CHAPTER-II
ORIGIN AND STRUCTURE OF ULFA

2.1. Introduction

Assam has its own importance in whole of the North-East region. It has common boundaries with Bhutan and Bangladesh. The name of Assam has come from a community name “Ahom”. This Ahom dynasty ruled this region for about 600 years prior to British entry in the region. People started calling it Ahom’s land which further was abridged as “Assam”. This region was known as ‘Pragjyotishpur’ in ancient time and ruled by ‘Danavas’. According to ‘Kalki Puran’ the Brahma created the planets (Naksatras) in this area only. As such this area surrounded by hills started to be known as ‘Pragjyotishpur’. During the period astronomy and astrology were developed in this area. Its proofs are available today also in the form of ‘Navagraha” temple of Nine Planets. The ‘Kamakhya’ temple must also have been erected in those days only.³⁰

A Chinese traveler Huen Tsang visited Assam when it was ruled by Bhaskar Burman (594-650 AD) and described Assam with details. According to him, Assam had trade relations with other countries even before 100 BC. He also wrote that Assam had a silk trade with Egypt and Rome in those days. The King Bhaskar Burman had friendly relations with Harshavardhan. Assam was flourishing in those days. ‘Salastamba’ dynasty rose after the Burman rule in Assam. It ruled Assam till 10th century. Shri Vanmala Vermandeo from this dynasty spread its rule to North-Bengal. After this rule Brahmapal founded the Pal dynasty which ruled Assam till early 12th century. Another important ruler ‘Prithu’ returned successfully the Muslim attack by Mohammad Ibn-e-Bakhtiar, but was defeated in 1228 by Muslim.

³⁰Bhushan, Chandra, Terrorism and Separation in North-East India, Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2004
During 1228 itself, Ahoms from Burma entered this area by crossing ‘Patkai’ mountain ranges, under the leadership of Chukapha.

Koch state in Kamrup was established by Vishwa Sinha in 1515 named ‘Kamata’. His son Nararayan was an efficient and intelligent ruler (1540-1584 AD). He joined North-Bengal with quite a large land of Assam. He ruled Tripura, Kachhar, Khasi and Jayantiya hilly areas also.

The Ahom Kingdom was extended to Manas River in the west by 17th century. But from 18th century Ahom rule started falling. Frequent attacks by Mughals, internal clashes added by frequent attacks from Burma finally defeated the Ahoms in 18th century. The region then came under the rule of Britishers in 1824. The British government signed the Yandabu agreement on 24th February 1826 and compelled the Burmese to leave this region. Thus, the Britishers captured the region.

The region was attached to Bengal and was ruled accordingly between 1826 and 1874. But finally in 1874 this region was declared as a province. Goalpara, Cachar, Sylhet, Khasi, Garo and Lusai (all hilly areas) were joined to Assam and were made its parts. But at the time of India’s independence; the district of Sylhet was given to East Pakistan, today's Bangladesh. Gradually, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh were made separate states severing them from Assam. This is the reason why all the North-Eastern states are known as seven sister states. Now Sikkim is also part of this region as the eight states.

2.2. Historical Background of ULFA

Origin and Growth:

ULFA was formed on 7 April 1979 at a meeting of its initial think-tank at the Rang Ghar, the 17th century amphitheater of the Ahom Royalty, near Sivasagar. The group that morning included Arabinda Rajkhowa, Buddheswar Gogoi, Bhimkanta Buragohain, Somnath
Bora, Bhadreswar Buragohain, Rupeswar Gogoi and Pradip (Samiran) Gogoi. According to Kanaksen Deka, the organization was formally constituted on October, 1981. There were five members in the organization at the initial stage, Buddheshwar Gogoi as President, Suren Dihingia as Vice-President, Someswar Gogoi as Adviser, Bhimkanta Buragohain as Ambassador and Pradip Gogoi as member. According to the Week Magazine, there were six members at the beginning, Arabinda Rajkhowa, Paresh Baruah, Gopal Baruah, Pradip Gogoi, Bhadreswar Buragohain and Bhimkanta Buragohain. According to Pradip Gogoi, one of the founder members of the outfit, there were seven members in that morning, Buddheshwar Gogoi, Suren Dihingia, Someswar Gogoi, Bhimkanta Borgohain, Bhupen Borgohain, Ponaram Baruah and Pradip Gogoi. Thus the organization originated with 5-7 members.

Their professed aim was liberation of Assam from the “Indian Colonial rule” and setting up of an independent State, through armed struggle if necessary. The slogan of “sovereign, socialist Assam” lent certain intellectual underpinnings to ideological dreamland which did bestir the rural masses and a section of the intelligentsia. Most leading lights of the leadership at that time were of Muttock origin, belonging to Upper Assam.

At the time of birth of ULFA, Assam was passing through a spell of instability. The founders blamed exploitative policies of New Delhi for Assam’s troubles. Like any ideologically-driven movement, they stood for a revolutionary purge of society. They had convinced themselves that Assam was never a part of India. It had been made a part of Indian polity by some Hindu and Muslim rulers at various periods of history. Till then the Assamese nationality grew in isolation and the people of Assam were proud possessors of a heritage, historical, racial, ethnic, and cultural, totally distinct from that of Metropolitan India. Assam

32 Deka, Kanaksen, Ulfar Swadhin Asom (Ulfa’s Independent Assam), Dispur Print House, Guwahati, 1994.
33 Mahanta, N.G., Confronting the State: ULFA’s Quest for Sovereignty, Sage Publication India, 2013
was annexed by the British under the Yandabo Treaty on 24 February 1826 and it came under the unified Indian administration. But the treaty itself was bad in law, hence, the annexation under it itself became null and void as it did not have concurrence of the people of Assam, nor was it ratified by the Ahom rulers. So on 15 August 1947, Assam reverted to its status of an independent country; the Indian Independence act of 1947 only joined it artificially with India through a narrow strip of land (Siliguri Corridor). Therefore, as an ULFA publication explains, “to create an exploitation-free society, our next step must be a national war of liberation….we have no alternative to armed revolution”.34

It should be of interest to trace the lineage of Sovereignty from earlier times, even if nurtured by a section of intelligentsia. In that sense, ULFA is not the progenitor of the Swadhin Asom (Sovereign Assam) as it had already been dreamt of by earlier generations. The peasant struggle in Assam in the latter half of the 19th century was unique in the sense that, unlike similar struggles in the rest of India, a common front was put up against the British Rule by both the land-owning class and the middle and poor peasantry. This was possible due to various factors: (1) nature of land settlement under the long Ahom Rule (2) strong tribal content in the Assamese society (3) predominance of the small land-holding farmers and (4) absence of the Zamindari system.35

Different struggles during the period of British Rule by themselves were not a fight for “Assamese identity” or “Assamese nationality”. They were simply stages in the mobilisation of people, who would in years to follow be involved in a larger national struggle where the peasantry would play the pivotal role.

It was during the initial years of consolidation of Assamese nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s that the idea of Swadhin Asom began to fire the imagination of a section of the

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34 Prakash, Ved, A gathering Storm: Terrorism in India’s North-East, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2008. pp. 188
35 Prakash, Ved, A gathering Storm: Terrorism in India’s North-East, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2008
middle class. Incidentally, ULFA ideologues claim to take the inspiration for their movement from this period.

Modern political consciousness in Assam may be deemed to have commenced from around 1853 when Maniram Dewan and Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan submitted their memorials to Moffat Mills. It would take another 70 years or so for this consciousness to develop and give shape to Assamese nationalism, with the INC establishing its unit in Assam in 1921.36 On August 12th, 1927, a large convention of Kachari Youths was organized at Titabor for protection of their interests.

**Pre-independence roots of insurgency:**

The root of insurgency in the region goes back to pre-independence days. The British deemed it prudent not to bring the tribes under a strict regime of political control and rigid regulations. Their tribal policy and Christian education and influence were also believed to have queered the pitch for Independent India. Clamour for autonomy greeted Simon Commission during its visit to the region in January 1929. As many as 27 memoranda were presented to it at Shillong by various groups, including (1) Bodos and other plains tribes (2) Goalpara groups (3) Kacharis (4) Naga club of Kohima (5) Nagas of Mokokchung (6) Kashi National Durbar and (7) Representative of Khasi and Jaintia hills.

