies Programme (ISSSP)
As a part of its research activities, the ISSSP organised a multi-disciplinary debate on pursuing “peace” in conflict and post conflict societies in South Asia.

For the purpose of this debate, the issue was addressed through three disciplines—realism, social science and philosophy. Three scholars at the NIAS looked at the issue through these three prisms; the debate was well attended by scholars from different disciplines.

Prof D Suba Chandran, Professor, ISSSP coordinated the debate. Following is an excerpt of the debate, took place in June 2016.

Dr. SS Meenakshisundaram was a member of the Indian Administrative Service and had held numerous assignments including Secretary, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj department when Karnataka launched its new system of panchayatiraj institutions. He served as Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister of Karnataka and Joint Secretary to three Prime Ministers of India.

Prof Narendar Pani is an economist by training who takes a multidisciplinary approach to issues of Indian political economy. He has over the last three and a half decades held positions in academia and the media. His books include, ‘Inclusive economics: Gandhian method and contemporary policy’ (Sage, 2002); ‘Redefining Conservatism: An essay on the bias of India’s economic reform’ (Sage, 1994); and ‘Reforms to pre-empt change: Land legislation in Karnataka’ (Concept, 1983).

Prof Sangeetha Menon is a philosopher with keen interest in consciousness. Her major area of research is in philosophy of psychology. Her expertise is in Indian philosophy, consciousness studies, philosophy of psychology, philosophy and psychology of self. She works with her colleagues at NIAS and collaborators across the world in creating and encouraging a first-person centered approach to understanding consciousness and cognitive capabilities that favours experiential wellbeing for all.
Conflict and Post Conflict Societies in South Asia

Defining “Peace”
A Poli-so-philical Approach

The Institute held two discussions in June 2016 on issues relating to peace in conflict and post conflict societies in South Asia. On 1 June, as a part of its Wednesday discussion, it held a discussion titled, “Post Conflict Societies in South Asia: How peaceful is our peace?” and during 9-11 June, the ISSSP organised a decennial review of armed conflicts and peace audit in South Asia.

The above discussions at the NIAS, among other issues, have thrown a set of interesting questions relating to the definition of peace in conflict and post conflict societies:

- “What” is Peace, in terms of its nature and extent?
- “Whose” Peace it is?
- “Who” defines what peace is? Or who should define?
- While in conflict and post conflict societies, larger theoretical issues of peace have to be looked into, at the same time, certain pragmatic measures will have to be pursued. This raises another important question: Should “peace” be “political” or “philosophical”?
- Or, should peace be “Poli-so-philical” – a combination of political, societal and philosophical?

The Institute held a debate with Dr Meenakshisundaram, Prof Narendra Pani and Prof Sangeetha Menon as panelists. The debate took place at the NIAS auditorium on 23 June 2016 and well attended by its faculty and scholars outside.

Following is an excerpt of the debate, including the Questions and Answers
When I began my career in the IAS, I was supposed to be in charge of ensuring peace in my territory. We were so busy in maintaining peace that we never had the time to debate on what peace is. In the government there are tough postings and peace postings, however none of us ever tried to debate on what peace is. Now that I reflect on what is that we were trained to maintain, I find three things which we tried to do. The first is the peace at the individual level. Today we find that if you are dropped from the cabinet, you make a hue and cry which disturbs others’ peace as well as yours. Individual peace means that you are at peace with yourself irrespective of your environment. However the government is not concerned with this.

The next stage is the environment. You live in a society, do you maintain peace in that society?. This country is divided by religion, caste and even within them there are divisions. All kinds of misunderstanding between the sects also exist and are experienced by the society. When there was some conflict, it was settled using typical methods and equations. So, peace within a community would mean that everyone lives in harmony with others acknowledging the differences in their livelihoods and religious beliefs. Conflict occurs when there is a misunderstanding that goes beyond the tolerance limits. When there is a conflict the government gets in and applies two tools. One is force to reverse damage if any caused, the second is to organise a peace committee which is expected to bring about peace within the community.

