SUSTAINING THE PEACE PROCESS: POWER SHARING AMONG THE CONTENDING ETHNIC GROUPS

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The global socio - political scenario in the 1995, is painted with high intensity conflicts with latent potential to escalate into full blooded inter-state wars. The onset of the detente has brought the inter - state conflicts, hitherto contained by the Cold War dynamics, to the fore. The United Nations is now actively involved in peace keeping operations than it had been ever before.

Most conflicts of the third world are ethnic in nature and demand power sharing with the dominant ethnic group. However the definition of ethnicity may vary from one continent to another depending on their past experiences. The following definition of ethnicity is applicable to the South Asian region which has a common historical and social experience: the term ethnicity encompasses varied elements like cultural markers' i.e. language, religion, customs and traditions, historical memories, values and race. The identification by a group, irrespective of its numerical size, to some or all of these elements creates an ethnic identity. Ethnic groups that use ethnicity to make demands in the political arena for shifting their status, in their economic well being, in their civil rights or educational opportunities are engaged in a form of 'interest group' politics. The greater the demands for equity, the greater is the potential of a problem turning into a crisis and escalating into an armed struggle, the intensity of which depends on the mobilization of the majority and minority groups to realize their dominant and suppressed status.

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At times it seems that the ethnic conflicts arise form the common evaluative significance accorded by one group to acknowledge group differences and played out in public rituals of affirmation and contradictions. According to Ted Gurr, ethnopolitical conflicts are those in which one or more contenders in each conflict defines itself using communal criterion and makes demands on behalf of the group's collective interests against the state or against other communal actors (Gurr, 1994 p. 352).

The South Asian countries encapsulate the above dynamics by way of the existing conflicts in Sri Lanka and India. The region with multi -ethnic character and pluralistic society has become a stage for ethnic struggle. The existing political systems within the countries are either conducive, or detrimental, to the solution of the ethnic crisis in the region.

In order to analyse the conflicts in South Asia, a framework has been adopted dealing with factors like global environment, regional security system, the inter - process leaning and the inter - actor dynamics that lead to or fail to culminate in a peace settlement (diagram on next page). If all these factors are interpreted in the systems approach schema, they would act as input and an outcome that could be either a stable settlement, or an unstable settlement, or resumption of hostilities, depending on the whole system. The whole mechanism does not function in a vacuum, but is affected directly or indirectly by the global environment and the regional security system.

In the case of the South Asian region, global environment, which vacillated from one extreme of intense Cold War to the collapse of the Soviet Union, remains an active remote control mechanism. The East - West security system and global manipulations somehow contained the ethnic conflicts within the national boundaries, which otherwise could have manifested in inter - state wars. The post cold war world, with USA as the remaining Super Power, has become more prone to resolving conflicts and bringing peace in the regions torn with ethnic rivalries.

The regional security system of the South Asia is intimately linked an interplay of the foreign policies of China, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Since there is a continuity of territory, history and culture, it appears that the regional security system instigates, aggravates, or reduces the crisis in the region.