J.H. Hutton, long-serving Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hill District and author of several authoritative books on the tribes, submitted a memorandum on behalf of the Assam Government, which demanded: “The Hills should not be tied politically to the advanced plains.” The Naga Club went a step further, telling the Commission: “Just leave us alone!” Indians blame the Hutton ancestors and their ilk for sowing seeds of separation among the tribes. Expectedly, the Nagas refused to be a part of India on 15 August 1947, declaring their

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36 Prakash, Ved, A gathering Storm: Terrorism in India’s North-East, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 189
own independence on the preceding day; refused to accept an ADC under Schedule Six; and were the first to raise the flag to insurrection in early 1950s. Government of India acted wisely by granting autonomy to many ethnic communities who perceived their ethnic and cultural identities were threatened by a mega-identity called India, and thus doused some potential conflagrations. But Assamese political class displayed certain insensitivity towards the ethnic insecurities and sensibilities of the tribal minorities. Some inconsiderate measures, the Official Language Bill of 1960 foremost among them, aggravated those fears. The Mizo’s went the Naga way a decade later, the two posing the most serious challenge to India’s integrity till date, others following these trends in due course.

Rising aspirations of the people did not match up with the pace of economic development, and the consequent frustrations fuelled the discontent. Administrative apathy and economic dominance of up-country businessmen (particularly in Assam) was the right breeding ground for the growth of insurgency.\textsuperscript{37}

The separatist movement was visible in India as early as 1906. The concept of a broadly secular Indian nationalism, which developed during the Independence struggle, came to be opposed by centrifugal tendencies based on regional, ethnic, linguistic and communal identities. Through countenance and political will some of the problems have been solved, however, problem in North-East India especially in Assam remains a hotbed for multiple conflicts.\textsuperscript{38}

A study on British India has pointed out that secessionism thrived in the areas which were late in becoming a part of the British Empire in India. Assam is witnessing a

\textsuperscript{37} Prakash, Ved, A gathering Storm: Terrorism in India’s North-East, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 31
\textsuperscript{38} Devi, Elizabeth, Kh, A Study on the Social Background of Insurgent in Assam with special reference to ULFA, Research Project, OKD Institute of Social Science, pp. 16
multiplicity of conflicts and tension in various forms due to various historical, geographical, cultural, economic and political factors for the last thirty years.\footnote{Devi, Elizabeth, Kh, A Study on the Social Background of Insurgent in Assam with special reference to ULFA, Research Project, OKD Institute of Social Science, pp.17}

An in-depth and comparative analysis of how insurgency and separatist movement arose in Assam is necessary for a meaningful study. Examining the historical background of ULFA from the beginning of formation of ULFA shall suffice in answering many unanswered questions.

**Secessionist Movement in Assam:**

The idea of secessionism among the Assamese could be traced to late 1930s. At that time it was a Governor’s Province and had contemplated secession from India as early as 1937. There was a grave threat of the Assamese being reduced to a minority in their own land due to incessant immigration into Assam from eastern Bengal districts and hegemony of the Bengali middle class. This grave situation compelled a section of the Assamese intelligentsia to secede from the nascent India Nation as the only way to save Assamese nationality. A conservationist movement grew out of these fears whose sole aim was to ‘save’ the Assamese identity from extinction’. The protagonists of this movement like Nilomony Phukan, Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury and Gyannanath Bora, with support of a large section of the Assamese People, started a campaign for secessionism of Assam. As a consequent development, the Asamiya Samrakhini Sabha and Asom Deka Dal submitted a memorandum to Jawaharlal Nehru for secession of Assam from India. It stated in the memorandum that “for years we (Assamese) have been standing face to face with extinction as a people …. Desperation has taken possession of the minds of the people. And as a means of saving the
Assamese race from extinction a considerable section of the intelligentsia has even expressed their minds in favour of secession of Assam from India…”

In the memorandum submitted by Asom Deka Dal, it argued “the temple of Swaraj when it is built on the bank of Brahmaputra it will be on the grave of the Assamese nation. The only alternative ...that we can think of is that we should get separated from India as Burma had done”.

When India got independence and Assam became a state of the Indian union, the Assamese people were hard hit with the realization that for every economic development and change, they have to follow the path of hard pressed demand otherwise they receive nothing in spite of its rich economic resources.

The traits of secessionism, movements for self-determination and ethnic identity movements in India as well as Assam have been endemic in post-colonial era. Though it seems to be disappearing during the years of post-colonial nation-building, there was resurgence of ethnicity which led to various movements.

After independence, Assam Government as well as Central government failed to provide adequate checks against the infiltration from the newly-created East Pakistan, the Assam Samrakhini Sabha (ASS) later known as Asom Jatiya Mahasabha (AJM) founded by Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury in a meeting on 1st January 1948 declared that “Assam should come out of Indian Union and become Independent like Burma”. In earlier times, Assamese middle class intellectuals like Roy Choudhury and Jagannath Bora, Chandranath Sharma wrote on the need to defend Assamese homeland against “foreign” incursions.

From 1947 till the 1960s, regional nationalist forces had to take the back seat. “It was from the early 1970s, that Roy Choudhury’s ideas started finding favour with sections of the

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40 Memorandum to Nehru by AsomiyaSamrakshini Sabha, 1937, cited in Devi, Elizabeth Kh, A Study on the Social Background of Insurgent in Assam with special reference to ULFA, Research Project, OKD Institute of Social Science, pp. 29
post-1960 generation of Assamese who had become increasingly aware of the colonial pattern of exploitation of Assam by the Centre as well as the growing threat posed by the influx of foreigners into the state.” Jagannath Bora, an intellectual who advocated for a sovereign Assam during the 1930s, asserted that the British forcibly incorporated Assam into British India and on that basis, “the educated amongst them have trying to prove that Assam is a province of India.” This argument is very similar to the ULFA’s present stance regarding the role of the intellectuals in Assam, who are dubbed by it as the ‘Indian agents’. Bora’s writings, forgotten for decades, have now been resurrected by the proponents of the Swadhin Asom who have been trying to use them to garner people’s support for the ULFA’s cause.

In spite of their large scale participation in the 1942 Quit India Movement, the Assamese felt let down when the Congress Working Committee accepted the Grouping Plan on 10 August 1946. Assam’s fears were not unfounded as Bengal with its huge majority could impose its will on it. In view of this betrayal by the Congress, some scholars ask as why the Swadhin Asom proponents did not push their case more aggressively. One of the main reasons for their low profile during this period could be the fear of Muslim domination resulting from the inundation of the indigenous Assamese in the flood of migrants from across the border and hence the need to stay with India. Given the demographic realities and the experience of the recent past with the Sadullah Ministries, a ‘Swadhin Asom’ would have been even more vulnerable and fall an easy prey to the machinations of the Muslim East Pakistan.42

The ULFA remained rather dormant for some years after formation in 1979. During the AASU agitation (1979-85), some militant groups like the Assam Fighters Union (AFU) and Assam People’s Liberation Army (APLA) came into being which lent some belligerent touch to it from the sidelines. Subsequently sprang up some parochial organisations like

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42 Prakash, Ved, A gathering Storm: Terrorism in India’s North-East, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2008, pp.192
Assam Jatiyatabadi Dal (AJD) and Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad (PLP) which also occasionally shouted some belligerent slogans for effect. ULFA was, besides these four groups, another outfit that played on the sidelines of the Assam agitation, but with a difference. Some saw it as B team of the AASU during the agitation. With its brazen advocacy of Assamese chauvinism, ULFA represented the extremity of xenophobic ideology, the bedrock of this agitation. The AFU, APLA, AJD and PLP declined and fizzled out after the Assam Accord was signed in 1985. But the idea of forming a violent underground with the sole objective of liberating Assam did not die down. It stayed alive and was nurtured by ULFA. There are several organisations which advocate the independence of Assam. The most prominent of which is ULFA.

The underground outfit has gradually made soil of Assam and neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar etc. congenial for its growth. In spite of several efforts of the governments mainly through counter insurgency activities like Operation Rhino, Operation Bajrang etc. followed by talks with the civil society to put an end to it, it is still having the way. In the beginning of the year 2010 the top leaders of ULFA including Arabinda Rajkhowa and Sashadhar Choudhury have been arrested except Paresh Baruah. Although the Government is trying to have talks with the organization, the problem still remains unresolved.

Insurgency in Assam was not born in vacuum. It has significant background and linkages with the social, economic and political environment of the state of Assam. The challenge before the state is how to save the multi-colored Assamese society from the scourge of hatred and inhuman treatment by constructing the path of love, sacrifice and spread of humanism. The task of the governance is to bring back the youths of Assam who have strong faith in violence and are engaging in insurgency activities to establish a peaceful civilized society.
Responses of the government to the insurgency activities through army operations, legislations, negotiations and personal visits of the dignitaries have proved to be futile exercises to put an end to the insurgency problem in the state. The problem is remaining even now with some fluctuation in its gravity, change of locality and target group for attack.

