

**CLASS, SOCIAL MOVEMENT AND
TERRORISM - A CASE STUDY OF
ASSAM MOVEMENT AND ULFA**

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DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled '**Class, Social Movement and Terrorism - A Case Study of Assam Movement and ULFA**', submitted by **Pallabi Pegu** in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy is her original work. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree to this university or any other university to the best of our knowledge.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiner for evaluation.

Dr. Sudha Pai
Chairperson
(acting ch)

Dr. Rakesh Gupta
Supervisor

for my father and mother
who made endless efforts
to make me
what I am today

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INTRODUCTION

The work on Assam, raises some pertinent issues for the understanding of the Indian federalism in general and the kind of nation we want to be. At another level, it raises the issue related to social movements, at yet another level questions of political economy and culture are raised. The Ahom rule, Vaishnavite movement and British consolidation and integrated Assam with the cultural 'mainstream' centuries back. The Brahmaputra and the Barak Valley of colonial Assam were deeply drawn into the national movement and produced many great national leaders, yet in recent years sub-national identity movements have engulfed this region, threatening Indian polity. Assam is therefore rightly seen as a test case for understanding the problem of Indian unity and sub-nationalism. There is no religious angle like Punjab and Kashmir. In case of Assam economic neglect remains important but what makes for the problem is the inability of the Assamese to realise themselves within their culture. On the one hand the mosaic that surrounds it demands dissection, as the influx from across the borders has threatened its identity. Equally it has found it difficult to handle the diversity within. Consequent social tensions, political issues and mobilisational strategies come up as competing paradigms in the struggle for development and identity. Ever since independence Assam has been a scene of turmoil, turbulence and tragedy, as much as reconstruction. As

part of this twin process Assam has witnessed shifting bases of mobilization strategy in search of identity. Assam movement in post-independent India shifted from its original linguistic demand of the 1950's to demands related to economic deprivation in the 1980's. However the shift did not mean a complete overtaking of the linguistic demand by demand of economic nature. The introduction of Assamese language, along with geo-strategic factors led to the demand of Bodo identity as a counter poise to the Assam movement of the 1980's. Unlike in the 1950's the movement in the 1980's led to a fringe of terrorist politics both within Assamese and as a reaction in Bodo identity politics. The Assamese society showed emergence of class stratification owing to speculation related development activities, miniscule Assamese presence in tea plantations and timber and transport trade. Primarily the ruling group which emerged in Assam had a distinct feature of its own. Pre-colonial society in Assam was fundamentally semi-tribal and semi-feudal in nature wherein colonialism was superimposed from above. It, thus hindered both the maturity of feudalism and the emergence of a strong indigenous capitalist class. Whatever stature the small Assamese capitalist class had reached under the colonial situation, it remained weak. The first generation of Assamese ruling class emerged from the rural gentry in the late 19th century. The Assamese ruling class is mainly composed of small Assamese capitalists, landed gentry, the emerging

Assamese business men transport operators, the government employees etc. Besides the owners of the Assamese bourgeois press are also a part of the ruling class. A clearer picture of this class would emerge if we note the nexus between the Indian ruling class and the Assamese ruling class. The Indian ruling class is composed of big-Indian capitalists and landlords in which the former plays the dominant role. As a class of exploiters operating under the same economy, the Assamese ruling class is an inseparable part of the Indian ruling class. However as a competitor seeking to gain control over the regional market the Assamese ruling class is also a competitor at the regional level. So it can be safely assumed that the Assamese ruling class is both an inseparable part of the Indian ruling class and a weak competitor at a regional level. Therefore at times the Assamese ruling class would fight against the Indian ruling class and at times it would collaborate with them to enhance its class position. The Assamese ruling class is not bourgeois in a clear productive sense but ideologically and culturally they are inclined decisively towards the bourgeois system. The Assamese ruling class without a clear role in production and with a weak economic position vis-à-vis the Indian ruling class are forced by the objective law to enforce their hegemony through their control over the government apparatus at the state level. This class is more concerned with the middle class issues and demand, although at times they take up issues of the general masses. Their weak position at

times made them restless and nagging. At times they show a remarkable power to fight back with the support of the masses. The Assamese ruling class has been largely successful in protecting the interest of Assamese nationality or the people of Assam. Because of its weak position the class is not sure about its destiny or its future. It has been able to pass on its own identity crisis, its lack of confidence and apprehension as the crisis of the Assamese nationality or of Assam. (Hussain, 1993: 92).

Even though the class formations took place in Assam, it combined with Hindu high caste aspirations in a society where caste solidarities were fluid and not rigid. Both caste and class have been inseparable parts of India's social formation. There is a caste basis of class and class basis of caste, hence both are variable as well as consequence of one another. There is a caste basis of rituals, pollution-purity, and other apparently non-material aspects of social life. There is no uniform pattern of caste and class structure in actual terms throughout India. There are numerous middle classes which are not directly related to production processes, they are an offshoot of the modern Indian state. In India class-struggle is also in effect caste struggle and vice versa. For example, caste mobility movements are also class mobility movements both manifestly and latently. (Sharma, 1986: 17-33).

Weber's notion of 'status groups' has been equated with 'caste groups' and his 'class situation' and 'market situation' have been found

relevant for studying class in India. Caste and class nexus is highlighted by Gough in her analysis of mode of production as a social formation in which she finds interconnection of caste, family, kinship, marriage with forces of production and production relations (Gough 1980 : 337-64). Caste and class represents to a large extent the same structural reality. Singh rightly comments on caste and class nexus: "The situation corresponds to a 'prismatic' model of change where traditional sentiments of caste and Kinship undergo adaptive transformation without completely being distracted into classes or corporate groups." (Singh, 1968 : 171). Therefore common class consciousness among the members of a caste are mainly due to their common economic deprivations. In Assam too, the all India character is reflected in the caste class nexus of the Assamese Ruling class.

The continuing feature of Assam movement has been its middle class high caste social character. As a result of speculator like development growth of poverty has accompanied a feeling of relative deprivation among the better off. B.S. Minhas, L.R. Jain and S.D. Tendulkar had made a study of incidence of poverty in India for the period 1970-71 to 1987-88 with the help of National Sample Survey (NSS) data. Using adjusted price relatives of the consumer price index series for agricultural workers (CPIAL) for rural areas and the combined price relative data of consumers price index for industrial workers (CPIIW) and

for non-manual employees (CPINM) for urban areas. The data they had processed for 20 states revealed that Assam, along with Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal etc. fell in the category of states which have a poverty ratio above all India level. Even the Planning Commission Expert group report 1993 reflected an absolute increase in number of poor in Orissa. Bihar, Assam and UP during the year 1973-74 and 1987-88. (Minhas, Jain and Tendulkar 1991; 1681). (It is to be noted that the above years were taken because this phase forms the inception of the Assam movement).

Although the survey reflects that growth of poverty was not exclusive to the state of Assam, the ruling class was able to mobilise public opinion by playing upon traditional social identities. This further gets aggravated by the increasing intensification of Intra-ruling class conflicts. (Alam 1989; 204). Leadership of the Assam movement, its ideology and social base has come from this segment both in the 1950's and the 1980's. The difference in the 1980's being that a terrorist fringe has developed in the form of ULFA and Bodo Security Force (BSF).

This dissertation seeks to relate the leadership, base and ideology of ULFA with the leadership base and ideology of the Assam movement. The focus of the study is then on the political and not on either linguistic or ethno-identity of Assam. The question of linguistic politics will lead to a discussion on linguistic lines with regard to the relationship of Assamese with the Bangla and Bodo identity. The discussion on

divergence and intermingling of races in the formation of the Assamiya identity in history and as of today. These two fall outside the scope of this dissertation. We focus on the political organization of ULFA in the context of Assamese social movement of the 1980's and see how far, if at all, there is any specific difference between the two.

Review of Literature

The writings on the North-East can be divided into two broad categories:

(a) writings concerning nationhood of the Indian state like Rajni Kothari's - 'State Against Democracy', Barrister Pakem's - 'Nationality, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity in North East' and scholars whose writings have been edited. In this category there are shades of differences and nuances revolving around showing greater sensitivity to the needs of the region, tribe and autonomy of power B.G. Verghese's book draws a sympathetic account of the region, and provides unwitting evidence of a divide between the way some issues are framed in the pan Indian public sphere and in the subnational public spheres of the region. Verghese describes north-east India romantically "India's north-east is rainbow country" he writes "extraordinarily diverse and colourful, mysterious when seen through parted Clouds, a distant and troubled frontier for all too many" (Verghese, 1996; 1). His book makes an attempt to correct

misconceptions and to make the region less remote to the "heartlanders". Verghese seems to believe that the turmoil in the region is only a minor hurdle in a process that is destined to have a happy ending. The people of the north-east are to him "by and large the youngest member of the Indian family." It is a politics of "nascent nationality formation among awakening tribes and groups" that feel "threatened by demographic and political change (ibid: xi-xii). A combination of development and nation-building, Verghese believes will put an end to these turmoils.

Some writing from the region itself shows in much greater detail the universe of the region eg. - songs of Bhupen Hazarika or the book by Sanjib Baruah - 'India Against itself - Assam and the politics of Nationality'. In a song by Bhupen Hazarika the seven states of north eastern India are portrayed as seven sisters born of the same mother. The lyric suggests the impact of these divisions on the Assamese subnational imagination. In Hazarika's lyrics, the undivided territory of Assam is the mother and the breakup of Assam is a story of seven sisters being married away. "Mother, we are seven sister who once played together in the Sunny Sands of the river Lohit" (another name for the river Brahmaputra). Here is how the lyrics depict three of the new states: "Meghalaya went her own way as soon as she was old enough, Arunachal too seperated and Mizoram appeared in Assam's gateway as a groom to marry another daughter." The portrait of Tripura is interesting: "I have

built my home in frontier of Bengal to keep an eye on the enemy's movements... Mother please don't leave me out" The lyrics end with a determination to keep the unity of the Assamese with other small nationalities that are left in present - day Assam - "the Karbis and the Mising brothers and sisters are our dear ones." (Baruah; 1999: 112) Baruah book speaks of the separatist movements located in historically constituted subnational ideological fields, and they have a dialogical relationship with pan-Indian political institutions, processes and values." Baruah has observed the shrinking space for civil politics in Assam. He feels that the faith in the rule of law needs to be restored by holding insurgents as well as army and security personnel accountable for their actions. "Conditions for civil politics in Assam can be recreated. Among the reforms that would be necessary are measures to restrict arbitrary powers of the state and efforts to create greater institutional space for subnational aspiration and identities" - (ibid., xxii) Baruah feels a bold project of genuine federation - building, which ultimately is the only way to bring subnationalism and pan-Indianism closer together. (ibid: 213) Both Baruah and Verghese do not have any alternative to India's perspective.

(b) The literature which is related to assertion of sub-nationalism, example - speeches, writings and action of leaders, politicians and political organizations. Sanjay Hazarika's - 'Stranger of the Mist-Tales of War and

Peace from India's Northeast', discusses with circumstantial detail problems of neglect, apathy, subversiveness, change and social inequilibrium. "Time is of the essence. India has wasted fifty years dealing with its rebellions minorities in the north-east. It cannot afford to continue this piecemeal approach. Only a doctrine embracing regional, economic, environmental and security concerns can transform the jungles of unrest into communities of property" (Hazarika, 1994: 330) Here too there are shades of nuances in terms of seeking political restructuring within the constitutional framework and those that seek it beyond it. The former would involve the position of the Assam Agitation of the 1980's standpoint of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his comrades. The latter would be related to reactions to assertion of Bodo land identity/assertions of terrorist outfits like ULFA in Assam.

The literature does not however show the linkage between class, tribe, and caste and community in politics of integration in Assam. (except the book by Monirul Hussain - 'The Assam movement - class, ideology and identity'). We have made an attempt to analyze the caste-class nexus and how far it has been able to shape Assam politics in the past and will do so in future.

Scheme of Chapters

In the 1st chapter we deal with theoretical considerations on class and social movements. Focussing on the ruling class which we identify as

the middle class we analyse the origin and role played by this class in shaping Indian politics and society. These classes were the driving force behind pan-Indian nationalism. The historical, civilisational, geographical and administrative unity under colonialism generated sentiments of all-India nationalism amongst the masses, especially in the wake of the national movement. However in the absence of full-fledged development of the different regions and their economies, cultures and languages, nationalities (along regional, cultural and linguistic lines) have emerged as a force to contend it. These nationalities assert themselves in terms of a fight against subjugation by the Indian state and the dominant classes identified with it, as well as by dominant linguistic - cultural nationalities. (Mukherjee, 1989 : 100)

The 2nd chapter deals with the Assam movement, pre and post movement politics. It examines how the dominant classes in Assam were dissatisfied with the existing policies of the state and wanted major changes. They wanted a pliable state. To achieve this they supported several national and regional right wing parties against the Congress Party and the Congress Central Government. The general mood of protest all over the country resulted in a series of mass movements; the Assam movement being a significant one. The immigration problem heightened the tension in the state and coupled with the issue of economic deprivation, the movement sustained itself for 6 long years, having deep

political, constitutional, social and economic implications. The discontent of the dominant classes and the people was reflected in the weakening of the Congress Party; not only in the national but also the regional levels. The political scene clearly reflected the changed balance of class forces and class aspirations faced with pressure from the dominant classes, the state made a series of changes, in case of the Assam movement the Assam Accord was signed to bring an halt to the six long years of struggle. The change in policies, the shift of class support and the resultant correlation of political forces gave rise to interesting developments in the polity. There were growth of radical movements, posing a serious challenge to the state and the dominant classes. The insurgency movement in Assam of the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) was a fallout of these grievances.

Chapter 3, traces the genesis, growth and politics of ULFA. We trace back its origin to the beginning of the Assam movement, although that being a phase of its dormancy. The organization, aim and objective of the outfit has been analyzed in detail. The ULFA phenomenon is the product of the total alienation of Assamese youth from the Indian state. The vast majority of young people find in the Indian constitution no guarantee of a right to a reasonable decent life. But the support for ULFA does not mean necessarily support for secession from India. The weakness of the Assamese national base has made it impossible for the

ULFA to formulate a programme for national reconstruction. (Gohain, 1996: 2066) We notice that a weak ideology couldn't sustain the movement for long and soon a split emerged in the insurgent group, giving birth to SULFA, (Surrendered ULFA) to bring back the boys to the mainstream. Here we see a role reversal of the state, earlier the state was committed to crush them now it is duty - bound to protect than. These 'redeemed', militants are in turn 'refined' militants. They are no longer outlaws. (Jha; 2001).

In the 4th chapter we analyse a deeper malaise inflicting Assamese society, the ruling class and ULFA nexus. A close observation of the political situation reveals the cobweb of insurgent activities and electoral politics. It is reliably learnt that the ULFA had lent its considerable support to both the AGP as well as the Congress government as and when their needs demanded. Various ministers and high ranking officials have been accused of supporting ULFA's sinister design. The Tata tea - ULFA controversy exposed the trader - insurgent nexus and once again brought to the forefront question of failure of the state in providing security to these industrial establishments.

These twists and turns have left the people thoroughly bemused. The blood-stained confusion has exposed all political rhetoric as hollow. The middle class, which has for long regarded ULFA as the last bastion of

Assamese interests has now grown tired. There is an increasing desperation in the clamour for resumption of talks with the government.

The ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India report on 'Bleeding Assam - The Role of ULFA' rightly remarks

"Have People thrived where a militant section has taken to the gun? Apart from bringing death and destruction to the area, do such movements achieve anything? A general climate of uncertainty descends on the region. The economy suffers. Investors become hesitant to plough any movers into the area, transporters stop plying in the region; economic activity dwindles and people stop stirring out after sunset. And, of course, the state reacts. The paramilitary rumbles in, in long, winding convoys. As ambush or two takes place, starting a cycle of reactive incidents. Bitterness increases. The divide between the militants and the state, becomes wider as peace prospects become more and more remote. And nothing can wash away the stains of blood" (Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, 1999).

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Chapter - I

MIDDLE CLASS & SOCIAL MOVEMENT: CONCEPT AND ISSUES

"History does nothing, it "does not possess immense riches", it does not fight battles' it is men, real living men, who do all this, who possess things and fight battles... History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their end" (Bottomore and Rubel, 1963: 63) whatever the contradictions within a given form of society and whatever abstract forces may be at work, they can only become effective through the consciousness, purposive actions of human beings. And these actions arise out or are shaped by the real life experiences of individuals within the division of labour and the class structure (Bottomore, 1988: 16).

In recent years, the concept of 'class' has come under increasing scrutiny as a means of explaining both the present and the past. The reason for this lie in the profound economic, political and intellectual changes marking our time. These changes has led to considerable effect on peoples sense of collective and personal identity "class is a social and cultural formation (often finding institutional expression) which cannot be defined abstractly or in isolation, but only in terms of relationships with other classes and ultimately, the definition can only be made in the medium of time - this is, action, and reaction, change and conflict. When we speak of a class we are

thinking of a very closely defined body of people who share the same congeries of interests, social experience, traditions and value system, who have a disposition to behave as a class, to define themselves in their action and in their consciousness in reaction to other groups of people in class ways" (Thompson - 1966: 357).

Broadly there are two different conceptions of class, one that was developed by Marx which focused on the conflicting relations between classes based on relations of production, and the other which focused merely on social stratification.

Historically, according to Marx, society is dominated by the propertied classes which control the means of production and exploit others belonging to the non-possessing classes. Under the capitalist mode of production, in the early stages, the class structure became simplified into three great classes, the wage labourers, capitalists and landowners. What constitutes a class is not its economic share through wages, profit and rent respectively. Neither is the distinction based on divergent interest which the division of labour creates. Rather the elements which constitute the classes have to be seen in the context of property relations and the power relations determined by it. The chief constituent element of power is private ownership of means of production and the control of the minority over the wealth of the whole nation. Thus a person's material and social conditions of

existence are determined by his relationship to the means of production. (Rao 1989: 35).

In 'The Poverty of Philosophy' Marx states economic conditions had in the first place transformed the mass of people into workers. The domination of capital created the common situation and common interests of this class. Thus this mass is already a class in relation to capital, but not yet a class-for-itself. In the struggle of which we have only indicated a few phases, this mass unites and forms itself into a class-for-itself. The interest which it defends become class interest. But the struggle between the classes is a political struggle (Bottomore and Rubel (eds.) 1956: 187).

A similar conception is formulated in Marx's discussion of the role of the peasantry in France in the 18th Brumaive of Louis Bonaparte - "In so far as millions of families live under eco-conditions that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of other classes and that place them in hostile attitude towards the latter, they constitute a class. In so far as there exist among these peasants only a local connection in which the individuality and exclusiveness of their interests prevent any unity of interests, national connection and political organisation among them, they do not constitute a class, separate individuals form a class only to the extent that they must carry a common struggle against another class. (Marx 1968: 303).

For Marx, similar economic activities and style of life are necessary but not sufficient condition of class. For there to be a class, there must be a consciousness of unity, an awareness of distinctive interests and feeling of hostility towards other classes. Therefore, the proletariat is a modern class created by the growth of large scale industry and able because of its concentration in factories and towns to develop a class consciousness and independent political organization.

The social-stratification view of class was developed in varying contexts. The wider theoretical anchorage for this view was provided by the -notion of status inequality, and social mobility. In the framework of social-stratification, status, prestige, labour, esteem, worth and legitimacy all assume important dimensions. Each stratum is characterised by a set of features expressed in consumption behaviour and style of life marking it off from another in a hierarchical system. (Rao 1989: 34).

Max Weber's treatment of class as a category of persons whose situation is determined by the market, provided one of the bases for the stratification view of class. Persons share common economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for earning income. The class situation is determined by the commodity or labour market which creates specific chances. Thus, Weber shifted the emphasis from relations of production to the market situation

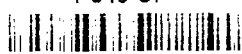
affecting income distribution and consumption. For Weber classes as such are not groups and the social action that brings forth class situations is not basically action among members of the identical class, but an interaction among members of different classes. Social actions that directly determine the class situation of the workers and the entrepreneur are the labour market, the commodities market, and capitalistic enterprise. (Ibid 34).

This attempt of Weber to diffuse Marx's position that identical class interests could lead to antagonistic class formations (class-for-itself) was not successful, although he succeeded in complicating the class situation by differentiating three classes - a propertied class, a commercial class and a social class. He also pointed out that unity of social classes was highly variable. He maintained that, although a uniform class situation prevails only when completely unskilled and propertyless persons are dependent on regular employment, it gets blurred because of mobility of class positions, and because of specificity of conflict in each class situation. (ibid., 35).