The present paper attempts to understand the ethnic conflicts of South Asia, analyse them and put forward some suggestions by way of resolving them. It is interesting to note that the case studies denote two stages of the conflicts resolution process. The escalation of conflict and failure of negotiations is seen in the Sri Lankan case, and a relatively stable settlement of conflict by signing an accord marks a watershed stage in India's management of conflict in Assam. The case studies are the links of the same process and help in understanding the positive and negative aspects of conflicts resolution.
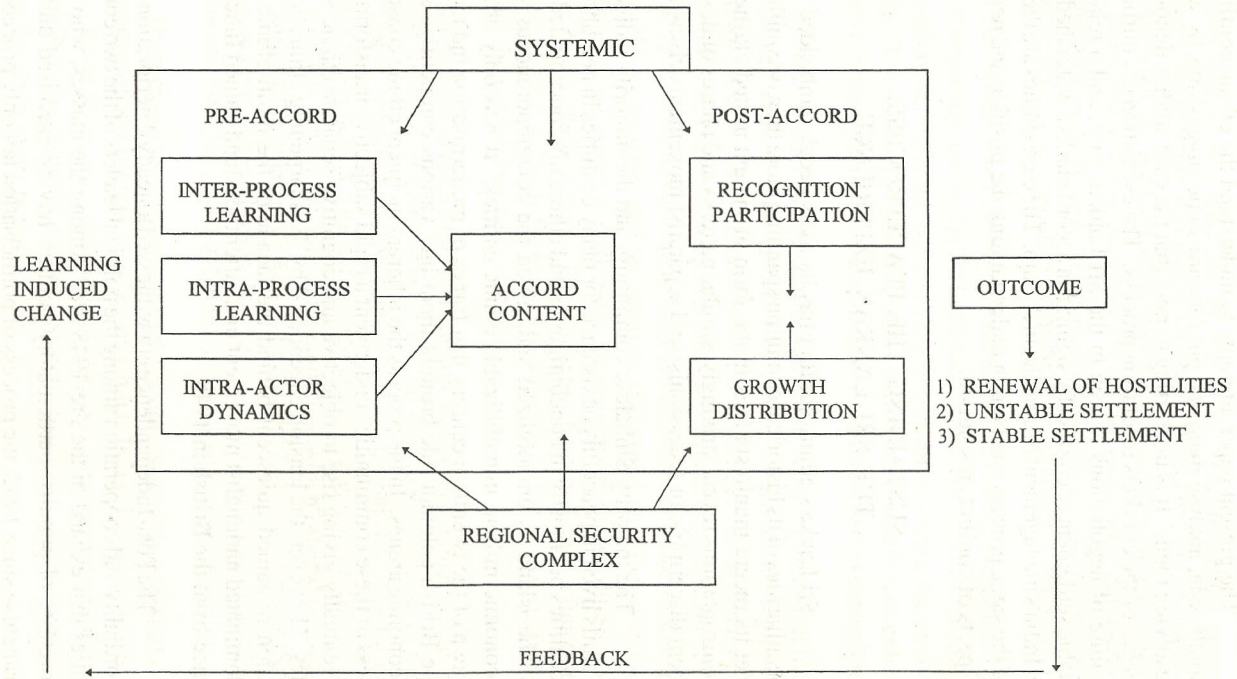
SUSTAINING THE PEACEPROCESS: THE SRI LANKAN EXPERIENCE

Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict has its roots deeply embedded in the peculiarities of its historical evolution spanning more than two millennia. Yet its recent manifestations in the form of violent armed clashes and confrontations reveal strikingly similar patterns and phases of development discernible in secessionist and separatist movements elsewhere.

The majority Sinhalese community and the minority indigenous Tamils lived in peaceful coexistence for many centuries in neighbouring localities but mostly in noncontiguous and ethnically concentrated areas of the island as unmobilized and, given the contemporaneous socio-economic milieu, unmobilizable ethnic entities. It was only after the dawn of the twentieth century that forces of modernisation inducted by the British colonial rule brought them into various competitive socio-economic arenas. In the process the inherent incipient ethnic consciousness of these communities underwent a rapid subjective transformation, eventually giving rise to objective and cognitive separate ethnic identities. However, the tension engendered by the sharpening ethnic competition remained quiescent behind the facade of the multi-ethnic elite-dominated nationalist movement until after the island gained Independence from the British in 1948.

The Post-Independence era witnessed a steady deterioration of the cordiality and cooperation among the political leaders of the two communities that existed in the pre-1948 era. Among the masses, who had a foretaste of populist participatory politics, having exercised universal franchise since 1932, the process of politicisation not only proceeded at

PROCESS OF DURABLE PEACE

SYSTEMIC

PRE-ACCORD

INTER-PROCESS LEARNING

INTRA-PROCESS LEARNING

INTRA-ACTOR DYNAMICS

ACCORD CONTENT

POST-ACCORD

RECOGNITION PARTICIPATION

GROWTH DISTRIBUTION

LEARNING INDUCED CHANGE

OUTCOME

1) RENEWAL OF HOSTILITIES
2) UNSTABLE SETTLEMENT
3) STABLE SETTLEMENT

REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX

FEEDBACK

brisk peace, but also proceeded along the ethnic divide. The minorities, in particular the indigenous Tamils, became increasingly disenchanted with the then existing parliamentary, representative system which had an in-built majoritarian bias as well as the unitary state framework under which on meaningful transfer of power away from the centre was possible. When Sinhala, the language of the majority community, was enacted the official language of the country in 1956, further polarisation of political loyalties along ethnic party lines became a foregone conclusion. Although two republican type Constitutions replaced the Westminster model Parliamentary system and system of proportional representation superseded the first-past-the post electoral system in the subsequent period, the estranged Tamils could never be lured to rejoin the mainstream politics.

