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## About the Article

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# The Anatomy of Peace: A Reading of *How to Tell the Story of an Insurgency*

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## Abstract

This paper aims to study the traumatic impact of violence in the late twentieth century Assam, caused primarily by the unresolved conflict between popular ethno-nationalist demands of an independent, 'Swadhin' Assam and retaliatory steps of the Centre. The short story anthology, *How to Tell the Story of an Insurgency* edited by Aruni Kashyap will be considered chiefly, to understand the deep-seated, sometimes 'belated' occurrence of trauma on people's lives, which often resisted representation. Cathy Caruth argues that the belated occurrence of trauma may be linked to what remains unknown/unsaid in our actions and language. Robert Eaglestone mentions that our linguistic registers may prove inadequate to represent traumatic experiences. People's trauma in Assam was worsened by the disciplinary actions imposed to restrain revolutionary acts. Foucault described 'discipline' as a "type of power, a modality for its exercise". People lived in a panopticon, gradually becoming disillusioned about the cause. Between ideology and peace, they chose the latter. Thus, reading these polyphonic stories using the theoretical discourse of trauma will help to locate the phenomenon in the social, political and cultural history of Assam, to see how people emerged out of conflict by opting for relative peace.

**Keywords:** Violence, traumatic neurosis, ethno-nationalism, disillusionment.

## Introduction

The process of nation-building in post-colonial, independent India faced perhaps one of its greatest challenges from Northeast India. One of the primary reasons for this was the linear direction of the policy-making processes that often seemed to ignore the concerns and interests of the people inhabiting the area since a long time. Besides, in the newly-created northeastern region, there were problems of underdevelopment, poverty and lack of economic opportunities which had been issues of discontent even in the pre-Independence era. Additionally, the attempts of the Indian nation-state to integrate the Northeast into the Indian 'mainstream' in the years immediately following Independence were viewed with "antagonism and distrust by the region as a whole and the hill areas in particular" (Misra, 2014, p. 5). The Partition of the country, therefore, did not bring a closure to the problems that plagued the region, since most indigenous peoples within the region began to demand freedom from the 'colonial' clutches of the Indian nation-state and also, their own share of sovereignty.

Under these circumstances, the region also witnessed the rise of fringe groups of dissatisfied people whose demands for sovereignty soon came to represent the myriad issues that had been troubling the region. Among the many such groups, ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) was one of the most important ones that not only represented the wishes and aspirations of the

Assamese, but also of indigenous people of the region. Nani Gopal Mahanta (2013) comments that “ULFA represents a mindset, a suppressed voice which is deeply engrained in Assam’s psyche” (p. xvi). Initially this group upheld people’s views and was supported by common people; ULFA transcended the narrow ethnic appeal of the term ‘Assamese’ and appeared as an alternative voice to that of the Centre’s (Baruah, 2020). Soon however, their activities were overtaken by violence and they gradually lost the initial fervour because of the indiscriminate bomb blasts and killings in the region. The nature of the revolution being primarily violent, people were affected and traumatized severely when retaliatory steps, including disciplinary actions, were taken by the Centre to curb these ethno-nationalistic demands. The violence and trauma arising out of this contention may have led people to choose relative peace – since their support to the cause was gradually beginning to be replaced by disillusionment. My paper aims to study people’s choice of relative peace over ideology, with the help of *How to Tell the Story of an Insurgency* – a short story collection edited by Aruni Kashyap. It also intends to consider the effects of trauma on common people, which may be said to have primarily facilitated the choice for eventual peace in Assam.

### **Trauma and Its Manifestations**

‘Trauma’, originally derived from the Ancient Greek word for ‘wound’, and referring to a physical injury, later came to signify traces left on the mind by catastrophic, painful events. The implication of the word in recent times has gone far beyond its medical usage, and begun to assume a cultural significance. Its impact is so huge that “over the past few decades, the term has spread so that our entire global culture is sometimes characterized as traumatic or post-traumatic” (Davis & Meretoja, 2020, p. 1).