The process of solution has been swayed by friction, suspicion, provocation rather than mobilizing collective efforts of the people to join hand with the government, to build unanimous and explicit opinions of all the political parties. One may also feel the political activism and irrational factors contributing to the process of emotionalization and personalisation of the whole issue in certain areas. It needs detailed, objective and rational diagnosis of the whole problem caused by the militants and faced by the youths having faith in the violence one could have expected a solution to it within a short time. Mere narration of the happenings in the surface may not lead us to reality to adopt effective remedial measures. The state administration has failed to adopt the clinical approach to it. But the government is searching for the solution to it both by violent and non-violent means.

Looking at the political and social culture why separatist feelings have developed among the Assamese, an inward look at the legacies of pre and post independent India is necessary. In fact, the demand for secessionism by Assam is a legacy of pre-independent India which failed to evoke the right response at that time, but it filtered down to the next generation more rigorously due to conditions of economic deprivations and geographical distance with New Delhi.43

This feeling of economic exploitation and step motherly treatment by the Centre provided the background for social problems, a kind of socialisation that normal protest, strikes and agitations would not fulfil their demands among the hurt younger generation

43Devi, Elizabeth, Kh, A Study on the Social Background of Insurgent in Assam with special reference to ULFA, Research Project, OKD Institute of Social Science, Guwahati
especially the unemployed youths to go the insurgent way. According to an estimate\textsuperscript{44}, the number of registered unemployed in Assam as on February 2, 2006 stood at 17,38,330.

**Causes for emergence of ULFA:**

Assam is a cauldron of insurgent movements, full of separatist tendencies for last three decades. The sense of alienation prevailing in the minds of younger generation, the feeling of negligence by Centre, rampant corruption in public life and geographical location of the region have contributed to factors that led to insurgency. In spite of its abundant natural resources, economic imbalance, feeling of utter negligence by the Centre, frustration among educated youths and sense of insecurity in their own land have been identified as some of the causes of insurgency in the state\textsuperscript{45}.

**Economic causes:**

To a group of scholars, economic factor seems to be the origin of all problems in Assam. However, many do not subscribe to this view. Various socio-political implications since the first decade of the 20th century play an important role in arousing Assamese nationalism. It is very important to analyse the reasons behind the formation of ULFA.

Oil sector:

The oil wells in Assam produce five million tons of crude oil, but the first refinery to process this crude oil was set up in Barauni in Bihar and it was only after a popular movement was launched that a small refinery was set up at Guwahati and later a second refinery at Numaligarh, as a result of the agreement reached with the AASU in the settlement of the Assam agitation.

Tea industry:

\textsuperscript{44} BJP Today, March 16-31, vol 15, Nov 6, 2006 pp. 31

\textsuperscript{45} Devi, Elizabeth Kh, A Study on the Social Background of Insurgent in Assam with special reference to ULFA, Research Project, OKD Institute of Social Science
The state in spite of producing more than 400 million kilograms of tea with a turnover of Rs. 20 billion\(^\text{46}\), the headquarters of all the tea companies are located outside the state, thereby, enhancing the belief by all sections of the Assamese society that Assam is deprived of the benefits of a large share of taxes paid by the industry, denying business opportunities for local people in the supplies and servicing requirements of this huge industry.

**Political cause:**

The political culture of alienation by distant Delhi has resulted in inept handling of even the genuine demands and aspirations of the people of Assam. Central government has become almost an insensitive and ill-informed establishment in the eyes of the people. This has resulted in preparing a fertile ground for the extremist harp, to propagate their theoretical orientation that India and Indians were only interested in exploiting the rich natural resources of the state and do not consider Assam as a part of the Indian Nation.

The situation in which the insurgency organisation of ULFA was born may be called political simply on the ground that it originated at a time when the All Assam Students’ Union took the leadership to delete and deport the illegal immigrants into India in the perspective of holding bye elections to the Lok Sabha and later to the general elections to the legislatures.

All Assam Students Union launched a movement against the illegal foreign nationals into India at a time when a seat in the Lok Sabha remained vacant in 1977 due to the demise of Hiralal Patowary representing Mangaldai constituency. While preparing for bye election to fill up the vacancy the government of Assam indicated that the voters’ list contained the names of illegal foreigners and the list required revision. It became a serious issue attracting the attention of all sections of the people in the state. The All Assam Students’ Union started movement demanding the removal of illegal foreign nationals from the voters’ list. A highly

successful student movement was launched at the leadership of Union for a long period of six years from 1979 to 1985 in Assam which claimed more than 3000 lives. A section of the youths was not satisfied with the mild strategies of the organization and the attitude of the government towards the public opinion in support of the movement. These youths became violent and accordingly started preparing of their strategies.

Ultimately, a secessionist organization was formed on 7th April, 1979 by the frustrated youths of Assam. The organisation was known as United Liberation Front of Asom.

**Geographical location:**

Another major factor, which contributed to the growth and tactical success of the insurgent outfit ULFA of the region, is its geographic location. Assam and the entire North-East is connected to mainland India by a narrow corridor known as “Chicken’s Neck” through Siliguri in North-Bengal area which is only 22 kilometers wide as compared to the 4500 international borders which are very porous. Assam, which shares borders with Bhutan and Bangladesh, has served as safe havens for the ULFA, providing excellent training and operational bases, besides having tactical advantage to the cadres and a disadvantage for the security forces.

ULFA has many facets and its causes are manifold, including historic, socio-economic and political, and perhaps no less important the international dimension of the crisis. Assam shares an international border with Bangladesh, Bhutan, inhabited by mixed people\(^{47}\).

In Assam, the insurgency problem started in the 1970s due to prolonged step motherly attitudes of the centre, economic backwardness, unemployment problem, poverty, porous border etc. culminating in the birth of ULFA in 1979. The Anti-foreigner movement started

in 1979 by the All Assam Student Union (AASU) against the influx of non-Assamese migrants from Bangladesh. The militant group had firm conviction that the way of Gandhian Satyagraha method adopted by AASU against illegal immigrants would not work, but a more violent voice would be listened to by Delhi.

Reasons responsible for the terrorism and separatism according to Chandra Bhusan are:

1. **Historic conditions/Reasons:** The British are responsible for the Separatism mentality and for that the terrorism in the people of this areas. British had sown the seeds of separatism in this area. Some of the British officers mainly Prof. Koopland and Hattam and Mills had prepared a plan and submitted it to the British Government recommending therein, to separate this mountainous area along India Burma border and present Arunachal Pradesh, from India. British separated the people in plains and mountains from each other by implementing inner line Regulation in 1874.

2. **Geographical Situation:** Geographical atmosphere was the greatest obstacle in the process of constructing roads and laying Rail lines. The geographical structure of this area is such that it is very easy for the infiltrators to enter this region.

3. **Regional Mentality:** Every community is always proud of its culture. It loves its motherland. When the regional ambitions do not find place in central stream, or when the central authorities neglect the regional ambitions, these people start shouting separatist slogans to obtain its shelter and here starts the terrorism.

4. **Social and Communal reasons:** Social structure of Assam is many folds. Complexity of Geographical structure and backwardness in the means of conveyance has kept this area away from rest of India. There are many tribes, communities and thereby communal identity of these communal groups is always maintained.
5. **Division of States**: In the early post-independence period the complete North-East region was known as Assam. But this state of Assam was divided into seven states for protection of the culture. The Bodo’s in Assam are not satisfied with more autonomy and pressing for separate state of Bodoland.

6. **Army Action**: The army jawans used their guns against the innocent and peace loving people just like butchers. Eventually New Delhi should stop talking about army action to curb the terrorism and should come forward to accept that the centers role in Assam.

7. **Problem of Infiltration**: The problem of infiltration into Assam is very serious and dangerous. This state is surrounded by foreign countries. This increase in the population with direct impact on voter lists.

8. **Economic Reasons and Unemployment**: Assam is very rich in economic resources. But people of Assam are not financially well off and increase in unemployment gives impetus to terrorism.

9. **Political Motives**: Politics in Assam is also one of the important reasons of terrorism and separatism. All the political parties, small or big, with an object of winning elections, have always encouraged and fuelled the regionalism. Terrorism increased in such way.

10. **Cultural Situation**: There is a cultural multiplicity in Assam. This diversity in culture separates one community from the other.

11. **Weak, inefficient, careless law and order situation and police**: Assam lacks efficient police administration. The Police are not successful enough in taking action against terrorists.

