

# Periodic Research

## Terrorism: Ethnic Insurgency in the North-Eastern Hill regions (Special reference to the state of Assam)

### Abstract

Terrorism by its very nature is antagonistic to sovereign state system. In its earlier form the nature of terrorism has been territorial, confined within a nation or a state. It has been either in the form of National liberation movement (LTTE in Srilanka, Irish Republican Army in U.K.) or ethnic in nature, involving a nation, race, tribe, religion, a community and the like; all confined within a certain territory. Sometimes it has been in the form of social unrest, intended against a system based on exploitation of one class by the other. (Naxalite movement in Bihar, Orissa, M.P. and Andhra Pradesh on the Maoist movement in Nepal) "Terrorism has often been confused with revolutionary and Gurilla warfare, insurgencies, a political militancy of local groups. These forms of warfare involve combat against regular force in one form on the other; Terrorism does not..... Terrorism uses secrecy or stealth as its main weapon to attack a society or culture. Open combat with arms forces or the police is never its agenda."

Terrorism in any form or in any name can not be commendable, since it involves terror and thus is a negation of civil liberty, life or public property. It involves threat of violence or campaign of violence designed to create terror in the people and thus to exert pressure on the Govt. in favor of their individual or sectional motive. Since last, a decade or two, the nature of terrorism has changed. Contemporary terrorism has become 'global and transnational in nature: A global alliance exist amongst the different terrorist groups. The bond unifying them is the exchange of arsenals, ideology, and network of information.

**Keyword:** Bigot gone Berserk, Rattled, Mooring, Religious Fanaticism, Insurgence

### Introduction Objectives

The objectives of the paper is to describe the multi-facets of Terrorism and it's effect on the State System with a focus on the need of state policy to overcome the menace of terrorism. The paper focuses on the ethnic conflicts in the North- Eastern Hill regions specially in the state of Assam.

### Methodology

The paper is based on the explorations of secondary sources of data collection. The Reference books, Internet has been explored to develop the plan of the research paper.

### The Problem

Terrorism Is derived from the Lattin term 'Terrere' meaning 'To Frighten'. It is an act of intimidation or threats to use illegitimate force causing massive destruction. All the terrorist activities are directed against a state or intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons or a group of persons or the general public. It is defined as the deliberate, negligent or reckless use of force against the Non-combatant by State or Non-state actors for some ideological ends. Terrorism uses violence, psychological terror, illegitimate force, intimidation or threat to Individual liberty. All the terrorist groups & Insurgents claim to better the society through radical and revolutionary techniques. They usually target the state machinery, the elites, the privileged or upper rich class as they take them as natural enemies to their basic rights. The term is not easy to define as "one man's terror is another man's freedom fight".

In its traditional form, terrorism involves the use of organized force against the legitimate authority for some or other socio-political, economic,

### S.P. Shukla

Professor,  
Deptt. of Political Science,  
Govt. T.R.S. College of  
Excellence,  
Rewa, Madhya Prasesh

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religious or communal motive. Contemporary terrorism whether territorial or global can not be said to have only political ramifications; It has become more ethnic or religious rather political. Some or the other way religious fundamentalism and ethnic confrontations have been in the root of genesis of terrorism. Osama Bin Laden, the greatest terrorist of this age was "not a bigot gone berserk". He was a manifestation of bigotry wave engulfing the world; almost every crisis in the world has religious bigotry as its essence<sup>1</sup>. 'He (Osama) has brought home to us that the Earth is being rattled out of it's mooring by an explosion of religious fanaticism and religious politics; and India is the thick of it, contributing to fanaticism and victimized by them'<sup>2</sup>.

The dimensions of contemporary terrorism have had a revolutionary change, so far as the technology and networking is concerned. In the aftermath of 9/11, The Major terrorist organisations Al-Kaida and it's offshoots have come out with still improved networking and technology. The demise of Osama Bin Laden, had a set back to terrorist organizations, like 'Al-Kaida' & 'Hizbulla' But they are still at large unleashing terror in the different part of the world in association with terrorist networks and sleeping cells in the countries already inflicted with territorial terrorism or regional insurgency. SIMI (Students Islamic Movement of India) and HUZI (Harket-UI-Zehadi Islami), an extremist organization of Bangladesh are the new offshoots of terrorism; whose involvement in the 2006 terrorist incidents in Varanasi and Bombay has been detected. A number of terrorist organizations are developing sleeping cells and have found their base in India; The regional insurgency has undoubtedly helped these organization to flourish in India. These organizations are well equipped in the use of explosives, Bombs, Missile launchers, use of RDX and the like.