Next came the militarisation of the Tamil politics. Primarily instrumental in this transformation were sections of the radical Tamil youth who lost no time in setting up several underground guerrilla "fronts" and engaging the state security forces in sporadic skirmishes. One such attack in 1983 unleashed a devastating wave of anti- Tamil violence in the South. Thousands of threatened Tamils fled to the predominantly Tamil South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. After several attempts at bringing about a negotiated settlement between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Indian government finally intervened in the Sri Lankan conflict in July, 1987.

The outcome was the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, the treaty instrument of the agreement, which sought to proffer a deal acceptable to both parties to the conflict by disarming the LTTE and coercing the central government to devolve self-governing powers and institutions on the Tamil 'homeland' territories, the northern and eastern provinces. However, India's sanguine intentions in this regard were destined to be miscarried. Within weeks of signing the Accord the LTTE resumed its armed struggle triggering off an excruciatingly virulent phase of fighting with the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) on the one hand and the Sri Lankan security forces on the other.

The First Cessation of Hostilities

While the Sri Lankan conflict has thus escalated into a three-frontal war, two significant developments were afoot in the south of the country, i.e.; first a Marxist-oriented insurgent movement launched by predominantly Sinhalese youth, namely, the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), posing a major challenge to the government authority and second, the election of a new President (R Premadasa). Since one of the most emotionally powerful rallying points of the JVP popularity was its stand against the presence of IPKF on Sri Lankan soil, the newly elected President sought to pull the rug from under their feet by calling for the withdrawal of the Indian forces and, then, entering into a strategic alliance with the LTTE with a view to enlist their support for his 'crusade".

Between April 1989 and June 1990, twelve separate discussion sessions were held for this purpose behind a thick veil of secrecy, fueling speculation that this exercise was a smoke-screen to transfer arms and ammunition to the Tigers to fight the 'common enemy'. While the 'peace talks' were in progress, both sides observed an unwritten cessation of hostilities. But no sooner had the IPKF left the shores of Sri Lankan in June, 1990, than did the Tigers turn their guns on the government forces.

The renewal of fighting in the aftermath of the ill-fated peace talks opened a particularly destructive chapter in the Ealam war claiming thousands of combatant and civilian lives. In the South, meanwhile, a number of leading politicians were killed in a spate of political assassinations allegedly commissioned by the LTTE. Among them were President Premadasa and the Presidential candidate of the ruling United National Party, Gamini Dissanayake. It was against this gloomy backdrop that the Peoples' Alliance Coalition government was voted into office in August 1994. One of the first tasks undertaken by the new dispensation was to honour a pledge given during the hustings to explore the possibility of ending the war by unilaterally taking the initiative to send peace feelers to the Tigers.

No doubt the manner in which this peace move evolved itself was, to some extent, shaped by the ground realities of the situation. But, viewing synoptically, the entire episode leading to its eventual failure can be subsumed under the three main phases outlined by Robert - F. Randle in his seminal work entitled *Origins of Peace* and, also presented

diagrammatically on the following page incorporating the situational peculiarities. Furthermore, various analytical tools developed by conflict resolution researchers too can be employed here to shed useful insights into its complex problematique.

Preliminary Stage of Peace Making

At no time of the Sri Lanka's long drawn-out ethnic problem did extra-regional Big Power rivalry or interest aggregations have a direct impact on its vicissitudes. The numerous ethnic squabbles that erupted throughout Asia and Europe on the termination of the Cold War created among the concerned international community a new awareness of the need to resolve such disputes by peaceful means.
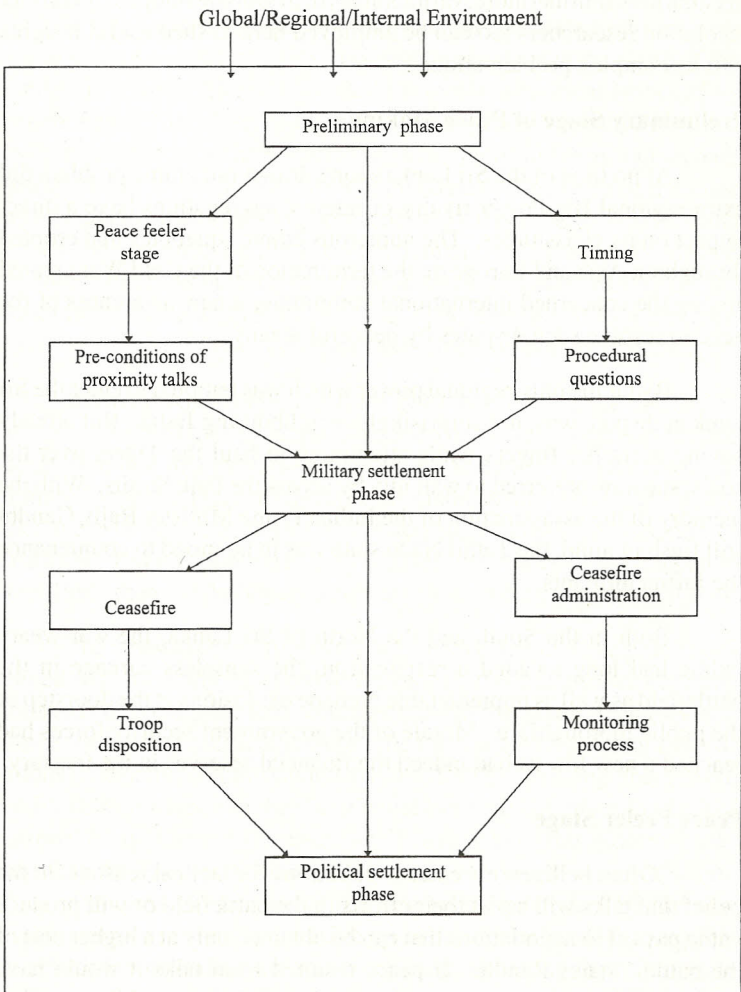
By far the only regional power which was tempted to enter the Sri Lankan dispute was, not surprisingly, neighbouring India. But already having burnt her fingers while attempting to haul the Tigers over the coals, she now preferred to wait idly by across the Palk Straits. With the memory of the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi still fresh in mind, the Tamil Nadu state was in no mood to countenance the Jaffna militants.