Beyond the community is the state: there are inter-
state disputes. For instance, in the Cauvery dispute, when the Karnataka government ordered some amount of water to be released to Tamil Nadu, there were protests leading to violence particularly in the areas where there was a large population of Tamils living in Bengaluru. The problem got aggravated because of politics. Political disputes such as in J&K, Belgaum or Cauvery basin can be solved only politically. The same thing applies at the international level, such as land disputes between India and China and India and Pakistan which periodically result in conflicts. I believe, it is the word ‘only’ which causes conflict. If we use the word ‘also’ instead, it would lead to a better outcome. The government no doubt is responsible for maintaining peace in the society, in the state and in the country even though they are now trying to regulate private peace also through Yoga.

Professor Narendar Pani

The debate of what is the ideal element of peace has been going on for thousands of years. If you talk about it at a personal level, it is a spiritual and mental state which is free from oppressing and disquieting thoughts. At a social level, it is a state of public quiet. However, this might describe the peace of a graveyard. There is no dynamism, no change, it is the peace of a dead society; it is a society where inequality is accepted and any cause for concern is brushed aside. As this is not always understood you swing to the other extreme, which is the state approach to peace where peace is the lack of violence. You are not concerned about a society that is just, fair or acceptable. This is the challenge of the difference between what exists and what is ideal. Political scientists respond by saying we can have either a positive definition of peace, a state of public quiet, or we could have a negative definition of peace, a lack of violence. Just because there is an absence of violence does not mean the people are satisfied, they are simply not expressing their dissatisfaction through violence. So how do we move from one to the other?

One way is the consequential view which looks at the end result. The Nobel Prize was given to Kissinger for the conclusion of the Vietnam War while his actions during the same war were ignored. The other is the minimalist view which says that as long we have minimum acts of violence then we have peace. But then peace is just reduced to some indicator of peace such as the number of deaths. For example in the Maoist conflict, peace is calculated by the number of
civilians dead while the deaths of insurgents do not count. The most positive way of bridging the gap is the approach of Gandhi, which is essentially moving from peace as a concept to a reality where non violence is wholesome. Gandhi made a distinction between absolute and relative truth. No matter how you define peace, it how it is perceived which is important. He focused on how far one could go in the pursuit of peace. Peace is not a specific target that must be achieved. Then each person would have a relative notion of truth. What would actually exist in society would depend on three things: On power and people pushing for peace, what options people have, and fairness.

So when you're pushing for peace you focus gaining mass support, on non-violence and fairness and the appeal for truth. It is then a continuous set of negotiations where all must be considered and none can be disconnected from each other. For example in Kashmir there is evidence that the use of power is making it hard for the Indian government to reach out to the people of Kashmir. When we ignore this the issue tends to become one of unfairness. There is no effective system to monitor and ensure peace.

Professor Sangeetha Menon

A set of interesting questions relating to the definition of peace in conflict and post conflict societies:

“What” is Peace, in terms of its nature and extent”

Philosophically, I would think, peace is a sense of settlement, and an experience of equanimity towards the existence of unresolved conflict and disruption. Any philosophical examination of peace, whether Eastern or Western traditions, or phenomenological self-reflection, the nature of peace is often presented as having strong subjective foundations. In spite of the social and political contextualisation of the absence of peace, most often, a conflicting state of affairs, traces its roots to the individual self. In short, I would argue that both the absence of peace and the presence of conflict is embedded in self-centricity, agency, ownership and alienation. This is evident in the theories of Plato, Upanishads, Mahabharata, Freud, and even the post-modern and post-structuralist discourse. The presence, or absence of peace, extends from the ownership of physical space to a transcendental space where ownership and self-identity itself becomes objects for transformation. In both cases the sense of alienation is profound leading to the desire for belongingness to some-
thing which ensures security at physical and several psychological levels.