In terms of the mode of stratification Weber spoke of status society or class society. While the commercial class arose specifically in a market-oriented economy the two other classes, namely, the social classes and the propertied classes were related to the status group. He maintained that the status group was most closely associated with social class but status groups were often created by

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propertied class. Weber's differentiations of classes indicates that status group which is elsewhere equated with caste group can also occur in a class situation. This position of Weber comes closer to the view stated by M.S.A. Rao that status is found in caste, class and ethnic situations but the distinguishing feature of class have to be seen in the determinants of status in the class situation (Rao 1989: 35).

Broadly, the determinants of status in class are control over means of production and other productive resources, property, occupation, income, education and style of life. Using these determinants of stratification three classes are distinguished: the upper class, the middle class and the lower class. With the spread of egalitarian values in regard to different areas of behaviour and equality of opportunities, the idea of upward social mobility gained in significance. In the Indian context as the traditional sanctions and agencies of social control which supported the caste system became weaker, new sources of legitimacy made upward social mobility possible on the axes of occupation, income, education and a different style of life. All these new status marking made inroads into the caste system. As a result each caste category became heterogeneous in terms of class status.

It is necessary to look at the formations and development of the middle classes (Mishra 1961) which mainly consists of the

professionals, semi-professionals, and white collar workers, and the channels of social mobility in the context of changing economic and political conditions. The middle class provides the basis for the emergence of different types of elite - professional, intellectual, bureaucratic and technocratic - as opposed to the industrial and business elite, and the military and political.

Middle Class-Concept and Issues

Marx's views on class do not form a unified essential whole, his position changed over time in response to political and theoretical developments. In his earlier writings Marx emphasised very strongly the polarization of classes, for example in 'The communist manifesto' he asserts that "the epoch of the bourgeoisie possess... this distinctive feature, it has simplified the class antagonism. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other - bourgeoisie and proletariat. But in the unfinished chapter of capital Vol.III written much later Marx was trying to advance from his fundamental economic analysis to an investigation of the social relations that develop from the economic basis, he observed that even in the most highly developed modern society England 'the class structure does not appear in a pure form... intermediate and transitional strata obscure, the class boundaries even in this case (Bottomore 1988: 18).

The possibility that the intermediate strata in capitalist society would grow, rather than diminish, as a proportion of the population is suggested in a number of ways and expressed most clearly in a comment on Ricardo in the 'Manuscript of Theories of Surplus Value': 'What he (Ricardo) forgets to mention is the continual increase in numbers of the middle class ... situated midway between the workers on the one side and the capitalists on the other, who vest with all their weight upon the working class and at the same time increase the social security and power of the upper ten thousand. (Bottomore and Rubel 1956: 190-1). Else where in theories of surplus value, commenting upon Malthus, Marx observes: 'His greatest hope - which he himself considers more or less utopian - is that the middle class will grow in size and the working class will form a continually diminishing proportion of the total population. This is, in fact the trend of the bourgeois society (Bottomore 1988: 19).

Marx refers to the middle class in his contribution to the critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right' written in 1844. Marx however doesn't give a definition of the middle class and of its lower or higher strata. But in the opinion of Dandelkar, 'Judging by whom he includes in the lower strata of the middle class, it is not difficult to see the implied scheme of classification. The basis division is of course between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, those who own the means of production, do not work themselves but employ wage labour

and those who do not own any means of production and must work as wage labour. 'In between the two lies the middle class those who own the means of production and also work by themselves (Dandekar 1978: 37-42).

C. Wright Mills makes the crucial distinction between the old and the new middle class in his book 'White Collar': The American Middle Class'. According to Mill, with the rise of the giant corporation there has been a sharp decline in the economic importance of this so-called old middle class. This class is defined in terms of its modest ownership of some means of production, a small shop, a factory, or a professional practice. While it is true that economic enterprise has become increasingly concentrated at the expense of this old middle class, the displaced membership of this class have emphatically not been catapulted into the Marxian proletariat (Mills, 1951: 63-76).

Instead a whole new class of people has been created. They are not old fashioned entrepreneurs for they do not own companies for which they work, neither are they wage workers in the stricted sense. They are instead members of a new salaried middle class, a heterogeneous group, including salaried professionals and technical workers (such as teacher, social workers and engineers) managers (but not owners), and office workers of all kinds (ibid., 76). It's this middle class of salaried white collar employee, that has shown and will continue to show the greatest dynamism in advanced societies.

Growth of this class reflects basic changes, rising productivity of the economy, the transformation of property and the growing role of government.

What, then are the essential attributes of middle class - both old and new? The old middle class stood between the land and capital on the outside, and labour on the other, and incorporated in it some of both these extreme worlds. The old middle class possessed a little of land or capital and also performed labour on its own, and thus it was distinguished from the idealised bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Similarly the new middle class also stand between the land and capital on the one side and labour on the other with the difference that unlike its counterpart it neither possesses land and capital nor performs manual labour perse. And yet, in a certain sense, the new middle class also is basically a worker working upon its own capital, the specialised knowledge at its command (Mishra, 1983: 9).

Middle Class in India

Political life in pre-colonial India was structured around a peculiar organization of power. The state had to function under the rigid rules of the caste system. The logic of traditional identity was different from its modern counterpart in several respects. Politically, pre-modern identities tended to be fuzzy in at least two ways. First the identity of an individual was distributed in several different social

practices; a kind of layering in which the fact of his distinctive belonging to his village, local community, caste group, religious sect, language would have all figured in a context dependent fashion (Kaviraj, 1992: 1-39). It was not only individual identity which was plural and flexible, the structure of identities in the world itself was fuzzy. (Ibid 117).

British colonial power in India put an end to this traditional social ontology and replaced it with an ontology of a fundamentally new kind. Colonial control over new India was uneven, and in its early years resembled earlier empires, a thin layer sitting rather insecurely on top of an exceptionally resilient social order. See (Chatterjee, 1993, Alavi, 1972). But British colonialism commanded historically non-precedented resources in military, political, administrative and cognitive terms; and some of its political initiatives started off a comprehensive social transformation. The fundamental transformations involved a picture of the social world in which the organization and perception of social difference was altered, irreversibly changing peoples images of their collective selves and their occupancy of the social world. (Kaviraj 1995: 118).

Enumeration processes began in the early nineteenth century, as did the establishment of western-style education for producing a new, collaborating middle class. By the middle of the century, the first consequence of this process of enumeration had become

apparent. Sections of the new intelligentsia who were more disgruntled or imaginative than others already grasped the sources of power this enumerated space provided.

Large fractions of them participated in the anti-colonial movement, and emerged as the ruling class after Independence (See, Mishra 1961, Desai, 1976). Freedom came in 1947, but the nature of the entrenchment of the middle and upper classes under British rule, and their leadership of the freedom movement, ensured that the institutions built up during the colonial era remained largely intact. This continuity, both in form and substance, in spite of such a significant rupture with the past in terms of the end of colonial rule, is not difficult to understand if seen from the point of view of what the Indian middle classes expected from Independence. Their aim was the end of British rule. In this respect their outlook was unhesitatingly anti-colonial. But political independence meant the absence of the British. It did not mean a jolting discontinuity which would end a system of governance, or jeopardize a socio-economic matrix in which the middle classes had acquired a stake (Varma 1998: 26).

However it needs to be noted that the freedom movement had generated a powerful ethical and intellectual legacy quite distinct from the anti-colonialism inherent in a liberation movement. This legacy was symbolized in the compellingly charismatic personalities of

Gandhi and Nehru. For the educated Indian, Gandhi stood for the pursuit of morality as an absolute end in itself. His consistent stress on the means being as important as the end and his emphasis on uncompromising probity in public life were internalized by the middle class as an imperative, valid not only during the course of the freedom movement but also in the conduct of the affairs of the newly independent state. Nehru's vision a modern Indian state, dismissive of the obscurantism of the past and striving towards progress on the foundations of science, technology and industrialization, also had an irresistible appeal, for this urban-centric class nurtured on western concepts of rationalism and liberalism and impatient to get on, with the task of 'nation building'. At the sametime, the concern of both Gandhi and Nehru for the poor was perceived as being far more than merely an emotional awareness of the deprived; the middle class understood this concern to mean that both the state and society need to have a sensitivity towards redressing the problems of the poor. Gandhi's spartan life style and his ability to live what he preached had a special fascination for the middle classes. For its members his austere life style was not viewed as something to be emulated in an absolute sense, it was internalized more as a guiding principle: high thinking and simple living. But it was Nehru's vision of an awakened India, invulnerable to outside manipulation and moving towards the creation of a modern and industrialized economy on the basis of its

long suppressed indigenous strengths, that had a far greater appeal for this class (ibid 30).

The leadership provided by the new intelligentsia to the forces of rising Indian nationalism was historically progressive in contrast to the feudal leadership of the forces of the anti British Revolt of 1857. The new intelligentsia was imbued with the ideas of modern nationalism and democracy. (Desai 1976: 318). They were passionate supporters of the spread of the rich democratic and scientific culture of modern Europe in India and zealously campaigned against the medieval obscurantism and authoritarian social structure inherited from the pre-British period. They stood for democratization of social relations and economic advancement through industrialization. The liberals believed in orderly progress, subscribed to the principle of slow evolution and were opposed to revolutionary change. But the non-fulfilment of most of the demands slowly brought about moods of disillusionment among the Indian Liberals (ibid 326).

As a result of the spread of political disillusionment regarding the principles and methods of the liberals among the ranks of the Congress, a new group of militant nationalists having a different political emerged and crystallized within the Congress. Thus there emerged an extremist fringe in Indian freedom struggle by the end of the 19th century. This weakened the secular character of the political

movement. However with the advent of Gandhi, the movement got a more secular character and popular outlook.

Another seductive goal for the middle class in India was the pursuit of modernity, 'modernity' was interpreted in Nehruvian sense of shedding the shackles of the past and adopting a rationalist and scientific outlook. Such an approach it was felt would equip an individual to tap the possibilities of the future in a modern and progressive India. The image that beckoned was that of the 'new man' or the 'modern man', the 'industrial man' and soon, 'India must break with much of her past and not allow it to dominate the present' wrote Nehru in his book 'The Discovery of India'. Our lives are encumbered with the dead wood of this past; all that is dead and has served its purpose has to go' (Nehru; 1981: 522).

However the past could not be so easily wished away. The rising middle class wanted some cultural roots to cling to. The middle class therefore fostered an effortless schizophrenia: an endorsement of the project of modernity in the public realm and a retention in the private domain of many of the orthodoxies and rituals incompatible with such a stance (Varma; 1998: 43). The patchwork acceptance of the idea of modernity led to its own distortions. Thus in theory the caste system was rejected as a relic of the past, inimical to the creation of an egalitarian society because it was suppressive of such

normative values as the dignity and equality of human beings. In practice, the middle class remained upper caste in character.

The distinction between what the middle class sought to be, or what it thought itself to be, and what it actually was, casts important shadow on future events, leading to the rise of religious fundamentalism and communalism. The contradictions between the two occurred because they were posited as essentially representing two different ways of life. The dilemma was all the more acute for the educated Indian, because his education exposed him to the new, even when he could not give up the old. The middle class, caught in the penumbra of the past and the present, the traditional and the modern, was unable to develop an authentic paradigm synthesizing both. And this would have important consequences for developments in the future.

In the post 1991 phase when India embarked on a process of economic reforms, opening up its economy and inviting foreign investment, the Indian middle class came into new prominence. The Indian middle class as a numerically broad brush identity, disproportionate to its size has yet played a pivotal role in the making of modern India (Varma 1998: xi).

The 'liberalization' package on mid 1991, tailored to make India a player in the 'globalized' economy, suddenly put the spotlight on the middle class for an entirely new reason: its ability to consume (ibid,

170). The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) carried out a survey in 1994 titled the consumer classes. (NCAER; 1996). The survey revealed that the middle class consists of three segments, the consuming class accounting for 150 million people, the climbers consisting of 275 million people and the aspirants numbering about 275 million. According to the NCAER survey, households with incomes restricted to between Rs. 12,500 and Rs. 40,000 per year, account for as many as 331 million people. Only 4.1 per cent of the population, or 37 million people, have a income of over Rs. 40,000 a year. And the rich, with an income of over five lakh rupees, do not number more than 1.4 million. Other indices are equally sobering. The number of cars in private possession is less than fourteen per 1000 households. In Mexico the number 15 112, and Brazil eighty-five. Only 5.5 per cent of the total population owns a colour T.V. The penetration of consumer durables is as limited such statistic indicate 'the middle class of a poor country (Varma 1998: 178).

The New Economic Policy (NEP) may have put a new focus on the middle class, primarily as a consumer, but the middle class was not suddenly conjured out of thin air. The middle class had 'ancestors' and a history. The Indian middle class could not be an entity unto itself, defined solely by its material desires, and autonomous to the economic realities of the country as a whole. In

Discovery of India Nehru had made an unusually prophetic statement: 'Classes that have ceased to play a vital part in society are particularly lacking in wisdom (Bidwai, 1995). A key component in the emergence of a prosperous India is to somehow involve the influential middle class in the vital project of civic engagement. It is only such an engagement that can perhaps help it transcend its obsession with short-term gain at the expense of the long-term good of the nation and its enduring well-being. It is only such an engagement that can, hopefully, give birth to a social concern that will give primacy to the real principles for a resurgent India (Varma 1998: 214).

Industrialization after independence helped strengthen the national economy, but at the cost of intensifying regional inequalities. Resentment against regional unevenness tended to find quick translation into regionalist movements. (Kaviraj 1995: 126). The logic of uneven development results in unusual backwardness, as in the case of Assam, and very rapid development, as in the case of Punjab. Both conditions have offered the grounds for the growth of exclusivist movements. (Hasan 1989: 23).

What is remarkable is the rapidity with which the curve of regional resentment rises from electoral defects straight to armed militancy, instead of the trend common in the fifties and sixties, of spilling over into large street demonstration and popular movements.

Thus the central contradiction of the history of the Indian nation-state seems to be, at this point at least, between the logic of economic development and the logic of political identities (Kaviraj 1995: 128).

Rajni Kothari puts forth the 'class versus nation' phenomenon according to which the middle class which occupied formal positions of authority after independence has turned parasitic and is on the whole alienated from the bulk of the people. Every society needs an educated middle class which provides it with intellectual, professional, and political-bureaucratic skills and which should, if properly utilized, become a bulwark of both constructive continuities and radical changes. (Kothari 1976: 24).

Middle Class in Assam

Assamese society in the precolonial phase has been largely a self-sufficient economy; therefore maintained a significant distance from the rest of India which explains the perpetuation of Ahom rule for 600 long years (1228-1826) (See Guha, 1984).

With the British conquest and annexation of Assam in 1826 by the treaty of Yandabu, migrants from the mainland found new vistas to make a fortune in the land of Red rivers and the Blue hills (Reddi 1984: 260). Colonial Assam territorially much larger than pre-colonial Assam included the hill areas of nearly the entire North-East India, Cachar district and parts of Bengal. Colonial phase broke the isolation of Assam and added complexities with serious socio-political

and economic ramifications into the semi-feudal and semi-feudal society in Assam (Hussain 1993: 38). Before going into the complexities, a study of the class structure of pre-colonial society in Assam it is necessary to comprehend the issues like continuity and discontinuity in the ruling class. Hussain presents a very comprehensive picture of the class structure in the pre-colonial society in Assam. The classes are broadly divided into the ruling classes and the toiling classes. The ruling class, small in number dominates and controls all aspect of social life by virtue of its economic position while the toiling class, larger in number is oppressed and exploited by the ruling class. The Ruling class mainly composed of three hierarchically distinct aristocracy that is:

- (1) Higher Aristocracy
- (2) Middle Aristocracy
- (3) Lower Aristocracy (They were the non-productive and non-labouring classes)

The higher aristocracy comprised of the king, the members of the Royal family, the ministers and high officials of the Ahom state. The middle aristocracy composed of the priestly classes the like Shakta Brahmins priests, the Vaishnava Brahmins, the Kayastha and the Kalita priests; Grahabipras/Ganaks/Dai Vangya - the astrologers and a small group of Muslim clerics. The middle aristocracy was largely secular in composition. The lower aristocracy composed of

officers of lower rank in the Ahom State, the Chamua Paiks (the peasants*) and the merchants - * didn't do physical labour.

The toiling classes in the pre-colonial Assam were the Paiks - militamen-cum-peasants, fisherman, artisans, small merchants. At the bottom of the stratification stood the bondsmen serfs and slaves. (See Hussain 1993: 32) for a detail understanding of the toiling class and the peculiar land system in Ahom Assam. The Slaves and bondsmen were locally known as bandi, beti, golam, dash, bohotiya, loqua, lickshau etc. (Guha, 1984: 503).

The original Ahom system was challenged from many directions but the challenge primarily came from the development of sanskritizing movements of the indigenous peasants by the great Assamese Vaishnavite movement of the 15th and 16th centuries (See Sharma, 1980). Saint Sankaradeva (1449-1568) popularized Vaisnavism among the masses in Assam. Gradually satras (Monasteries) of Vaisnavism became popular and powerful institutions in Assam. The result was a long drawn out series of civil wars with the majority of peasants and the new developing feudal forces from below on one side and the Ahom tribal oligarchy on the other. Thus paved the way for external intervention which finally led to Assam's incorporation into the British colony.

On assuming power the British systematically excluded the Ahom oligarchy from the state machinery and set up an

administration, the lower rungs of which consisted almost wholly of Bengalis imported mainly from Bengal (Hussain, 1993: 38) Thus delayed the process of formation of the middle class among the Assamese. In the absence of an Assamese middle class in the early colonial Assam, the Bengalis monopolized nearly all jobs meant for Indians in the colonial Administration. The policies followed by the British, like taking away excess land resources from the aristocracy introduction of new land revenue policies and the significance of embracing education as a means of retaining the status of a social elite, quite a few of the Assamese middle class leaders emerged from the Vaishnava Sattras families.

With the emergence of a national movement for Independence, the growing popularity of the Congress and the consolidation of Assamese middle class in the 20th century, a large section of this class could gradually step into newer roles. The Assam Association was formed in 1903, which merged with the Indian national Congress in 1920. With the merger of the Assam Association with the Indian National Congress, the Assamese middle Class gradually abandoned its collaborative politics with colonialism. The national movement for independence of India, helped the emerging Assamese nationality to identify itself with the great Indian nationalism. It broke the political isolation and marked its integration with Indian nationalism. However it must also be admitted that though small in size, a section

of the Assamese middle class continued its collaborationist politics. By then the Assamese had gradually become an integral part of the multi-national Indian society with a distinct regional identity. As mentioned earlier the distorted transformation of semi-tribal and semi-feudal society in colonial Assam had its affect on the Assamese nationality formation process, as a result the Assamese people did not have much confidence in their own destiny (Hussain, 1993; 51).

The Assamese middle class is of a comparatively recent origin, trailing atleast a hundred years behind its Bengali counterpart (Gohain 1985: 89, Saikia 2000: 159). The roots of this middle class can be traced to two important sections of Assamese society of the British period, the revenue officials like mauzadars and the religious institutions like satras. Position of the Brahmin priests and that of the Gossains - Mahantas (clerics of Vaisnavism) did not decline because of the continuity of state patronage from the colonial rulers. In addition to the Gossains, Mahantas, the Brahmins, Kayasthas, Gonaks and a section of the Kalitas and the Assamese Muslims because of their literate background and means formed the larger chunk of the Assamese middle class (Hussain, 1993:40). The dominant majority of the leading personalities of the Assamese middle class of the last quarter of the 19th Century belong to the Assamese high caste (Guha, 1977; 341-43). Nearly the same social composition continued till the end of colonial rule in Assam the middle class

mainly composed of high caste like Brahmins, Kayasthas, Gonaks, Kalitas, Gossain-Mahantas and few Assamese Muslims (Hussain, 1993; 41).

They took interest in the development of Assamese language and literature and gradually language became an important perhaps the most sensitive symbol of the Assamese middle class and nationality.

The case of Assam compounded with the rising tensions of the North-East as a whole. Tensions developed along the two broad lines of the various tribal peoples of the sprawling north-east region, seeking autonomy, and the indigenous Assamese - speaking population seeking to free itself of the Bengali economic and administrative strong hold on Assam over a period of 20 years, the North-Eastern stretch of the country was divided into seven states and UT's (of which Arunachal Pradesh's and Mizoram has been conferred statehood) (See, Satamurthy; 1983).

