



PEACE PROCESSES IN NORTH EAST INDIA – AN EXAMINATION

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Abstract: In today's world, peace building and its efforts towards managing conflicts has gained interest which seeks to ensure peace and harmony in the conflict ridden society. It is towards this end that the international community is also involved in establishing peace in order to ensure development. In general peace building includes a number of activities at different levels which involves various actors that are interested in establishing peace. In this article, following the initial remarks on the idea of peace and peace building, an effort is made to examine the conflict in north east India in brief. Following the initial remarks, the essay examines the peace processes in north east India and the current efforts taken by the government of India towards establishing peace in the region. The article also makes an effort to establish the fact that there is considerable progress made in terms of establishing peace in the north eastern region of India.

Index Terms - Peace; Peace building; Northeast India; Nationalism; Irredentism.

Introduction

Broadly speaking, Peace building includes a number of activities, levels of activities and the role actors involved in the process of achieving peace (Llamazares, 2005: 3). In conflict ridden societies, peace building refers to certain actions that aim to prevent, resolve violence or potentially violent conflict (Goodhand & Hulme, 1999: 15). In recent times, the international communities are indulging in new forms of engagement to ensure development. The understanding of peace building in yester years did not foresee any transformation in any society, but was more interested in societies maintaining stability (Denskus, 2007: 657). According to Featherston, "if conflict is caused, enabled and reproduced by particular social structures and institutions which favour a dominant group, we cannot hope to alleviate or remove those causes, without altering those structures. Then peacekeeping becomes another aspect of a system which only seeks stability within the confines of that system, a system which already made the war possible" (Featherston, 2000: 196).

Mitigation of armed conflicts and promotion of peace has been always difficult in the world. There have been umpteen numbers of initiatives by various international peace-supporting institutions to establish peace since the emergence of armed conflicts from the beginning of 19th century. There is also a general agreement with regard to the understanding and meaning of peace processes. It is considered as an effort of the international, national and local efforts to minimise, eliminate and transform violent conflicts (Ozerdem & Lee, 2015). Sustainance of peace is also not a naturally occurring phenomenon and a conscious and continuous action to the changing situations can only provide for a permanent peace. Insurgency prone States have been exposed to violent conflicts and restoration of peace has been a challenge to such societies. (Jenkins, 2013: 1). Civil wars are due to failure of state authority to sustain peace. An effort to bring in peace among conflicting groups is a significant action (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000: 779). Thus an attempt has been made to examine the efforts undertaken by the government of India which has constantly engaged to bring about sustainable peace in the north eastern region for over six decades. But this article concentrated on the last ten years of peace building measure and its effectiveness.

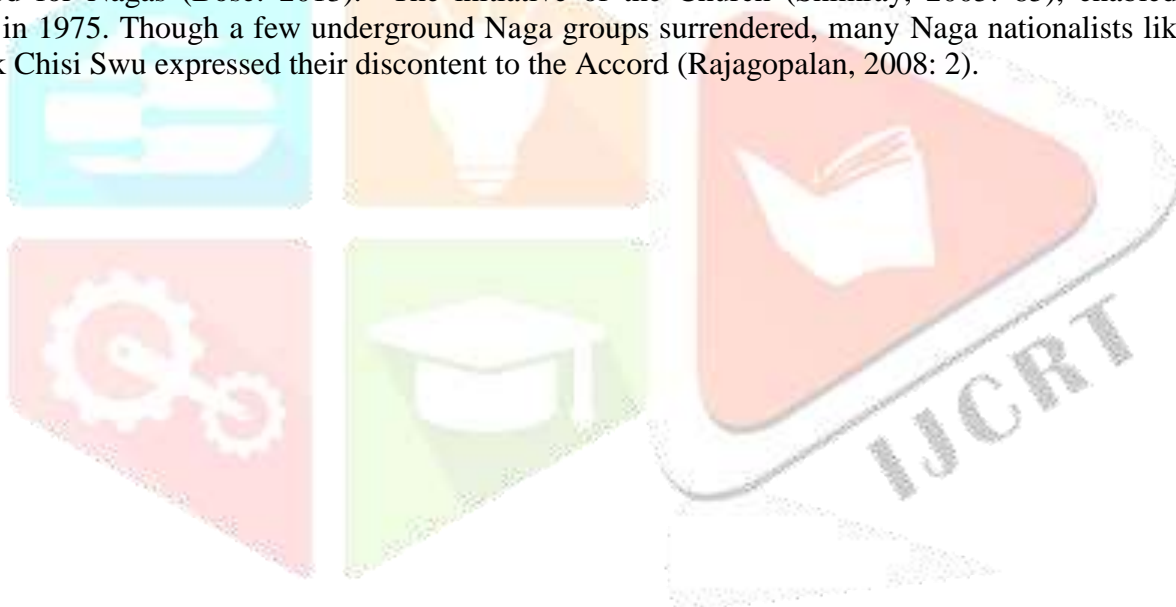
Though separatist and insurgent movements have been witnessed in India since obtaining freedom from colonial rule, it has not lost even a small portion of its territory to such movements. Not only these separatist tendencies have been new to India, they have also been the most violent ones in south Asia. A new novice government had to prepare a political warfare through its military (Ladwig: 2009).

Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura together form the north east states of India. Sikkim was given full statehood status in the year 1975. The Siliguri corridor of West Bengal connects the north east region to the rest of India. The people of north east India with high self-esteem find it difficult to accept the diktat of the imagined 'others'. The northeast India is home to multifarious social and ethnic groups with diverse culture, language, customs and traditions. This region receives the highest rainfall in the country and is rich in natural resources. Still this region suffers ethnic conflicts, low productivity, poor governance and lack of infrastructure. Insurgencies have grown due to remoteness, seclusion, backwardness and have provided fertile grounds for breeding armed insurgencies. The northeast region is unique due to the attitude of the state in containing ethnic extremism and assertions of various ethnic identities.

For most of the researchers, northeast has been a place of insurgency and counter insurgency. Mutual alienation marks the relationship between the people of northeast India and the rest of Indians. Irredentism, mal-integration, colonial attitudes, nativism, illegal migration and relative deprivation have resulted in violent conflict in the region for over six decades (Freddy, 2016: 107-08).

Peace Building in India's North-East

The state is a strong entity, insurgent groups can be suppressed through military force, peace efforts to be taken up unless the atmosphere is conducive and limited autonomy has better results measures are some of the Indian political assumptions. (Ghosh: 2013). The northeast India is the most neglected region and has rarely been noticed unless when there was large scale violence are when efforts taken to sign peace accords (Rajagopalan, 2008:1). Northeast has witnessed thirteen peace accords signed between 1947 and 2005. In the years 1947, 1960 and 1975 three peace accords were signed between Naga rebel groups. The Naga – Akbar Hydari Accord of 1947 (SATP: 2001) promised the Nagas autonomy to a certain extent. In 1960, the sixteen point agreement gained statehood for Nagas (Bose: 2013). The initiative of the Church (Shimray, 2005: 85), enabled the Shillong Accord in 1975. Though a few underground Naga groups surrendered, many Naga nationalists like Th, Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu expressed their discontent to the Accord (Rajagopalan, 2008: 2).



Date	Accord	Parties to the Accord	Features
1947	Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord	Governor of Assam and Naga National Council	Nagas given autonomy for ten years. Terms of autonomy not classified, and conflict continued.
1960	Sixteen-Point Agreement	Government of India and Naga Peoples Convention	Created the state of Nagaland. The Naga National Council refused to recognize the agreement
1975	Shillong Accord	Governor of Nagaland and the Underground Organisations	The underground organisations surrendered. Accord was not beneficial to the Nagas.
1985	Assam Accord	AASU & AGSP representatives, Union Home Secretary & Chief Secretary of Assam	Immigrants who entered Assam between January 1, 1996 & March 24, 1971, were to be registered under Foreigners Act. Deportation of people who immigrated to Assam after 25 th March 1971 under IMDT ACT, 83.
1986	Memorandum of Understanding	Government of India and Mizo National Front leader Laldenga	Mizo National Front gave up violence and demands for secession. Statehood is granted.
1988	Memorandum of Understanding	Tripura National Volunteers and Government of India	Restoration of tribal lands. Reorganization of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Councils to include tribal areas and exclude non-tribal areas.
1988	Darjeeling Hill Accord	Gorkhaland National Liberation Front, West Bengal State and Government of India	Sikkim separated. Statehood demand was dropped Ghising keeps raising issues about states of Darjeeling
1993	Memorandum of Understanding	All Bodo Students Union, Assam State Government in the presence of Government of India Ministers and Chief Minister	Surrender and rehabilitation of ABSU cadres in return for establishment of Bodoland autonomous Council.
1993	Agartala Agreement	Tripura Government and the All Tripura Tiger Force	Renews commitment to recognizing the TTAADC and provides cultural safeguards for Tripuri's
1994	Memorandum of Settlement	Mizoram State Government and Hmar People's Convention	Chinlung Hills Development Council established
1995	Memorandum of Understanding	Assam State Government and representatives of community organisations of the Rabhas, Karbis, Tiwas and Mishings	(i) Karbi Anglong District Council becomes Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council. (ii) Rabha – Hasang Autonomous Council, Tiwa Autonomous Council and Mishing Autonomous Council, which were not territorial were established
2003	Bodo Territorial Council Memorandum	Government of India, Assam Government and Bodo Liberation Tigers	Bodo Territorial Council established, plus cultural provisions
2005	Memorandum of Understanding	Mizoram State Government and BRU National Liberation Front	Government agrees to repatriate displaced Reangs in Tripura. The Mizoram Scheduled Tribes list will now list Reangs as BRUs