Both in the South and the North of Sri Lanka, the war-weary public had long awaited a respite from the senseless carnage in the battlefield as well as unpredictable grenade explosions at the doorstep or the public thoroughfare. Morale of the government security forces had reached a new low as had indeed the financial reserves in the treasury.

Peace Feeler Stage

"Often belligerents enter negotiations for tactical reasons, in the belief that talks will assist their efforts in the battlefield or will produce value pay off in negotiations that can be obtained only at a higher cost of the battle," states Randle. If peace resulted from talks it would have produced a monumental euphoria which can distract public attention from the unpalatable domestic issues. It needs to be recalled here that the PA had a threadbare majority in the Parliament which left her in an unenviable position in the face of the mounting pressure from the Opposition. However, nothing conclusively can be said about the LTTE's motives in dabbling in the peace process in the absence of their public statements on this matter.

PRE-ACCORD DYNAMICS

Global/Regional/Internal Environment

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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │ Preliminary  phase  │
                    └─────────────────────┘

  ┌──────────────┐                      ┌──────────────┐
  │ Peace feeler │                      │    Timing     │
  │    stage     │                      └──────────────┘
  └──────────────┘

  ┌──────────────┐                      ┌──────────────┐
  │Pre-conditions│                      │  Procedural  │
  │of proximity  │                      │  questions   │
  │   talks      │                      └──────────────┘
  └──────────────┘
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │ Military settlement │
                    │       phase         │
                    └─────────────────────┘

  ┌──────────────┐                      ┌──────────────┐
  │  Ceasefire   │                      │  Ceasefire   │
  └──────────────┘                      │administration│
                                        └──────────────┘
  ┌──────────────┐                      ┌──────────────┐
  │    Troop     │                      │  Monitoring  │
  │ disposition  │                      │   process    │
  └──────────────┘                      └──────────────┘
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │ Political settlement│
                    │       phase         │
                    └─────────────────────┘
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Timing

It is axiomatic that the most propitious moment for a government to initiate radical policy changes is when it is riding high on a wave of electoral victory. Therefore it was both tactically correct as well as quite imaginative on the part of the PA government to send peace feelers up to the north within weeks of its electoral victory. While the public watched new policy directions with cautious optimism, the government boldly announced the lifting of embargo on the transportation of twenty four commodities to the battle affected areas. Before long the PA received a fresh mandate for continuing its peace policy when its leader was elected to the office of President in November 1994 with a landslide victory of 62.28 percent of the popular vote.

Preconditions of Proximity Talks and Procedural Issues

The LTTE laid down several preconditions virtually at every stage of the peace process. Of these the most important are, first, the complete lifting of the ban on transporting goods to the North and the East, and second, the removal of the strategically situated army camp at Pooneryn on the gateway to the Jaffna peninsula. The government made a measured response to the first and ruled out the possibility of conceding the second until complete peace is restored.