The years of unresolved conflict between the Centre and the dissatisfied groups of people regarding the central demand of achieving a ‘Swadhin’ or independent Assam turned into a traumatic period in the history of Assam. Consequently, people began to be afraid of secret killings which would supposedly establish peace in the area. In Assam of the 1990s, there were a set of defections, in which amnesty programmes by the Central government looked for the rehabilitation of ULFA cadres and their reintegration into society. These people came to be known as S(Surrendered)ULFA. Sanjib Baruah in his book *In the Name of the Nation* mentions the testimony of Angshuman Choudhury who points out that this policy “was one of co-opting the surrendered militants into its elaborate security wheel as informants against their former comrades” (Baruah, 2020, p. 131). Choudhury also mentions that the death squad killings in Assam occurred at the height of the Sulfa phenomenon. The government not only held control over the lives of the people in this way but also encouraged the independent ventures of SULFA. Thus, people began to turn against each other – it was quite difficult to determine the motives behind the killings and extortions. People’s experiences of living in this politically charged ambience resulted in immense trauma. Deriving from the idea of Giorgio Agamben’s ‘bare life’, Amit R. Baishya (2019) writes that people’s lives in Assam were reduced to bare life during and after this crisis, since “the incessant shuttle between bare life and the centralized mode of the sovereign” defined people’s lives in Assam (p. 2). The trauma of living a bare life, in addition to being victimized by the play of power, was a common phenomenon in Assam during this period.

However, sometimes it took time for the trauma to manifest in people. Davis and Meretoja (2020) write that the manifestation of trauma sometimes happens when the past resurfaces in the present – through “indirect symptoms, silences and repetitive patterns of thought and affect” (p. 3). Cathy Caruth (1996) mentions that trauma “describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, the uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (p. 11). In *How to Tell the Story of an Insurgency*, the first story named ‘Surrender’ (written by Anuradha Sharma Pujari, translated by Aruni Kashyap) explicates this point. Dipok, the central protagonist, has been associated previously with an underground organization with sub-nationalist demands. Although it has not been mentioned directly in the story, yet the references seem to insinuate that he now belongs to the group of nationalists who had ‘surrendered’ to the government. Dipok discloses the whereabouts of one of his former mates to the police. However, this only happens as a resolution of the traumatic experience that he has before – when he is triggered by his wife Sondhya into assaulting her. In an accidental turn of events at the beginning of the story, Dipok slaps his four-year-old daughter and is called an ‘animal’ by Sondhya, which takes him back to his past life as a militant – “just that one word tore him apart like a whip tears away flesh, and it brought out the old Dipok” (Pujari, 2020, p. 3). The years of service in the organization ended in surrender for Dipok, who still deals with its pressure. The use of the word ‘animal’ unleashes the trauma in him, as he is reminded of the wife of a dead high-ranking officer who had also called him the same. The memories of his time in the organization and his consequent surrender, for which he has often termed an opportunist, seem to come alive in his present time and situation. For a short period of time, he turns extremely violent and almost loses track of his actions. It appears that he is a fly caught in a web which he cannot get out of; he is also reminded of how his brother-in-law calls him a ‘Shikhondi’. Eventually, he realizes that it is at home that he can be at peace, and traces his way back to Sondhya. Dipok’s choice of peace is representative of many such people in similar situations, who wish for a life devoid of trauma. That he is killed the next morning by some of his ex-comrades highlights the irony and pathos of the situation, in which siding with the government acts negatively for him.

The inability to speak about trauma and the resultant silence was exhibited in many people across the region. While some of them reacted belatedly, some others withdrew themselves into silence about the incident. Cathy Caruth (1996) calls this experience ‘unclaimed’ since the pain of the revelations is indefinitely deferred, and therefore the truth of trauma can never be accessible. This experience is beyond comprehension; it resists representation and can only be understood as “the unsettling effects on the victim’s grasp of reality” (Dean, 2020, p. 116). Trauma, then, is much more than pathology or simple illness of a wounded psyche; it is a wound that cries out time and again and tells an otherwise untold story. The appearance of the truth in trauma is delayed and may be linked to not only what is known, but also what is unknown in our very actions and language. Caruth mentions the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on human minds. It is the overwhelming experience of a sudden or catastrophic event on the mind, which includes an often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other disturbing phenomena. In other words, PTSD reflects the “direct imposition on the mind of the unavoidable reality of horrific events, the taking over of the mind, psychically and neurobiologically, by an event that it cannot control” (Caruth, 1996, p. 58). It is the direct link between the psyche and external violence.