12. **Mutual understanding between Politicians and terrorists**: The role of political parties in flourishing of terrorism cannot be treated as negligible. The secret agencies also have proofs of shelter being provided to these terrorists by politicians. Rise of ULFA in Assam and simultaneously killing of a number of Congress workers is, in itself, a proof that Assam Gana Parishad had its deep relations with ULFA.
13. **Role of Central Government:** Central government has taken and is taking lots of initiatives to stop terrorism. Banning any organisation adversely glamorises it. These organisations start and continue their activities under new banner.

14. **Foreign Protection:** Terrorism in Assam has a considerable protection from other countries—Myanmar, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

15. **Administration and corruption:** The corrupt administration and lack of development is also one of the reasons of terrorism. Corruption has become rampant and the administration totally dilapidated.

16. **Colonial history writing and Misunderstanding:** Indian historians are blindly adopting and accepting the history written by the British.

17. **Role of Christian Missionaries and ISI:** Role of Christian Missionaries and I.S.I. of Pakistan in encouraging and supporting separatism and terrorism in Assam cannot be denied.

18. **Combination of student organisations and Militants:** The hard core group of students from this organisation parted from AASU and founded ULFA. The AASU leaders had kept mum about the activities of ULFA. They never spoke against ULFA.

19. **Role of Media:** People of Assam complaining that the newspapers and electronic media do not give proper coverage to them. The newspapers are devoted to their welfare and benefits of their own. The role of Assamese newspapers in making paper tigers of ULFA cannot be denied.

**Ideologue of ULFA:**

Parag Das, a social activist and writer of *Swadhinotar Prastab* (banned by Government), *Swadhin Asomor Arthinity, Rastradruhir Dinlipi, Mok Swadhinata Lage, Nishiddha Kolom aru Anyanna* and *Sanglot Phenla* provided the ideological foundation for independent Assam. Writings in *Boodhbar* as editor and a magazine called *Aagan* he also
wanted to actualise his dream of an independent Assam. He was the founder secretary of *Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti* (MASS), established on 2 November 1991, the pioneer human rights organisation of the state with allegedly a pro-ULFA stand. He was arrested by the Government under different laws for his pro-ULFA stand. The ULFA issue was raised at UNO under the patronage of Parag Das. He was killed by secret killers on 17 May, 1996 in Guwahati.

Nibaran Bora, who started *Purbanchal Lok Parishad* (PLP), tried to create awareness against economic exploitation of Assam and illegal immigrants. He wrote extensively in *Nagarik* and *Dainik Asom* and also authored a book titled “*Swadhin Asom Swambhab Ne*” (Is Independent Assam Possible)? His writings influenced the founders of ULFA.

In 1980’s, another writer and cultural activist who influenced the thought process was Suresh Phukan. In his most popular book? “*Moidamor Pora Moi Lachite Koisu*, he outlined the political system in Assam from the Ahom kingdom, defending Gopinath Bordoloi and Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury for defending the cause of Assam at the time of independance, blaming Sir Sadullah for facilitating entry of millions of muslims into Assam from East-Bengal and held the political elites of he state responsible for present state of affairs.

### 2.3. Organization, Structure and Changes

On 7th April, 1979, seven youths gathered at ‘Rang Ghar’ in Sivasagar. It was an informal gathering of a few concerned Assamese who were highly apprehensive about the identity and future of the Assamese people. They were worried about illegal migration, the step motherly and apathetic treatment of the Centre, the reckless and indiscriminate use of Assam’s resources and growing lack of opportunities to the Assamese people in their own land. The seven youths discussed the severity of the situation and three of them forcefully

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argued for an armed struggle and a fight for an independent Assam. The urge for an independent struggle caught the imagination of all the members and they kept on discussing the various parameters of armed struggle the entire night within the premises of the historical Rang Ghar. The end of the meeting was pronounced by the ushering of the sunrise which they considered as a good omen for the birth of their brainchild and spontaneously decided to make it the emblem of their new endeavour. It was decided that Rajib Rajknowar would frame the constitution of the organization keeping ‘Unity, Revolution and Liberation’ as the chief motto. The name ‘United Liberation Front of Asom’ or shortly, ULFA was proposed by Pradip Gogoi.\footnote{Pangging, Tushar, Personal Interview.}

Although both Arabinda Rajkhowa and Paresh Baruah were absent in the first executive meet, very soon they became the nerve centre of the organization as most of the first executive members, except Bhimkanta Borgohain, were no longer with the organization. Arabinda Rajkhowa met Paresh Baruah when the former was the president of the district committee of the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP), Sivsagar. Both Paresh Baruah and Arabinda Rajkhowa, as active members of Assam agitation, had to remain underground to avoid army and police atrocity. Rajib was the sixth son (out of nine) of a distinguished Gandhian non-violent freedom fighter from Sivsagar- Uma Rajknowar (perhaps the senior most living freedom fighter of the state who had completed 100 years on 11 January 2001). Rajib was very prominent in all the social activities and was highly concerned about the community issues and later on the national issues of the state. The third important person along with Rajib and Paresh Baruah was Rajib’s maternal uncle, Bhimkanta Buragohain, who was arrested in Bhutan Operations. The fourth important person in influencing the initial works of Rajib and Paresh was Buddheswar Gogoi, an ex-principal of Moran High School and a prominent social worker of the region. The fifth important person
in the initial phase of the organization was Bhadreswar Buragohain, a prominent citizen of Sapekhati, Sivsagar, who later on joined AGP and became the deputy speaker of the Legislative Assembly. The sixth and the seventh important persons in the initial phase were Samiran Gogoi and Golap Baruah.

At the initiative of Bhimkanta Buragohain and Buddheswar Gogoi, some other members took part in the proposed organization. They were Suren Dihingia, Someswar Gogoi, Bhuben Borgohain, Nava Neog, Kiran Baruah, Pabitra Neog and Chakra Gohain.\textsuperscript{51}

First batch of ULFA had the following members: Buddheswar Gogoi- Chairman, Suren Dihingia- vice Chairman, Someswar Gogoi- General Secretary, Bhimkanta Borgohain - foreign Secretary, Bhuben Borgohain - Finance Secretary, Ponaram Baruah - Special Member and Pradip Gogoi - Member.

By the end of 1979, when ULFA conducted its second meeting, the organization had another eight members to assist the committee.

Towards the end of 1980, ULFA’s first session of the Central Council took place at Dibrugarh. The meeting presided over by Buddheswar Gogoi passed the name ‘United Liberation Front of Asom’ or ULFA as the name of the organization. Two persons formally got rid of all the organizational responsibilities - they were Buddheswar Gogoi and Bhadreswar Buragohain. During the time, ULFA could expand its organizational base to Nalbari, Guwahati, Barpeta and Nagaon. This fast expansion was possible due to the effortless support of the AJYCP.\textsuperscript{52}

In this period, ULFA was essentially divided into two wings- political and military. The Central General Council was to look after the political activities and it included members like Chitrabon Hazarika, Jugal Kishor Mahanta, Sasha Choudhury, Sunil Nath, Manoj

\textsuperscript{51}Mahanta, N.G., Confronting the State: ULFA’s Quest for Sovereignty, Sage publications India Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 2013, pp. 59
\textsuperscript{52}Aditya, Parag Moni, Swadhinota, NiyarPrakash, 2002
Hazarika and others. In the first meeting of the Central Council, a Military Council was formed by including members like Chief of the Army Staff Paresh Baruah, Ratul Kotoki, Hirakjyoti Mahanta, Raju Baruah, Bening Rabha, and Lohit Deuri among others. The meeting decided to use pseudonyms for their organizational activities. Thus, Rajib Rajknowar became Arabinda Rajkhowa, Pawan Baruah- Paresh Baruah, Samiran Gogoi – Pradip Gogoi, Golap Baruah- Anup Chetia and Rajen Sharma became Uddipta Hazarika.

The organization got strengthened after 1984, after the coming to power of the regional AGP government. It was from 1983 that ULFA was grouping from one corner to the other in search of authentic ideology which could be acceptable to various communities. Initially, the organization was primarily constituted to protect the cause of the Ahom community particularly Mottok-Moran community of Upper Assam till 1984-85.

