

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION BETWEEN THE ULFA AND INDIAN STATE

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ABSTRACT

The ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) was formed in 1979 with the aim of liberating Assam from the Indian State. The ULFA is the most vocal group in Assam that demands secession from the Indian State. In spite of several internal factions in the militant group, ULFA still remains forceful in the state. Efforts have been taken from the state government and civil society organizations to facilitate negotiations between ULFA and the government. In the very initial stage, the civil society groups were very sympathetic to ULFA's cause and many even supported the militant group. Prior to the deliberation stage, GoI had taken many hard steps to dominate ULFA including use of military and Para military forces. In a state like Assam inclusive dialogue is an efficient method of conflict resolution. The Pro-Talk faction of ULFA has already entered into the formal talks and the Anti-Talk faction is vehemently opposing negotiations with the Government of India (GoI). That's why internal division between ULFA remains as a strong obstacle in the peace process. This paper will try to evaluate the role of civil society in Assam as a mediator between ULFA and Indian Government.

KEYWORDS: Civil Society, Peace, ULFA, Negotiation

1. INTRODUCTION

Theoretically, conflict resolution is the process through which a particular conflict can be resolved. In every human society conflict is an unconditional subject that affects on many human lives. Conflict is usual but not necessary condition for surviving in society. The different opinion of individual in society as well as social groups leads to conflict. Differences among the individual in their interest is natural, so their greedy behavior disrupt the social order. The repercussions of the unresolved conflicts in society are so harmful. So, it is very essential for every society to develop mechanisms to bring about conflict resolution. Here, a society's social

structure, culture and political system play a very dominant role. Conflict resolution is generally used to describe efforts to resolve a conflict by addressing the underlying contradictions or incompatibilities of interest of the parties to a conflict. Further, it is a process of working through opposing views in order to reach a common goal or mutual purpose. The conflict between the state and non-state actors sometimes leads to the violent insurgent movements. The purpose of the insurgent movement is to change the existing social system which creates difficult law and order problems. Insurgency problems in modern states are one of the most significant issues that confront the entire state system. The ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) was formed in 1979 with the aim of liberating Assam from the Indian State. The ULFA is the most vocal group in Assam that demands secession from the Indian State. In spite of several internal factions in the militant group, ULFA still remains forceful in the state. Efforts have been taken from the state government and civil society organizations to facilitate negotiations between ULFA and the government. In the very initial stage, the civil society groups were very sympathetic to ULFA's cause and many even supported the militant group. Prior to the deliberation stage, GoI had taken many hard steps to dominate ULFA including use of military and Para military forces. In a state like Assam inclusive dialogue is an efficient method of conflict resolution. The Pro-Talk faction of ULFA has already entered into the formal talks and the Anti-Talk faction is vehemently opposing negotiations with the Government of India (GoI). That's why internal division between ULFA remains as a strong obstacle in the peace process.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- i. To understand the peace process of ULFA and Indian Government.
- ii. To examine the role of civil society in Assam as a mediator between ULFA and Indian government.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. How far peace process between ULFA and GoI is successful?
- ii. What is the role of civil society in Assam in initiating the peace building with ULFA?

4. METHODOLOGY

The method of study used here is descriptive and analytics based on secondary data. The secondary data are collected from various sources like books, journals, newspaper, magazine

and internet. Also researchers' eye observation and internal criticisms are used for further analysis.

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

United Liberation Front of Assam is a secessionist organization which demands is to establish a separate sovereign state for Assam. With the aim of establishing a sovereign Assam ULFA was created on April 7, 1979 at Rang Ghar in Sivsagar town of Upper Assam. The organization was dormant till 1984 and then virtually started running a parallel government with the formation of Assam Gana Parishad government in 1985. ULFA demanded that Assam government as an agent of Indian government and Indian government is an imperialist government. According to ULFA along with sovereignty ASSAM should be a socialist country. That's why in the initial years ULFA was engaged in many developmental tasks. As a result a wide section of Assamese people including the mass media supported the secessionist organization. Samir Kumar Das in his book, *Conflict and Peace in India's North-East: The Role of Civil Society* viewed that civil society group's initiatives play diverse roles in conflict affecting North-East. But here the role of civil society in making peace is limited as it is mainly remained in background. Nani Gopal Mahanta in, *Confronting the State: ULFA's Quest for Sovereignty* said that ULFA represents a mindset, a suppressed voice, which is deeply engrained in Assam's psyche. ULFA is the last source of Assam's protest against New Delhi, especially after the decline of All Assam Students Union (AASU) and regional forces like AGP. The declining support base of ULFA is not to be seen in its numerical strength. It represents the unmet aspiration of the innumerable tribal and ethnic groups of Assam. He mentions that due to some violent incidents ULFA is losing its support base but the issues raised by the organization are still relevant. According to Udayan Mishra feeling of independent Assam was in there in the minds of Assamese people before India's independence itself, peoples like Ambika Giri Raichoudhury wants an independent Assam in 1937 itself. He added that behind the growth of all the disintegrating tendencies was the policy pursued by central government and its bureaucracy in post independent India. In Assam the failure of state government and weak role of left parties lead youth movements and dissatisfactions in the minds of Assamese people. He added that to make a durable peace in North-East, center-states understanding of North-East must undergo a change. Sanjib Baruah in *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of North-East India* says Indian democracy have a