Source: Swarna Rajagopalan: 2008.

The state government of Assam have signed agreements with Bodo separatists and other ethnic groups too. So many peace accords were necessary due to many small stakeholders were there in the northeast. The autonomous Darjeeling Hill Council established by the 1988 accord between the Government of India, the Government of West Bengal State, and the Gorkhaland National Liberation Front suffer from clarity; it is not clear to which administrative tier of the Indian Union the new district belongs. Accords signed in Tripura State had no positive impact as the violence had been on the increase. Issues like illegal immigration, nativism, and citizenship are contentious in Northeast India. The success of the Mizo Accord of 1986 has been the ethnically inclusive mobilization of the Mizo National Front around a regional rather than ethnic identity.

The foremost effort on the part of the Indian government was to contain the armed violence by insurgent groups through military force. India's diplomacy with Bhutan and Bangladesh and the grass root empowerment of communities in north east have helped the reduction of insurgent activities. Shifts in the policy of the government in negotiating peace in north east has been noticed since the NDFB-S The killing of 70 civilians in Assam in December 2014 by the NDFB-S had changed the government stand in negotiating peace and has refrained from engaging in peace negotiation with those outfits that have killed innocent civilians and branded them as terrorists. Such hard stand taken by the government of India have produced favourable results (Hussain: 2015; Hussain: 2015a).

Almost every insurgent group has been engaged in peace talks by the government of India so that conflicts can be resolved. The major north east insurgent outfits who were engaged in talks are United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland - Progressive (NDFB-P), National Democratic Front of Bodoland - Ranjan Daimary faction (NDFB-RD), Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front (KLNLHF) in Assam and National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Isak Muivah faction (NSCN-IM) in Nagaland. Ceasefire

Agreement has been signed with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Khaplang faction (NSCN-K) and National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Khole Kitovi faction (NSCN-KK) in Nagaland and Suspension of Operation (SoO) agreement with United Progressive Front (UPF) and Kuki National Organisation (KNO) in Manipur. Also, Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed with three Meitei insurgent groups in Manipur - United Revolutionary Front (URF), Kangleipak Communist Party – Lamphel (KCP-L) and Kanglei Yawal Kanna Lup (KYKL) (ibid).

ULFA's willingness for talks with the government of India on February 5, 2011 was more to satisfy the desires of the people of Assam (Mathur, 2011: 269). Further, it also had very limited support towards achieving a separate sovereign state from among its population. The outfit found safe haven in neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan Nepal along with the tacit support of the ISI from Pakistan (SATP: 2000).

Between 2007- 09, the insurgent activities were at its peak with serial blasts in 2008 by the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) that targeted civilians and hence marked the transition from insurgency to terrorism. The fear of losing their cause made them to create a sense of fear among the common man. Later the diplomatic efforts undertaken by the Indian government created opportunities for economic development for Assam and the north east region at large. The mentioned facts were the reasons for an environment of sustainable peace. Operation All Clear in 2003 by the Bhutanese government to destroy approximately 30 militant camps in its territory to clear out all insurgent camps added to peace building measures (Mazumdar, 2005: 579). The logistical support of the Indian army assisted in eliminating all militant camps (ibid: 576). Since then Bhutan has been a reliable partner in countering insurgency. The re-election of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed in Bangladesh had positive impact in India who even played an important role in handing over insurgent leaders such as Arabinda Rajkhowa (ULFA) in December 2009 (Hindustan Times: 2009) and Ranjan Daimary (NDFB) in May 2010 (TOI: 2010). Northern Myanmar remains as a home for the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) and some of the remaining factions of the ULFA. The Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty signed between India and Myanmar has to an extent prevented activities related to insurgency (TOI: 2010). During the years 2007-09, counter insurgency operations initiated by the Indian Army and the Assam Police diminished ULFA and made them to surrender (Hussain: 2008).