Describing itself as the revolutionary organization, an ULFA declaration reads: “The nations of the world have been struggling for the restoration of their own identity and total development. The history of struggle in real sense is the struggle of establishing justice against injustice and truth against untruth. Above all, a nation under foreign occupation has no alternative other than to fight for freedom and national liberation. The ‘United Liberation Front of Assam’, ULFA, a revolutionary political organization was born on the lawns of the historic Rang Ghar of Sivsagar on 7th April 1979”. 53

The genesis of ULFA can be traced to the AJYCP, a radical group, more systematic and active than the AASU. The AJYCP shuns the limelight and working silently- unlike the high profile AASU does more for the youths of Assam than anyone actually cares to mention. As a matter of detail, Arabinda Rajkhowa, Pradip Gogoi and Anup Chetia had all worked for the AJYCP at some point of time or the other. The organization’s central issues resolve around more power to the state, control over their resources and introduction of dual

53http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Congress/7434
citizenship. Needless to say the organization has been playing a pivotal role in devising a negotiated settlement between the Government of India and ULFA.

**Organisational Rules, Structure and Powers:**

ULFA has two types of membership

1. Local
2. Central.

Local members are entrusted with the work of wall-painting, distribution of propaganda literature, communication and making lodging arrangement for central members when they happen to come to their place. These members are also organisers of local people for convincing them to join ULFA. Local members are also divided in various units. Each unit is entrusted with specific job. Generally such jobs are kept secret and not made known even to other units.

Central members have organised action squads. These members generally remain underground\(^{54}\).

In the initial phase, particularly from 1985, ULFA had Primary units, Mouza or Sub-Divisional units, Zila or District units and the Central Committee. Later on, from 1985-86, General Head Quarter (GHQ) was formed to look into military issues and central Headquarter (CHQ) was formed in order to look into political activities. When the military pressure became more intense, a Mobile Head Quarter (MHQ) was created in 1993. The organization created the United Liberation Force of Asom, the military wing in 1995.

Making ULFA more military oriented and Paresh Baruah centric, the party had constituted various mandals dividing the entire state into four regions.

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\(^{54}\)Bhushan, Chandra, Terrorism and Separation in North-East India, Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2004
After the Bhutan operation, the organisation was reconstructed and both GHQ and CHQ were merged into Central Command Headquarter (CCHQ) which was based in Bangladesh. According to Article 1 of ULFA’s constitution, the name of the organisation is United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). Clause ‘B’ of the same article says: ‘United Liberation Front of Asom is a revolutionary political party and the military wing that works under the supervision of the party is United Liberation Force of Assam (also ULFA).’

Under the administrative and political wing, there are four sections, namely, General Assembly, permanent Council, Central Executive Council and Battalion Management Committee. These four units were responsible for the operation of the organisation till the capture of its chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa.

There are three organs of ULFA which play the most dominant role in the exercise of power. These are:

1. Central General Assembly
2. Central Executive Council
3. Permanent Council

According to Article 15 of ULFA constitution, Central General Assembly is the highest decision making body. It has power to constitute or dissolve or bring necessary changes to the Central Executive Council. It has general powers like amending the constitution, framing the general objectives and guidelines of the organisation; it can also initiate self-criticism and modification in the light of changing circumstances. However, as per the Article 17 of ULFA constitution, it is the permanent Council which is in reality the most powerful body of the organisation. It is like the politburo of the communist party and the Cabinet of Parliamentary Form of Government. It consists of the following important portfolios of the organisation:

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55 Article 1, Section B of ULFA Constitution (amended and accepted in 2005)
1. Chairman

2. Vice Chairman

3. General Secretary

4. Chief of Army

5. One more senior member from Central Executive Council.

It may be mentioned that the constitution of the Permanent Council was a bone of contention among the top brass of the organisation as all the occupants of the most important executive body belonged to upper Assam and mostly two communities of Assam. It is important to look at the constitutional powers of the organisation (Council) as it is said to be the most powerful body.

1. It has the power to take all major emergency decisions. However, the participation and opinion of all departmental heads is a must.

2. It has the power to constitute a mass-based non-violent political party to espouse the cause of independent Assam.\(^{56}\)

3. It has the power to decide on the elections of India like what will be the role of ULFA vis-à-vis elections and political parties subject to the verification by the Central Executive Council.

4. All the important decisions pertaining to military and other associated arms procurement, etc., will be decided by the Body.

5. It can directly supervise all the wings including the battalions according to the need of time.

6. It has the power to decide on all important decisions like ceasefire, talks with the government and so on. However, in this matter the opinion of the Central Executive Council will be indispensable.\(^{57}\)

\(^{56}\) ULFA constitution, Clause ‘C’ part -3 of the article 17 (amended and accepted in 2005)
Central Executive Council is a broad-based wing of the organization, as is clear from the above, although the Permanent Council is the most powerful. Nevertheless, the mandate of the Executive Council is mandatory on all important decisions of the organisation. It comprises the top 15 functionaries of the organisations. Apart from these bodies of ULFA, the constitution makes provision for a council of advisors who can advise on important issues of the organisation.

ULFA has five main functional battalions: the 7th, 27th, 28th, 109th and 709 battalions. Each number signifies certain milestones or events in the history of the organisation. For example, on 28 November 1990, early morning at 1.15 a.m., operation Bajrang was declared-in protest, the battalion was launched. The 7 Battalion is in tune with the establishment day of the party, i.e. 7 April 1979. 27 Battalion signifies the martyr day of ULFA when the Border Security Force (BSF) jawans killed five civilians in Dipila on 27 July 1992. 109 and 709 signify the operations of the organization.58

Apart from the regular organisational set up, there were few other units which were created from time to time. The Volcano unit is a specialist military organisation constituted to perform a few objectives (mostly killing or assassination). The most active and physically fit cadres are examined to be recruited to this unit. It is basically a suicide squad. However, there are no reports of such suicide squad activities. The unit is constituted in the following ways - Paresh Baruah (Overall Incharge), Raju Baruah (Operation In charge), Dristi Rajkhowa (Commander of Volcano Unit), Bidyut Kachari (Assistant Commander), Nirmal Bodo and Babul Ingti (Field Commanders) - the former surrendered and the later died during police encounter.

57 ULFA constitution, part 12 of article 17 (amended and accepted in 2005)
58 Personal interview with Tusar Panging
The organisation has a women wing known as Nari Bahini (women soldiers). The organisation is very selective in recruiting the woman cadres into military wing. Pranati Deka is the highest ranking cadre who is the Cultural Secretary of the organisation.

The hierarchical order of the Nari Bahini at GHQ is as follows: Kaberi Rajknowari (wife of Arabinda Rajkhowa), Meghali Saikia (wife of Pallav Saikia, Lieutenant), Kalpana Neog, Moni Baruah (wife of Satabda Kumar, Chief Instructor), Sadhana Batcha (Second Lieutenant), Rangdongiya Rabha (she held the highest position for women in the army wing), Malati Rabha (wife of Hiren Bodo, Commander of central training centre), Sangita Saud-Sargent Major (wife of Bhaiti Gogoi, GHQ Commander).

The main functions of the woman cadres can be divided into: Communication, Administration, medical, transportation and building network for the release of the arrested leaders.

The woman cadres and sympathisers act as the couriers of ULFA letters to various cadres and districts. It is through the women cadres that instructions were communicated. At the GHQ, Bhutan, it is the women cadres who maintain the office records and perform other necessary administrative works.

The woman cadres are generally trained in medical services and take care of the medical aspects of the camps. In military operations, particularly by the Volcano unit, women cadres accompanied the unit as it helped them to get rid of the police and military searching. Besides, it was the responsibility of the women cadre to secure release of the arrested ULFA leaders by mobilising people’s support in the form of gherao or mass protest. In addition, the women cadres also collected information necessary for the organisation like military and other security personnel movement, spying, etc.

Apart from the above, a Purbo Bongiya Samiti-a branch of ULFA which was constituted to look into the issues of mobilising the people of East-Bengal origin was
established in 1990, headed by Diganta Raghab and Saddam Hussain as the general secretary of the committee. Sikhar Jyoti Deka and Sankar Baruah of Darrang were a few other central leaders who looked into the minority issues. The committee was active after Operation Bajrang and in the areas like Darrang, Morigaon and Goalpara. The main functions of the committee were as follows:

a) The most important function of the committee was to impart revolutionary and political principles to the common people, particularly to those of East-Bengal origin.
b) The Committee made attempts to make the immigrants feel that they are a part of the greater Assamese society.
c) The committee urged the people to get educated so that they couldn’t be exploited by the leaders and politicians.
d) The most important objective of the committee was to convey the message that ULFA is the friend of the charbashi people (most of the immigrants reside in the chars or riverine areas).

The Central Committee comprises of 7 members: Arabinda Rajkhowa, Paresh Baruah, Raju Baruah, Mithinga Daimary, Bhimkanta Buragohain, Anup Chetia and Chitrabon Hazarika.