great difference in theory and practice. Baruah said that center and state government both ignores the gravity of the problem and only busy in army operations. The creation of SULFA by giving economic assistance to the Surrendered ULFA (SULFA) cadres by the central and state government is not the right way to solve the problem according to him. Sanjoy Hazarika in *Strangers of the Mist: Tales and Wars of Peace in India's North-East* points out that Delhi's we know the best attitude is responsible for all types of problems in Assam as well as in other North-Eastern states. He mentions that the weak economy of North-East India is also a cause of all insurgent movements in North-East. In 1980s ULFA was an emotion to the common people of Assam. In the very initial stage the civil society of Assam was divided into two groups both around the objectives and the strategies of ULFA. One group supported ULFA or dared to criticize its activities and other groups openly criticized ULFA's activities by writing piece in Newspapers. In Assam many civil society organizations are coming out to take an initiative to solve the problem between ULFA and GoI from early 1990s. All Assam Democratic Citizens' Association was the first organization who took an initiative in 1990 to hold a peace process with ULFA. In All Assam Democratic Citizens' Association intellectuals from the all sections of the society represented. Among them notable personalities was Prof. Hiren Gohain, Dhiren Bezbaruah, Paresh Malakar etc. It was the first civil society organizations who openly criticized the violation led by both ULFA and government. The members of this organization even criticized against the central governments acts like AFSPA and NSA. All Assam Democratic Citizens' Association was the pioneer institution by creating and urging for peace process by both the parties. But its initiative was failed because of ULFA's rejection of it by arguing that it was more partial to the government. Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad also tried to agree ULFA within the discussion table but it was failed. An 11 member People's Consultative Group was nominated by ULFA in 2005 for the purpose of negotiating discussion with the government. The chief coordinator was Dr. Mamoni Roysom Goswami and the coordinator was Rebati Phukan. About the formation of PCG Dr. Mamoni Roysom Goswami was of the view that, "As is the case in different conflict ridden regions around the world, the role of the civil society in aiding and facilitating conflict resolutions either as initiator or catalyst mediator gained momentum particularly in the new millennium. According to such a role of the civil society, the ULFA, after 26 years of armed revolution, constituted the People's Consultative Group in 2005 to initiate a political conflict resolution process, thereby throwing open the options for a direct

dialogue with the Government of India. It was a jigsaw road there after both for the PCG and the ULFA for at least two years. More importantly, it was a period of hopes and aspirations for that large populace of Assam who as opposed to a vested segment allergic to the very name of ULFA and still professing militarization as a means for bringing “peace”, foresee and vouch for a political conflict resolution process.” Though People’s Consultative Group interested to act as a mediator but central government was more willing to solve ULFA problem by military means. In 2010 most important civil society initiative was taken by the Sanmilita Jatiya Abhibartan under the leadership of Dr. Hiren Gohain. More than 109 civil society organizations across Assam gathered in Guwahati. Prof Hiren Gohain said that, “We tried to intervene. This brutal warfare between the two forces should end. This is not a solution to any problem. Negotiation, settlements, dialogue and talks can solve these issues. We facilitate the grounds for talks. In the interest of the people of Assam talk should be held. We can say that civil society processes are succeeded as the talks are going on now. Before preparing the grounds for talks we talked with Arabinda Rajkhowa and Bhimkanta Borgohain. We helped them in making their demand draft, which they later submitted to the government. The charter of demand should fulfill the aspiration of the people of Assam.” Its initiative was to some extent successful to bring ULFA and GoI in the discussion table. Though Civil Society is a strong actor of a state, in case of Assam civil society has been increasingly losing its voice and this naturally is a matter of grave concern. Today ULFA leaders have responded positively towards civil society’s initiative in Assam. Sasha Choudhury is of the view that, “we are very happy with the role of the civil society of Assam. The initiative taken by the members of civil society group of Assam is very positive regarding the peace process. The responses of civil society also help in preparing the grounds for the peace process with the Government of India.”

6. CONCLUSION

Civil society in Assam has taken a very positive role in bringing peace between ULFA and GoI. Civil society is active in Assam to restore peace in the state. Since 1990 civil society plays a very positive role in bringing peace in the state. As a consequence of the peace initiative by civil society in Assam, ULFA positively came forward for a civil society driven approach and declared the formation of a nine member group called PCG. The lack of conviction between GoI and ULFA failed the peace process. GoI and ULFA responded positively to the peace initiative

taken by the civil society organization after arresting the ULFA leaders in Bangladesh. The division between ULFA regarding the ongoing peace process creates a question mark. Because, the hard fiction of ULFA declares it meaningless unless the issue of Sovereignty of Assam is being discussed. Presently, the role of civil society in Assam is very much important to bring these two groups together for the durable peace in Assam.

7. REFERENCES

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