The linguistic conflict took a new discussion, by virtue of the fact that the economic, educational and administrative life of the state was dominated by an immigrant upwardly mobile Bengali community and the economic future of the mass of the people belonging to the Assamese linguistic cultural nationality was being imperiled by the regular influx of Bengal people - mainly poor, muslim peasants and landless labourers from East Pakistan into Assam. It wan't given the

adequate attention that it deserved until it exploded into a big violent crisis for the first time in 1962 (Satyamurti 1998: 241).

Social Movement

Social movements are a modern phenomenon. They represent the struggle of particular civil society and their organs against the policies of the state and its apparatus, be it colonising, developing or developed state. They are direct offshoot of and reaction to the challenges and problems of industrial civilization. Social movement always have a class character. Literature talks about old and new social movements reflecting on their social character. Old social movements have been of the poor, new social movements have been of the well to do. Example, the middle class. If labour and peasant movements were of the old variety, new ones are the ones on gender, ecology and Human rights.

Social Movements: Theoretical Consideration

In the west, a social movement denotes a wide variety of collective attempts that change the nature of functioning of social institutions or create an entirely new social order. The main conceptual problem of the western scholar relates to social changes with different social movements. This change may become evident in the socio-economic status of the groups of people who play the key role in a movement. A change may take place in social stratification or in the value system within a society. Sometimes, a social

movement may aim at the total change of a system by means of violent or non-violent actions. (Chakraborty, 1991:2).

In the academic discourses in Europe there is a distinction between the conventional and the contemporary social movements. This distinction became evident first during the students movements, which waved through most of Europe in the 1960s the objective of this movement were quite different from the workers movement. The anti-nuclear movements in late 70's the German Green movement in early 80s and peoples spontaneous upsurge against the totalitarian states in late 80's further strengthened this view. Initial objective of the workers movements was to secure a better status of citizenship through the instrument of voting rights. Later their demands was changed to more economic benefits and greater participation of the working class in the political system. They were basically engaged in political bargaining with the state. A similar argument was made for the early feminist movements. In contrast the aims of the students movements or the anti-nuclear movements were mobilisation of the civil society for democracy. These movements were not for the seizure of the state power. Their main concern was morality, value, humanity, peace. They were anti-authoritarian and kept a distance from the institutionalised poltiics (Ibid: 3).

The Marxists crticized this view for it kept the concept of class away from social movements. In their opinion, any social movement

independent of class dimension and indifferent to fundamental change of economic relationship, ultimately goes against change. The Marxist analysed social movements as a collective expression of a self-activating class with its political potential to bring about a social change. It is a struggle by the oppressed against those who control the means of production and market mechanism.

a) Alain Touraine

Alain Touraine has come out with a new analysis of social movements. His view neither subscribes to the Marxists nor to the functionalists. He has located social movements with the civil society. The old form of industrial capitalism according to Touraine is gradually replaced by a new post industrial, 'programmed' society with a fundamentally different pattern of class relations and class conflict. In a programmed society the dominant class is technocracy, and workers cease to be the main challengers of status quo. The key conflict is socio-cultural rather than socio-economic, it revolves around the control of knowledge and investment.

Touraine looks into the concept of class from a social point of view. Classes can exist when there is a system and the system itself is a product of social relation and history. "In human relations, no matter how unequal, there is necessarily an element of mutual dependence and recognition between subjects occupying the subordinate and dominant positions" (Touraine, 1981: 77). He uses

the term 'subjects' for the collective body of people Touraine defines social movements as "the organised collective behaviour of a class actor struggling against his class adversary for the social control of historicity in a concrete community." (ibid; 77).

In Touraine's analysis the organisation does not take the central stage in social movement. Mobilisation of people is almost spontaneous and its basis is ideology. Touraine's view does not help much in analysing social movements of India. In India, organisations and the political forces have a very significant role in augmenting social movements. Moreover, class is a very important category in socio-economic change in India. Different classes not only co-exist in Indian society, they often try to change society according to their respective class interests and/or coalition of interests.

(b) J. Habermas

J. Habermas comes up with a more extensive articulation of the post-industrial society. He analysed social movements in the context of long historical process of nationalisation within the European societies. Its genesis has been located in the privatised civil life predominated by traditional values. In the post-industrial society the traditional values, like self-reliance, privatism of individual persons etc. are undermined because of increasing state intervention. "Family or the community life, which was previously private concerns, in capitalism are exposed to the public realm and they become subject of

political issues. At the political level this reflects the growing suspicion about the role of the state. When the member of the civil society resist the colonising behaviour of the political system it surfaces as social movement. In this process only positive social movements are capable of asserting a change. Therefore, it was not capitalism but the post-industrial society against which the social movements of the modern times are directed. The fundamental conflict of a social movement is not only conflict between classes, but, between the social world and nature" (Habermas 1987: 80).

As it has been concluded by Habermas that the conflict between the classes is not evident in social movements, is not acceptable because class is an important category in the social conflict of India. For example, the traditional fish workers in the marine fishery sector of India are fighting mainly against the increasing presence of the mercantile capitalist class. (Chakraborty 1999: 6).

(c) Alan Scott

Scott views social movements as a search for an alternative against the attempt of the state to undermine the traditional values. The states dependence on technocratic advancement leads to the state ignoring the value system, and culture of society. As a consequence more people face the challenge of survival due to further economic marginalisation. According to Scott the movements in contemporary Europe are initiated mainly by the educated middle

class or by the most educated section of generally less privileged groups. Social movements are significant for him in changing social relationship and social structure. At the same time, he opposes the idea of branding them as the medium of total transformation. (Ibid 10). Alan Scott defines social movement as, "a collective actor constituted by individual who understand themselves to have common interest and, for at least some significant part of their social existence, a common identity. Social movements are distinguished from other collectivities, actors, such as political parties and pressure groups in that they have mass mobilization or the threat of mobilization, as their prime source of social sanction, and hence of power. They are further distinguished from other collectivities such as voluntary associations or clubs, in being chiefly concerned to defend or change society, or the relative position of the group in society (Scott, 1990: 6).

(d) Samir Amin

Samir Amin, a noted economist of Africa rationalises contemporary social movements by means of a centre-periphery analysis. He places capitalist societies at the centre which he calls bourgeois nation states. According to him,

"One essential function of the capitalist states is to regulate the condition of accumulation through the national control that it exercises over the production of labour force, the market, the

centralization of the surplus, national resources and technology" (Samir 1993: 80).

According to Amin the revolutionary attempts of the present century which are known as socialist revolutions, are the first successful attempts against the capitalist expansion. Amin opines that the unequal development, immanent in the capitalist expansion, has placed on the agenda of history another type of revolution, that of the people of the periphery. These people's revolutions are also termed as social movements. They are anti-capitalist but not socialist. These social movements in their anti-imperialist struggle reject the peripheralisation and assume a national or at least a nationalist dimension. They are progressive since they basically demand for the abolition of inequality between people which is accentuated, reproduced and deepened by the very expansion of capitalism. The future of social movements largely depend on their capacity to make a break through of the capitalist social system (ibid: 85).

(e) Ted. Robert Gurr

Gurr puts forth that a social movement is a wild (weak, underdeveloped) form a revolutionary outbreak or an aspect of revolution. In his off quoted book 'Why men Rebel' Gurr explains "relative deprivation as a gap between expectations and perceived capabilities involving economic conditions, political power and social

status" (Gurr 1970: 60). Relative deprivation may be elaborated as a negative discrepancy between legitimate expectations and existing reality. The basic area in these explanation is that when the perceived deprivation of social collectivities in mobilised for transforming the current order, movement emerge within the limits of their goals and objectives. The leading bases of categorising objectives may be religion, caste, tribe, language, region, economy and so on. (Karna, 1998: 20).

Gurr feels conflict between ethnic groups and states are a part of the heritage of large historical processes: imperial conquest, colonial rule, frontier settlement and international migration of labour. He distinguishes between four important types of ethnic groups existing in modern states; ethnonationalists, indigenous peoples, communal contenders, and ethnoclasses. Historically the ethnonationalists were usually independent and they want to reestablish their own states, whereas indigenous people are mainly concerned with protecting their traditional land resources and culture. Communal contenders are one among a number of culturally distinct group in plural societies that compete for a share of political power whereas ethnoclasses want equal rights and opportunities to overcome the effects of discrimination resulting from their immigrant and minority status (Gurr and Harff, 1994: 95).

Local economies were undermined by colonial rule. Through the introduction of economies that favoured the dominant group conquered people were forced into servitude, slavery, and dependency colonial rule also brought some benefits, especially to those who could supply the rulers with surplus food, minerals, or other valuable goods. The British and French colonial practice of relying on strategically located ethnic groups as clerks, soldiers or middlemen in commerce often led to stratification of colonized people among ethnic lines.

The sense of separate identity and grievance that result from imperial conquest and colonial rule can persist for many generations and provide fuel for contemporary movements. Another source of friction in colonial situation resulted from colonial policies that encouraged immigration of outsiders to work on newly established plantations or to engage in commercial activities involved by the indigenous population. (ibid: 16).

In summary, each of the major historical processes left legacies of antagonism and inequalities that fuel contemporary ethnic conflicts. Discrimination and exploitation by the more technologically advanced people, have been the major cause of their growing sense of common identity and purpose.

Social Movements in India

Studies of social movement in India have been directed mainly to assess the role of the state. According to Rajni Kothari, social movements are largely protests by people against the political system. "when there is search for new instrument of political action and when large vacuums in political space are emerging thanks to the decline in the role of the state and the virtual collapse of 'government' in large parts of rural India" (Kothari 1985: 217).

Social movements in India have been promoted or supported by Gandhians (Chipko, Tehri etc.) radical Christians and freelance Marxists intellectuals (peace movement, Fishworker's movement etc.) and other (Movts of dalits, gender, anti-liquor etc.).

Social movements in India lack of common analytical framework and vision of society, politics and economy. Their notion of state is not categorical too. There are forums, alliances and networks meant for providing space to the activists to consider different problems/issues and evolve a common view, ideology and strategy, and augment people's movements. They emerge, not so consistent, not so open and not so democratic. Domination - subjugation in relationship becomes pervasive. They wither. (Chakravaty, 1999: 19). The cumulative effect of this isolation is the setback to the possible and desirable transformation of society. Due to this isolation social movements in India have remained far from being able to contain

communalism, ethnicity and to reduce the incidents of social discrimination etc.

Traditional India was characterized by political fragmentation and linguistic regional insulation, hierarchical social division and institutionalized inequality, cultural - ethnic diversity and social tolerance. (Oommen, 1990: 32). Each of these elements in the historicity of Indian society influenced the nature and types of social movements which originated and spread in India. Given the severity of the caste system and the deeply entrenched social inequality, these movements were mainly directed against the evils that emanated from the caste system. Political fragmentation and regional - linguistic insulation invariable blocked the development of all-India movements. It was only with the emergence of nationalism as an ideology that the divergent social movements of autonomous origin have been gradually welded together into an overarching Indian National liberation movement. (Desai 1976: 307).

Independent India is characterized by rapid urbanization and industrialization, planned economic development, a series of social legislations undermining several traditional values and extending protection to 'weaker sections', commitment to 'socialism', 'secularism and democracy', political pluralism as reflected in a multiparty parliamentary democracy. Each of these elements again influences the origin, the nature, the types, and the spread of social movements.

(Oommen, 1990:33). The process of economic development inaugurated through national planning had accepted the notion of balanced regional development. Since the benefits of development were to be shared by a population characterized by considerable disparity, understandable anxiety arose as to the basis of distribution of the extremely limited developmental inputs. Regional disparities and the fear of exploitation by other linguistic groups gave birth to the emergence of a series of sub-national movements within Independent India, leading to reorganization of Indian States based on language in 1956. The acceptance of the linguistic principle for state formation gave birth to three distinct variants of 'national' movements in Independent India. (a) secessionist movements (Naga, Assam and the Mizo underground movement) which mobilize people who speak the same language, share the same style of life and inhabit a common territory for the formation of sovereign states.

(b) Movements for the formation of linguistic states with relative autonomy but within the framework of nation-state. Once language is accepted as the basis of state formation, other primordial ties may be used to articulate demands in this context. The demand for a separate Jharkhand state uniting the tribal groups of the border districts of Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal illustrates this tendency.

(c) Movements which emphasize the rights of the son of soil and breed animosities to 'outsiders'. These movements are mainly

led by urban middle classes, particularly in those cities where a substantial migrant population with different linguistic backgrounds compete for employment, licences for industry, establishing new economic enterprises, admission to elite educational institution etc. (Oommen, 1990: 35).

Gurr, refers to them as the 'people of the frontier' because they live in peripheral regions eg. The North East India. They want to protect their language and way of life from what their advocates call ethnocide that is, the destruction of their culture or cultural genocide, and they seek to regain as much control as possible over their lands and resources. These movements have been highly influential in encouraging political activism among previously passive groups (Gurr and Harff 1994: 15-20).

According to M.S.A. Rao social movements in India, "though aim at change, it is not necessarily of uniform nature". He distinguishes between three levels of structural changes through social movements - "reformist, transformative and revolutionary" (Rao, 1979: xii) While reforms aims at modifying the belief system and lifestyle of the members of a group, revolutionary changes aim to bring about sudden and total changes in all the aspect of society. Transformative changes refer to changes in the traditional balance of power relations, altering the economic and political super-ordination - subordination relationship.

Since social movements in India function in isolation, T.K. Oommen advocates politicization of every social movement. Social change is closely linked with the change in the political system. Instrumentality of a party to carry on a social movement, therefore becomes indispensable and inevitable. To quote Oommen, "This politicisation cannot be avoided because action groups can be initiators of social movements but not necessarily their customary agents, instruments or carriers" (Oommen, 1990: 145-140) Politicization is also necessary to strengthen a movement's ideology which is an integral component of every social action. Ideology may not be categorically visible in a movement, but it is there because people create movements to achieve a preconceived goal, which is again conditioned by specific social and structural factors. It may be formulated by a core section of the leadership and, it may continue to exist in very abstract terms. Among the people the ideology may be problem oriented and issue - centred programmes. (Chakraborty, 1999: 20). In Oomens view, when, 'a movement' to translate its ideology into reality, it needs an institutional vehicle, for example a party" (Oommen, 1990: 152) Oommen however doesn't argue for transformation of social movements into political movements. He makes a functional distinction between social and political movements. According to him, "while political parties are organized groups with formal power, operating within the boundaries of nation-

states, social movements consist of unbounded and open-ended social collectivities." (ibid, 1990: 37)

Social Movt. in North-East India

Various theories like the 'theory of relative deprivation, including internal colonialism, peripheral and late capitalism, distorted and dependent development, lopsided and uneven development and wider development are currently in vogue as far as the analysis of social movement in the north-east region is concerned" (Chaube 1973; Misra, 1978, Guha 1977).

Another perspective put forward to explain movements in the North-East is couched in terms of an inevitable and "growing conflict between the great and little nationalism". (Oommen, 1990; 79). The great nationalism of India emerged in the colonial context as the ideology of the pan-Indian big bourgeoisie eager to capture an appropriate share of the growing market in India to the exclusion of, or is collaboration with foreign capitalists. They perceived an Indian state more conducive to meeting their aspirations and establishing the hegemony of Indian capitalism and hence they supported the Independence struggle. On the other hand, the little nationalism emerged as the ideology of the regional small bourgeoisie, the local middle class of other regions but also from the pan-Indian big bourgeoisie. Therefore, the ideology of the little nationalism is oriented

to the exclusive control of regional markets by the respective middle classes.

In the Assamese context, it has been frequently argued that internal-structural contradiction in the region surfaced due to the demographic imbalance created by the large scale influx of refugees at the time of partition. Apart from this substantial internal migration particularly of Bengali's in search of better opportunities also took place. This demographic imbalance had both political and economic consequences. The possibility of 'outsiders' becoming a decisive force in the context of electoral choices within the region is being perceived increasingly by the local people. In economic terms, the 'outsiders' have come to occupy not only a large proportion of jobs in prestigious occupations and professions but also have virtual monopoly of trade, commerce and industry. The domination of 'outsiders' ran parallel with the emergence of an educated and articulate middle class who believed that they have the first claim on these positions. (Oommen, 1990: 79) (Rakesh Gupta, 1998: 28).

The Assam movement is a reflection of the above factors and has its roots in major socio-economic, demographic and political changes and correlations of class forces in Assam during the colonial as well as the post-colonial period. The subsequent chapter analyses the Indian states role in tackling the immigration issue and the far

reaching implications it had in the future cultural politics of the state. With the Assam movement there is a shift of an 'elite group' culturally invisible to becoming culturally visible - a result of a loss of hegemony: (Sharma; 1989: 120).

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CHAPTER - II

ASSAM MOVEMENT - PRE AND POST MOVEMENT POLITICS

The north-east Indian 'other' had for long been an exotic area for mainstream theorists. Interpretation of the questions of identity assertion in this 'other' were formulated on the classical framework centered mainly on problems of economic distribution. Though economic cleavage is an important component of this identity assertion which is the cultural specificity of this 'other' has been consciously sidetracked. The emergence of New Social Movements in the form of Ethnic nationalism in the North-east is a revolt against the domination and cultural impoverishment by the dominant centre of these margins. (Dev, 1996: 116) New Social Movements are the outcome not primarily of distribution problems, but by questions having to do with the grammar of forms of life. (Habermas, 1987; 392) or more aptly of recognition rather solely of redistribution. Such new social movements address the celebration of the emergence of "local resistance" (Foucault) or "local determinism" (Lyotard). The redeployment of cultural consciousness and the accentuation of the same at the level of primary loyalties based mainly on ethnic affiliations, religion, gender, cultural specificity etc. gave spurt to these new social movements. (ibid., 115)

The genesis of ethnic nationalism in the north-east is the outcome not merely of the failure of the federal polity but also the inability of the Indian state to provide a genuine political template which could accommodate the immense differences. The imagery of a quite equilibrium reflected by the liberal national state celebrating homogeneity has been in reality repressive and coercive and seems to have colonized the 'life world' (Habermas, 1987) of these marginal identities. The identity movements generated in this space of a quite equilibrium are making claims to their marginalisation and peripheralisation bordering them on political, economic and most importantly cultural differences (ibid., 116).

The first major difference of opinion between Assam and the centre occurred over the question of settling the refugees from newly created East Pakistan in the state. A steady stream of Hindu refugees had been flowing into Assam since the partition and the Assam government, despite severe financial constraints, was doing its best to provide land and shelter to the uprooted of about twenty lakh refugees who entered India. During 1947-1950, undivided Assam had to give shelter to some three lakhs. But when the state government expressed its unwillingness to continue settling refugees without limit, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to the Chief Minister Gopinath Bordoloi in May 1949 that Assam was getting a bad name for its narrow approach to the problem and continued "you say there is no further land

available in Assam. This is a question of fact which can easily be determined. It is patent, however, that if land is not available in Assam, it is still less available in the rest of India". Nehru, in the same letter, threatened the Assam minister in no uncertain terms that if his state did not agree to accept the unending stream of refugees from East Pakistan and settle them on its land, then the centre would cut off financial aid to Assam. Stating that the refugee problem was one of the problems given first priority by the Indian government, Nehru concluded by saying that "if Assam adopts an attitude of incapacity to help solve the refugee problem, then the claims of Assam for financial help (would) obviously suffer. (Barooah 1990: 30-31).

In reply to Nehru's threat of economically strangling Assam, Gopinath Bardoloi wrote:

I feel extremely hurt when you say that the claims of Assam for financial help would suffer for our incapacity to help solving the refugee problem... It will be quite easy to throttle the province of its existence by withholding the necessary help for its life and growth, but I hope it will not be done - not surely on the plea of our failure to solve this particular problem ... I am sure if we are unable to do more, it is entirely due to the non-development of the province. A more developed province today might have helped better in solving the problem. (ibid.: 32)

Nehru's intolerant and near total refusal to see the Assamese view point would mark Assam-Centre relations in the years to follow and would contribute in no small measure towards widening the gap between Assam and the rest of the country (Mishra 2000: 113).

Right from the days of the Muslim League Ministries under Saadulla (1937-42), the opening up of the reserve belts to Muslim immigrants had been a major issue in Assam Politics. Though immediately after Independence some fifty thousand immigrants Muslims were said to have left the state, ten of thousands more kept coming over the years (ibid.: 114).