Of the procedural issues, the most controversial was the one on the composition of the negotiating teams. After much hedging and procrastinating, the government decided against including Ministers or, for that matter, ordinary Members of Parliament in its team-a tactical blunder which was taken serious note of by the LTTE who, as tit-for-tat, as it were, kept their 'A' team away from the talks. The casualty of this short-sighted move was none other than the peace process itself.

THE MILITARY SETTLEMENT PHASE

The Cessation of Hostilities

On January 09, 1995, it was simultaneously announced in Sri Lanka and the LTTE's London office that President Kumaranatunga and the LTTE supremo Prabhakaran signed an agreement for cessation of hostilities without actually meeting each other but through the good offices of the International Red Cross. The loosely worded sketchy document declared that *there will be no offensive operation by either*

party during the operative period of the agreement and that *an offensive operation will be considered a violation of the agreement.* Quintessentially, it was a document conforming to Randle's definition of the sort of an agreement in which *the parties might agree to an armistice, and no more, which could end the war, but in the circumstances, it may not be an adequate settlement and may lead to fighting in the near future.*

Troop Disposition

Under the terms of the agreement, troops on both sides of the divide were to return to the pre-cease fire boundaries and to keep a minimum distance of 400 meters between each other. The effectiveness of this stipulation remains a moot point in view of the fact that 'forward defense lines' of either militia often become indistinct under the thick canopy of jungle.

Cease Fire Administration and Monitoring Process.

The agreement envisaged that six monitoring committees be appointed to deal with violations of the stipulated terms and to take immediate action on complaints received. It also specified that each of these committees should be headed by a representative drawn from Canada, Netherlands or Norway. The Sri Lankan government formed monitoring committees under chairmen appointed as prescribed in the agreement, but through an inexplicable volte face, the LTTE refused to send the delegates it had already named for them.

Failure of the Cease Fire Agreement

After a fledgling fourteen weeks' existence, the cease fire came to an abrupt end on April 16, 1995, when the LTTE blew up two patrol boats of the Sri Lanka Navy, and hot on its heels, attacked two army camps in the North. The government responded to the blatant violations of the cease fire by renewing military operations and resuming the twelve year-old civil war. This was soon followed up by yet another extension of the war-the deployment of the surface to air missile technology by the LTTE in shooting down two Air Force air crafts transporting troops to the North. This has the effect of driving the last nail on the peace coffin.

For several reasons, it can be said, of course with the benefit of the hindsight, that the ceasefire agreement was foredoomed to failure. Much of its success or failure depended on the good intention of its signatories. The Tigers in fact made their intentions quite clear several times in the course of the peace process, during which they destroyed a Navy inshore patrol-craft as early as September 1994 and again, a few weeks later, a cargo ship chartered by the Sri Lankan government. Neither party had a clear vision of the post - cease fire peace arrangement or political power sharing formula. The absence of political intercourse transcending the military armistice left precious little leeway for the dynamics of diplomacy, the fine art of managing the insoluble, as averred by Henry Kissinger, to dispel misunderstanding and acrimonious atmosphere on both sides of the border. After all, the phrase cease fire connotes a negative line of action, providing a breathing space to the belligerents to beef up their arsenals and resume the battle until, as they perceive, the war is won.

CASE STUDY OF INDIAN MANAGEMENT OF ETHIC CONFLICTS

The Democratic Republic of India, which attained its independence on August 15, 1947, inherited ethnic conflicts as a parting gift from the British. The colossal task of integration of the fragmented principalities into unified country was possible due to the 'federal' character of Indian democracy.

In the last fifty years the country has been torn by violent social conflicts. The mid 1950s witnessed the eruption of ethnic conflicts in several states as a number of linguistic groups demanded states of their own. Though these were not secessionist demands, the call for linguistic states disrupted many state governments and led to conflicts between highly mobilised groups and the central government, e.g. Maharashtra - Gujrat, Telangana movement for Tamil-speaking people.

The central government responded by redrawing the map of India so that each major linguistic ethnic community could have its own state within the federal system. The two border areas of northwest and north east of India were excluded from this reorganisation. These two regions soon become the site of violent political turbulence. Hitherto, the

linguistic conflicts had been restricted to demonstrations, low grade riots and arson. But the Northeast region of India experienced one of the most violent armed conflicts between the ethnic tribal communities and the state. The present case study attempts to analyse the causes, the escalation and management of the ethnic strife in the North east of India.

Introduction to the Problem

The Assamese, an Indo Aryan group, are the indigenous population of the Brahmaputra valley. Other ethnic groups include tribals, Bengali Muslims, Bengali Hindus; Nepalis, Biharis, Oriyas as well as Marwaris and Punjabis.