“Whose” Peace it is?
There is a continuous search for peace, and effort to “establish” peace with the help of psychological as well as political tools – if you analyse the narratives of the Mahabharata and the life experiences of the Mahabharata characters.

Even after the victory in war, Pandavas did not find settlement of peace with themselves and did not become people who happily-lived-ever-after. Iravati Karve writes in the Yuganta: “the war in the Mahabharata was a real war, bringing grief to the victor and the vanquished alike.”

The irony that the Mahabharata presents is a sense of alienation experienced by its characters in pre- and post-war scenario. While earlier there was an alienation that sprung from the lack of equity and propriety, the post-victory scenario also presents another kind of alienation. While the pre-war alienation led to efforts for filling up the lack and responding to what was not justfully given, the post-war alienation was to get rid of something which didn’t truly belong to them – and that was the very physical existence itself. This is evidenced by the trave-logue narratives and predicaments described in the Maha-prasthana-parva. The experience of alienation is so deep that the Mahabharata characters search for peace whose nature and existence itself is not clear. The long Vanaprastha journey of the Pandavas, Gandhari, Vidura and others symbolically represent the ar-duous processes of giving up the sticky layers of identity, and fixation with dharma. The door to heaven is opened to Dhramputra only when he is willing to renounce the sense of justice he expressed towards the dog who followed him in the journey.
“Whose peace” and “What is peace” are questions that come up again and again in the Mahabharata, with particular emphasis and discussion in the Bhagavad Gita. Essentially, the story that is told by the Mahabharata, and the philosophy that is extolled in the Bhagavad Gita is that, peace cannot be achieved, if it was earlier absent. The search for peace is the search for the unknown and the unattainable. The search for settlement and peace only leads to disenchantment, if the journey stops with the fulfilment of the desire to discover peace. But then, why search at all? Both the Mahabharata and the Gita approach presents the process-philosophy in the Wittgensteinian sense. What is searched will never be found, because it is the process of search which has to discover and articulate the nature and experience of peace. And if the process has to be experienced in its true colors, detachment and a readiness to stand out and look in are essential. The Gita philosophy is in synopsis the discussion on ways to stand out from the comfort zones of existence and look within. According to Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta, the 9th and 10th century aestheticians the central tone and mood of the Mahabharata is peace, the constant search for peace, which is continuously redefined. Freedom from what is achieved and freedom for reaching the unknown is the existential purpose as presented in the Mahab-
“Who” defines what peace is? Or who should define?

Both the Mahabharata narrative and the Foucauldian discourse says that the power is with one who makes the choice, and more importantly, one who has the facility and freedom to make choice. According to Foucault the world is driven by conflict. According to his philosophy there is no one kind of peace, but peace is discovered by each person in his or her own individual terms. The self-embraced predicament of Gandhari and Draupadi, and even Dharmaputra, demonstrates that both the definition and attainment of peace is possible only through one’s own ways of reconciliation. And there is no one way applicable for all.

In a 1976 interview Foucault says:

... Isn’t power simply a form of warlike domination? Shouldn’t one therefore conceive of all problems in terms of relations of war? Isn’t power a sort of generalized war that, at particular moments, assumes the forms of peace and the state? Peace would then be a form of war, and the state a means of waging it. ... Who wages war against whom? Is it between two classes, or more? Is it a war of all against all? What is the role of the army and military institutions in this civil society where permanent war is waged? What is the relevance of concepts of tactics and strategy for analysing structures and political processes? All these questions need to be explored.

... We are at war with one another; a battlefront runs through the whole of society, continuously and permanently, and it is this battlefront that puts us all on one side or the other. There is no such thing as a neutral subject. We are all inevitably someone’s adversary.

The Gita begins with the visual presentation of a binary, an unresolvable binary of the haves and the have-nots, in the Kurukshetra. The only way to resolve the existential binary is to make choices that lead to freedom, freedom which is not other worldly, but freedom from oneself, and freedom for nothing.