The multi-facets of terrorism are thus

- Territorial (Secessionist insurgency)
- Ethnic or Religious
- Social Unrest
- Cross- Border terrorism
- State Sponsored
- Global or Transnational.

### **Ethnic Insurgency in the Eastern Hill States**

India is a highly pluralistic society. Since the dawn of Indian Independence, the pluralism and heterogeneity in India became assertive by the process of time; and became manifest in the form of secessionist movement, communal or ethnic violence. The immediate cause of the genesis of secessionism and ethnic unrest in the North-Eastern regions was the Re-organization of states on linguistic basis; and the influx of large number of migrants in Assam and other Hill regions, affecting adversely their indigenous culture. Ethnic and religious minorities have severe grievances against the center blaming the Govt. for not giving wastage to the interests of their respective groups in social, political and religious milieu.

The North-Eastern Hill regions have been in the state of flux since the dawn of Independence. Due to its specific location, geography, socio-economic

and ethnic nature, these regions is not only strategically more sensitive but also alienated by virtue of its district socio-cultural and ethnic features. The insurgency in the North-Eastern regions was the immediate cause of the unrest due to the influx of large number of immigrants from other parts of the country and their meddlesome interference in the Govt. jobs, agriculture, industry and their cultural heritage. The terrorist violence in the hill regions may be attributed to this very feeling of insecurity whether real or fake. Secessionist movement got impetus with the ISI and the terrorist organizations like 'Jamat-E-Islami' and other Islamic fundamentalist meddling with the affairs of the hill regions. ISI in association with DGFI (Director General of Field Intelligence), a secret service agency of Bangladesh, has formed an extremist organization ULFASS (United Liberation Front of Seven Sisters). The secessionist organizations in Assam have full support of ISI.

Nevertheless, 'the extremist organization in the Eastern hill states are being catered by Laden-Taliban supported Islamic fundamentalist active in Bangladesh'<sup>3</sup>. The entire Eastern region is under the fire of terrorism & this is affecting adversely the indigenous culture of the Eastern hill states. ISI has been giving impetus to insurgency providing economic assistance, arsenal, weapons and militancy training. The North-Eastern Hill regions thus have proved a fertile ground for growing militancy due to mass of unemployed youth dwelling aimless in the region. ISI is engaged in a dual strategy in the hill regions. On one side, it is giving assistance to the extremist tribal organizations in form of arsenals to keep the territory on fire; on the other side it has formed several extremist groups from amongst the large scale immigrants of Bangladesh.

### **Ethnic insurgency in Assam**

The state of Assam had long been inflicted by ethnic unrest and insurgency.

A more serious manifestation of ethnic insurgency appeared in Assam. The state of Assam had long been inflicted by ethnic unrest and insurgency. Several sects of ethnic confrontations intersect in Assam-between Hindus and Muslims, linguistic groups (Particularly Assamese and Bengali speaking people), plain people and tribal hill people, plain tribal and non-tribal indigenous population and a large number of migrant's populations<sup>4</sup>. In the pre-Independence period, Assam was initially integrated into Bengal presidency; and thus Bengali people dominated the administrative services, privileges in education and employment sector. Bengalis came to dominate since the post-independence period to the present in high paying public and private sector jobs and in middle class occupations generally<sup>5</sup>. At the time of the state-reorganization, the spokesman of tribal people demanded separate statehood in view of the district languages and culture; that were district from Assamese and Bengalis. The tribal people did not consider themselves Indian or they didn't wish to come into the National Mainstream. In the 90's a new insurrectionary and secessionist movement arose in Assam, both among plain tribal people and among the

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dominant Assamese Hindu population as well. The insurgent organizations active in the State of Assam were- ULFA, NDFB (National Democratic Front of Assam), KNLF (Karbi Longari Hills Liberation Front), Operative in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao District Of Assam that was formed on May 2004. UPDS (United People's Democratic Solidarity formed in 1999) and the like.

However the crises created in Assam was basically due to a large number of migrant populations. 'Since the beginning of the present century, some six and a half-million migrants and their descendants have settled in Assam<sup>6</sup>. These new migrants in their different ways monopolized virtually all new opportunities for resource exploitations or jobs in the modern sector of economy and in Govt. Service. The migrations have been so large as to threaten to transform the indigenous Assamese Hindu population into a minority. 'If we put a cursory glance over the language figure (census 1971), we get an important view of a major aspect of ethnic diversity in Assam. Assamese Speakers constitute a majority in the countryside but a minority of 39% in the total urban population where they are outnumbered by Bengali Speakers with 40% and where Hindi speakers constitute another 16% of the total<sup>7</sup> Bengali speaking people had the privilege in employment and job opportunities as the Bengali was the principal medium of instruction; thus the language issue emerged as the focus of conflict between Assamese and Bengali Hindus in the post-Independence period.