Assam, the land of resources and opportunities, is the Indian frontier state, sharing its international boundaries with Bangladesh, Tibet, Bhutan and Burma. It has been a vastly under-populated state and has attracted many immigrants for more than a century now. Immigration and internal migration, though desirable at first, became haphazard and politically inflammable issue.

The sense of attachment to the native 'place' is as strong as the attachment to the group, and the two are closely intertwined. Groups often regard the territory in which they live as the site of their exclusive history-a place in which great events have occurred and sacred shrines are located. Tribal and linguistic groups often regard a home land exclusively as their own. It is not sufficient that the group has the control of the land, they would also like to control the politics of the region too.

The indigenous Assamese people feel threatened and fear that through intracolonising process they would turn from a 'minority' to a minority' group. Moreover, they believe that they are subordinated within the economic and educational structure.

'The foreigner' issue is central to the Assamese struggle. While the Assamese leadership tend to believe that the majority of the migrants has retarded the progress of the state, the migrants contend that through their skills, labour and education they have contributed to the development of the region.

However the Assamese population perceived their position as being threatened both at linguistic and religious level by the migrant Bengalis. In a political structure where numbers could create or destroy a nationality, the Assamese fought for the survival of their nationality by seeking to decrease the Bengali Muslim population.

Conflict Crystallisation

The major issues around which the movement crystallised were:

* The language movement and the conflict over making Assamese as the official language in 1960,

* The food movement of 1966-67,

* The anti-states reorganisation movement of 1967-68,

* the movement to make Assamese as medium of instruction in school and colleges 1972,

* The most recent upsurge of the movement against the foreigners that began in 1978.

In the wake of the changed leadership both at the centre and the state levels, with Janata Party taking over the helm of affairs, the struggle against the so called 'foreigners' intensified. Aided by the ruling Janata Government, the Assam Police and the Local Administration began to identify the 'illegal' immigrants in the region and if possible return them to their states of origins.

Initially the Movement with the slogan of Assam for Assamese or 'the sons of the soil' was peaceful and non-violent in nature with satyagraha as their leitmotif. During the early stages of the movement the *Assam Sahitya Sabha* and since 1967 the *'All Assam Students'* Union (A.A.S.U.) assumed the leadership of the movement.

Escalation

The observers of Indian domestic conflicts hold two views on the impact of politics on the ethnic group conflicts: some believe that it worsens the group relations while others argue that it helps to bring the conflicting groups to mediation table and, as such, a useful way to reduce group conflicts.

The distribution of education, employment and wealth in India is largely determined by the political process. This central feature of he political life would mean that each ethnic group can best improve its share of education and employment by increasing their political power. Hence, the belief that the twin objectives of all ethnic groups in the country i.e. strengthen their group identity and improve the socio-economic status of

the group, can be best achieved through the course of political participation. It is this central fact that induces the politicians to use their ethnic card at the time of elections, which, on rebound, can escalate the existing ethnic conflicts in the region.

The Assam conflict is an ideal case to examine the interplay of different political parties and analyse the centrer-periphery dynamics. The changed domestic scenario, the end of emergency period in 1977 and the general sense of the instability within the country somehow added fuel to the fire. The coming of the Janata Rule both at the centre and the State expedited the process of identification of the so-called foreigners. It also heightened the armed struggle within the state. The hitherto peaceful struggle become more violent and there was an increase in the circulation of armaments within the region.

The regional security system, led by China, tended to increase infiltration of arms and there by aided the insurgents in Assam. With the return of the Congress Party at the centre (1980) and with India Gandhi as the Prime Minister of India, the insurgency in Assam was handled with an iron hand. Instead of solving the problems of the area, it aggravated the situation. The AASU now become more militant and violent.

The violent turn to the movement clearly indicated the evolution of the anti-foreigner issue towards increased violence. The question of Assam for the Assamese became a question of power-sharing by one section of the society rather than one of ethnicity. The political leadership of the Congress Party has often been accused of waiting till the conflicts reached a point of no return and deleting the process of negotiations. This analysis seems to hold valid when we see the way in which the Assam problem was handled by the then Government. The iron-fist approach did not really facilitate the pocess of peace making.