The synonym for peace in the Mahabharata and the Gita is freedom, freedom to question the ways and actions of the powerful, and the freedom to renounce what is achieved, and move on.

While in conflict and post conflict societies, larger theoretical issues of peace have to be looked into, at the same time, certain pragmatic measures will have...
to be pursued. This raises another important question: Should “peace” be “political” or “philosophical”?

I would think peace is embedded in a space which is both political and philosophical. The need to possess that which is denied, or to favour actions of justice, on one side brings to focus the political structures of power, the power of the have-nots, and the power of the have-nots over the have-nots.

As long as we cannot extricate peace from self-centricity, individual agency and sense of ownership, the individual becomes the centre stage. And his or her freedom is the question that is highlighted by the discussion on peace.

The discussion on peace itself is a political activity, which remains incomplete without exploring the philosophical questions on individual yearnings. According to the Katha Upanishad the search for peace is like walking on the razor's edge. In the words of Foucault, peace is the dream of the philosopher who belongs to neither side. Both the walk and the dream, for sure, points to the discovery and expression of peace in myriad ways.

**Discussions, Questions and Responses**

**Meenakshisundaram:**

I agree with Prof Sangeetha Menon; there has to be peace in the first instance, only then after a conflict, can peace be restored. If you maintain peace within the society, and even if there is a conflict after sometime, it will be possible to restore peace. Political peace is the most important. In a system without peace, it is not possible to restore peace in a conflict.

Second, if the society and the political system do not provide peace in an area, it will be very difficult for an individual to maintain peace. Individual peace can be defined as - a person being at peace irrespective of developments around him. If that is accepted then that becomes superior to political and societal peace.

**Narendar Pani:**

Can we really rely on the state as the prime giver peace? If the social processes
of negotiation do not allow for peaceful solutions, then the state as a single power cannot create peace out of nowhere. It has been shown in Kashmir, in various states in Africa.

The idea that peace can be imposed has its periods of ascendency such as the short term control of the LTTE in Sri Lanka. But to believe that since you have been able to militarily destroy them that you therefore have a peace is rather short sighted. Until you can get a system of negotiations where they can actually interact and state their aspirations, only then can you arrive at a mechanism that everyone accepts and is seen to be fair by those who accept them. We are mistaking the victory of short term power as the persistence of peace.

Sangeetha Menon:
I have a question. Let us say I change the word peace from your usage to coexistence to the pluralistic reality around you. Would that make a big difference? Why is the term peace even metaphorically important if its content can be understood in a more political and social context.

Meenakshisundaram:
It is not just coexistence, I would say peaceful coexistence. All of us exist and coexist, but are we happy with each other? It is peaceful coexistence is what defines peace.

Prof Bishnu Mohapatra:
I begin with a meta-conceptual question that points towards a conundrum. If you take a minimalist conception of peace and keep a lot of things out of it, then you have an advantage of establishing a link between peace and other things. For example, if 'fairness' and 'justice' are definitionally part of 'peace', then it is difficult to establish meaningful connection among them. If a just society produces peace for example, you can only say this if you keep these two elements separate. So there is a meta-conceptual question that we must confront while thinking about the definition
of peace

Second there is a larger conundrum because, we think normatively, peace is a desirable universally acceptable goal. This is not necessarily so, if you look at the history of philosophy, it is not that peace has always been considered as a desirable goal. For example Professor Pani mentions the peace of the graveyard. During the start of the 20th century and closer to the First and Second World War, many considered War as a way of galvanizing society and War was a way of making dead societies alive.

But there is another big narrative- the connection between state and the establishment of peace. This is deeply conditional on our definition of how the humans are, or on some kind of philosophical anthropology. Depending on how one defines the nature of humans one posits a link between chaos, uncertainty, rules, politics, violence and peace. If individuals are seen by nature peaceful then conflict is liminal, a temporary state. According to this line of thinking, given appropriate conditions individuals/ communities can return to 'peace'. The idea of 'return' is an important metaphor here. On the contrary if individuals are inherently selfish, incessantly pursuing their ends (like in a Hobbesian state of nature) then peace can be an achievement, a desirable goal that individuals strive towards. If it is a construct then we assume that conflict is inherent to human condition, and peace at best is a fragile achievement.