Nehru was not alone in adopting a totally partisan stand on the question of settling the refugees in Assam. Sardar Patel, who otherwise seemed perturbed by the continued influx of immigrants into Assam from East Pakistan, made clear his disapproval of the Assam governments move to settle landless indigenous peasants on surplus waste lands to be followed by the garden labourers. It wanted to give the third priority to the refugees in matter of land settlement. Patel wanted the surplus waste land to be distributed on a fifty-fifty basis between the Assamese landless and the refugees and was clearly upset when the Assam Revenue Minister, Bishnuram Medhi refused to be impressed. In a letter to Bardoloi, Patel condemned Medhi as a narrow and parochial person who did not wish to give any land to the 'outsiders' (Barooah 1990: 36-37).

When Nehru was threatening to cut off financial aid to the state, Assam was going through a grave economic crisis. The partition of the country had cut off Assam from the rest of India and turned it completely into a land locked province. Assam's rail-link with the rest of the country was snapped following the partition. It was only in January 1950 that the rail link was restored by a metre-guage line through the narrow chicken-neck corridor of North Bengal. The disruption in the rail link had a very adverse affect on Assam's economy. Assam also lost the Chittagong port which was a major outlet for Assam tea.

With Bardoloi's death in August 1950 and the passing out of the leadership to Bishnuram Medhi, the overall situation in the state gradually began to change. Meanwhile, the migration from East Pakistan continued and the number of Bengali refugees in the state increased from two lakh and seventy three thousand in 1951 to six lakhs and twenty eight thousand in 1961(census of India 1961, vol.3, Part III C 218; census of India 1951, vol.12, Part 1-A Report, 32-33). The rate of growth of Assam's population during the period 1951-61 was 34.9% as against the all India average of 24.6%. In the next decade, 1961-71, the population in the age-group of 15 to 59 yrs. which normally constitute the workforce increased by some 20.59 lakhs or 41%. The number of job seekers went up from 29.5 thousand in 1961 to 93.6 thousand in 1971. Thus as the unemployment figures

rose, dissatisfaction also grew at a fast pace primarily among the Assamese middle class; which started questioning the centre's policies towards this resource-rich state (Mishra 2000: 117).

Popular anger mounted and found its first expression in the movement for the first oil refinery in Assam which occurred in 1957. The agitation for the setting up of the first oil refinery in the public sector in Assam was the first populist movement since independence and was supported by all the political parties of the state. Medhi's demand for an oil refiners in the state was rejected by various technical committees. In a 13 June 1957 letter to Medhi, Nehru expressed impatience with the Assamese and added that he was especially irritated with the Congress Legislative Party's opposition to the main refinery being awarded to Bihar. In addition he said, the Defence Ministry had told him that it was safer, in terms of national security, to locate the refiner in Bihar (Hazarika 1994: 250).

Medhi replied tersely 'If Defence cannot undertake to protect the refinery located in Assam, how will they protect the oil fields and the transport system in the eastern region. We feel that the proper course is not to think of the protection of the refinery separately from the oil fields and the transport system, but to treat the refinery, oil fields and the lines of transport as a part of an integrated defence system in national interest..... 'In that case we do not understand how the defence will be able to protect the pipeline to Barauni, 140 miles of

which will necessarily have to pass along the Pakistan border. We also do not understand how the pipeline would be more defensible than the railway line as a good bit of it will have to pass at a distance of only 20 miles from the border". (ibid 250).

The government of India stubbornly resisted all demands for a sufficiently large public sector refinery near the oil-rich areas of upper Assam. The suggestions put forward by Soviet experts, on the basis of extensive surveys for the establishment of a large scale refinery at Silghat near Nowgaon was rejected outright. There could have been no other reason except vested political interest for the establishment of the large public sector refinery for Assam's crude at Barauni with an annual capacity of more than 30 lakh tonnes (Mishra 1980: 1361).

Mass movements protesting against this unfair decision of the centre were staged in Assam in 1956-57 as a result of which the centre tried to appease the people by establishing a small refinery at Gauhati with an annual refining capacity of only about 7 lakh tonnes.

Gradually economic issues were redefined and a cultural dimension was added to it, which led to the growth of demands to make Assamese language the language of the State. Medhi was succeeded by Bimala Prasad Chaliha (1957-70). His government made the move to make Assamese the official language of the State. This could be the earliest assertion of Assamese cultural pride. The very first generation of modern Assamese public intellectuals had to make

the case that they were a distinct people with a distinct language and culture (Baruah, 1999; 71) while for the Assamese, the adoption of their language as the official language of the State seemed to be a necessary logical step towards safeguarding their identity and culture, the non-Assamese tribals were beset by the fear of being Assamised. The Bodo movement in Assam is a fall out of the Assamese efforts to Assamise Assam. The urge to preserve the Bodo identity has been the major cause behind the Bodo movement (George 1994: 878-891) Also see (Chattopadhyay, 1990)

With the language movement of the 1960's the significant fact which emerged was the role played by the Assamese student community and the premier Assamese literary organisation the Asom Sahitya Sabha. Its motto is "my mother language - my eternal love". The Sabha, comprising of the educated middle class had been pressing for the adoption of Assamese as the sole official language of the state and its observance of "State language Day" in September 1959 virtually set the stage for the language movement. (Mishra: 2000; 119).

Assamese suspicions were further strengthened when during the Sino-Indian clash of 1962 Nehru in his now well-known broadcast virtually abandoned the State (Mishra, 1988 : 77) The feelings of being let down again found violent expressions in yet another upsurge of nationalistic feelings - demand for a second oil refinery in 1969.

Thousands of people from the Brahmaputra valley took to the streets to vent their anger against the centre's lackadaisical attitude towards Assam and demanded steady industrialization of the state. The regional press took up the cudges and highlighted the centre's exploitation of Assam.

The colonial thesis was being raised seriously for the first time (See Mishra, 1980; Sharma, 1980; EPW debate) This would be preceded by a state wide agitation led by the AASU in 1974 on the issue of economic development of the state.

Political Development in the 1970's

The Congress was dominated by the socially and culturally advanced high caste Assamese. From 1971, the Congress party started encouraging backward classes to take up important positions, thus improving their support base, however antagonising the powerful Assamese middle class composing of high caste (Hussain, 1993: 96). Congress attempt to improve the economic status of the state failed as it failed to get the necessary cooperation from the bureaucracy dominated by high castes. The new leadership predominantly belonging to the backward caste failed to meet the high caste expectations of the people. The state of emergency deepened the crisis and in the 1978 elections Congress lost power (Ibid 97).

March 1977, Janata Party came to power in the centre. In Assam two regional parties the people's democratic party of Assam

(PDPA) and "Ujani Asam Rajya Parishad" (UARP) merged with the Janata Party and formed the government headed by Gopal Barbora. However the government collapsed within 20 months in November 1979.

The six years of Assam movement followed. The bye-election in mid-1979 in Mongoldoi gave concrete shape to the Assam movement. The revision and preparation of electoral rolls for an by election, following the death of the MP Hiralal Patwari (Janata Dal) from the Mongoldoi constituency of the Lok Sabha pinpointed the deluge of non-citizens sweeping over the electorate (Neog, 1984).

The tribunal set up by the state government, declared as many as 45,000 voters in an electorate of 6 lakhs to be foreigners. The then Chief Election Commissioner Sham Lal Shakhder a constitutional expert and former secretary general of the Lok Sabha told a conference of election commissioner from across India in 1978 that he was alarmed by reports especially from the North East that foreigners were being included on the electoral list.

In one state (Assam) the population in 1971 recorded an increase as high as 34.98% over the 1961 figures and this contributed to the influx of a very large number of persons from the neighbouring countries. The influx has become a regular feature. I think it may not be a wrong assessment to make on the basis of the increase of 34.98% between the two censuses, the increase that is likely to be

regarded in the 1991 census would be more than 100% over the 1961 census. In other words, a stage would be reached when the state would have to reckon with the foreign nationals who may probably constitute a sizeable percentage if not the majority of the population of the state. (Hazarika, 1994:139).

In a situation which was becoming more and more complicated because of unbridled migration of people to Assam. Dr. Amalendu Guha had also admitted: "although the Assamese constitute the majority in the total population (in Assam) yet their majority is not strong. Hence the necessity of controlling further immigration so that the right of the Assamese people to self-determination may be safeguarded is insured." He also said that since the beginning of the seventies immigration "has become inimical to the formation of Assamese sub-nationality and that it has been acknowledge by Indian Public opinion by now that "there is a legitimate ground for" the fear that the very existence of the Assamese people might be endangered in future because of uncontrolled immigration (Barua 1984: 304).

The Assamese bourgeoisie press played it up as a major issue which generated a fear psychosis among a large section of Assamese middle class and the rural rich thus the movement for assertion of Assamese identity began. (Hussain, 1993: 108).

Emergence of AASU

With an 'a political image All Assam Students Union (AASU) had successful led a movement to make Assamese the sole medium of instruction along with English for college education in Assam. (1970's) mid 1979 AASU took up the foreign nationals issue and provided the leadership base preparing the masses for the movement. Before this in 1974, AASU tried to build up a mass movement based on certain genuine economic demands like the implementation of progressive land reforms in the interest of the Pesantry, more industrialization of Assam under the public sector, nationalization of industries owned by the bourgeoisie without paying any compensation; measures to control the perennial floods in Assam, take over of procurement and distribution of all essential foodgrains by the government etc. (AASU, 1974 : 1-16).

The most significant feature of the 1974 demand was that AASU did not demand the expulsion of foreign nationals from Assam. They only demanded the ban of bohiragotas (outsiders) to Assam till the state attained a position at par with the other developed states of India (Ibid 12-13). Also See (Deka, 1991).

The 1974 movement was suppressed by the state government because of lack of popular support base and also because it received no support from the Assamese bourgeoisie press, which wouldn't support progressive demands like land reforms or nationalization of

Industries (Hussain 1993: 107) AASU realized the futility of fighting for political and economic issues from within an a political students organization, which was isolated from the masses. In 1978 AASU, underwent an internal transformation from left of the centre to right of the centre. The Assamese bourgeoisie press now came forward to help it in 1997. Thus reflecting class nexus involved in the Assam movement. (ibid 108)

AASU spearheading the anti-foreigners movement, declared 'no revision, no election? What they wanted was three D's : detection, deletion and deportation of the foreigners prior to the election of 14 lok Sabha seats in Assam. Under the leadership of young, affable president Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and General secretary Bhrigu Kumar Phukan the movement started on 6th November 1979 with mass rally of the people at Guwahati to demand immediate settlement of the foreigners issue'. They had the solid support of the All Assam Ganga Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) with its constituents Asom Sahito Sobha, Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal (AJD) and Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad (PLP). (Barpujari, 1998: 57).

This was the beginning of an active phase of protest actions and mass mobilization. Mangoldoi by-elections did not take place and the Janata government collapsed at the centre, August 1979. So intense was the feeling of the Assamese and such was the movement of agitation that in its wake two popular governments were swept out of

office in quick succession, all major political parties pulverised, wheels of public sector undertaking brought to a grinding halt, all education institutions close down for months together and election in 12 out of 14 Lok Sabha constituencies scuttled. (Sarin 1982: 48) Also See (Rafiabadi, 1979).

12th Sept. to 14 Sept. - AASU gave a call for mass picketing of all govt. and semi-govt. offices. 6th Oct. 1979, leadership of the movement gave a call for a mass rally at Guwahati, 9th Oct. - leadership announced a 'drive out foreigners' campaign, followed by a general strike... Most of the actions were initially peaceful. But the situation soon went out of control in pockets of Bengali speaking population at Tiusukia, Dumdumma, Duliajan and Naharkatiya (Barpujari, 1998: 58).

Assam gradually plunged into lawlessness. 12th Oct. - 18th Nov. 1979, week long actions programme with Satyagrahas courting arrest etc. movement intensified. Coalition government headed by Jogen Hazarika collapsed on 12th Dec. 1979. Assam came under press rule for the 1st time in Dec. 1979.

18th Dec. 1979 was observed throughout the Assam Valley as Mritya Samkalpa Divas. Presidents rule had already been clamped on Assam and the State Assembly was put into animated suspension on Dec. 12. 1979. A non-cooperation movement was started on Dec. 1979. The govt. now benefit of local support, became cruel and

started repression. From 9 to 12th Jan. 1980 members of the Indian army carried on vandalism in a number of villages. On 18 Jan., 1980, BSF and CRPF men opened fired on peaceful squatters at the gate of Duliajan oil field, killing four persons and injuring many. At other places there were police firings and lathi charge on satyagrahis. Different types of punitive measures were taken against government employees who went on strike and played a crucial role in the movement mainly through their coordinated body, the All Assam Employee's Parishad (Neog 1984: 282).

It would be relevant to point out here that many scholars expressed reservation about the democratic content of the Assam movement. It still remains a much debated topic till today. The movement generated a lot of debate and counter debate. The most famous being the EPW debate between Hiren Gohain and Sanjib Baruah two renounced Assamese scholars.

Hiren Gohain put fort his 'conspiracy theory' aknowledging the mass character of the movement albeit questioning its democratic content. According to him immigration and population explosion is the issue but its yet to be ascertained how much of the growth is due to natural fertility and the fall of the death rate especially among the immigrant muslims who had come before partition and India (Gohain 1980: 418-420).

He acknowledges the middle class character of the movement, but also hints at RSS element in the movement which primarily directed Anti-Muslim channels to the movement. The movement was a fall out of Assamese chauvinism. Backwardness, alone doesn't explain the cause, since the 60's Assamese liberal middle class culture have been undermined from within by a systematic infiltration of Fascist ideas and attitudes and the local press playing its role in legitimizing the issue (Gohain 1980*: 589-590).

He comes down heavily on the Assamese hangover of parasitical semi-feudal culture which promotes dreams of unearned leisure, and socio-economic weakness of the middle class. Has migration had no other effect than 'swamping Assamese identity - as claimed by the Assamese opinion builders? Paradoxically enough, it was only the coming of skilled people from outside that indirectly laid the foundation of the 'Assamese National Identity' (Ibid 590).

Sanjib Baruah gave a counter argument by putting forth his 'spontaneous upsurge theory' and said that the movement may be traced back to an ideology which articulated the fears and aspirations of a small nationality. The movement according to him has nothing to do with a mercenary press or with skilful planning and organisation. It's a forceful assertion of Assamese cultural sub-nationalism, what he calls 'false consciousness'. It's no middle class movement and insists on the Democratic content of the movement, the strength of the

movement lies in its passionate constitutionalism (Baruah 1980: 545)
Also See (Baruah 1980*, Baruah, 1994).

The structuring effect of sudden demographic change rather than the cultural weakness of the Assamese ruling elite better explains the 'non-integration of the non-Assamese into Assamese society' (ibid 546).

Though reservations have been expressed by social analysts & scholars about the democratic context of the Assam movement (Nellie massacre reveal strong communal over tones). See (Hussain 1993: 127). Given the scale of people's participation in it, it must be said that there was a great degree of national content in it. Had it not been for its wide popular base the movement would not have been able to sustain itself against such severe state repression for 5 long years. The Assamese middle class no doubt played the leading role in the agitation, but its success was ensured because of the strong degree of support it received from the rural masses, both Assamese and tribal (Mishra 2000: 132).

Although the AASU leaders consistently maintained that theirs was a struggle to save Assam today so as to save India tomorrow yet there were trends within the movement which seemed to espouse the cause of an independent Assam. The Jatiyatabadi Dal and the Asom Yuvak Samaj as well as the Purbanchaiya Lok Parishad were known to harbour secessionist feelings and the demands for a sovereign

independent Assam free from the 'colonial clutches' of New Delhi, often surfaced in its posters and leaflets. The stage therefore was gradually being prepared for the emergence of a political group which would eventually demand a sovereign Assam in order to put an end to the 'colonial' exploitation of the region. (Ibid 132-33).

The centralizing autocratic approach adopted by the Indian govt. to centre-state relations and to such regionally based opposition to the centre on the Assamese movement, as exemplified in a repeated resort to Presidents rule in the offending state, had the effect of exposing the limitations of deploying the main force in the form of an unbridled use of the coercive power of the state apparatus in order to stifle democratic dissent. As a consequence these democratically organized violence acquired an overlay of extremist violence (Satyamurthi 1998: 257).

Jan. 1980, return of Mrs. Gandhi to power and within 3 days of her assumption of office as the Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi sent her emissaries to meet the leaders of AASU at Guwahati.

Negotiations : Crystalization of Issues and Demands

2nd Feb. 1980, AASU submitted a written memorandum to the P.M. (See Appendix I). It was reported that the Prime Minister conceded five points out of the AASU's eight point demand, namely (1) the foreign nationals must be detected and deported from the country (2) the names of foreign nationals must be removed from the electoral

rolls before any fresh election is held. (3) The inclusion of foreign nationals in electoral rolls should be made impossible through the proper election machinery (4) India's border must be fully protected against infiltration (5) Indian voters in Assam should be issued identity cards with photographs. The three other points left out for future consideration were :

- (1) necessary safeguards should be provided to the people of the northeastern region for the next 15 to 20 yrs., by making necessary constitutional provisions for the protection of the identity of the indigenous people.
- (2) The Govt. of Assam should be free to reject citizenship certificates issued by the district authorities of West Bengal and Tripura and.
- (3) The authority to grant citizenship certificates delegated to state governments may be withdrawn by the central govt. immediately, so that those foreigners who are detected and deported from Assam may not come back armed with citizenship certificates liberally issued by other states. (Neog 1984: 283).

The acceptance of the first few demands represents the success of the movement. The first round of talks had catapulted the Assam movement into prominence and it received a wide coverage in the media. However, the negotiations were bogged down because both the

parties failed to arrive at a mutually acceptable definition of foreign nationals in the Indian sub-continental context and the cut-off years for detection and deportation of foreign nationals from Assam. Though the first round of talks failed, it paved the way for further negotiations between the leadership of the movement and the Government of India.

The problem arose on the cut off date: while AASU - AAGSP agreed to accept all the foreigners that entered Assam between 1951-61, the Centre wanted to have 25 March 1971 on the ground India-Mujib Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace, 1972 had imposed an obligation on the Government of India to accept all refugees who came to India before 1971. (Barpujari 1998: 60). Deadlock continued and no break through was in sight despite twenty seven round of talks at various levels. (These were started from 2 Feb 1980 to 5 June 1983 : 22 bipartite and 5 tripartite at various levels; (Ibid 60).

The agitation continued the political parties were divided in their opinion. Depended as it was entirely on the support of the foreigners, the Congress (I) stood against the movement. Backed by the party in power there had emerged in March 1980 the All Assam Minority Student's Union (AAMSU) to safeguard the interests of the foreigners.

Javelins and fishing forks acted as flag sticks and there was arson, display of the Bangladesh flag, cries of 'Jai Bangla' and 'Jai

Mujibour Rehman' and attacks on at least one police station. The police had to open fire on these counter-agitators, this was a black day for the state. The Prime Minister hastened to declare solemnly that her govt. and party had no hand in the game. But all this never meant the agitation should bend or break. (Neog 1984: 284) Also See (Murty, 1983).

In March 1982, Mrs. Gandhi endeavoured to install a Congress (I) ministry in Assam. Her first nominee Anwara Taimur had fallen after six months and Keshab Gogoi in two. Accordingly it was officially announced that the election would be held on 14, 17 and 20 Feb. 1983 on the basis of 1979 rolls without any revision on failure of last round of talks AASU - AAGSP leaders left Delhi on Jan. 7 1983 and on arrival at the Guwahati airport they were arrested and detained under the National Security Act. While the moderate leadership were under detention anti-poll agitation passed under the control of the extremists. The govt. clamped down Section 144 cr. D.C. and enforced Assam Disturbed Areas Act 1983 and Assam Armed Force Special Powers Act 1958. The entire district was in a stage of siege by the police. (The Assam Tribune, 1983).

Election personnel had to be recruited from outside the state on the refusal of the Karmachari Parishad (Council of the state staff) to perform election duties despite inducements and threats of pay cuts, break in service and disciplinary action. The organisation of general

election in such a situation proved a 'stupendous task' (Barpujari 1998: 62) Voting was very poor in the valley. Though Congress I had a landslide victory, the voting percentage was disappointing. Communal tension had reached new heights. The dominant community has been further alienated and extremism and violence had acquired much wider acceptability in the Brahmaputra Valley (ibid., 66)

27 Feb. 1982, Hiteswar Saikia took the oath as the CM of Assam. Born in 1934 in a middle class family near Nazira, upper Assam, with his ripe experience, administrative acumen and deft manoeuvring he weathered storms one after another that rocked the state and made himself indispensable to the centre and the state after the controversial elections (Bora, 1993)

Meanwhile the movement lost its vigour, bandhs and blackouts continued. Cracks were appearing in AASU - AAGSP's Camp. Following the Nellie massare constituents of AASU suspected 'a pro Hindu communal tilt' to the movement.