A military wing of the ULFA, the Sanjukta Mukti Fouj (SMF) was formed on 16th March, 1996. There were three full-fledged battalions: the 7th, 28th, and 709th. The 7th was responsible for Defense of GHQ (HQ- Sukuni), the 8th covered Nagaon, Morigaon, Karbi

59Mahanta, N.G., Confronting the State: ULFA’s Quest for Sovereignty, Sage publications India Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 2013
Anglong. The 9th covered Golaghat, Jorhat and Sivsagar. The 11th was responsible for Kamrup and Nalbari, the 27th was operational in Barpeta, Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar. The 28th covered Tinsukia and Dibrugarh. The 709 Bn. was located at Kalikhola.

The ULFA’s organizational structure is divided into four zones. The zones and their areas of influence are as below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>East Districts (Purbo Mandal)</th>
<th>West Districts (Paschim Mandal)</th>
<th>Central Districts (Madhya Mandal)</th>
<th>South Districts (Dakshin Mandal)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
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<td>Karbi Anglong</td>
<td>NC Hills</td>
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<td>Sivsagar</td>
<td>Bongaigaon</td>
<td>Nagaon</td>
<td>Cachar Hills</td>
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<td>Tinsukia</td>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>Morigaon</td>
<td>Karimganj</td>
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<td>Dibrugarh</td>
<td>Barpeta</td>
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<td>Bokajan div of Karbi</td>
<td>Nalbari</td>
<td>Part of Sonitpur</td>
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<td>Anglong</td>
<td>South Kamrup</td>
<td>North Kamrup</td>
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<tr>
<td>Golaghat</td>
<td>Part of Sonitpur</td>
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Communal makeup of the leaders of ULFA:

There are five Ahom sects, Saringia, Tunghungia, Tipomia, Porbotiya and Dihingia. Arabinda Rajkhowa is from the Saringia sect, Pradip Gogoi, Bhimkanta Borgohain, Akhanta Bagh Phukan (organising secretary) are from the Ahom community. Anup Chetia (General Secretary) and Paresh Baruah (Commander in Chief) were from Motok-Moran community.
The 28th battalion came into ceasefire in 2007 mostly comprises of Motok-Moran community from Sadiya, Kakopathar, Meleng, Dirak, Maithong, Doomdima, Margherita, Dibrugarh, Moran etc.

**Code of Conduct for ULFA members:**

Do’s and Don’ts for ULFA members:⁶¹

The central underground wing of ULFA had framed rules for Do and Don’t for ULFA activists, which are given below:

What to be seized and what not to be seized?

1. Scooter, Motorcycle, Bicycle, should not be forcibly acquired. If needed such vehicles can be requested and returned after the work is completed but only after obtaining prior permission of the District Parishad.

2. Car and any such four wheelers should not be acquired without the prior permission of District Commander. That too can be done in case of dire necessity.

3. Every activist must travel either by bus or by bicycle. The activist may use car or motor only if badly needed.

Laws and Punishments:

1. Any common person from general public shall not be either publicly punished or executed unless District Committee gives green signal.

2. District Parishads will convict a person only on submission of undoubted and sufficient proof.

3. If anyone criticises the organisation with noble intentions his criticism is welcome and if found concrete, his suggestion will be implemented.

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⁶¹Bhushan, Chandra, Terrorism and Separation in North-East India, Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2004
Employment and Education:

1. ULFA activists shall create atmosphere for education.
2. Any student connected with ULFA shall not resort to copying or any unfair means during the examination. He shall neither encourage such things.
3. System of Ragging of new students shall be totally stopped.
4. Libraries will be established, conventions and Symposiums will be organised. Books depicting revolts will be read.
5. Habit of merry-making and unfruitful or unnecessary talks, especially at road side tea stalls and such others places will have to be stopped.
6. Every ULFA activist must learn some handicraft so that he can earn his own bread.

Culture and Conduct:

1. Pay respect to elderly people.
2. Stop Goondaism.
3. Be polite and conservative in expenditure.

Religion, Language and Culture:

1. Give respect to other religion, language and culture.
2. Be connected with some social organisation.

Warning: One who does not follow the above conduct rules should be prepared to pay the cost.
**Literary activities: Published Magazines**

- **Pratush**: Wall Magazine published by Madhya Mandal Camp.
- **Rodali**: Wall Magazine published by Central Head Quarter.
- **Chetana**: Inter camps Magazine published by Central Publicity Cell. Later its title was changed as *Prabhatar Padsabda*.
- **Silalipi**: Wall Magazine published by Enigma B Camp.
- **Misil**: Wall Magazine published by Military Head Quarter.
- **Hatiar**: Wall Magazine published by Paschim Mandal Camp.
- **Sainikar Kanthswar**: Hand written Magazine published by Paschim Mandal Camp.

**Recruitment of ULFA members:**

For nearly six years after the first meeting at Rang Ghar, the ULFA remained passive. Most of the participants of the April 1979 meeting were exploring possibilities of tying up with other like-minded organizations. Anup Chetia in 1982 took initiative to reunite the original members who had met at Rang Ghar.

Recruiting for the front did not begin until 1983. It was not before late 1983-early 1984 that large scale recruitment in the ULFA began. The early inductions came from all across the state but one district, Nalbari, provided perhaps the highest number of cadres. Nearly three-four months in a year, more than half the district is flooded. Agriculture gets destroyed and the majority of the population is perpetually in economic ruin. Constant migration from Bangladesh puts enormous pressure on land in the district. Despite the odds, however, literacy rate in Nalbari district is good, four percentage points above the state’s average at 56 percent. The employment opportunities have not kept pace with the rate of literacy rate, there are no factories or even small scale industries in the district.

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For the ULFA therefore, there could not have been a more fertile ground to recruit cadres. When the leaders approached one young man to sign up, he would get a dozen others with him, girls included. It is little wonder therefore that the outfit’s first ideologue, Uddipta Hazarika (real name Rajen Sarma from Bahjani), came from this district. At least three important leaders in the organization, Sashadhar Choudhury, Foreign Secretary, Raju Baruah, Deputy Commander-in-chief and Pranati Deka, Cultural Secretary belong to Nalbari district.

Soon after it finished recruitment in 1984, it began to seek out training and arms procurement from other groups such as the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). In 1986, it launched a fund raising “campaign” across India by way of extortion. It then began to set up camps in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts. The ULFA enjoyed immense popularity during first decade of its struggle as well as its economic power which in turn helped in bolstering its military capabilities.

In the initial years of the ULFA movement, the organisation enjoyed widespread public support in both urban and rural areas of Assam. At the time the cadres were recruited from rural areas as well as from many towns in upper and middle Assam districts. One of the most popular ULFA leaders of all time, late Hirak Jyoti Mahanta hailed from a place which is just a few kilometers from the state Capital Guwahati. However, with the Assamese urban middle class becoming increasingly skeptical of ULFA’s method of functioning, the ULFA targeted the remote villages and the tribal areas for recruitment.

**ULFA’s Aims and Objectives:**

Some of ULFA’s aims and objectives could be understood by looking at what the organization has to say about its existence.

1. To liberate Assam, through armed national liberation struggle, from the clutches of the illegal occupation of India and to establish a sovereign independent Assam.
2. ULFA represents, as its name implies, not only the Assamese nation but also the entire struggling peoples with independent thinking, irrespective of different race, tribe, caste, religion and nationality of Assam.

3. The struggle for national liberation of Assam is never a separatist or secessionist movement. The central argument of ULFA is that Assam was never a part of India at any point of time in history. The fact is independent Assam has been occupied by India, and deploying occupation forces, they are oppressing our peoples and persecuting them. ULFA itself and all freedom fighters of Assam are neither planning nor compromising to break up India. It says, ‘We are not conducting any armed operation inside India. Freedom fighters of Assam are only trying to overthrow Indian colonial occupation from Assam.’

4. On the need for an armed struggle, the organization says: The armed struggle for self-defense is a compulsive objective reality: The people of Assam are confronting with various problems. Among those, the National identity problem is basic. The communal riot that was followed by the partition of India and Pakistan was responsible for the influx of foreigners from the Indian subcontinent in large scale and thereby caused a real threat to the demographic composition of Assam. India has all along encouraged this influx because of a population base having ethnic affinity with main land India is always favourable to their long term security perspective. This is one of India’s major aspects of colonial occupation of Assam.