In the famous 'Shanti mantra' there is an intriguing line that says 'let there be peace on peace'. The idea is that what appears to be in 'peace' may not actually be peaceful. This needs greater elaboration.

Prof Dilip Ahuja:

To think of peace as the absence of conflict I believe is erroneous. The quietness of the graveyard is not peace. It might help us to look at analogies from other fields: the World Health Organization does not define Health as merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Similarly humility is not the absence of pride. All three pairs-- peace and conflict, health and disease, humility and pride are not opposites of each other but inverses. Just as cold and hot are inverses of each other. There is no conceivable limit to how hot a thing might be. There are stars much hotter than our sun.

Similarly there is no limit to how much conflict there can be, no limit to suffering from ill-health, and no limit to human pride. But there is a limit to how cold a
thing can be. We have an absolute zero and we cannot go below it, in fact we cannot ever reach it. Similarly perfect humility, perfect health, and perfect peace, are all unobtainable. They are all unattainable ideals to strive for, but are rarely touched. What I have said is not original—I owe this formulation to the late Hubert Benoit—a French psychiatrist. There may be other things that are similar—love is more than the absence of bickering, happiness is not merely the absence of unhappiness. None of the positive attributes are amenable to scientific measurement. We can only measure their inverses and then reductions in those inverses should be considered progress.

Narendar Pani:

The idea of let peace be on peace is a very insightful expression; there can be a peace that is not peaceful - just a period of quiet before a conflict. This is a new requirement in any idea of sustainable peace. Most governments, particularly in South Asia and Africa, seem to think of peace as essentially a matter of power. They know of the options that societies have and the fairness it demands. This would lead to the
Pakistan kind of solution to use force to ensure peace. In many created peace situations the seeds of violence are very deeply entrenched and enhanced.

Sangeetha Menon:
An interesting point was raised by Prof Bishnu Mohapatra, whether peace is desirable. But do we have a choice? There is always a continuous unsettlement within for something which is more harmonious in our life. Also for a space where acceptability leads you to further action. Even the notion of desirability is problematic which is also giving added weightage to the possibility of desiring itself.

To me, the idea of desire itself must be questioned. Is peace itself something to be desired for? I am not sure whether the relationship between peace and desire itself is something which is congruous. I would think there is a constant yearning for something which is more settled where at the same time once you reach that space of settlement, and then still there is a disenchantment which we earlier spoke about which again leads you to continue the journey. The ‘happily living ever after’ is not necessarily desirable let alone possible. None of us are capable of living with such a peace that is so non dynamic.

Meenakshisundaram:
I am neither a philosopher nor a social scientist but I have practical experience of dealing with the conflict and standing among the ruins. One of my Chief Ministers told me that peace is something like a carrot at the end of the stick. You show it to the people saying it is desirable but you will never reach. This was at the end of a communal riot at a particular instance in Karnataka; We were very happy to say that we brought peace to this place when the Chief Minister came. He said peace will never be brought or bought. You may try and you succeed and fail at times. So I have been brought up with this theory that peace is a carrot at the end of the stick.

Dr Shalini Dixit:
I might sound a bit ideological but until we keep desiring peace, I think it’s diffi-
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cult to achieve it. Peace as a desire would be a contradiction in itself; if we stop desiring and hating and having any kind of negative emotion, then there is peace by itself. Peace is like a home rather than an object and that is why States through the use of power have not been able to ensure peace. On social and interpersonal conflict, the social scientist - Kenneth Gergen has done a lot of work on narratives and social constructions. He speaks about how we create our self identities and narrations and through the process we create conflicts. Peace for him is understanding this conflict. And resolution will only come through dialogue. The use of force might not be able to achieve this.