31st Oct. 1984, Rajiv Gandhi come to power with the assassination of his mother Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Aug. 1985, the student leaders were invited for further talks without any precondition. Hence followed the Assam Accord (See Appendix II). Which was signed in New Delhi in 15 Aug. 1985 by R.D. Pradhan the

Home Secretary and AASU President Prafulla Mahanta and General Secretary Bhrigu Kumar Phukan.

The centre conceded to the demand for (1) Saikia's removal (2) pledged to deport immigrants who had settled in Assam after 1971 and (3) disenfranchise 1966-67 migrants for ten years. On the cultural and economic demands, centre agreed to set up another refinery in Assam, establish an IIT, a Central University and open Ashok Paper and Silghat Jute mills. It was virtually a face - saving device. It did not deal with the primary demands : Detection, deletion and deportation of foreigners, 1951-70. (Barpujari 1998: 73)

Joining hands with the regional policies AASU formed the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and scored a clear majority in the general election, 1985.

It is indeed irony of fate that those who were in the vanguard of a peaceful movement turned before long into a group of 'gun toting, dreaded underground militants' namely the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).

Post-Accord

After the signing of the Accord two new parties emerged, the AGP, formed by the student leaders of the Assam movement and the United Minorities Front (UMF) formed by dissident Congress(I) politicians either Bengali Hindu or Muslim of Bengali descent. While the implementation of the Assam Accord was the main issue for the

AGP, the UMF demanded that the accord be scrapped (Barua 1999: 139).

The AGP government was installed amid public expression of enormous goodwill and optimism.

S. Barua in an Article in the Asian survey in 1986 wrote... 'one of the most significant effects of the Assam movement is that the immigration issue, which is enormous concern to the ethnic Assamese, have been put firmly on the public agenda... It is likely that electoral realities will bring about an approach to the problem that focuses move on shaping the future influx rather than on deporting those who are already there. New modes of incorporating illegal aliens eg. the status of guest workers' or of 'permanent residents' may be considered as options by a government that enjoys the trust of the ethnic Assamese on this question... some mix of resettlement of illegal aliens in the rest of the country and phased enfranchisement in return for measures that will stop any further influx may be an acceptable compromise (Baruah 1986: 1205-6)

However this proved to be little more than a brief moment of optimism after signing the accord not more than a thousand illegal aliens had been detected. The enormous expectations aroused by the coming to power of AGP soon gave way to disillusionment. The AGP's inefficiency on the immigration question could not but adversely affect the appeal and legitimacy of the government. Added to this were the

generally poor performance of the government in many other areas. As the appeal of the AGP declined, a new force came to occupy center stage in Assam Politics : the separatist militant organisation (ULFA).

ULFA began as a radical fringe of the Assam movement. It had made significant inroads during the violent elections of 1983 and the period immediately following it. Even though ULFA with its left-wing inclusionary ideology, distanced itself somewhat from the immigration issue, it too viewed the non-implementation of the Assam Accord as one more piece of evidence of the Central governments lack of interest in protecting the interests of the Assamese. In one of its documents ULFA claimed that "the mass movements of the past and especially the illegal elections of 1983 proves beyond dispute that there is no so called moderate road available to the people of Assam" (Sajukta Mukti Bahini Asom (ULFA), 1992).

Why is it that an identity movement develops a terrorist fringe or become a terrorist outfit? It is the failure of the liberal system to integrate the specific pluralities in the democratic process as also the failure of working class movements to lead to the formation of new solidarities that create the possibility of the growth of the terrorist fringe. Those who cannot be absorbed by the system, i.e. sections of the enlarged middle class, may become alienated from the system. In the wake of the failure of the mass movement, those who withdraw are the realists and those who fail to learn that they cannot sway the masses by normal means of mobilization become terrorists. (Gupta 1993: 43)

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CHAPTER - III

ULFA : GENESIS, GROWTH AND POLITICS

The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was founded in 1979 about the same time as the beginning of the Assam movement. The foundation ceremony was held on April 1, 1979 at symbolically significant venue : the historic Rang Ghar in Sibsagar a palace of the Ahom kings. (Barua, 1999 : 148).

The young men who met there that day were Rajiv Kanwar known as Arobindo Rajkhowa, Golap Barua, also known as Arup Chetia, Samiran Gogoi and Paresh Baruah. Rajkhowa's father was a veteran congress member who had been active in the freedom movement. He himself led the Asom Jatiyatad Chatra Parishad, a student wing of the Jatiyabadi Dal, that took an active role in the anit-migrant agitation. Samiran Gogoi's real name was Pradip Gogoi and he too was a member of the Chattra Parishad, studied science at Sibsagar and worked briefly at government Thermal Power Project before involving himself full time in ULFA. Paresh Baruah was one of the best foot ballers that Assam had produced in years. Although he was the youngest of the original founders, Baruah was chosen as the head of the organizations armed wing (Hazarika, 1994:167).

Organisation

ULFA has a three tier organisation namely (i) Central Unit, (ii) District Units and (iii) Anchalik Units. Each unit consists of a civil and military wing. At the central level, the civil wing is headed by a chairman and military wing by a commander-in-chief. Each of the district units is led by district President / district commander respectively. A district is divided into 'Anchals' which comprise a number of villages headed by an 'Anchalik President'. For operational purposes, ULFA has divided entire Assam into three zones. Each zone has further been divided into four 'regions' Each zone has seven member committee to look after affairs of the zone. The three ULFA zones are :-

- (i) East Zone - Lakhimpur, Jorhat, Golaghat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia Districts.
- (ii) Central Zone - Sonitpur, Darrang, Morigaon, Naogaon, Karbi Anglong and East Kamrup Districts.
- (iii) West Zone - Barpeta, West Kamrup, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Nalbari Districts.

The armed wing of ULFA has been organised on a battalion pattern

and is placed under central command and the armed cadres are posted to different zones / regions on requirement basis. (Kotwal 2000: 604). Though, the gang acts of ULFA hark back to medieval

bigotism, its political slogan and the command structure is embedded in modernity (Ibid : 604). Presently the command structure of ULFA is as follows :

Arobindo Rajkhowa	-	Chairman*
Pradeep Gogoi	-	Vice Chairman*
Paresh Baurah	-	Commander-in-Chief #
Anup Chetia	-	General Secretary #
Chittranjan Barua	-	Finance Secretary #
Sasadhar Chaudhary	-	Foreign Secretary*
Matinga Daimari	-	Publicity Secretary #
* - MILITARY WING		# - CIVIL WING

According to the delegation of power, the civil wing has been entrusted with the work to prepare and select youth for joining the armed wing and they would also provide shelter for underground violent operators in Assam. The Civil Wing would also organise publicity campaign and keep the existence of the group alive in the minds of the Assamese people while the army wing would handle the task of training the youth in insurgency activities. (Trapot, 1993 : 193)

Unlike the Naga National council which spearheaded the Naga struggle during its initial years, the ULFA has right from the beginning been a militaristic organization. The political wing, if ever there was a clearly demarcated one, has never had much of a say in policy matters. This is in sharp contrast with other conventional

insurgent organizations where the political wing often has greater weightage. It is interesting to note that the dangers of the armed wing marginalising the political wing has been noticed in many an African State where armed insurgency has over thrown colonial rule. For example in Guinean - Bissau, the revolutionary leader , Amilcar Cabral made it a point to punish all those officers who tried to give the armed wing priority over the political wing and he consistently warned his countrymen of the dangers of militarism, Cabral repeatedly emphasised that the struggle for national liberation was primarily a political and not a military struggle. Neera Chandhoke says that Cabral was aware that militarism led to grave abuses by the guerilla group where they have achieved military success. Military success had led to personalized political power and this assumed dangerous proportions in liberated areas. (Mishra 2000: 141) In organizations which were built on militaristic line, there was bound to be a power struggle between those in command of the armed wing and those in charge of the political wing. In ULFA too, its militaristic structure has stood, in the way of inner party democracy and has led to lack of proper co-ordination on policy matters between the different district and local units. There has been many instances of actions carried out by district and local units without the central committee being aware of it. Greater reliance on the gun than in winning over the confidence of the people often resulted in terror becoming "the

accepted weapon for both helping to maintain obedience and secrecy and loyalty, and as the ultimate sanction against deviant member". (Wilkinson, 1974 : 55).

Over-emphasis on the military aspect of the struggle often led to a lack of proper ideological orientation of the cadres and this short coming was adequately revealed when sections of those who opted out of the organization ("Surrendered ULFA" or SULFA in common parlance) started collaborating with the agencies of the state getting their former comrades gunned down. A proper ideological orientation would have made this difficult.

Objectives and Ideology of Ulfa

The ULFA believes that Assam was historically never a part of India (See Appendix III) nor had it any relationship with ancient India, except that it was brought under unified stage by the Hindu and Muslim rulers at various points of time in history. It was only on February 24, 1826, that Assam was annexed by the British by virtue of, the Treaty of Yandabu (Kumar, 1994:6) entered into with the government of Burma (Presently Myanmar) and was brought under unified Indian administration. Subsequently, Assam become a part of the present India, being constituted by the Indian Independence Act of 1947. (Kotwal, 2000 : 605) Also see (Phukan, 2000).

ULFA's place in the mainstream of Assamese public life comes across in Bhupen Hazarika's song with a martial melody applauds

bravery, sacrifice and heroism. "I salute mother Assam and dress up to go to war. I salute the river Lohit and give Puja to Goddess Kamakhya, with your blessings and an oath I am off to war." The Kahamkhya temple in Guwahati is Assam's most important temple and an important place in Hinduism sacred geography. Hazarika's song echoes the Assamese sense of how things come to this, persuasion has failed and there are few alternatives but battle to avenge past wrongs, "It is not the time to take it easy, the enemy taunts us at our gates, leave aside our daily tasks, get ready for war and be prepared to lay down your lives (Barua, 1999 : 149)

It has been the contention of the ULFA that the territory of Assam is prima facie self governing as it is both geographically separate and ethnically distinct from the country administering it. Moreover, it contends that in the name of governance, in Assam the India State created a situation where law and facts are at conflict, in as much as there is a conflict between practice and profession. Various laws and constitutional bindings with regard to migration of foreigners have been rendered inapplicable in Assam encouraging the illegal influx of migrants in millions from neighbouring Bangladesh, which has destroyed the distinct ethnic character of Assam. (Kotwal, 2000 :605). In one of ULFA publications it seeks "to create an exploitation - free society our next step (must) be a national war of liberation We have no alternative to armed revolution. The

resolution of the ULFA are to 'solve' the Assam problem by forming a firm United Front and taking necessary steps to execute it. The ambitions visions of this front is as

follows :

- (a) Unity of the national liberation struggles of the oppressed nations and nationalists all over the world.
- (b) Joint united programmes of national liberation struggles with class struggle on the working class people inside the colonial countries.
- (c) To include in this front the genuine communist parties of the countries where capitalism has been given warm welcome in the name of socialist rule.

The ULFA aims at forming an 'independent' Assam through armed struggle against the so called 'colonial rulers in Delhi. ULFA terms the relationship between New Delhi and Assam as colonial. Assam, it is said, is deprived of its fair share of benefits from the state's natural resources - oil and natural gas. The royalty paid to state government, it is argued, is little more than rent on land on which Assam's oil and gas resources are located. The state's tea industry, writes an economist, has turn over of about Rs 800 crores a year, but its surpluses are not invested in the state. Since the corporate headquarters are mostly in Calcutta, even the major purchases of the tea industry are made elsewhere. ULFA's actions are

reflective of ULFA's self perception a custodian of Assamese interests on the pattern of more mainstream organization, such as AASU or Asom Sahito Sabha ULFA's ideology also resonates with concern for the unity on 'indigenous' north-easterners. The terms "united" in ULFA's name reflects the primacy of theme in ULFA's ideology. On 20th May, 1990, the ULFA, the National Socialist council of Nagaland (NSCN) the United National Liberation Front of Manipur (UNLFM) and some other Burmese insurgent organisations signed a memorandum of understanding. The objective was to form a

- (a) United Front inside the motherland (unity of national liberation struggles of all the indigenous nations and nationalities of Assam).
- (b) Unity taking north eastern region as the base (for historical, geographical, political reasons).
- (c) United Front taking India as the base (those nations that oppose world colonialism, seek genuine liberation of the people, and recognise the Indian State machinery as their enemy).
- (d) Taking the world as a whole :
 - (i) Support to the national liberation struggles of the oppressed nations and nationalities all over the world.
 - (ii) Establishing contact with the genuine communist parties that seek change of the political system inside their

countries, where capitalism is being tried to be instituted in the name of socialist rule. (Kotwal, 2000 : 606) Thus they formed a common organization called the Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front (IBRF) in order to "unite and fight their war of independence (Barma, 1999 : 153).

Although ULFA began as a radical fringe of the immensely popular Assam movement, in the latter years ULFA move away from its original plank of Assamese nationalism to a position where it speaks for the "people of Assam ". In a 15-page booklet issued in July 1992 which is addressed to " The People of Assam of East Bengal Original" the ULFA document states that the migrants had now become a major part of the national life of the state. The document states : "when we refer to the Assamese, instead of meaning the Assamese - speaking people we actually mean the different intermixture of tribal nationalists - working for the good of Assam. The mixture of nationalists that is the Assamese is, in reality, result of immigration. We consider the immigrant from East Bengal to be a major part of the national life of the people of Assam. Our freedom struggle can never be successful without these people the masses who earn their living through hard physical labour can never be our enemies. All the labouring masses are our friends and the main motive, force of our freedom revolt." (Sanjukta Mukti Bahini, 1992) The document further states ; "we would like to state here for

everybody's information's that the movement led by the All Assam Student's Union and the Gana Sangram Parishad from 1979 to 1985 is viewed by the ULFA as one based on emotion" (Ibid) Yet another significant point made by the document is that English would be the link language of Swadhins Asom, thereby vellifying almost a century of struggle to give the Assamese language its legitimate place in the state. (Prabhakara, 1992) By moving away from its earlier position of espousing the Assamese nationalist cause to one in which it seeks to represent the "people of Assam" of whom the immigrant section's form a sizeable proportion, the ULFA was obviously trying to wider its organizational base and its area of operations. (Mishra, 2000:142).

ULFA dreamt of Swadhin Ason where scientific socialism could be the way of life and where its material resources would be exploited for the benefit of its own people : all its people including the immigrants and not the benefit of unscrupulous power elites in New Delhi (Hazarika, 1994 : 163) Referring to ULFA's claim to scientific socialism, M.S Prabhakara writes "... Characterizing itself as a party committed to "scientific socialism", ULFA maintains that its aim of liberating Assam and making it Independent is only the first stage of its two-stage revolution, the second and final stage being implementation of the principles of scientific socialism." (Prabhakara, 1990).

Rise of Ulfa

ULFA was dormant for a long time after the April 1979 meeting. For the first five years of its existence ULFA concentrated chiefly on building up its organization, establishing foreign links as well as co-ordination with other militant organizations. Several of the founding members of ULFA belonged to the Asom Jatiyabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) and had close links with the All Assam Students Union (AASU). The AJYCP unlike the AASU has all along been a semi-militant organization with many of its members having been known to hold popular Marxist as well as Assamese nationalist views. Formed in 1978, the AJYCP quickly made its mark in the political scenario of the state because of its good organizational network and a band of dedicated workers. The organization, which shuns Parliamentary Politics, declared that its objective was to build "communism on a nationalist base" and secure for the people of Assam dual citizenship and the right of self-determination. The AJYCP stresses the need for an egalitarian social set up where nationalism and communist pleas would form its guiding principles (Mishra, 1988: 149).

The AJYCP roots of ULFA should help one in understanding the latter's emphasis on "scientific socialism" from time to time - something which has been picked up by social scientist to give the

ULFA a Marxist or Communist veneer, while in reality it is a militaristic outfit. (Mishra, 2000 : 134).

After the controversial polls of 1983, ULFA began talking with another like minded organization, the Assam People Liberation Army (APLA) The APLA was founded at the sametime as ULFA by Arpan Bezbaruah in the city of Tezpur. Among its key activists were Munim Nobis of Guwahati. Rajkhowa and Paresh Baruah recognized the need to tap the APLA's channels as part of a long-term strategy aimed at liberating Assam. After intermediate talks the two organizations merged in 1985 at Nagaon. (Hazarika, 1994 : 169).

In the initial years ULFA tried to create a popular base by punishing 'anti-socials', profiteers etc. But, as the need for funds to procure arms grew, the organization changed its tactics and the attack on a Guwahati bank in May 1985 was the first indication that the ULFA had emerged as a major presence in the socio-political scene of Assam. (Mishra, 2000 : 135). ULFA's activities were at their height during the first Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) government from 1986 to 1990. ULFA and the AGP both grew out of the Assam movement and despite the effort of both these political formations to wider their appeal, the primary support base of both the AGP and the ULFA remains the ethnic Assamese population. As AGP's popularity began to decline because of its failure to deliver on the promise to resolve the immigration crisis and because of charges of corruption

against many of its young ministers. ULFA's star began to rise (Barua, 1999 : 154). Also see (Pakem, 1997).

The next five years from 1985 to 1990 saw dozens of non-Assamese businessman being gunned down for their refusal or inability to meet the militant outfits demands. This was the period of Asom Gana Parishad's rule and the ULFA took full advantage of its close links with the one-time AASU leaders (now with the AGP) to set up a parallel administration in many areas. Thus in this process the ULFA entered into a rather complex sort of relationship with state authority (Prabhakara, 1990) It is believed that there was no distinction between AASU, AGP and ULFA. When an ULFA suspect was arrested, AASU declared a band while the AGP leadership would secure his release from police history. (Barpujari, 1998 : 81).

The ULFA hit the headlines as the result of a spate of killings numbering over a hundred. The earliest victims was Kalipada Sen, President United Minorities Front, (UMF) 15 September 1986. This was followed by the assassination of the President Kamrup chambers of commerce, Girdharilal Harlalka, 15 March 1988, and his secretary Sankar Birmiwal, 20 January 1990 ; not because they were Marwaris, but they remained oblivious to social responsibilities. ULFA gunned down Daulat Singh Negi, SP, Dibrugarh, 29 July 1990 and well known Surendra Paul, Chairman, Assam Frontier Tea company, for

allegedly dismissing Assamese employees from his gardens. (Charvak, 1990).

Extortions and killings notwithstanding, ULFA had supporters of a section of the intellectuals, the middle class and the rural people because they undertook measures of social reform and economic development too: punishing corruption, conducting anti-liquor and anti gambling campaigns taking stern action against those molesting women etc. (Ibid).

The situation drifted from bad to worse. The militant who held the tea gardens in upper Assam to ransom made demands of protection money on the grounds that planters had taken away the produce of Assam without any investment. The managers and owners had to oblige the militants with their demands since the AGP government had utterly failed to afford them the protection they greatly needed. When the Indian Tea Planters Association met the Chief Minister on receipt of the letter from ULFA, the latter told them in no uncertain terms 'that they were on their own and that the government would do little to bail them out.' (Hazarika, 1994 : 194). In May 1990, on the plea of "Economic developments", huge demands were reported to have been made on Tata Tea, MacLeod Russell, Williamson Magor etc. It was only where the ULFA started targeting the influential tea lobby of state that the centre began taking grave note of the Assam situation. It provided Chandra Shekhar, who had

then unseated, V.P. Singh, as Prime Minister, 'solid reason', to take stringent measures against ULFA. This was followed by the dismissal of the AGP government in November 1990 and the ULFA was outlawed. The operation Bajrang moved on under Lieutenant General Ajai Singh of the Western Command. (Barpujari, 1998 : 83).

Operation Bajrang had its successes, it dismantled ULFA's major training camps and arrested many ULFA cadres, including some middle level leaders. But it 'did not touch the core leadership', nor did it in anyway affect the crucial support base of ULFA' (Barua, 1999 :155) operation Bajrangs failures were partly due to what has been called a "subverted bureaucracy". For instance when the army went into the largest of ULFA camps the militants appeared to have had enough advance notice to flee. ULFA thus managed to sustain its mystique and give the impression that it had out maneuvered the Indian army. (Barpujari, 1998 :84). Operation Bajrang continued till April 20, 1991. The organization faced gradual erosion of support for it among the middle class with discovery of mass graves at the Lakhpathar camp of the ULFA. It ultimately contributed to the collapse of many a popular myth about the organization (Mishra, 2000: 136).