The Assam situation had worsened by the time Indira Gandhi was assassinated. The emergence of a new, young and dynamic leadership of Rajiv Gandhi facilitated the peace process. The Congress Party was re-elected to the parliament with a historic victory in 1985. In the months that followed, the Rajiv Gandhi Government seemed to do everything in the right direction. In Assam an agreement was signed to close the international boundaries, to grant citizenship to those who illegally entered the state before 1967, to delete from the electoral rolls those who

had entered Assam between 1967 and 1971 and to expel those who entered after March 1971. The Assam leadership in turn agreed to end their agitation and take part in the state elections. This agreement, popularly called as the Assam Accord, between the Central Government and various ethnic parties ended the long drawn and violent conflict in the region.

* The diagram showing the sustaining peace process is on the following page.

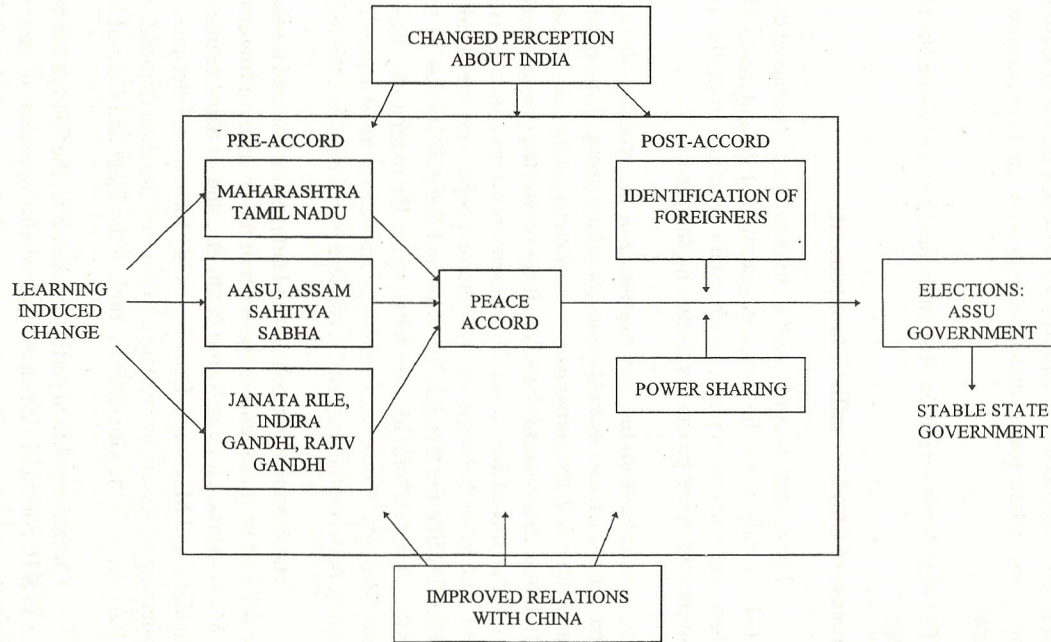### Process of Ethnic Conflict Management

The Assam Accord was the culmination of a series of events that acted as catalysts for the final configuration of the outcome. However, when one tries to separate each chain reaction from the other the complexity of the process is further highlighted.

Starting from the very beginning of the problem, there were too many ethnic groups against on major ethnic group. The local political parties that led the movement were heterogeneous in character with different socio economic interests. It has been often stressed that the main thread that linked the various constituents was the economic rivalry over land and trade between the Assamese people on one hand and the minorities like the Bengali Muslims and Bengali Hindus on the other. Furthermore, cultural identity remained as the main undercurrent of the entire struggle. However, in reality, it has been more of a quest for power sharing between the majority Assamese population and the rest.

The Assam ethnic conflict and demand for the land for the sons of the soil had its precedents in the form of the creation of linguistic states of Maharashrta, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu etc. and of tribal ethnic states of Nagaland and Mezoram. Drawing richly form these inter-processes the leadership of Assam learned how to put forward their demands and how to bargain with the Government both at the State and Central level.

The major political parties viz A.A.S.U. the Sahitya Sabha and the A.A.G.S.P. constantly changed their *modus operandi* in tune with the changing situations. This inter-process learning avoided the clashes within the movement and managed to keep the course of the struggle unchanged.

PROCESS OF DURABLE PEACE: ASSAM

CHANGED PERCEPTION ABOUT INDIA

PRE-ACCORD

POST-ACCORD

MAHARASHTRA TAMIL NADU

IDENTIFICATION OF FOREIGNERS

LEARNING INDUCED CHANGE

AASU, ASSAM SAHITYA SABHA

PEACE ACCORD

JANATA RILE, INDIRA GANDHI, RAJIV GANDHI

POWER SHARING

ELECTIONS: ASSU GOVERNMENT

STABLE STATE GOVERNMENT

IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH CHINA

However, the intricate dynamics among the various actors is something that really shaped the events. If we see the salient stages of the struggle we would find that the intensity of the conflict escalated with the changes at the Central Government. The Janata Party rule heralded the period of identification of the foreigners and increased armed insurgency from the international boundaries. The Indira Ganbhi period actually accentuated the conflict and the armed struggle. The Pro-Rajiv Gandhi wave in 1985, accelerated the peace accord in Assam. The inter-actor dynamics was perhaps the most important input in this process of conflict management.