5. The organisation believes that in economic sphere, India has been engaged in large-scale exploitation. Despite its rich resources, Assam remains one of the most backward states. Therefore, the question of real threat to the national identity of the people of Assam under the colonial occupation and exploitation of India has become

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63ULfarRaijorUchuratNibedan (In Assamese), a pamphlet of ULFA, 1985
64ULfarRaijorUcharatNibedan(In Assamese), a pamphlet of ULFA, 1985
the basic problem. As a whole, the problem has become a question of life and death to the people of Assam.

Declared Objectives of ULFA:

As per the constitution of ULFA, its main object is to free Assam from India and implementation of scientific socialism in Assam added by paving way for revolutionary development of Assamese community.

Following objectives are mentioned in the constitution of ULFA.65

1. To make Assam a sovereign nation by way of armed revolution.

2. To protect the interests of the people from neighbouring states of Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura along with that of Assam.

3. To have total control of the state on all revenue sources of Assam such as Crude oil, Natural Gas, Forestry, etc.

4. To gain public support against exploitation by India as well as non-Indians.

5. To stand against any kind of suppression of Assamese people.

6. To oppose the powers aiming at specific and or common interest of the people.

7. To consult those who believe in the objects of ULFA and gain their political support.

Sovereignty issue of ULFA:

The most influential and powerful insurgent group in Assam, ULFA demands complete independence to create a sovereign state of Assam.

Ahom kings successfully resisted the invasions of the mighty Mughals seventeen times. Consequent to the Yandaboo Treaty signed between Man (Burma now Myanmar) and British on 24 February, 1826, Assam ultimately became a British colony, but this was

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65Bhushan, Chandra, Terrorism and Separation in North-East India, Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2004
achieved over many years by a process of annexing several kingdoms. At the time of the Treaty of Yandaboo, the Ahom Kingdom was not an independent state and the kingdom was ruled by the Burmese. At that time, Assam was not a composite nation of all people including Ahoms, Chutias, Morans, Kacharis, and Motoks and so on. The Ahom were in fact a minority. If the British did not free Assam, the Burmese occupation would certainly have continued for decades, with all the violent and cruel atrocities that accompanied the Burmese occupation. The British launched the First Burmese War on 5th March 1824, at their own cost (5 million) without any help from the Ahom Kings and with 40,000 British and Indian soldiers (15,000 perished), routed the Burmese army and forced them to sign the Treaty of Yandaboo. The treaty was signed between the British East India Company and the Burmese King of Ava who renounced all claims on “the principality of Assam”. This implies that the British did not take over an independent Assam ruled by the Ahom Kings. The British also annexed Lower Assam (Koch Hajo), the Kachari kingdom and the Jaintia kingdom. In 1833, Upper Assam became a British protectorate with Purandar Singha as Ahom King, who had to pay Rs. 50,000 annually. The British annexed Upper Assam formally in 1838 because of King’s inability to pay the required sum of money. This brought an end to the Ahom rule in Assam. With the annexation of the Kachari, Moran and Mottok territories, the annexation of Assam into the British Empire was fully achieved by 1842. Leaving historical speculation aside, it should be noted that Assam grew into a form of composite nation with a degree of unity of purpose during the British rule right up to 1947.

Freedom fighters of Assam bravely joined the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 and there was popular support. Maniram Dewan and Peoli Barua were hanged by the British in Jorhat on 26th February 1858. Participation of Assam in Indian national political stage started in 1886 when six delegates from Assam attended the 2nd Session of the Indian National Congress held at Calcutta. Mahatma Gandhi visited Assam in 1912 and received overwhelming support
from the people of Assam. Furthermore, Assam Sahitya Sabha was formed in 1917 and immediately after that; Assam Association (1903) joined the Assam Branch of Indian National Congress in 1919. Assam enthusiastically joined the non-cooperation movement in 1920 and the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930. Congress leaders of Assam, under the leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi, fought tooth and nail to keep Assam as an integral part of India. Thus historical records show that the Assamese people willingly joined the Indian independence movement against the British rule. A vast number of Assamese people spontaneously and actively supported the Congress party led by Gandhi and Nehru. These represent strong historical evidence that the people of Assam expressed their free will to be an integral part of India. There is not a scarp of recorded historical evidence that Assam wanted to be an independent country. In light of these historical facts, the statement “Assam should have established an independent state” is merely a historical irrelevance. Throughout the period of freedom movement, beginning from 1857, Assam has gone through a process of historical osmosis such that a relatively more united Assamese nation emerged at the time of independence, and clearly, Assam as a nation decided to be with India.

ULFA’s argument that liberation struggle of Assam was united with India’s freedom movement and should have established an independent state, has flaws in reasoning. This implies that the freedom movement in Assam is something different from India’s freedom movement, as if freedom struggle in Assam joined hands with the rest of India’s freedom struggle out of strategic necessity in order to achieve a sovereign state. There is no doubt that the freedom struggle in Assam was an integral part of India’s freedom struggle. Also, no arguments have been put forward by ULFA regarding why the people of Assam should have opted for a separate independent state in 1947. Pakistan became a separate state with a clear purpose under leadership of the Muslim League. There was a separatist party in Assam in its
entire history of the British occupation. Only the Muslim League wanted Assam to be a part of Pakistan, but not a separate independent state.\(^{66}\)

Considering ULFA’s statement about “the British-created leadership of independent India” turning Assam into India’s colony “through intrigue and conspiracies”, the expression “British-created leadership” is a misnomer. The leaders of the Indian independence movement, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Rajendra Prasad, Lala Lajpat Rai or Ram Mohan Lohia were not “British-created”. Mahatma Gandhi or Rajendra Prasad did not conspire to make Assam a “colony of India”. The allegation that these great leaders conspired to make Assam a colony of India is completely false.

It is true that, immediately after independence, there have been stiff competition for limited resources and, in many ways, Assam lost out in the fifties, for example, in terms of not building a bridge over the Brahmaputra or not having a second oil refinery, or broad gauge railways across Assam. This is largely because Assam lacked political clout, rather than the alleged machinations by the “British-created” Congress leaders. Regarding oil and gas, the Central government constitutionally took charge of this natural endowment all over India. Consequently, the oil and gas producing states of India, including Assam, have certainly lost out as their precious black gold has been taken over by the Central government so that the benefits of natural endowments are equitably distributed among all Indians. This is normally what happens in a democratic society, and it does not imply, in any sense whatsoever, that the leaders of Indian freedom movement “conspired” to make Assam a colony of India. Whether proper royalties are paid to Assam is a matter of negotiations with the Central Government by a strong Government in Assam. India has always been referred to as the “occupying force” by ULFA and ULFA wants to get rid of the “Indian foreigners”. It is

\(^{66}\)Borkakoti, Jitendralal, Terror, poverty and development: The Agony of Assam. 2010. pp. 6
difficult to see how and when India attacked Assam; because it is impossible to attack a part of her own territory. One country becomes an occupying force if that country invades and occupies an independent country. This condition is not applicable to Assam, as Assam was not an independent country in 1947. Referring to India an “occupying force” is a mockery of history. The outburst against the “Indian occupiers” understandably is simply an emotional expression as the ULFA insurgents deeply believe that their arguments are correct.

On economic feasibility and political sustainability of an independent sovereign Assam, if it ever comes about, a landlocked sovereign Assam surrounded by India, China and Bangladesh will be an economic nightmare, leading to possible trade embargo. This will ruin the fragile economy of Assam, leading perhaps to starvation and famine. ULFA’s economic and political agenda for an independent Assam is not known, except for the reported Marxist agenda. However, Marxism as a form of political and economic system is not successful anywhere. One simply can’t consider sovereignty without paying attention to its economic and political consequences of the 30 million people of Assam.

In August 2008, ULFA actually called for a plebiscite in Assam on the issue of sovereignty. A plebiscite, however, will be unconditional as the provision for political secession does not exist in the Constitution of India.

Assam Public Works, a group formed by some relatives of the ULFA insurgents, carried out a survey in nine districts of Assam (Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Kamrup (Metro), Dhubri, Darrang, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji and Nalbari that account for about 37% of the population of Assam). They reported that 95% of the population prefers Assam to remain an integral part of India.

Dr. Hiren Gohain, The President of National Avibartan held in 2010 did not mention about the sovereignty issue while submitting its memorandum to the Central Government.
Social and Ideological leaning of the ULFA cadres:

To understand the social and ideological leanings of the founding ULFA members it is important to understand ideological leanings of Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) and All Assam Students Union (AASU) as several of the founding members of the ULFA belonged to these two groups and had close links with these two organizations.