Meanwhile within the AGP first signs of internal problems were surfacing. Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his long-time associate, Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, who had the all important home

portfolio, had quarreled and fallen out. Mahanta, using his prerogative as Chief Minister, had reduced Phukan into a dummy home minister by taking away the two sensitive departments dealing with the intelligence wing of the police and the information and publicity sections. Without these two vital components of the home department, Phukan was left to handle the routine transfers and promotions of the police officers. (Gokhale, 1988 : 22).

The breach between Mahanta and Phukan widened into an yawning gulf. It gave birth to a new party Nathu Asom Gana Parishad (NAGP) led by Brigu Phukan. The split cleared the path for the congress I to have a majority in the 1991 elections with the backing of the Muslims, Bengalis and some tribals. The 1991 elections thus brought Hiteswar Saikia to power once again.

Hardly had he been sworn in on 30 June when the militants kidnapped the secretary, General Administrative Department (GAD) and fourteen executives of the oil and Natural gas commission including Soviet engineer Gritchenko Sergei. The ULFA bargained that hostages would be released if twenty four of its cadre were freed from prison. Sergei was killed as he could not be subdued by threats or physical intimidation (Hazarika, 1994 : 212).

The failure of negotiations over the hostage issue and the killings of ONGC officials, Sergei and later T.S. Raju, sparked off nationwide protests. Oil engineers went on strike and refused to work

unless their friends were released and security ensured. The centre and Saikia's government had to abandon the search for a negotiated settlement and to revert to military crackdown. Lieutenant General Ajai Singh was recalled and the operation Rhino rolled out in September 1991 (Barpujari, 1998 : 85).

Operation Rhino launched by the Indian Security forces in September 1991 proved to be a greater success from the governments point of view. Most of the ULFA bases within the state were busted, scores of cadres were killed and hundreds taken into custody. But the successes of the army were neutralized to a large extent by the excesses committed in the course of the operations. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act and the Disturbed Area Act gave the security forces blanket powers of search, arrest and detention, and the killing of the ULFA cadres in false encounters came to be repeated with frightening regularity. The excesses committed by the state alienated it further from the people and its moral authority was severely eroded. (Mishra, 2000:137 The collapse of The moral authority of the state actually helped the proponents of Swadhin Asom. Though the Indian security forces were pitted in a difficult no-win situation in their effort to root out the ULFA, yet in the ULFA's rejection of the Indian Constitution was no justification for the state to adopt means which went beyond the legal and constitutional framework. Such action on the part of the state only helped to create conditions conducive to the

secessionist forces. The 'encounter' cases in which ULFA young men were picked up and killed in cold blood made the people grow more sympathetic to the course upheld by the ULFA. Thus by adopting counter-violence to tackle the insurgents, the Indian army seemed to be enfeebling itself because with such extra-legal and extra-constitutional method it adopts, the insurgents stand to make strategic gains. Thus the state not only compromises its moral authority but also its political authority (Ibid : 137).

The operation continued from September 1991 to January 1992, when the prospects of talks between the government and the ULFA led to a temporary suspension of army operations. In April 1992 army operations were resumed in six districts, specifically targeted because the local ULFA leaders were against the surrender of arms and negotiations. Operations Rhino itself was suspended in April 1993. But on May 7, 1996, just before the change of government, when two electoral candidates were killed allegedly by ULFA, operation Rhino was relaunched. (Barua, 1999:158).

Thus the Assamese middle class outrage at the ULFA killings of businessmen, 'traitors' or 'jati-drohis' and 'anti-socials' was gradually replaced by concern and sympathy for the boys. The large turn outs at the funerals of ULFA cadres killed in "encounters" bore evidence to the fact that all its weaknesses notwithstanding, the organization had succeeded in striking strong rural roots. For instance , at the

funeral of ULFA leader, Hirakjyoti Mahanta who was shot dead after being captured in a house at Guwahati in January 1992, thousands of villagers turned up at a place near Nalbari as ULFA cadres fired shots in the air and reversed arms to bid farewell to their deputy commander-in-chief. (Mishra, 2000 : 138).

Of the top level leadership the Army authorities were not slow to capture active operation commander Manoj Hazarika and Liaison officers Andrew Giri and Bhaskar Baruah. In Calcutta arrests were made of the General Secretary Golap Barua alias Arup Chetia and three others of rank : Prabhat Barua, Raj Barua and his wife Jolley. Then followed the apprehension of Vice-President Pradip Gogoi, Sunil Nath and Kalpajyoti Neog. The shooting of the Deputy-Commander-in-chief, Hirakjyoti Mahanta shattered ULFA's dream of Swadhins Asom and hastened chairman Arobindo Rajkhowa to make overtures for a settlement. He wrote a letter to P.V. Narasimha Rao declaring his willingness for a cessation of hostilities. It was a follow-up of a secret missive sent to Rao the earlier month by Rajkhowa where the ULFA Chief spoke of the Indian governments wish for a 'written commitment' from the ULFA about its having agreed :

- (a) to accept the constitution of India for the resolution of the Assam problem and .
- (b) to give up arms and objective violence. But he also sought 'government facilities for secret negotiations for thrashing out

the above points and a central, committee meeting for verifications. He wanted the consideration of a swift end to the ban on ULFA as well as army operations and the use of sweeping powers to arrest, detain and shoot, conferred by the Armed Disturbed Areas Act and the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. (Hazarika, 1994 : 221).

1st February, 1991, the general publicity secretary Siddhartha Phukan

alias Sunil Nath on behalf of the Central Council of ULFA' addressed to the governor Devidas Thakur soliciting removal of the President rule to create a favourable climate to hold discussions. The negotiations carried on both in Delhi and Dizpur paved the way for the talk on 12 January 1992. High officials of the Ministry of Home and Cabinet Secretary apart, the meeting was attended by the Assam Chief Minister and a delegation of five headed by the general secretary Anup Chetia of ULFA. (Ahmed, 1992)

The PM was assured that the insurgents would formally end violence and sought a solution within the framework of Indian constitution and in return the Prime Minister would suspend army operations and the ULFA would have to surrender arms and get necessary clearance from the central council for the accord and surrendering the militants (Ibid) Hiteswar Saikia was sceptical of the true motives of the militants. These fears and calculations prompted

the Chief Minister to reject the suggestion to ease army's hold on the militants. Saikia's views received the concurrence of the army authorities not to stop operations then in progress.

A deadlock ensued. No meeting of the Central Council was held to endorse the assurance given by the chairman Rajkhowa to the Prime Minister on January 1. The leaders of the five district units - Kamrup, Barpeta, Sonitpur, Jorhat and Lakhimpur being tired of insurgency decided to endorse the Delhi talks and come out in favour of the dialogue that began on 12th January. In a statement denouncing the top leaders then in Bangladesh, for their failure to give proper guidance, they reaffirmed the commitments already made and decided to start direct negotiations with the government (Hazarika, 1994 : 226). The hard-core clung fast to their ultimate goal Swadhin Asom. They condemned split in the cadre and expelled the dissidents from primary membership of the organization. The action of the chairman was denounced by the commander-in-chief Paresh Barua, then in Bangladesh, as unacceptable sell out' (Ibid : 227).

The split in the ULFA in early 1992 led a section of it to give up the path of armed struggle and accept the Indian constitution. ULFA's top ranking leader and publicity secretary, Sunil Nath, had written only a year before his quitting the organization that strict army discipline and modern weapons were the first priority in the struggle for independence, although there was much in the criticism

that ULFA had neglected efforts to mobilize the people (Boodhbar, 1991) Yet in January 1992 he was among those who declared their disillusionment with organization and instead of 'Swadhinata Swadhikar' of Assamese people. (Mishra, 2000 : 139).

Those who thought that ULFA had finally given up on its demand for an independent Assam here proved wrong. The failure of the talks seem to lie in the fact that right from the beginning the ULFA was organized as a militaristic organization, where the political wing occupied a subsidiary status. The talks were bound to fail because the 'commander-in-chief' was opposed to them and he was in virtual control of ULFA's armoury as well as its district commander. A section of the militants resolved not to abandon the path of struggle adopting tactics according to the exigencies of the situation. of the 'trinity' Chetia and Gogoi, who had been maintaining close links with Delhi disappeared ; perhaps left for Bangladesh . Rajkowa being pressurised by Parash Baruah had no option put to make a volte-face and left for Bangladesh to assure Baruah that they had not 'sold out' to insure their political survival and physical well-being '. (Hazarika, 1994 : 226).

Saikia was not slow to take full advantage of the split. His skilful maneuvering succeeded in surrender of over three thousand militants and most of these apparently joined the mainstream Saikia's rapport with centre enabled him to procure over a crore for

rehabilitation : half of it to be utilised in a police battalion to fight the insurgents and the rest to be expended on the cadres. In case the task of rehabilitation of surrendered militants (SULFA) was done in a planned manner duly monitored by an official agency, the energies of these misguided youths could have been fruitfully utilised in the larger interest of the community. SULFA boys were given soft loans and cars besides facilities to earn as P.W.D contractors, government supplies, commission agents for sale of essential commodities (coal, fish, eggs etc). The result has been, as The Home-Link observers (editorial):

The people of Assam have witnessed (during the last few years).... A repudiation of the rule of law, a total rejection of hard, assiduous study and skills towards earning a honest living option of criminal unlawful ways of securing short-cuts to five - star life - style , and a total isolation of a sizeable section of youth from their society in terms of productive and socially useful activities. (Home Link, 1995).

Admittedly, the government had no option but to bring the militants back to the mainstream. But there is no reason to pardon all the convicts of their past crime and permitting them to retain their 'clandestine' arms which they not unoften used in intimidating kidnapping and even committing violent crimes. What is more deplorable 'the authorities are sending wrong signals to the youths

that they should all give up studies and grab a gun so as to be rewarded a year after having looted, kidnapped and killed. (Barpujari, 1998 : 89).

ULFA had been lying low for sometime. With the surrender of nearly, 1,500 of its cadres since 1998, the state administration was inclined to believe that insurgency in the state was on the wane. The security forces had claimed that they had shattered the backbone of ULFA during the last few months and incidence of violence had come down. Just when the AGP government was becoming complacent ULFA struck. Top ULFA leaders who are in exile, felt that unless the organisation take recourse to fresh action, the morale of its cadres will be affected. Shortly after Assam's forest and public Work Minister Nagen Sharma was killed February 2000, ULFA Chairman Arobindo Rajkhowa and the "Commander in Chief" of its armed wing, Paresh Barua, issued a warning that ULFA would retaliate by killing State Ministers and top security personnel if the unified command of the Army, the paramilitary forces and the police persisted with its action plan against the ULFA. (Chaudhari, 2000 : 45).

Almost decade after many of them were granted amnesty without much thought, the ULFA militants continue to bleed Assam. The possibility of a negotiated settlement with the ULFA became bright in the early nineties and at one point of time the stage for such a settlement was almost ready. It is widely believed that the political

leadership sabotaged the move only to ensure that any settlement would mean the ouster of their government from power. The problem raises the question of the politicians - insurgent nexus against the state which shall be dealt with in the subsequent chapter. If socio-economic development has to be brought in and the security environment improved upon; then the nexus between the politicians and insurgents, has to be broken. Only a strong determination on the part of political parties to overcome their narrow goals in the interest of the nations integrity can restore normally in Assam and other part of its region. (Kotwal, 2000 : 612).

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CHAPTER - IV

ULFA LEADERSHIP NEXUS WITH AGP

Criminalisation of politics and politicisation of criminals are not a new phenomenon for the country. The politician-criminal nexus has spread throughout the country. In the north-east we also have the politician terrorist nexus. In India, it is the soft state as propounded by Guunar Myrdal as also its strong arm tactics that are regarded to be the cause of terrorism. The soft state argument accounts for both the internal and the external dimensions. The decline of the state is also analysed in terms of its incapacity to break the smuggler - criminal - bureaucrat - politician nexus that has emerged above ground as the Congress has receded in power and prestige. (Gupta, 1998 : 40-41).

Thus two sets of problems are emerging in Assam : political and administrative malaise. Which injects separatism through disaffected elements of society. The 'vote bank' politics has degerated the system to such an extent that political parties have no other agenda than to grab power by any permutation or combination (Kotwal¹ 2000: 612). The ruling elite sometimes also seem to allow the insurgent movements to perpetuate in order to make themselves indispensable in state politics as well as to ensure their political security.

It may be recalled that while the possibility of a negotiated settlement of the ULFA movement became bright in the early nineties

and the stage for such a settlement was set following several rounds of talks between the ULFA leadership and the central government, the ruling elite in Assam headed by Hiteswar Saikia reportedly sabotaged this move. (The Statesman, 1994) Perhaps they feared that such a settlement might oust them from power as had happened earlier in the case of Assam Accord in 1985.

It is widely believed that had an accord been signed with the undivided ULFA, the insurgency problem in Assam would have been solved. Thus the ruling elite in Assam, instead of forging a political solution, engineered a vertical split within ULFA and followed the policy of divided and rule in order to such a level so that it remained under control but did not put an end to it. They allowed it to perpetuate perhaps to make themselves indispensable in state politics. In the context of the high level of corruption and nepotism prevalent in all the states of northeast India. The motive of attracting additional central assistance may also be another plausible factor behind the perpetuation of certain movement in the region. (Kotwal² 2000: 147).

ULFA's rise, according to many, is the 'misrule' of the AGP government during 1985-90. P.K. Mahanta, it is alleged, was very lenient towards the outfit. He had political compulsion at that time to regard ULFA as his second line of defence. Then, the level of law and order deteriorated so much that the Central government had to

intervene and the Mahanta government was dismissed. ULFA was also banned on November 27, 1990. Next day, 'operation Bajrang' was launched and about forty ULFA hideouts were smashed. But Hiteswar Saika, who became the Chief Minister after June 1991 election, undid what the Army and the police had achieved. He released 450 of the more than 600 imprisoned ULFA insurgents. (Maitra, 2001; 90)

An emboldened ULFA took to killings, extortions and kidnappings in a big way to finance guerilla training for its cadres. It is widely believed that politicians of all parties in the north-east keep the insurgent groups alive and in good humour to strengthen their own bargaining power vis-à-vis the union government. In Assam, the scene is no different Lt. Gen. R.K. Sawhney, GOC, 4th corps was reported to have quoted in the local newspaper that they had 'solid evidence' of Assam's Revenue Minister Dr. Zoinath Sharma's complicity with the two banned insurgent - groups, ULFA and NDFB (National Democratic Front of Bodoland) and his involvement in aiding and abetting ULFA militants. An FIR had been filed by the Army at the Mangladoi police station on the basis of a confessional statement by a ULFA activist, Rakesh Barua, apprehended by the Army at Mangaldoi on October 23, 1997. (Maitra 2001: 61) Dr. Zoinath Sharma, denied the accusations saying that he had been

'fixed' by vested interests from a rival political party. His party AGP steering committee also took a serious view of the accusation.

While Assam Chief Secretary issuing a "press release" claimed that ULFA had plant baseless stories to malign the government, ULFA went to the extent even disowning Rakesh Barua as its activist and All Assam Students Union demanded withdrawal of the Army for "indulging in lies". The ULFA further alleged that Rakesh Barma was "a police informer".

October 1997, another report of a senior Congress leader from Assam, who had been a minister of state in the Narshima Rao Cabinet, was suspected to have given protection to one ULFA insurgent. His close proximity with ULFA militants, it was reported, due to his business interest in Assam as he had been trading in coal in Assam and one of the biggest suppliers. "He", said a police officer, 'not only used his links to further his interests in the business, but also used ULFA members to settle scores with his political rivals." A senior police officer added that the coal mafia has developed strong links with ULFA insurgents and regularly provided them with protection money and other help (Ibid: 62).

Insurgency in the North-east is a thriving industry. There is a symbiotic relationship between politician and militants, both drawing strength from each other. To quote an editorial of the Hindustan Times, dated Nov. 7, 1997 under the heading "Mahanta's woes" -

"The FIR lodged by the Army against Assam Revenue Minister Zoil Nath Sharma for Sheltering the outlawed ULFA cadres has caused considerable embarrassment to the AGP government. The FIR against Mr. Sharma couldn't have been more ill-timed for the chief-minister whose government has gone hammer and tongs at the Tata Tea limited for its alleged links with ULFA. The reaction of state leaders to the charge has been rather predictable. While AGP leaders have called it a motivated campaign to malign the government, Congress leaders have demanded Mr. Sharma's resignation. Ideally speaking, Mr. Sharma should resign and face the investigation. But by insisting that he would quit office only if ordered by the Chief Minister to do so, he has only embarrassed Mr. Mahanta. Things have gone difficult for the Chief Minister, who is himself under a cloud following the relations about his alleged role in the letter of credit scam in the Veterinary Department. Given the nexus between the politicians and the militants in the north-eastern region any charge like this against a minister is likely to stick for some time. There is another reason for this. The AGP leader's credentials to fight ULFA militants are not above suspicion. After all, the Mahanta government had done precious little to tame ULFA during its first stint and the centre dismissed the AGP government for that reason. Mr. Mahanta's Strident anti-ULFA statements, many believe are a ploy to cover up his own failure to curb insurgency in the state. The AGP's past

vacillating stance against ULFA is likely to haunt the government for a long time to come."

Ever since the insurgency started Assam's 850-odd tea gardens with their annual Rs. 2700 crore turn over remained the most vulnerable. The failure of both the Saikia and Mahanta governments to provide required security and protection forced tea companies to offer 'peace money' to the insurgents.

13 August, 1997, Pranati Deka, ULFA's "cultural secretary" gave delivery of her baby at Jaslok hospital, Bombay. The Tata Tea Limited, it was alleged, made payments for the medical bills of ULFA's "cultural secretary". The Tata Tea Limited (TTL) immediately issued denials of the allegation, asserting that the insurgents might have taken advantage, without company's knowledge of the social benefit scheme, including health, launched by the company.

But the Assam government claimed that the TTL had not only financed the hospital bill of Pranati Deka's delivery, they even financed the trip of top ULFA insurgents, Paresh Baruah and Arabinda Rajkhowa to Geneva. It was also added that the arrangements were made for the ULFA by Dr. Brajen Gogoi, TTL welfare manager.

TTL, is not the only tea company to finance insurgents, some other major tea companies, namely Magor Group and Goodricke Group paid large amounts to the National Democratic Front of

Bodoland (NDFB) in US dollars. The fact came out following the seizure of some documents, which were part of the insurgent outfit's internal audit from the NDFB's internal auditor. He was killed in an encounter with the Army in Nalbari district.

During the period of making charge and counter charges, TTL inserted an advertisement in some national newspapers which is quite explanatory, as reproduced below. Published in Hindustan Times, dated September 22, 1997, New Delhi edition.

Tata Tea Ltd., Assam

"It is fundamental obligation of every state to protect the lives and property of its citizens and also provide security to the industry in the state. In the past one decade the state of Assam has not been able to fulfill this obligation nor to control the militant organisations holding the state and its industries at ransom".

Over the years several attempts have been made to terrorise Tata Tea and its officials by militant organisations in order to extort money. The attempts have been made through threatening phone calls and forced meetings with company officials. At all such forced meetings in India and abroad Tata Tea even at risk to the safety of its officials and their families has refused to meet their demands in cash or kind. This is despite the fact that one of the companies managers was shot dead, another senior manager was kidnapped and held in

captivity for 11 months and two other managers were kidnapped and held for 48 hours before being rescued.

As a part of its policy to undertake charitable and welfare activities, Tata Tea has plainly told the militant organisations that it would undertake welfare activities in the state of Assam and for the Assamese people but would neither generate nor pay any money to the militant organisations. The above activities of the company and meetings held have been undertaken with the knowledge of the authorities concerned.

The welfare activities undertaken include the construction of hospital, vocational training centres, lab to land programmes, outreach medical camps and also provision of specialised medical treatment outside Assam. These schemes are available to all. The treatment of a lady patient alleged to be linked to ULFA at Bombay was under the specialised medical treatment scheme mentioned above.

Tata Tea has never acted directly or indirectly in any illegal manner and its actions have been transparent."

Clearly, what is happening in Assam is a failure of the state to control insurgency and terrorism. Blaming the Rs. 2000 - crore - tea industry or even the public sector oil industry for the failure of the state will only drive these businesses out of Assam. If the state has accused industry of funding militancy, industrialists also accuse the

state of patronising the same militants. They allege that information provided to the state officials is immediately available to the militants, further endangering their lives. (Maitra, 2001: 84) Rather than reckless allegations against the industry, the Assam government needs to demonstrate its own commitment to wiping out terrorism. Its present strategy of selectively attacking companies will only destroy the economy of this already backward state.