According to Caruth, trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also an enigma of survival. Traumatic experience is a paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival; it is by recognising this paradoxical relation that one may recognise the incomprehensibility that is at the heart of the traumatic experience. The perplexing nature of survival stands out in these traumatic experiences; Caruth suggests that through these repetitions, one also explores what it means to survive. The direct threat to life is not the root of trauma, rather the missing of the experience forms the basis of the repetition of the nightmare. Caruth states that it is because “the mind cannot confront the possibility of its death directly that survival becomes for the human being, paradoxically, an endless testimony to the impossibility of living” (Caruth, 1996, p. 62).

Beji in ‘What Lies over Here?’ (translated by Stuti Goswami), retreated into silence and became unusually grave after her husband is killed in the violence in Assam. Sorukon, her acquaintance and a surrendered rebel is tormented by the traumatic memories of his time in the organization, wondering if Beji’s husband was among the men killed in the rebellion – which he had also voluntarily been part of: “That night, he couldn’t sleep at all. All through the night, he felt as if he was floating above an abyss of blood. As if a deluge of blood had emerged out of the television screen and swept into their room. Could revolution be so cruel? So brutal?” (Pol Deka, 2020, p. 68). Sorukon wonders if he was initially influenced into joining the rebellion by Bipul who was eventually betrayed in course of the revolution. Bipul’s words were mesmerizing to him, and he was drawn towards the ideology automatically. The story mentions the cracks within the organization that soon destroyed its original attraction. It also talks about how the innocent were targeted in the course of the revolution. Udayon Misra (2014) mentions ULFA’s attack on Bihari brick-kiln workers and Hindi-speaking tradesmen in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh as he writes, “Clearly the ULFA had chosen the softest of targets to put its message across to the state and central governments that it still has the capacity to strike at will and make a mockery of the state’s law and order” (p. 209). Sorukon passes each day trying to recover from the agony of being a rebel once and living an ordinary life now; his young wife Sewali occasionally takes him away from the bane of his previous life, as it were. Disillusionment overcomes him as he thinks of his former comrades who had sided with the police to loot and swindle the wealth of the state. Violence and extortion thus became the order of the day; at some point, it overtook the spirit of the revolution. For Sorukon however, being alive is a reminder of his past and his proximity to death, until he is finally killed, while the rest of his family are away.

It may also be useful to mention Robert Eaglestone’s point about the appropriation of trauma both by the writer and the reader. Since trauma is difficult to be grasped fully, given that it deals with the very subtle and nuanced notions of good, evil, suffering, justice, etc., one should also be aware of the ‘right to write’ or its lack thereof. Traumatic experiences appear to be a ‘limit case’ of language – they have an effect so deep that only to name it means engaging with it. These experiences demand a deeper ethical engagement and thus, trauma becomes difficult to be represented in language. Several people in Assam – both ordinary men and women and surrendered/reformed militants undergo the process, and therefore the silence regarding this is noteworthy. In ‘The Vigil’ written by Jahnavi Barua, a mother is caught between two extremes; while one of her sons is a policeman, the other is a militant. The dilemma that Nirmala faces is representative of many people in Assam during the time. She supplies food to her truant son secretly, and while her other son knows nothing of it, he cannot mention his brother in his family.

It is a space that is forever empty and never talked about by either mother or son. However, they hope that the lost son would be back someday and live peacefully with them. It is ironical to note that the very revolution which was a beacon of hope turned into a source of disappointment for many a few years later. It seemed to demand more sacrifices than it initially promised or set out to achieve, and quite often the lives of young people in Assam were at stake in this unfair equation.

### **Initial Causes and Gradual Impacts of the Revolution**

Initially, the problems addressed by the nationalist organizations seemed to be of a legitimate concern for the state. The most prominent of them was that of 'illegal' migration from Bengal into Assam after the independence of India, which was a major cause of social concern even before Independence. At that point, even though people kept moving within the land, it was legitimate internal migration that changed as soon as there was an international border in between. However, unlike other nationalist organizations, ULFA had some unique characteristics. Nani Gopal Mahanta writes, "It was the only organization that had representations from all communities, unlike other caste-Hindu or 'tribal' organizations" (p.vii). More importantly, it raised the issue of the status of the people of Assam, instead of only Assamese people. Mahanta adds, "At a time when other organisations have taken a bold stand against the immigrants, it has tried to broaden the Assamese nationality by incorporating the immigrants from Bangladesh into the framework of the people of Assam. It has strong anti-India, anti-Delhi stand" (Mahanta, 2020).