Dr Anshuman Behera:

I don’t understand peace, but have few observations. I agree with Professor Mohapatra on the desirability of peace. The moment we say we desire peace we are pushed to understand another concept - whether peace is idealistic in nature or to be studied under realism. Most of our debate on peace sounds more idealistic than realistic.

I support Thomas Hobbes; conflict is the beginning of society as man is selfish and brutish all the time. To the larger question of this debate - whether peace is political or philosophical, it is multidisciplinary. Thirdly, an absence of peace is also good for society. If I borrow this idea from George Simons; the entire concept of association and disassociation in society then an absence of peace associates people in society as this brings laws and regulations. If I loosely understand Michel Foucault, a bit of conflict and absence of peace is good for society.

Finally, what do we understand by the violence? Should studying peace be a lesson in violence? The state does not speak of peace unless there is a violent problem. It is only when something contests the sovereignty of the state that the state reacts. For example the Anna movement was completely peaceful nature however the movement itself signifies that there is a lack of peace in society.

Meenakshisundaram:

I was trying to suggest that great deals of ideas are laden on our intuitive understanding of peace that any debate of peace must first cut through those intuitive entanglements. Let us say that peace is
desirable, and it is by the state and the law and conflict is to be avoided in any
cost. These are things that are intuitively important to use. Some of these intui-
tive ideas are in fact obstacles to understand peace in a meaningful way.

Secondly, there is a concept of peace but are there multiple conceptions of
peace. The concept and multiple conceptions are actually jostling against each
other. There is no way to arbitrate or adjudicate that the conception that wins.
One of the conundrums is the legalization of juridical manifestations of peace.
Therefore we think of a peace negotiation as a peace accord. When two states
enter into a peace negotiation why is it called a peace accord? Our contempla-
tions on peace are deeply juridical and this is deeply problematic. As Professor
Pani said some peace accords are actually seeds for conflict. This brings the
counterintuitive idea that peace actually brings conflict.

Sangeetha Menon:

I have a real problem with the idea that we should cut across intui-
tive ideas of peace and to construct it through debate. This might
violate individual senses of freedom and free agency to choice mak-
ing. If I sit at a table with other people and debate on what is free-
dom and I come to a consensus on peace. This universal notion of
peace may not be entrusted upon people with such a variety of ambitions,
dreams and views on life.

Peace is pluralistic, peace can be viewed and experienced in different manners,
but I have a problem of constructing peace as I don’t believe it can be con-
structed. It must be experienced within oneself. We cannot talk about peace
completely ignoring the individual. Ultimately peace is some kind of settlement
with yourself or an environment. That is why I think a peaceful coexistence can-
not be constructed.

Meenakshisundaram:

Though I would like to avoid this argument, I would like to react to the
question – what came first, peace or conflict. I believe that
peace came first as the very word, conflict, assumes that there was
originally peace. Secondly, there is need to have some sort of a
problem. I do not want a peaceful coexistence. It may be bad but that is how
you gain experience. If there is peace it is the peace of the graveyard. Nobody wants to be in 100 percent peace, but at the end of the conflict you certainly want peace. Your skill lies in ensuring that the gap is reduced.

Narendar Pani:

It is important to make a distinction between absolute and relative concepts of peace and truth. If we look at peace as an absolute concept it is clearly impossible to achieve. If we take Professor Menon’s idea of peace as a freedom from oppressive and disquieting thoughts or emotions, it will be difficult for even an individual to achieve that.

When you build societies with multiple individuals it becomes even less clear how to achieve, in fact the very thought of how to achieve freedom from disquieting thoughts might itself become a disquieting thought. The definition of an idea of ideal peace may not exist. Since we are always dealing with relative truth, we will continuously have an interaction. The thought of what came first, peace or conflict, is only an intellectual question on what is the starting point.