## **Problem of Migration**

Migrant problem intensified and added a new dimension to ethnic hostilities in Assam and other hill states. Most ominous of all has been the influx of immigrants from neighboring state Bangladesh threatening the dominance of Assamese people in their own region. The contraveners between migrants and non-migrants in 'Assam in the post-independent period, resulted into a political conflict between the indigenous Assamese Hindu and tribal population on one side and most Bengali Muslims on the other<sup>8</sup>. The Ethnic crisis in Assam became more intense in the post-70, prior to the creation of Bangladesh. After the Pakistan civil war (East Pakistan crisis), this region witnessed the considerable influx and Muslim Bengalis in the state. 'Between 1964 to 1971 about 10 lacks people crossed the border from East-Pakistan to Assam-----and about 2 laces of them has been allegedly, registered as voters. The Central Govt. declared these refugees as entitled to Indian citizenship<sup>9</sup>. Agitations against the influx of migration started in Assam in 1967. The Assamese organized the 'Lachit Sena' and started working up the sentiments of the students. On the Republic day, they called for the boycott of the celebrations, and violence erupted as a result of the agitations. The protest and agitations took serious turn in 1979 in a bi-election on the issue of a rapid expansion of voters in the electoral rolls. The agitation was launched by AAGSP (All Assam Gan Sangram Parishad) and AASU (All Assam Student Union). Assamese Hindus who had been before primarily in competition with Bengali

Hindus for middle-class jobs now also articulated the broader fear of being overwhelmed 'numerically politically and culturally by a massive migration influx<sup>10</sup>. The tripartite talk did not bear fruitful results. The agitations have been so intense as to paralyze the govt. machinery. The assembly elections held in 1983 resulted in violence and massacre of several thousand people. Only 10% votes were cast in the catastrophic event. The AASU and the AAGSP decided to topple the illegally elected Congress ministry of Hiteshwar Saikia; because the electoral rolls contained the names of ' a large number of foreigners<sup>11</sup>.

The movement launched on the issue of expulsion of foreigners from the voter list was turned into ethnic conflict. The extremists 'started intimidating the non-Assamese speaking people on the one side and accusing the centre of neglecting Assam on the other<sup>12</sup>. Towards the end of Dec. 1979 the extremists started secessionist agitations asking for "Golden Assam": The extremists did not only demand the detection and deletion of alleged illegal migrants; they alleged the union for 'adopting a colonial policy'<sup>13</sup>. The posters and pamphlets 'spoke of the united states of Assam<sup>14</sup>. They stuck on the 'sons of soil theory; proclaiming-Assam for Assamese and Bengal for Bengalis; they gave the slogans like-'If you see a snake or a Bengali; kill the Bengali instead of killing the snake<sup>15</sup>. AAGU and AASU gave the slogans-'Bye, Bye India', -Forget mother India, Love mother Assam<sup>16</sup>.

## **Assam accord and ethnic unrest**

The parochial motives and the indifference of the ruling party to the problem undoubtedly intensified the extremist movement in Assam. The next phase in the political and ethnic realignment of Assam politics started with the signing of Assam accord, providing for the identification, detection and deletion of migrants from the electoral rolls and their deportations from the electoral rolls and their deportations from the state. The movement launched by AASU brought the AGP to power with Prafulla Mohanta, The leading figure in the movement and a grass root leader as a C.M. in the election 1985. AGP Govt. proved an utter failure in the implementation of Assam accord. The leaders of the AGP progenitor the AASU had expressed dissatisfaction with the progress made in implementing the accord; according to which "migrants who had come to Assam between 1966 and 1971 were to be disfranchised and those who had come after 1971 from Bangladesh were to be deported. However the govt. at centre and at the state had neither pulse nor will to overcome the problem. The Congress leadership at the centre responded slowly to AGP request for more rapid implementation of the accord and clearly found the developing differences between the AGP and the AASU a matter for satisfaction and potential political benefit<sup>17</sup>.

The unenforceability of the Assam accord gave rise to insurrectionary movement and ethnic insurgency in the form of Bodo movement in the state. Bodo movement started with the demand of creation of an autonomous unit within Assam. Bodo's are plain

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tribal living in the heartland river but with some on the Southern bank as well. Bodo leaders had severe grievances against the non tribal people that they had not only lost lands to non-tribal but they were educationally backward and that their language was not taught in the schools resulting in job crisis. The Grievance of Bodos are that they suffered from the impact of legal and illegal migrations and encroachments on lands in the Brahmaputra valley by Bengali Hindu refugees and Muslim illegal migrants from East Pakistan and Bangladesh. Bodos participated in the anti-migrations movements led by the AASU. Since the Bodos did not get the reward from the govt. they formed an All-Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and started demanding the establishment of a separate state of Bodoland. On 1 January 1987 ABSU presented a memorandum containing a long list of demands like-

1. The establishment of separate Bodo state on the North bank Brahmaputra river, comprising nearly half remaining area of the state of Assam.
2. The creation of autonomous district councils for the Bodos.
3. Increased job opportunity.
4. Inclusion of their language in the eight schedule of the constitution.