The international and regional environment too, responded differently to the different Governments. The weakest phase in Indian politics was during the Janata rule, when India was perceived globally as an unstable political entity. It was during this period that the Chinese Involvement increased in the region. The terrorist activities also reached unprecedented level. With the return for the Congress in 1980s India was projected as a strong country and a country that had a stable central government. The attitude of the regional security complex in general and China in particular changed. Rajiv Gandhi's young leadership in fact helped in bettering the ties with China. As a result the general international and regional environment became conducive to the settlement of internal conflicts.

The post-accord elections and the formation of the state government by the AASU settled the problem of power sharing among the major ethnic groups. The outcome of the accord has brought relative stability in the region.

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The case studies reviewed above are drawn from two neighbouring nations jin South Asia and represent two different, though sometimes overlapping stages of a single continuum of ethnic conflicts, stemming from basically similar causal nexus. Each of these situations owes its escalation, if not the origins, to the challenge posed by a closely-knit minority group against a majority dominated power structure. Together, they shed considerable light on the conflict resolution process in general and in particular, the intra-process learning and understanding of the two countries concerned.

The Sri Lankan Tamils' militant defiance of the country's majoritarian political authority has now intensified followindg an aborted cease fire agrement. In contrast, India's appeasement policy with regard to the Assam conflict, as it turned out to be, has successfully defused what could otherwise has successfully defused what could otherwise have been a yet another protracted armed struggle on her hand.

In the colonial context, the ethnic minority groups, who are now parties to the present conflicts, had held socio-economic and political positions which were, in varying degrees and forms, different to those that they found themselves in after the Independence. In Sri Lanka, the minority Tamils watched helplessly as the predominatnt jposition they enjoyed under the British rule swayed in favour of the numerically superior Sinhalese in the post-independence era. The Assamese in India found to their chagrin the near-homogeneous and idyllic existence in which the they lived for centuries being threatened by a sudden influx of migrants from the neighbhouring territories.

The initial rumblings of protest aired by these minority groups fell on the deaf ears of the ruling elites oftheir respective countries. A similar lack of the appreciation of the aspiratios of the minorities marked the policies and the practices of he successive Sri Lankan ruling circles. Time and again she eschewed the policy of inducing minorities' confidence in their rule in favour of compelling their allegiance to an outmoded administrative structure where all the non-Sinhalese were relegated to accept, willy nilly, a win-or-lose situation. When the newly-elected government made a bold initiative towards peace, the Tamil intransigence had hardened beyond the point of being disposed to reciprocate the offer.

The ruling Congress Party circles in India remained, by and large, impervious to the brewing tension in Assam if only because they knew too well that it was not directed against the central government authority *per se.* It was nevertheless an indictment on the Centre's ability to check the steady flow of unregulated immigrants to Assam.

Neither the weak Janata Party rule in New Delhi or the big-stick policy resorted to by Indira Gandhi was able to arrest the surge of Assamese militancy. Finally the trend was reversed when the Rajiv Gandhi successfully conclude what has since come to be known as the

Assam Accord. Ironically, the culmination of the peace overture has triggered a chain reaction of demands to create homeland for the Bodo tribals in Assam and a minority state in Uttar Pradesh.

In summation, the conflict situations examined above clearly show that the decentralised forms of government, such as the Indian system, is better suited to accommodate ethnic and regional peculiarities than the rigid unitary system as adopted in Sri Lanka. Second, the pursuit of the democratic approach to tackle ethnic disputes has proven more efficacious than all forms of state coercion. However, the Sri Lanka experience vividly illustrates that the democratic practice alone cannot contain the pressures brought to bear of the state apparatus by the fastidious demands of the multi-ethnic state; it needs to be tempered with the principle of distibutive justice based on consociational power and resource sharing.

The conflict situations discussed above signify a stable settlement and failed negotiations which, separately and collectively, would lend themselves to the process of learning form each others successes and failures to resolve their individual disputes before they teach a point of no return. Through this inter-process learning the internal actors of each country could develop strategies to create an atmosphere conducive to the peace process.

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