While the reports about extortion notices to business houses started pouring in, the Army accused of the nexus among "the self-styled liberators and the transborder drug runners and the mafia-like extortion rackets run by the so called revolutionaries" (ibid:70)

"The army was busy", asserted Lt. Gen. S.S. Grewal, GOC, Army 3 corps at Dimapur, "exposing the essential parasite nature of the militants who have turned into gangs of narco-terrorists and extortionists" in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur, the three hot-beds of insurgency in the North-east. It has become an easy way of life for the gun-weilding boys. The Army claimed to have seized large quantities of drugs and used springes from the ULFA camps busted in Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh and Lakhpathar in Dompany area of Assam - Arunachar border. The captured insurgents reportedly revealed the nexus between ULFA and Myanmar's "Kachin liberation Army" for training and drug trafficking.

The acute difficulties AGP government faced vis-à-vis ULFA insurgents is mainly its own creation. Time and again Mahanta and AGP leaders demanded the Army pull out of Assam. Even in its election manifesto AGP promised of release of all political prisoners which aimed mainly to benefit the ULFA insurgents, of late however the Chief Minister has come out in support of the Army, but his belated efforts has enraged the insurgents and they attempted a murderous attack on his life on June 8, 1997.

On September 23, 1997, B.D. Gupta, commandant of the 16th Battalion of Assam Police was arrested from his residence on charges of aiding secessionists. During interrogation he told the police that he had provided certificates to at least four ULFA insurgents including Pranati Deka, 'cultural secretary' of ULFA, Raju Baruah, 'Deputy Commander-in-chief' of the outfit and two others for passports under false names. ULFA leaders were able to escape from the country. Gupta was the Guwahati Superintendent of police at the time and was considered the blue eyed boy of Hiteswar Saikia, the then Chief Minister. The Assam administration has belatedly began to flush out every official link with the insurgent groups in the state and attempts are being made to keep up pressure on all those involved in aiding and abetting insurgency in any manner.

In the given political environment, where protection of the 'vote bank' is more important than national security, a favourable situation

has emerged for the ISI intensifying transborder terrorism in the state. This is mainly due to the unabated influx of illegal immigrants over the years from East Pakistan/Bangladesh. The ISI is able to recruit new agents, merge them with the local population activate its sleeping agents on requirement basis, and carry out sabotage activities whenever and whenever it feels like. (Kotwal¹ 2000 : 611).

The involvement of Pakistan in north eastern India goes back to the early 1960's. The late Prime Minister of Pakistan, Z.A. Bhutto wrote about the geo-political aims of Pakistan in 1968 in his book "the myth of Independence" where he elaborated (Shukla, 1980 : p.22) that :

"It would be wrong to think that Kashmir is the only dispute that divides India and Pakistan, though it is undoubtedly the most significant... One at least is nearly as important as the Kashmir dispute... that of Assam and some districts of India, adjacent to East Pakistan. To these East Pakistan has very good claims, which should not been allowed to remain quiescent."

The Assam police claimed to have arrested four hardcore ISI functionaires in Guwahati on August 7, 1999. It was disclosed by them that the ISI had plans to train 10,000 people in Assam for 'jihad' to 'liberate' Assam and establish an Islamic country comprising the territory of the state and certain other parts of north eastern India. If Pakistan has designs to create an Islamic country out of the north

eastern states, it is because of bad governance, and vote back politics to remain in power.

Extortion and abduction are not limited to one section only. The business community, especially from Rajasthan, have been the targets of insurgents since the mid-seventies all over the north-east region. There has been a prevailing gloom in all walks of life. "Is it not a fact that AGP govt. allowed AK-47 trotting ULFA cadres to carry the two top ULFA leaders with heroic reception from the central jail to Nalbari in full view of everybody? - the traders ask. After according a ground welcome in Nalbari by the insurgents the ULFA leaders were taken to their base camp in Bhutan with the full knowledge of AGP govt., it is alleged. (Maitra, 2001; 74)

Lately there has been allegations against the police for being hand in glove with SULFA activists. "The violence perpetrated by the insurgents can be countered but rectification of democratic process which has to come from within. As long as political expediency takes precedence over national interest, the Assam cauldron will continue to simmer. (Kotwal¹ 2000:612)

Even the innocent NGOs were forced to close down their developmental efforts and those who did not yield paid a heavy price. The kidnapping and brutal killing of Sanjay Ghosh, Director, AVARD/NE, an NGO committed to overall development of Assam, by ULFA in July 1997 has shocked the conscience of the Assamese

people and the world. Sanjoy Ghosh's murder highlighted the criminalisation of the ULFA and brought out clearly the cadres nexus with corrupt elements in the state machinery. In this case, the murder was more a matter of money than any ideological difference with the AVARD/NE. (Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, Feb. 1999). Paresh Barua, self-styled 'commander-in-chief' of ULFA informed Pratidin, an Assamese daily on July 10, which is said to have close links with the underground movements, that Ghose had been "arrested" and not abducted, because he was a RAW agent. Although the charge was denied, ULFA maintained a stoic silence. Since Ghose's kidnapping generated a wide spread reaction from world dignitaries and unprecedented adverse public opinion, ULFA issued a number of 'conflicting reports' about his safety and well being. Earlier ULFA reported that they would hand over Ghose to an unnamed foreign agency, in July 22 ULFA faxed a message to the media that Ghose was drowned while being taken by his captors across the Brahmaputra. The next day, it again denounced the message as a "fake one". The Army intercepted radio messages between ULFA activists on 4th August 1997 conforming his death.

The Sanjay Ghose episode brought the entire print media in Assam under cloud when a sensational revelation of nexus between the ULFA insurgents and the editor of the Assamese Pratidin newspaper, Ajit Bhuyan was exposed. It was alleged that Ajit Bhuyan

had advised ULFA insurgents in Majuli, the world's largest river island on the Brahmaputra river in Assam to tarnish the reputation of Sanjay Ghose by dubbing him a RAW agent. The document written in Assamese to ULFA activist, Bhaskar Barua, Chief organiser of the subansari unit. But Bhuyan states that the killing of Sanjay Ghose was having an adverse reaction in the country and to counter the same, Ghose should be dubbed a RAW agent. (Maitra, 2001 : 68).

Ajit Bhuyan is the founding president of the Manav Adhikar Sangram Samiti (MASS), a non-governmental human rights organisation, and ostensibly, a front organisation of the banned ULFA. Bhuyan was arrested under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act in August 1997 but was later released on parole by the Guwahati High Court.

Another modus operandi adopted by the ULFA is to utilise corrupt officials in the government to divert governmental funds or force than to do so under threat. As a result, at places resources allocated for development have not reaches the beneficiaries, viz. the people. (Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, Feb. 99) Construction of several roads, including World Bank - aided projects at many places could not take off because of demand for huge amount from the contractors. A project assisted by the bank under the Assam Rural Infrastructure and Agricultural services Project (ARIASP) in the "two packages (N2 and N3)" in Nagaon were affected due to the

insurgency problem. Hence infrastructural development in Assam continues to be hampered. According to the report of the ministry of Home Affairs a brief look at revenue allocations to the region debunks this allegation of the "colonial" attitude of Delhi and underscores the fact that the funds are misused for various purposes.

Another incident which revealed the strong links forged between the sections of police and assorted anti-socials was the murder of Parag Kumar Das, an ambitious, fiery and talented journalist and human rights activist, who had not only become the spokes person of the ULFA but also the voice of the angry and frustrated youth of the state. On May 17, 1996 as he was waiting outside a school to collect his young son and escort him home, he was knocked down by a deadly hail of machinegun bullets. Under intense pressure the police revealed that they had conclusive evidence of the identity of the culprit, alleged to be one Prafulla Bora, a SULFA hitman. Mysteriously the police also stated that certain high-ranking police officers had intervened to release the culprit from police custody and help him to escape. Despite this extraordinary revelations the high-ranking police officers said to be involved in the escape of the suspect have not been suspended and charge sheeted. There have been a spate of rumours linking the murder with the army intelligence, the RAW and even the ULFA. The situation became all the more intriguing with the suspect claiming from his hide-out that

the police were falsely accusing him and were planning to bump him off to protect the real culprit. (Gohain, 1996 : 2067).

On December 6, 1997, the then Prime Minister I.K. Gujral, made an appeal to the insurgent groups of Assam to come for peace talks. But the banned outfit stuck to their basic demands. The ULFA's army chief, Paresh Barua stated in 1996 that they would agree for talks on three conditions; namely - the talks would be held in a third country;

- talks should be witnessed by a United Nations, representative as the issue has been internationalised at the Geneva meetings of the UN's Indigenous People's Organisations (UNIPO);
- talks should discuss sovereignty of Assam.

The Assam government came up with two preconditions to hold political negotiation with ULFA. First they should make an immediate and unilateral declaration that it will stop all killings, second ULFA must indicate a specific time frame to stop its militant activities. (Maitra 101) Here we quote a national daily which made a commentary, on this subject "Talking with ultras".

The militancy situation in Assam and else where in the North Eastern region has shown visible signs of improvement. While the presence of the Army has helped to debilitate the various insurgent groups, the people in the region are no more enamoured of the militants empty rhetoric. The ongoing talks with the NSCN militants

have also reinforced the faith of various outfits in the pursuit of peace through negotiations. While ULFA militants in Assam are still by and large capable of hitting where it hurts, the division in their ranks and the people's growing disillusionment with their terror tactics have more or less blunted their appeal. ULFA leaders have long fattened themselves on the people's accrued sense of isolation and alienation. Today things seem to have changed. ULFA leaders have so far spurned all peace overtures and only the other day ULFA Chief Arabindo Rajkhowa harped on his renewed call for "Swadhin Asom". There are once again indications that the extremists would accept talks provided these are held outside India. There is nothing wrong in accepting this demand provided there is evidence of sincere desire on the part of militant groups for negotiated settlement. After all, preliminary talks were held with Phizo in London and with Laldenga in Paris. A few years ago the then Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda met top NSCN leaders in Zurich. Former Union Minister Rajesh Pilot too had met Naga leaders in Bangkok.

Are ULFA militants serious about peace talks? They have often talked about accepting the government's offer of talks only if these revolve around sovereignty and right to self-determination. Such a ploy is apparently intended to derive legitimacy for their violent acts. The centre is still working in fits and starts. It still does not have a definite political game plan to deal with secessionist groups. The

NSCN leaders have shown pragmatism in choosing a course of dialogue and discussion. It is a combination of political realism and the realisation of their ideological bankruptcy that has forced them to change their track. The ULFA leaders may have to follow suit, sooner or later" (The Hindustan Times, New Delhi edition, 14 April, 1999). "The Kargil crisis has demolished the fiction that the people were with ULFA and other militant groups in Assam. The overwhelming response to the Kargil crisis and the sense of pride among the people for the martyrs of Assam have further demonstrated how the state is very much a part of the national mainstream. Historically, culturally and emotionally Assam's integration with the Indian nation has never been questionable. ULFA has lost its appeal for a variety of reasons. People tend to see the group as extortionist which has bled the tea and other industries white. ULFA has lost touch with reality and its ideological claims sound hollow. The government should capitalise on the sense of revulsion against ULFA's links with Pakistan as also against its terror tactics and deal firmly with the outfit." (The Hindustan Times, N. Delhi, July 22, 1999).

History bears witness to the dictum that ultimately truth prevails, truth has dawned upon the people of Assam as they are aware of the true face of ULFA. Growing alienation of ULFA from the people holds only a future of despair for the outfit. Its leaders owe an explanation to the peace-loving people of Assam for bleeding the state,

to the youth for shattering their dreams, to the bereaved families for putting a cruel end to their innocent happiness, to the poor of the state who deserved redemption through growth in economy and opportunities which stand eclipsed by ULFA, to posterity for leaving a legacy of undeserved ruin.

Indeed the day of reckoning is not away! (Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, Feb. 99).

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CONCLUSION

The annexation of semi-tribal and semi-feudal society in Assam by the colonial rulers into British India in 1826 paved the way for a different historical transformation which had broken Assam's long isolation of the pre-colonial period. The traditional social structure changed. The aristocracy particularly the ruling class, the non-caste Ahoms weakened. However, a small fraction of upper caste groups managed to escape the onslaught of the pre-colonial aristocracy propelled by the mechanics of colonial system. They produced the first group of western educated Assamese Middle class by the end of the 19th century. The Assamese middle class which was numerically very small had to face stiff competition from the Bengali middle class in colonial Assam. It had two pertinent reasons, first by the time Assam was incorporated into British India, its neighbour Bengal, already had a large western educated middle class. When Assam was annexed, relatively advanced. Bengali came in together with the British rulers. Secondly, a thickly populated part of Bengal, that is Sylhet was amalgamated with the province of Assam. Therefore being the subject of the same province, many educated Hindu Bengalis moved to Assam proper. Assam's economy had taken off with the tea plantations introduced by the Britishers but it failed to accommodate the Assamese middle class which had been facing competition from

the Bengais. This generated a lot of ill will between the two communities (Hussain, 1993; 278)

Immigration to Assam thus began as a consequence of the colonial conquest. Once Assam became a part of British India, it came to be perceived as a part of the Pan-Indian economic space. Colonial policymakers saw Assam as a land frontier that needed more settlers and actively pursued policies to encourage immigration. The economic transformation that began with the introduction of tea plantations set off economic forces that gave further impetus to immigration and turned the colonial vision of Assam as a land frontier into a reality. (Singh, 1990; 13)

Historically the regional nationalism or what we call subnationalism in India arose simultaneously with pan-Indian nationalism. Typically the cultural foundation of subnationalism was the language of a region, or to be precise, the language that was emerging as a regional standard (Baruah, 1999; 69) "It was no more than a reflex action of the will", believes Guha, given the primordial relationship that man as species-being has to natural language. "The passions it inspired and the metaphors of motherhood used to describe it," write Guha, "were all evidence of its rootedness in such a primordial connection." (Guha, 1987; 41-43) In Assam too, Regionalism gave way to patriotism, and the Assamese ruling class actively participated in the National Movement for Independence. Yet

in the 1950's language was made the rallying point by the Assamese middle class, to project their identity crisis vis-à-vis their Bengali counterparts. However in the 1980's with the Assam movement the explosive issue of immigration which was somewhat dormant obscured by the focus on cultural policy issues - returned to Assam's public agenda with vengeance. Because of partition (1947) the issue now acquired a constitutional and legal dimension. The entry and the enfranchisement of the newer immigrants from the region, the campaigners argued, was illegal (Baruah, 1999: 116) We see that behind the edifice of the movement stood the dominant class of Assam. The leadership of the movement indoctrinated the Assamese masses by emphasising that the root cause of Assam's problem lie in the continuous immigration from across the border. It needs to be noted that this problem alone was not fundamental to Assam's backwardness. After independence strong economic disparities compounded the situation, furthering the burden of backwardness. The centre's stepmotherly treatment in resolving the issue of migration and resettlement of refugees from East Pakistan built up popular discontent in the region. Another significant development which took place was the decline of the upper caste factions of the Assamese ruling class in Assam politics with the emergence of the non-caste leadership in the Congress party. Therefore they were in search of a new ideology to recapture their lost status in the power

structure of the state. This is not to say that the Assam movement was confined only to the elite. The Assam movement had a wide social base, although the leadership of the movement was mainly confined to the Assamese middle class. It was its strong popular base, which sustained the movement and gave birth to a right wing regional party the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) which captured political power in the state. The emergence of the AGP as a ruling party in Assam with the prominent leaders of the movement leading the state government, led to the institutionalization of the movement. There was a gradual transformation in the goals of the movement. Initially 1951 was demanded as the cut-off year and later 1971 was accepted for deportation of immigrants. This was because over the years the movement had lost its vigour and there was a gradual erosion of support base. Ultimately the Assam Accord was signed between the government of India and the leadership of the movement. The new leaders who had captured state power failed to create new situations for implementing the Accord, because of their severe class limitations. The goals of the Assam movement remained as distant as they were before. The AGP had not been able to leave any impression as a regional party. Leaving aside the equivocation regarding implementation of the Assam Accord, the party seems to have gone back on every single promise it had made when it was voted to power. Not only has it inherited and nourished the decadent and corrupt

style of functioning, many of its ministers and legislators have set new records in corruption and favouritism. For example, a committee of the state Assembly had indicated the chief minister of involvement in a deal comprising purchase of grains for stated worth several lakhs of rupees. Bereft of any ideology, the AGP was hit but internal squabbles soon after it assumed office. (Mishra, 1990; 247).

The perceived failure of the Assam movement to resolve Assam's immigration crisis led to radicalization of Assamese subnationalism, giving it a separatist turn. Another effect of the sustained campaign was the rupturing of ties between a number of ethnic group. The campaign led to frictions between the ethnic Assamese and some of Assam's "plain tribal" groups - the Bodo movement of today is in some ways an outgrowth of the Assam movement. In any case, the political culture of the state in an environment of persistent stagnation tend towards plunder and nepotism rather than development. A new force came to occupy centre stage in Assam's politics: the separatist militant organization, United Liberation Front Of Assam (ULFA). The idea of a Swadhin Asom, long embedded in the Assamese psyche, soon found expression in insurgency. Large - scale unemployment of educated youth and the deep-seated feeling of cultural insecurity coupled with regional disparity complicated the situation. In its early years ULFA conducted trials of people involved in drug and prostitution rings. It punished corrupt government officials though it

is alleged that it had as often blackmailed them into giving them money - and those neglecting public responsibilities. The leadership base of the organization mostly composed of the educated - unemployed youths and had strong rural roots. In the initial years the ULFA enjoyed popular support but gradually the militant's game plan was exposed when it began attacking innocent civilians, traders and industrial establishments. For example (Tea companies). Extortions became a regular feature. It gave birth to a complex trader-criminal-bureaucrat nexus. The gradual erosion of support base of the ULFA can be traced back to its weak ideology and strong military base. Over the years many militants surrendered and came to be known as SULFA (Surrendered ULFA). The policy of allowing these surrendered militants to keep their weapons led to the advent of a new breed of political violence.

In the course of events from the Assam movement till the emergence of the ULFA we notice a shift in ULFA's original plank of Assamese nationalism to a position where it speaks from the "people of Assam" of whom the immigrant sections form a sizeable proportion. However there is no other area more continuous with mainstream Assamese social discourse than the issue of Assam's economic underdevelopment and what is described as the neglect of Assam by New Delhi.

With the collapse of Soviet Union new intra-state conflict have emerged which have shown post-modern characteristics. Unlike wars of earlier times now war's are not between two armies but atleast between three parties. These are no longer wars among national parties. They are wars among parties one of which is the armed forces. Second characterstic of intra-state conflict is that among the parties are not only armed and militants but also unarmed civilians. Among the civilians its doctors, teachers, students, lawyers, women and childrens who are involved. These wars are not over Nation-States or territorialities. They are over capturing areas of influence, trade routes and control of legal and illegal commerce. All these takes place with the rhetoric of ethncity.

The political economy of intra-state conflicts shows that the militants of today are like the warlords of yesterday. They are not revolutionary leaders in the mould of Che, Castro or Mao or the revolutionaries in India. They are the new entrepreneurs. By use of force they impose extortions, code of conduct and control trading routes/centres. They engage in illegal trade within. They trade in commodities that fetch them high prices in the parallel market at the national and international level. At the external level these war lords become economic entrepreneurs leading luxurious lives. They establish nexus with highly placed people in the government, police and the private sector both at home and abroad. This political

economy of intra-state conflicts is partially evident in the case of ULFA. Its charismatic character is giving way to splits and divisions within its ranks and also to a mercenary character. Its leadership when it goes abroad leads a luxurious life style and is not at all seen as a charismatic leadership. Naturally this is bound to exhaust the moral of its rank and file as well as erode its mass base.

There is a view that developmental aid will solve the problem of militancy and as a result huge central government aid is given to these regions. We notice that developmental aid and welfare schemes helps the Smuggler-Politician-Bureaucrat-Militant nexus and not the common people. In that sense militancy becomes part of the operating political economy of distorted capitalist market in the northeast.