Another important milestone in the history of peace building process of northeast is the Indo-Naga peace framework signed between the Centre and NSCN (IM) on August 3, 2015. It is significant due to its flexibility and realism in the approach. The goals of complete sovereignty and greater Nagalim were put aside and began to work within the constitutional framework for greater autonomy for the Naga inhabited areas. The opposition to divide Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur for establishment of greater Nagalim gave way for a supra-state structure in 2011. The accord created a peaceful path to conflict resolution in Nagaland (Goswami: 2015).

Government in negotiating peace in north east has been changing its stand after NDFB-S killing civilians in Assam in December 2014. Peace talk was prohibited with any outfit that involves in killing civilians was branded as terrorists by the government of India. The hard stand taken by the Government of India had positive impact on these insurgency cadres.

Civil societies though not pro-active in this also played its role by bringing the conflicting parties to sit together and find a negotiated solution to the problem (Klingelhofer & Robinson: 2001). Government of India also maintained its stand by directly dealing with this group and never encouraged mediators. There were four kinds of groups among the northeast population. They are as follows: (a) particular ethnic groups (b) non-governmental organisations that prepare for ceasefire agreements (c) church and vigilante groups and (d) other new organisations (Das: 2007). Certain initiatives towards peace building by organisations like Asom Sahitya sabha and the Asom Sattrra Sanmilian are worthy to be mentioned as even banned leaders like Paresh Baruah were present for talk. The People's Consultative Group (PCG) formed by ULFA itself for talks with government in October 2005 but withdrew itself in December 2006 citing Government's lack of sincerity in the peace process. The role of civil society in Manipur in fighting drug-abuse, alcoholism and also human rights violations committed by the armed forces and the insurgent groups is praise worthy. Civil society groups such Meira Paibis, Kuki Women's Organisation, Kuki Mother's Association and the Naga Women's Movement played a vital role to foster peace in the conflict ridden state. These groups have led the agitation against the AFSPA since 2004. In this context, Irom Sharmila has been on fast for more than 10 years against the draconian Act. Concerted efforts have been attempted by Naga Hoho, The Naga Mother's Association and the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights against the human rights violations committed by the state and non-state armed groups.

Tripura is no exception towards the contribution of civil society for the promotion of peace. The notable ones are Jamatiya Hoda, Jamatiyas, the Reangs and the Uchai communities who have joined the anti-insurgency

movements. Tripura Atimjati Sevak Sangh and the Borok Human Rights Groups have organised awareness campaigns, workshops and seminars for citizens on conflict resolution.

Conclusion

Interestingly, human development is given priority over human security in the regions of northeast. The people of the northeast are yet to develop their trust with the government of the states and the centre in spite of flow of funds for development. The views of the people and the views of the state have two different perspectives. Though there has been certain allocation of developmental funds, it lacks not only human development but also human security and freedom from fear and want. Absence of violence is still a distant dream. Freedom from want in the context of north east refers to lack of development leading to unemployment. Research work on human security in north east India identifies certain noteworthy aspects. They are (a) prevalence of threat from armed groups (b) prevalence of threat from state through counter insurgency operations. So there is an urgent need for conflict resolution to reduce the feelings of insecurity, repeal AFSPA and strength the peace process. Further, the development of infrastructural facilities has to be given a priority. The Indian government initiative towards the development of the northeast is far from ground realities and the views of the people are often ignored. Hence governmental initiatives often attract violent protests from the people and when the government suppresses these protests through the armed forces, the vicious cycle of insurgency is ignited. The alienation of the region against integration of the region with the Indian union is strengthened. Thus human security in the region is essentially a significant and important aspect for building peace and also to bring development in the region. A renewed determination and new approaches are required to build peace in the northeast. Peace cannot be secured by meeting the demands of the insurgent groups. Resorting back to violence should come to an end. All strongholds of insurgency should be dismantled by the security forces of India. Development of the interior regions of the northeast will go a long way in establishing peace. Maoism and Islamism which have seen an increasing activity in the region poses a serious concern in the peace of the north east and it has to be addressed immediately for a permanent peace in the region.

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