Udayon Misra (2014) writes that the "growth of Assamese nationalism has been inextricably tied up with the question of official recognition of the Assamese language" (p. 173). In spite of several nationalities being included in ULFA's quest for a sovereign Assam, the issue of language gradually began to be considered with more importance, since it was a chief contributory factor to the development of nationalist sentiment and a key marker of one's identity as an Assamese. This demand for a unilingual identity, in addition to a homogeneous homeland for the Assamese formed a part of the Assamese middle-class quest. ULFA soon realized the difficulties of carving Assamese identity out of a plural and heterogeneous land like that of Assam, which had diverse ethno-linguistic groups. Misra also writes that the process of Assamese nationality formation was ongoing, with the parameters of Assamese nationality expanding continuously to accommodate new "entrants" (Misra, 2014). Thus, there were the na-Axamiyas or the new Assamese, who were the immigrant Muslims, soon to be defined as people of Assam. Moreover, ULFA could not define its stand clearly on the 'tribal' question; it also failed to create a common united national platform for its people. Misra comments that this proved 'self-defeating' which might have highlighted its inherent contradictions.

There were some secessionist urges in the minds of a section of the Assamese elite even though it was in a rudimentary form. Initially, anti-Bengali feelings arose in the colonial policy of replacing Assamese with Bengali. In some cases, the Hindu-Bengali was also considered superior to the Assamese population in terms of getting jobs under colonial rule, which led some to believe that the Bengali Hindu was a threat to the Assamese society. These sentiments came to be represented in different regional movements, such as the Language Movement of 1960, and the Anti-Foreigner Movement of 1979-85 (Mahanta, 2020). In the post-Independence era, the strong animosity between the two communities grew, and soon, upholding the Assamese language became

synonymous with the consolidation of Assamese national sentiment. To this was added the formerly contentious question of 'illegal' immigration. If the desire for 'Assam for the Assamese' was harbored by many in the pre-Independence era, who expected that Partition would keep Bengalis out of Assam, it was now thwarted by the continuous arrival of 'immigrants'. The innocuous immigrant Muslim peasant who was previously an ally against the Bengali-Hindu, now began to be regarded with suspicion, since it appeared that if immigration continued from Bangladesh, the national character and language of the Assamese would soon be lost. Thus, these two issues of language and infiltration forged cultural unity across various strata and would form one of the bases of nationalism in Assam.

Muslims who had lived in Assam all their lives also survived the trauma of being categorized/suspected as immigrants. Often, it was difficult to determine which part of the land they belonged to – since the border ran across the houses of many such people. Maryam Bibi in 'Maryam', written by Jayanta Saikia and translated by Maitreyee Siddhanta Chakravarty, is a midwife by profession who was born on the Indian soil which gets shifted across the border after the Partition. Her grandfather, Dadajaan had donated money to set up Assamese schools in Mancachar. Ironically, these people lost their nationality and identity in the wake of the Partition. When Maryam hears two men talking about how the land is taken over by Bangladeshis, memories of her youth spent in a united land come back and she wonders what side of the land she is on. She also ruminates about her family back in present-day Bangladesh whom she has to see from the other side of the fence.

In 'Charred Paper' written by Nitoo Das, a group of young men and women prepare to stage a protest march in response to the restrictions imposed on student protests. They protest since they think that the 'Miyas' are getting bolder. In the course of the story, some handwritten pamphlets and books are burnt, since a raid by the army is imminent and no one must be found in possession of these seditious items – the 'charred paper' of the title carries along with it all revolutionary messages and endeavours. However, the process is relentless. If common people had become accustomed to raids and army operations constantly in the 90s, which created a sense of trauma, the protests against the policies of the government and infiltration continued unabated too. There were two groups of people with a very distinct set of opinions – one which was against the immigrants while the other was fairly moderate. Dani-*pehi* is a staunch supporter of the nationalist movement who wants the 'Miyas' out of the state, but her family members realize that even they have ancestors who were born in present-day Bangladesh. The Muslim rickshaw-puller who is belittled by Dani-*pehi* saves her from a riot-like situation; later in her family, she is shown the importance of peace, of not being involved with a movement that was essentially secessionist and likely to cause animosity among people of the same land. In this story, nationalist supporters fight in favour of the linguistic supremacy of the Assamese.