The impact of this political economy is that dominant ethnic groups and minorities are at logger heads and are fighting trug wars, like Naga and Kukis in Manipur and ULFA's and Bodo's in Assam. The Indian Nation-State which is suppose to follow the principle of integration is under seige. There are either assimilationist signs in the term of violent riots in the Assam Agitation/Hindutva or in the form of secessionist demands in the form of terrorist organisations like ULFA. The integrationist thrust of the democratic polity that is capable of absorbing the Assam movement and offering to Assam its indigenous power structure in the hands of the AGP is weakened by the new

nexus that ULFA has established originally with the AASU and later AGP. Therefore the discussion of Assam in terms of nationalism and subnationalism within the framework of 'melting pot' and 'salad bowl' is not applicable to India. What is applicable to India is a bouquet of flowers with a ribbon of nationhood around it. It is this metaphor which is being eroded in Assam.

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APPENDIX - I

Memorandum

(Excerpts)

To
The Prime Minister of India
New Delhi.

Hon'ble Prime Minister,

We, on behalf of All Assam Student's Union, hereby submit for your urgent attention the following memorandum on the explosive issue of influx of foreign nationals into the North East Region, particularly Assam.

The problem which is agitating the minds of people of the entire North East Region is the problem of influx of foreigners from the neighbouring countries particularly Bangladesh and Nepal. The influx of foreign nationals into Assam is not a recent phenomenon. The problem exists from the days of independence. The problem has become so alarming that the very existence of the indigenous populations is threatened. But we are determined to preserve our identity, our history, our culture and our heritage in our strive to maintain the ethnic beauty of the people of North East Region.

The huge magnitude of the problem and the serious threat to the territorial integrity of the nation that this influx of foreign nationals poses is clearly revealed by the following figures:

Percentage of increase of population per decade:

Assam and India

Year	Population of Assam	% increase Assam	%increase India
1951	80,28,856	19.94	13.31
1961	108,37,329	34.98	21.64
1971	146,25,152	34.95	24.80

Assam tops the list of states which registered more than 50% increase during 1911-1961.

State	Rate of Increase
Andhra	67.8
Assam	174.0
Bihar	64.1
Gujarat	110.5
Jammu & Kashmir	55.3
Kerala	136.5
Madhya Pradesh	66.5
Madras	61.2
Maharashtra	84.2
Mysore	74.4
Orissa	54.2
Punjab	70.0
Rajasthan	83.5
Uttar Pradesh	53.2
West Bengal	94.0

Assam's Position Remained Unchanged Till 1971. We have Every Reason to Apprehend the Next Census Would Definitely Maintain the Same Trend if not increase it.

As early as the 1930 important leader like Nehru and Rajendra Prasad had expressed their concern at the continuing influx into Assam. They must have been alerted by the following table:

Trend in Population : Assam and India

% decadal variation

Year	Assam	India
1991	16.99	5.73
1921	20.47	6.30
1931	19.92	11.00

But that was a different story. India was then not divided. Following partition of India, illegal immigration particularly from Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) and Nepal began on a scale larger than ever before.

The people of Assam have reasons, based on real experience to the apprehensive of being swamped by foreign nationals in the near future. Commenting on this large increase of 34.95% per decade compared with the national figure of 24.80% (one of the highest in the World), the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) said to duty during the Conference of the Electoral Officers held on 24-26 September, 1978:

"The influx has become a regular feature, I think that it may not be a wrong assessment to make on the basis of this increase of 34.95% between the two census, the increase that is likely to be recorded in 1991 census would be reached when the state may have to reckon with the Foreign Nationals who may in all probability constitute a sizeable percentage, if not the majority population in the state."

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A silent invasion by foreign nationals from the neighbouring countries particularly Bangladesh and Nepal is taking place. We cannot remain silent spectators when sovereignty of India is attacked. The problem has been deliberately neglected by the leaders leaving the destiny of Assam at the mercy of foreign nationals. The foreign nationals pose challenge to the integrity of India.

The first thing foreign nationals try is to enrol their names in the voters' lists with the connivance of antisocial elements, politicians, and officials on this side of the border. The motive is crystal-clear. The infiltrators vote for the politicians who protect them in all respects. In fact politicians encourage infiltration to ensure their political survival. Therefore naturally the rapid growth in population of Assam as a result of large scale influx from the neighbouring countries is bound to be reflected also in the increasing number of electors in Assam from 1957 to 1979. The following figures fully reveal it.

Year	No. of electors	Increase	% of increase during the years
1957	44,93,359		
1962	49,42,816	4,49,457	10% (in 5 years)
1966	55,85,056	6,42,240	12.99% (in 4 years)
1970	57,01,805	1,16,749	2.09% (in 4 years)
1971	62,96,198	5,94,393	10.42% (in 1 years)
1977	72,29,543	9,33,345	14.82% (in 6 years)
1978	79,74,476	7,44,933	10.30% (in 1 years)
1979	85,37,497	5,63,021	7.06% (in 1 years)

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Indian Constitution defines in unambiguous terms who can be a voter. A Foreign National cannot certainly participate in Indian Elections. But the sovereignty of the country has been openly insulted by the political parties. This is amply told by CEC:

Another disturbing factor is the demand made by the political parties for the inclusion in the electoral rolls of the names of such migrants who are not Indian Citizens, without even questioning and properly determining their citizenship status.

The number of foreign nationals in Assam has already become explosive. The problem must be tackled with utmost speed. Foreign nationals whose presence is of grave concern to the people of Assam, are mainly from Bangladesh and Nepal. In addition to Bangladeshis, Nepalis who have entered Assam without Restricted Area Permits either from Nepal or from Bhutan account for a sizeable number of foreigners. The increase of Nepali immigrants in the last two decades cannot be ignored.

Nepali Immigration

Year	Persons	Decade variation	General variation Assam
1951	101,335	-	-
1961	182,925	48.1%	34.98%
1971	352,673	48.2%	34.95%

The percentage of increase of the Nepali population is higher by about 13% than the percentage of increase in the general population during the period 1951-1971.

The conclusion from all these figures is obvious. Variations in population and electorate have been abnormal. Only influx of foreign nationals from neighbouring countries can account for such consequential changes.

Consequence of Unbridled Immigration:

The harmful effects of continuous immigration are evident in every sphere of life. Tensions in the social, political, economic and cultural fields have already surfaced and both Central and State Government must act before it is too late. Attempts to develop the region industrially cannot succeed unless the record population growth due to influx is fully halted. Immigrants have created pressure, unprecedented in the modern World history, on every resource of the region.

The immigrants have gathered enough strength to influence may major decisions of the State Government overlooking the security of the State and the country. An innocent looking newspaper report that appeared in *The Statesman* on January 16, 1979 throws sufficient light on the threat to our sovereignty. It reads:

An off-shoot of this population explosion has been a sudden change in the composition of the district's (Goalpara) electorate. The immigrants are in absolute majority in seven of nineteen Assembly Constituencies in the district. In five more constituencies they are numerous enough to be crucial for an electoral victory. There is almost a similar transformation in the smaller border district of Cachar, which returns 15 legislators to the 126 members State Assembly.

It is quite possible that majority of immigrants and the leaders behind them are determined to create instability in the region to serve the interest of the foreign powers. No body can deny such a possibility. We are apprehensive of the Political realities since vote in central to our democratic structure. Those who vote and those who are elected are deemed to be invested with power and responsibility to safeguard Assam's political future within the framework of Indian Constitution. *The people of Assam have genuine reasons to believe that foreign nationals would injure Regional and National interest. Our neighbours in the Hill states share our fears.*

Threat to tribal existence

The problem has badly hit the tribal populations. All the 33 blocks and belts reserved for the tribal people are on the verge of extinction. Pressure economy has reduced sizes of the reserved tribal blocks. Forest resource are fast disappearing due to indiscriminate felling of trees and occupation of the area by the foreign nationals.

The very identity of tribal population is in danger of extinction. The recent history of Tripura provides a good example to substantiate our belief. People of Assam cannot afford to ignore the warning.

Different Phases of the Movement:

When appeals and requests to the State Gvoernment, Central Government and the President of India failed to evoke any response, the people of Assam had to come out to the streets. Thousands of meeting were organised throughout the State to educate the people. Rallies were held. Mass picketing and Mass *Satyagraha* received support of everybody with a sense of belongingness to the region. Non-cooperation was extremely successful. Will of the people made election in twelve constituencies impossible. Determination of the people prevailed over the election on the indigenous population in the two constitutencies of Cachar. The representatives who are declared to be elected from Cachar

district have natural obligation to protect the interest of foreigners. Foreign nationals have already out-numbered the Indians in Cachar district. The people of Assam registered due protest on January 21 by observing it as a Black Day.

The students of Assam have been agitating on the issue since 1974. The detection and deportation of foreign nationals were - our demands included in the 21 point Charter which was submitted to the State Government in 1974. Now we are determined to correct the mistakes of our previous generations.

Character of the Movement

We are committed to pursue the cause of the present movement with sense of deep conviction on the principle of non-violence, democracy and secularism. The people of Assam spontaneously responded to our call with a sense of discipline, solidarity with the movement is evident in every phase. Determination to maintain peace and harmony is written on the face of every body participating in the movement. Unfortunately state politicians created troubles at different places and many lives have been lost.

Active Conspiracy:

But conspiracy has been on. This only proves that foreign nationals are very active in the state politics. Political elements patronizing the foreign nationals are inflaming communal passions among the innocent people in the name of language and religion. Our firm answer has been a foreigner is a foreigner; a foreigner shall not be judged by the language he speaks or by the religion he follows:

Conspirators in collusion with a section of anti-Assam politicians and bureaucrats are active in their attempts to frustrate the movement by indulging in anti-social activities at Lumding, Pandu, Maligaon and Digboi; these conspirators raised their ugly heads in Bhawanipur, Gauhati Medical College and Dham Dhama and stretched their design to Morigaon, Soalkuchi and Bijni. The same happened in North Kamrup. Army took advantage of the situation, tortured innocent people and raped helpless women and girls. At Duliajan many peaceful picketers were brutally killed by the CRP. It is unparalleled in the history of India. Even Cachar was not excluded. But we are clear about our aims and objectives.

Another Undesirable Factor:

There is another disturbing factor that has complicated the problem. Many infiltrators once deported by Assam Government have been detected again. But most surprisingly now they are armed with citizenship certificates issued by West Bengal and Tripura Governments. Assam Government, however, has no power to cancel these certificate inspite of the previous record that these people are foreign nationals. Only the Central Government can nullify such illegal certificates. Feeling helpless, the Assam Government was reported to have forwarded the cases to the Central Government. However, Central Government has not taken any immediate action against those anti-national officials. Though these factors have complicated the issue, the problem is not beyond permanent solution. Peoples, representatives also must play the constructive role expected of them. In Assam, it is surprising that no member of Legislative Assembly has demanded that the foreign nationals in his/her constituency should be detected and deported. What does it indicate? It is not very difficult to find the answer.

Our Demands:

1. Foreign nationals must be detected and deported from our country.
- 2a. Names of foreign nationals must be removed from the concerned electoral roll before holding any election in Assam.
- 2b. Inclusion of foreign nationals' names in the electoral rolls in future must be made impossible with the help of an adequate and strong election machinery.
3. Border of India with neighbouring countries must be fully protected to effectively check infiltration.
4. Indian voters residing in Assam should be issued identity cards with photograph affixed.
5. Necessary constitutional safeguards should be provided to the people of North Eastern Region for the next 15/20 years by making necessary constitutional provisions for the protection of the identity of the indigenous people in this Region.
6. The Government of Assam should be free to reject any certificate delegated to the State Government should be withdrawn by Central Government immediately from all State Governments, so that those foreigners who are detected and deported from Assam do not come back armed with citizenship certificates issued by other States.

Some of Our Proposals:

1. The National Register of Citizens (NRC) of 1951 should be made up-to-date by taking into consideration the additions to the number of each family since the time of compilation of the Register.
2. The comparison of the NRC with the successive electoral rolls since 1952 will also be helpful in making it up-to-date.
3. A free zone devoid of trees and houses should be created all along the border and any one crossing it without valid travel documents from either side must be shot at. We attach great importance to this suggestion. We have reached a stage when threat to the State of Assam and to the country can no longer be ignored.
4. Birth and Death Register at all Block, Village, Town etc. level should be strictly maintained in order to prevent future infiltration into voters' list.
5. The number of check notes posts should be increased so as to enable one check post to be visible from the other.

Lastly

Madam, the problem demands immediate attention of the Central Government. Firm and strong decision and its implementation to detect and deport foreign nationals from Assam can only ease the minds of the people. We know of your association with Assam from your early days. We all look forward to a speedy and just solution. Loss of so many lives must not go in vain. We hope, you would feel the pangs of our bleeding hearts.

We once again request you to pay a visit to Assam and meet the people and different Organisations.

2nd Feb. 1980

With regards,
Yours Sincerely,
Sd/- Prafulla Mahanta
President, AASU
Sd/- Bhriku Kr. Phukan
Secretary, AASU

APPENDIX - II

Assam Accord 15 August 1985 Memorandum of Settlement

Government have along been most anxious to find a satisfactory solution to the problem of foreigners in Assam. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) have also expressed their keenness to find such a solution.

2. The AASU through their Memorandum dated 2nd February, 1980 presented to the late Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi, conveyed their profound sense of apprehensions regarding the continuing influx of foreign nationals into Assam and the fear about adverse effects upon the political, social, cultural and economic life of the state.

3. Being fully alive to the genuine apprehensions of the people of Assam, the then Prime Minister initiated the dialogue with the AASU/AAGSP. Subsequently, talks were held at the Prime Minister's and Home Minister's levels during the period 1980-83. Several rounds of informal talks held during 1984. Formal discussions were resumed in March 1985.

4. Keeping all aspects of the problem including constitutional and legal provision, international agreements, national commitments and humanitarian considerations, it has been decided to proceed as follows:

Foreigners' Issue:

5.1 For purpose of detection and deletion of foreigners, 1.1.1986 shall be the base date and year.

5.2 All persons who came to Assam prior to 1.1.1966, including those amongst them whose names appeared on the electoral rolls used in 1967 elections, shall be regularised.

5.3 Foreigners who came to Assam after 1.1.1966 (inclusive) and upto 24th March, 1971 shall be detected in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act 1946 and the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order 1964.'

5.4 Names of foreigners so detected will be deleted from the electoral rolls in force. Such persons will be required to register themselves before the Registration Officers of the respective districts in accordance with the provisions of the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939 and the Registration of Foreigners Rules, 1939.

5.5 For the purpose, Govt. of India will undertake suitable strengthening of the governmental machinery.

5.6 On the expiry of a period of ten years following the date of detection, the names of all such persons which have been deleted from the electoral rolls shall be restored.

5.7 All persons who were expelled earlier, but have since re-entered illegally into Assam, shall be expelled.

5.8 Foreigners who came to Assam on or after March 25, 1971 shall continue to be detected, deleted and expelled in accordance with law. Immediate and practical steps shall be taken to expel such foreigners.

5.9 The Government will give due consideration to certain difficulties expressed by the AASU/AAGSP regarding the implementation of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983.

Safeguards and Economic Development:

6. Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.

7. The Government take this opportunity to renew their commitment for the speedy all round economic development of Assam, so as to improve the standard of living of the people, Special emphasis will be placed on education and science and technology through establishment of national institutions.

Other Issues:

8.1 The Government will arrange for the issue of citizenship certificates in future only by the authorities of the Central Government.

8.2 Specific complaints that may be made by the AASU/AAGSP about irregular issuance of Indian Citizenship Certificates (ICC) will be looked into.

9.1 The international border shall be made secure against future infiltration by erection of physical barriers like walls, barbed wire fencing and other obstacles at appropriate places. Patrolling by security forces on land and riverine routes all along the international border shall be adequately intensified. In order to further strengthen the security

arrangement, to prevent effectively future infiltration, an adequate number of check posts shall be set up.

9.2 besides the arrangements mentioned above and keeping in view security considerations, a road all along the international border shall be constructed so as to facilitate patrolling by security forces. Land between border and the road would be kept free of human habitation, wherever possible. Revenue patrolling along the international border would be intensified. All effective measures would be adopted to prevent infiltrators crossing or attempting to cross the international border.

10. it will be ensured that relevant laws for prevention of encroachment of government lands and lands in tribal belts and blocks are strictly enforced and unauthorised encroachers evicted as laid down under such laws.

11. It will be ensured that the relevant law restricting acquisition of immovable property by foreigners in Assam is strictly enforced.

12. It will be ensured that Birth and Death Registers are duly maintained.

Restoration of Normalcy

13. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) call off the agitation, assure full co-operation and dedicate themselves towards the development of the country.

14. The Central and the State Government have agreed to :-

(a) review with sympathy and withdraw cases of disciplinary action taken against employees in the context of the agitation and to ensure that there is no victimization;

(b) frame a scheme for ex-gratia payment to next of kind of those who were killed in the course of the agitation;

(c) give sympathetic consideration to proposal for relaxation of upper age limit for employment in public services in Assam, having regard to exceptional situation that prevailed in holding a academic and competitive examination, etc. in the context of agitation in Assam;

(d) consider withdrawal of the prohibitory orders/notifications in force, if any.

15. The Ministry of Home Affairs will be nodal Ministry for the implementation of the above.

Sd/-
(P.K. Mahanta)
President
All Assam Students Union.

Sd/-
(R.D. Pradhan)
Home Secretary
Government of India

Sd/-
(B.K. Phukan)
General Secretary
All Assam Students Union.

Sd/-
(Biraj Sharma)
Convenor
All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad.

Sd/-
(Smt. P.P. Trivedi)
Chief Secretary
Government of Assam

In the presence of
Sd/-
(Rajiv Gandhi)
Prime Minister

Date: 15th August 1985.
Place: New Delhi.

APPENDIX - III

INSURGENCY IN ASSAM

ULFA

Ulfa's aims and objectives

(This is transcript of text from the Ulfa's official website)

To liberate Assam, (a land of 78,529 square K.M.), through Armed national liberation struggle from the clutches of the illegal occupation of India and to establish a sovereign Independent Assam.

ULFA represents: ULFA represents, as its name implies, not only the Assamese nation but also the entire independent minded struggling peoples, irrespective of different race-tribe-caste-religion and nationality of Assam.

The struggle for national liberation of Assam never is a separatist or secessionist movement:

Assam was never a part of India at any point of time in history. The fact is independent Assam has been occupied by India, and deploying occupation forces they are oppressing our peoples and persecuting them. ULFA itself and all freedom fighters of Assam are neither planning nor conspiring to break up India! We are not conducting any armed operation inside India. Freedom fighters of Assam are only trying to overthrow Indian colonial occupation from Assam.

The armed struggle for self-defence : a compulsive objective reality: The people of Assam are confronting with various problems. Among those, the national identity problem is basic. The communal riot that was followed by the partition of India and Pakistan was responsible for the influx of foreigners from the Indian sub-continent in large scale and thereby caused a real threat to the demographic composition of Assam. India has all along encouraged this influx because of a population base having ethnic affinity with main land India is always favourable to their long term security perspective. This is one of India's major aspects of colonial occupation of Assam.

In economic sphere, India has been engaged in large-scale exploitation. Despite its rich resources, Assam remains one of the most backward states. Therefore, the question of real threat to the national identity of the people of Assam under the colonial occupation and exploitation of

India has basic problem. As a whole, the problem has become a question of life and death to the people of Assam.

The people of Assam confronted with the aforesaid problems such as influx of foreigners and massive exploitation of its natural resources and determined as national identity problem after summing up them. Against the gross injustice for sheer survival as a nation, as a people and as individuals, the people of Assam many times launched democratic and unarmed peaceful movement. However, India ruthlessly suppressed and crushed them ignoring the value of democratic movement. Especially in 1979, democratic and unarmed peaceful movement against the influx of foreigners and economic exploitation, the occupation force of India killed seven hundred unarmed agitationists where the majority were teenage students. Though the people of Assam and leadership of the struggle have a strong stand for peaceful and amicable solution of the conflict, India has always been trying to force a military solution.

Thus the unarmed peaceful movement against the influx and economic exploitation transformed to an armed national liberation struggle. On 28 Dec.'98 the Indian military operation' in Assam will be eight years old. The main intention of this operation is to suppress the legitimate aspiration of the people of Assam, and their basic and fundamental human rights i.e., national self-determination. There are endless lists of gross human rights violations during this period by Indian occupation forces. They have killed hundreds of innocent people, hundred more have disappeared in their custody and many of our womenfolk have been raped while many more hundreds have been severely tortured to become handicapped. It is the reflection of direct consequence of colonial repressive policy of India. Today, Assam in an occupied country under Indian's martial law and an undeclared war inside Assam is running on. Any thing may happen at any time inside this war theatre. Colonial India's this repressive policy compel to the freedom fighters of Assam to take up arms for self-defence. So, armed national liberation struggle of Assam is a democratic struggle for the survival of a Nation without any doubt.

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