Peace and People's Security: An Agenda for Neoliberal Times

Samir Kumar Das

1. CRG's four-volume work on South Asian Peace Studies published between 2004-2008 was aimed at making a departure from the conventionally understood Security Studies by disconnecting it from conflict and war on one hand and reconnecting it with such ethical values as rights, justice and democracy. These three values of rights, justice and democracy are said to form a triad given their largely overlapping nature.

2. The conventionally understood Security Studies would have defined peace as security that is keyed to the doctrine of balance of power. Most of the Indian Universities continue to offer Security Studies of this variety in the name of Peace Studies.

3. By 2010, we started facing criticisms mainly on three counts: (a) Peace in the name of establishing the ethical values is essentially a power game, for, most of the recent interventions in international politics have taken place in the name of establishing 'freedom' and 'democracy' as Universal values. Peace in such cases turns into an instrument of exercising hegemony. (b) Peace defined with reference to such Universal values has already turned into an 'industry' and poorer countries compete among themselves for receiving foreign funds in the name of establishing peace in their respective countries. (c) Peace-making is too large an issue to remain confined to the conflicting parties.

4. The context has substantially changed during the last two or three decades. The liberal utopia of recognizing the 'inalienability' of life has given way to the "the sovereign right to kill or its covert attendant, the right to maim" (Puar 2017:X) thanks to the 'neoliberal restructuring and production of insecurities', as the Concept Note eloquently illustrates. The differential value of life is now grossly displayed in such instances as pandemic, denial of livelihood opportunities to unskilled manual labour, climate disasters and agrarian crisis posing a threat to food sovereignty and security. As a result, peace today – unlike at the time of Rights Revolution in the 1970s and the 1980s - is required to reckon with the more fundamental and first order question of life per se and its survival. Rights have been reduced to secondary importance. Never before in history, has the biopolitics of people's security acquired so much of importance as it has now. Peace has to redefine itself as 'people's security' in the context of neoliberal restructuring and production of insecurities.

5. The paper seeks to develop an agenda for people's security: (a) A large number of people, for instance, simply loses their life or lives a life that makes her neither a healthy and rights-bearing body nor 'lets her die'. (b) Civil society organizations provide no answer to this chronic biopolitical insecurity. The pandemic, as CRG studies have shown, offered an opportunity of experimenting with different forms of people's solidarity. Solidarity becomes people's answer to biopolitical insecurities. One may gainfully draw on Modern Indian Social and Political Thought to decipher and make sense of such experiments - instead of borrowing from Western Political Theory. (c) These experiments also tell us how people 'live dangerously' and yet live a 'secure' life.