Bodo movement turned more and more violent in 1988 and 1989 with undisciplined violence and massacres. In the August 1989 Bodo activists attacked and burned the villages of non-Bodos, Assamese Hindus and non-tribal groups massed and responded with similar attacks against Bodo villages<sup>18</sup>. It was due to the indifference and hostile attitude of the state and the central govt. that effective measures 'to suppress the insurgency. The continuance of the Bodo agitation served the congress purposes to the extent that it discredited and weakened the AGP govt. in the state<sup>19</sup>. Being disenchanted by the AGP and AASU, The ABSU formed 'the Bodo people's action committee: which had a spectacular performance in the Eight legislative assembly and 1 Lok Sabha seats wining in the 1991 elections from the area inhabited principally by Bodos'.

However the Bodo problem still persists in a more violent manner and the problem has turned into a more serious ethnic insurgency.

ULFA (United Liberation Front Of Assam), yet another progeny of AASU and AASP formed by the dissidents from AASU and AASP in 1980. This extremist organization came in the forefront only in 1990 after the dismal performance of AGP Govt. of Assam in implementing the Assam accord and revising the electoral rolls. ULFA expressed the loss of faith in both the AGP and the central Govt. demanding secession and launching violent movement to achieve its aim. The party in the Govt. could not deal with the ULFA movement effectively as it was hampered by the fact that ULFA was itself a bastard child of their own previous movements challenging them in their own strongholds with a similar appeal to Assamese Hindu resentments against the alleged loss of their territory to foreigners

and their exploitation by the central govt.<sup>20</sup>. The movement became so intense that in Nov. 1990 the govt. of India imposed President's rule on Assam and started operation Bajrang to suppress the insurrection; By April 20, 1991 the operation ended. ULFA started yet another tactics of capturing hostages to put pressure on the govt. in favor of their demands. On July 1, 1991 they captured 14 hostages; 3 hostages including a Soviet technician posted at coal India were released in exchange for 26 ULFA militants. The Govt. started yet another-operation Rhino in Sept. 15, 1991 to crush the militancy. The govt. of Assam succeeded in negotiation with ULFA leaders. The latter agreed to accept Indian constitution, and seek the solution within constitutional framework. Operation Rhino was suspended. The Govt. offered a grant of 110 cr. for the rehabilitation of defecting ULFA members and coming into national mainstream.

The insurrection and insurgency in Assam had been tedious to subside. It is still persisting. Insurgency in Assam and other hill regions is being sponsored by the ISI and other International terrorist organization. Large number of ULFA activists are being trained in the training campus running in Bangladesh. It has made peace process in Assam impossible. In spite of a large number deployment of Para-military-Forces were deployed in Assam during the recent visit of Home Minister, Shiv Raj Patil, for his effort to come about a peaceful negotiation with the insurgency. Due to the detention of a few ULFA activists (leaders) and the center's precaution, the terrorist activities in Assam had reduced; Indira Goswami, the leader of people's consultative group made an effort to get the Centre and ULFA at negotiation table. On 22nd, June 06 a tripartite negotiation resulted amidst the central govt., the state and 11 members of people's consultative group. The govt. decided to release 5 ULFA activists; It is still in the mist of doubt, whether this negotiation will get the lasting peace for the territory or not.

Bodo movement has again come out with its demand of autonomous state of Assam. NDFB (National Democratic Front of Bodo land) has now become more aggressive. On May 24, 2005 NDFB has had a tripartite negotiation in effect from June 1, 2005. The tenure of ceasefire has come to an end on May 31, 2006. Within this period the state govt. had been indifferent to Bodo problem. Only when the general secretary of the NDFB warned about the consequences for not increasing the tenure of ceasefire, the govt. took the problem into notice. Although about 8 thousand Bodo extremists have come into national mainstream, but the movement is going to be intensified, in want of the rehabilitation programmed for the extremists coming into national mainstream.

However the extremist movement is now being induced with a new wave of terrorism from the ISI and Bangladesh. The govt. at the centre has not only to use forces against the insurgency but also have to evaluate its policy of Pakistan and

Bangladesh to hold the wave terrorism in the eastern hill regions in check.

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