'Koli-Puran', written by Arup Kumar Nath and translated by Anannya Barua, talks of appalling violence as Aafiya, the young daughter of Monsur Miya, is rescued by Koli very briefly in the midst of a riot. Koli does not believe that the Muslims are 'foreigners' who should be sent away from the land, so she hides the young child after her family is killed. She faces its repercussions too, as she is threatened to give the child up and her bun is chopped off when she refuses to do so. She wonders how the revolution could butcher someone like Monsur Miya who had to struggle to make ends meet, and how young Aafiya could have a nationality. She is also pained to hear of the

deaths of the two young men, Jali and Bhuli, due to no fault of their own. That common people suffer extremely in the rebellion remains an unchanged condition across various strata of the society. In 'Colours' written by Uddipana Goswami, one sees the violation of a woman's body as a result of a love affair she has with a garden labourer. While her own people assault her because of the affair outside their community, her lover Dambaru is killed. The assault makes Deepti join the nationalist forces in her community; however, the speaker is surprised, wondering why she joins the same people who had killed Dambaru. Deepti, on the other hand, is indoctrinated into militant ideology at the Bodo village she had crawled into after being raped. She wonders if she might surrender since co-opted militants are given advantages by the government too. Deepti's trauma materializes into a kind of resistance; however, her resistance is different from that of the nationalists.

### **Disillusionment and Failure: Choice of Peace**

It has been widely acknowledged that violence and extortion governed the functioning of ULFA, although initially, it aimed to provide a strong anti-Delhi stance. There was also the question of safeguarding Assamese identity using the National Register for Citizens (NRC) which was an important demand in its negotiation with the Centre. Many other regional parties too demanded the same. Moreover, the group's Bangladesh connection and taking shelter there alienated it from the people. People thus wondered about the reasons behind three decades of violence and bloodshed, if the ULFA's demands were ultimately reduced to claims put forward by an essentially regional party. There was also a lack of inner democracy and with the military wing having taken over, the party became "ideologically bankrupt" (Misra, 2014, p. 158) with its support base considerably eroded.

Kaushik Barua's 'Run to the Valley' substantiates the quandary of living under the shadow of the gun in Assam. This was a terror that people experienced at being terrorized by the SULFA cadres and the army at the same time. This story, which has been structured like a dialogue with an invisible listener, narrates a meeting between a group of young boys and the local youth with guns who are identified as the SULFA. The men with guns engage in moral policing the boys who express their desire to leave Assam and study in Delhi. Jango protests this and calls the police, but the outcome is worse because he is in turn humiliated and assaulted by these officers who think he has been extorting money in ULFA's name. Jango stands up to this incapacitating, nameless fear of being bullied by the gunmen and the army when his friends 'run to the valley' to save themselves. The story reflects on this cultural and social paralysis in Assam during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, that afflicted several youths at that time. Aruni Kashyap's *The House with a Thousand Stories* mentions a similar situation where Prasanta-da tells the narrator Pablo to leave Assam as soon as possible since no good can arise out of a conflict zone. Ironically, the liberation of Assam and its progress seemed to be stalled in the mess of nationalist politics and the retaliatory steps adopted to curb it.

Foucault writes that to govern means to "structure the possible field of action of others" (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). In the equation of power, there is invariably the question of freedom insofar as power is implemented over only those individuals that consider themselves free. People in Northeast India always had an independent spirit. Particularly for the Assamese, the sense of



independence was derived from the undefeated and continuous stint of Ahom rule for about 600 years. Thus, the use of power and government diktat came into direct conflict with their wishes and aspirations, and the response to this invariably led to the conflict in the region. In the late twentieth century, it was common for people in Assam to live under surveillance at all times. Gradually, this became similar to living in a 'panopticon' at all times – watched and monitored always.

'Stone People' written by Manikuntala Bhattacharya and translated by Mitali Goswami, narrates the experiences of the family members of an underground agent who has not been seen since he joined the cause. His sister, who is also the narrator, is now expected to take over the responsibilities of the absent brother. She must also look for him, every time he is seen in the vicinity. His sister mentions other boys who had given up arms and returned home. The search for her brother, on the other hand, is elusive as he constantly seems to move away from them and yet, her parents seem to miss him more with every passing day. As she goes searching for her brother, her bitterness is evident. She also mentions how the dream of a generation had been thwarted due to the movement and also how several such movements have not gathered the response they should have. She is also pained to note that many such young boys and girls are convinced of the revolution, often ignoring their responsibilities to their families. The trauma that many parents face is given a voice in this story: "When people took to the streets to agitate, my father roamed the streets in search of his son" (Bhattacharya, 2020, p. 145). They become, as it were, 'stone' people who are just alive, but listless without their children.