Instead we must recognize that there is a continuous interaction, and that any change would require a movement away from a certain static element today and that movement would begin by encouraging discourse. That is why today Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr and many others are seen as champions of peace but they also created the largest social movements creating large amounts of disquiet in the societies they were functioning in. They may have looked for peace but they did not succeed on getting peace upon peace.

Question: We are talking about peace at two levels, at the state and as a process. Any kind of peace would only result in a new kind of exploitation moving into society. How do we then remove this exploitation? So whether you opt for violent and non violent means does not matter but is there an institution that can take peaceful resolutions is more important.

If we consider the ideas of the French revolution; liberty, equality and fraternity, that somehow conceptualizes peace as a process. Peacefulness in society must take into account compassion, fellow feelings and fraternity. From a societal point of view, different elements of society coexist where peace is a desirable thing. But just because there is an absence of conflict, does not mean there is peace. If someone is being exploited but finds no evidence of it does not mean
he is not being exploited. If we want to reach an equilibrium, then the process must be sustainable.

**Question:** It is not so easy for an individual to be equanimous. The eastern philosophy was controlled by karma and other theories where peace was kept by telling people there is no need to have conflict, this is your life you must live it. However people like Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr told people that you need to confine yourself to the philosophical aspect, you must also observe the political aspect.

On communal upheavals, conflict will not arise without a background. If we just talk about conflict and peace after conflict, it has no meaning. Peace during conflict can only happen if the background to the conflict can be understood.

**Question:** When we talk about peace, whose peace are we talking about? Is peace synonymous with stability? Are we talking about society which is structured in a particular way which a lot has been invested, which achieves a means of stability with different types of force? And this has described by those people themselves as peace. Then they enforce the peace through law and order, something we did not hear in the debate. Is peace synonymous with law and order from the perspective of the state?

Using a metaphorical way of constructing peace, is it a brittle state which if dropped would be completely destroyed? Is it a structure in which a huge amount of energy has been invested and is the loss of that energy structure being described as the loss of peace? Therefore there are lots of resources being invested into that peace. This brings up the question whose peace? Your peace might be very different from my peace? This leads to simplistic debates about the odd even scheme or whether we should have more army in Kashmir. People are then forced to take a side which is grouped into peaceful and not peaceful. While in reality there are many more positions to take up.

**Narendar Pani:**

I would like to question the desirability of peace. Much of the difficulty we arrive is when we see it as a static term. If you achieve peace then you cannot have change, but in fact you can see peace that is desirable as an ideal but you are always in a process continuously recognizing the inequalities and weaknesses of a society. In this process there will always be some public disquiet. The debate is whether public disquiet
always leads to conflict. There are many examples where you can have social change where you can have public disquiet but not violence.

**Meenakshi Sundaram:**

I do not know whether it is good to equate peace and equality. I have heard as a child that we want to aspire to is a ‘Rama-Raja’. There was a huge amount of inequality but people were living happily with each other. There was peace. It is not necessary that peace requires equality. Whichever point of view you take, peace is a situation where everybody lives and respects each other. If that is disturbed then there will be a conflict, but at the end of the conflict you must restore the original position or a position that is universally acceptable. If there is a conflict in peaceful society then the peace must be restored.

**Sangeetha Menon:**

If I reflect upon the discussion at large, as panelists we have a challenge to break the binary on one side of truth and peace and the binary on the individual versus the societal. Can we talk about societal peace without having any concept about the individual sense of peace? When you talk about relative and absolute truth, the relative truth exists because we have an idea of the highest possible truth. Can we therefore talk about the self of the society with the same richness which we talk about the self of the individual? I do not know where the self of the society is but I know where the self of the individual is.
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With a right mix of senior scholars, full time faculty, doctoral and post doctoral fellows and young research associates the ISSSP is truly multi-disciplinary and one of the largest programme within the NIAS.

In terms of research and related activities the ISSSP is sui generis. The primary emphasis of the ISSSP research is towards integrating complex elements of science and technology with policy, organizational and institutional arrangements.