There were polarized opinions about the success/failure of the revolution but at large, people agreed that the abysmal condition of Assam had not changed too much during and after the agitation. 'Crimson' is a story written by Ratnottama Das Bikram and translated by Mitali Goswami, which narrates the extortion faced by non-Assamese people in Assam, forcing them to leave the place. Although this family does not belong to Assam yet, they have lived here a long time, perhaps even before the crisis took shape. When ULFA's meetings are held, they speak of a golden Assam but when the crisis is past SULFA takes over, often demanding money from people. Motilal Jain in the story is threatened and later killed over money, even though he has already made a lot of donations. This bears a tremendous impact on two young children who are friends of his son, Arunjyoti. This story points out that the effects of the militancy were all-encompassing; it affected every section of the population. Despair and disappointment ran through everyone's minds at the failure of the revolution.

'Hongla Pandit', (written in Bodo by Katindra Swargiary, and translated by Anjali Daimari) talks of Hongla Pandit, whose real name is Haragobinda. He refuses to be called anything else other than a 'pandit', since he is the first one in his community to pass matriculation and work in the lower primary school. He expects that his son Navajyoti would be as learned as him, and is quite troubled when Navajyoti takes up a Bodo name, Irakdao. His daughter, Delaisri, elopes with a Bihari youth, against her father's wishes. Thus, Hongla Pandit is extremely surprised when the army tells him that his son Navajyoti is engaged with the Bodo Liberation Organization as an undercover agent. Hongla Pandit never encouraged his children to speak their native Bodo language, but his son was still influenced by revolutionary ideals. The Assam Accord brought the security of the tribal communities to question. Some of these people, like the Bodos, Rabhas, Mishings, etc. who may have acquired a dual identity and considered themselves to be both tribal and Assamese, now felt

that only the interests of the Assamese-speaking people would be secured (Misra, 2014). There were, consequently, some nationalistic movements undertaken to safeguard the identities and interests of people in the tribal regions. In this story, the merciless attitude of the army is expressed with poignancy as Delaisri is raped and Hongla Pandit assaulted, for harbouring a militant. It is difficult for Hongla Pandit to grasp the reasons for being victimized but he is aware of the irreversible devastation caused by it.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to portray the crisis in Assam from the perspective of the people. While the demand for 'Swadhin' or independent Assam remained a primary demand to the nationalistic organisation, it is also important to remember that the counter-revolutionary steps of the Centre and the consequent changes to the rebellion shifted the aims of the movement to only securing its comrades and retaliating against the Centre. One of the primary causes attributed to its fall is the reliance on the military wing which betrayed its ideological weaknesses and resulted in the growing alienation from the masses. For people trapped between these two contending parties, the revolution may have lost its initial fervour because both the nationalists and the Centre engaged in violence. The stories in this collection show that people at large were in favour of a situation that would address the inherent problems of the region through discussions and peace talks. This was to be achieved some years later in the new millennium.

The ULFA has insisted that its change of violent policies to relatively peaceful ones has been made in "deference to the wishes of the people of the state as expressed in the Jatiya Abhibartan or civil society conclave of 2010" (Misra, 2014, p. 226). The civil society has welcomed the recent peace negotiations and "suspension of violence" (Misra, 2014). There are also some within the civil society that did not want the peace process to mean a general amnesty towards ULFA. For those who had lost their families in the crisis, there had been a unanimous view that the killings by ULFA and the state were mistakes that seized almost thirty years of the political and social history of Assam. Nani Gopal Mahanta writes that there is a need for a political system that nurtures, as it were, sub-nationalistic and sub-regional identities (Mahanta, 2020, p. 316). Ironically, the aim of these sub-nationalistic identities has been to replace the concept of the nation-state altogether. If the question of 'national identity' had to be reconsidered, then it was also true that the sub-nationalistic groups failed to proceed beyond the narrative of colonialism. The political space of India, therefore, needs to be restructured by "providing substantial degrees of provincial or regional autonomy" (Mahanta, 2020, p. 316). It also calls for a dialogue between the two parties that could effectively reduce the problems and create a harmonious ambience. Therefore, the people's wishes to shun violence intensified the need for peace talks in the international scenario, to bring about the much-coveted and necessary condition of peace in the region.

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