ULFA’s emphasis on “scientific socialism” had its roots in AJYCP. It is said that the ULFA like the AJYCP made an attempt to blend Maoism and Assamese nationalism. The AJYCP had all along been a semi-militant organisation with many of its members having been known to hold popular Marxist as well as Assamese nationalist views. The organisation in its objective declared to build “colonialism on a nationalist base” and secure for the people of Assam dual citizenship and the right to self-determination. It termed the Indian constitution as a tool in the hands of those who seek to continue a sort of neo-colonial rule in the country and asserted that only full self-rule would give the state’s control over their natural resources and put an end to their being colonially exploited by the centre. Though not a communist organisation, it stressed on the need for an egalitarian social setup where nationalism and communist ideas would form its guiding principles. So, it is understandable from the proponents of ULFA’s ideologues the presence of “ism” of Maoism and communism, while in reality it is a truly militaristic outfit.

Writing about the ULFA’s leanings, Prabhakara stated “characterizing itself as a party committed to “scientific socialism”, ULFA maintains that its aims of liberating Assam and making it independent is only the first stage of its two stage revolution, the second and final state being implementation of the principles of scientific socialism. The literature that is

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68 AJYCP Istahar, 1991
available from the organisation suggests that it has a fair notion of what scientific socialism is all about.\(^6^9\)

Interestingly, Jaideep Saikia, a commentator on ULFA commented, “The only abdication of ideology in the ULFA is its turnaround on the question of illegal migration from Bangladesh”.

Several of the founding members of ULFA belonged to the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad (AJYCP), having close links with AASU as well. The ULFA leaders actively participated in the anti-foreigners agitation, and the first Chairman of the outfit, Bhadreswar Gohain, was later elected Deputy Speaker of Assam Assembly as AGP nominee.

Arabinda Rajkhowa (Rajib Rajknowar), Anup Chetia alias Golap Baruah, Pradip Gogoi (Samiran Gogoi) worked for AJYCP, a radical group, much more active and systematic in approach than the AASU. Arabinda Rajkhowa was the president of the AJYCP’s Sivsagar district unit.

The AGP was formed in October and elected to power in December 1985 comprises leaders of the six years long anti-foreigners agitation. Most of the ULFA leaders had known the agitationists. Some of them, like the outfits then Publicity Secretary, Siddhartha Phukan had even taken part in the agitation as a member of AASU.

\textit{Camps of ULFA:}

ULFA established the General Head Quarter in 1988 at Lakhipathar under Makum Police station in Tinsukia district. The camp was established by Ratul Kotoki, Hirak Jyoti Mahanta and Chakra Gohain. Paresh Baruah directed the trained leaders to set up camps in their respective district. At Lakhipathar Head Quarter camp, the head military camp was established. There were seven small training camps around the Lakhipathar camp. The duty

\(^{6^9}\) Prabhakara, M S., In The Thick of It, Frontline, May 12-25, 1990
for protection of the camp was entrusted upon Dibrugarh district committee. Ratul Kotoki then deputy commander in chief was in charge of the camp. Ratul Kotoki elected cadres to the camp for military and political training. The theoretical leaders were given political training. Hirak Jyoti Mahanta took over the charge of Central Head Quarter by establishing camp on the way of Lakhipathar. The Central Head Quarter was also established at Saraipung Reserved Forest near Duliajan Police Station in Dibrugarh district. The camp near the Sabitri tea garden at the Arunachal frontier was most important camp for the organization.

Though these camps were known to the police no action was taken against ULFA. The journalists of Video magazine “News Track” came to the camp and took footage of the activities running in full swing. The central government, after the video was broadcast, started taking action. The central government banned ULFA on 27 November, 1990 and next day operation Bajrang was launched. ULFA leaders, knowing about the operation, shifted their camps of Lakhipathar and Saraipung.

At Margherita in the Assam-Arunachal frontier of Tinsukia district there was a camp. Besides Saraipung, the district training camp were at the reserved forest of Sensua Pukhuri, Barpathar, Pathalibam, Guijan and Bangali under Moran police station. In Sivsagar district near Lakowa at Sala reserved forest, Assam-Nagaland frontier at Kanubari the district training camp was established, Knowar Gaon of Majuli in Jorhat district, In Golaghat district under Dergaon police station at Panbari, Diflu field, Misamari, under Golaghat police station Melamara, Japarijag, Mikirsang and Barpathar the district training camps were established. In Nagaon district under Kaliabor Police Station at Barjuli Gaon, under Nagaon police station at Uriya gaon, Bhutai gaon, under Kathiatali police station at Kanduli. Bamuni, under Kampur Police station Ahom gaon, under Samaguri police station at Haspani, Anjupani, Khaisabari and Chapanala the training camps were there.
Many training camps were set up by the organization in the recruitment phase. Kalakuchi under Kamalpur police station, Silapuri near Bamundi under Hajo police station in Kamrup; Pakhila forest at the Assam-Bhutan frontier under Tamulpur police station, Nakhuti and Bahjani under Nalbari police station in Nalbari district; at Azagar Hill the Assam-Meghalaya border under Dudhnoi police station in Goalpara district; in between Aobhata and Sarupeta, Seulakhowa and Kumar gaon under Sarbhog Police station in Barpeta district. In Darrang district at Japakhana under Paneri police station, at Rangamati under Mangaldai police station, at the Assam-Arunachal border near the Dhansiri tea garden under Mazbat police station, camps were established. At Pithakhowa and Bihguri under Tezpur police station, at Balijan under Gohpur police station in Sonitpur district; at Jarabari, Narayanpur and Bhogpur under Bihpuria police station, at Tatibahar, Deubil, Baltugaon, Khablu ghat, Murani gaon, Jamunakhat, Gohain Tekela Sapari and Khaga Kalita Gaon under Lakhimpur police station in Lakhimpur District; at Kedijara Sapari, Gopalpur and Ghuria Gaon under Dhemaji police station the district training camps were set up. District commanders were in-charge of the training camps. The anchalik and local level ULFA members were given training by Kachin trained ULFA leaders at the training camps till 1990. These camps were closed after Operation Bajrang.

**ULFA’s support to other rebel outfits**

In December 1995, ULFA decided to encourage Rajbangsi rebel outfit at the initiative of Raju Baruah, a senior leader of ULFA. Another ULFA leader was entrusted the task to set up the Koch-Rajbangsi Liberation Organisation (KRLO) in lower Assam. Simultaneously, the Kamatapuri Liberation Organisation (KLO) was formed in North-Bengal following a meeting at Kumargram. ULFA trained the first batch of 25 KLO in Bhutan ULFA camp in December 1995 and they returned to Assam in 1996 when counter-insurgency operations
were stepped up in the state. Notably, most of the members of KRLO joined the Saraighat unit of the ULFA.

Then union Home Minister had warned the West-Bengal govt. that the ULFA is carrying out subversive activities in North-Bengal in league with Kamatapuri activities. They have carried out several joint operations with ULFA in North-Bengal, including kidnappings, lootings and extortion from tea gardens. The self-styled “Commanders” Das and Suriar of KLO confessed that in exchange for money and arms they provide shelter to ULFA cadres. The arrest of Suriar sheds light on the Kamatapuri-ULFA connection. The first reported ULFA-Kamatapuri armed operation was the kidnappings of Roshan Lal Garg, a Siliguri based businessman, on July 31, 1999. According to police source, this was the first incident of militants using AK-47s in North-Bengal. On November 22 1999, ULFA cadres and Kamatapuri activities looted railway cash near Siliguri and divided the loot.70

**AASU and ULFA:**

There are interesting speculations on the AASU and ULFA relationship. Some feel the ULFA had watched the AASU movement from close angles and learnt some lessons in organising and conducting such movements. In fact, the ULFA had ingratiated itself with the AASU hierarchy. It was not an unexpected development or difficult task, as the leadership of the two organizations was comprised of the idealistic, educated youth, having similar social and economic background. If some pointed that ULFA was an offshoot of the extremist fringe of AASU, others countered it by saying that it was born at least 6 months before the AASU agitation took off. A certain symbiosis between the two during the agitation is widely acknowledged. There is postulation that the AGP lost the 1991 Assembly poll due to ULFA’s antagonism, and returned to power in 1996 with its support. AASU deemed the 1983 election

as illegitimate. It was during these unpopular elections and the tenure of the Saikia Government (1983-85) that rose to power in consequence that ULFA cut its teeth in agitational politics and made significant inroads into the body politics of Assam. It assiduously built its case of exploitation theory. India was not concerned with Assam’s interests, but only in its resources. Hence its stubbornness in holding polls against fierce opposition of the Assamese spreading this sentiment adroitly; it built and expanded its support base among the educated, unemployed youth.

**Designated Camps of ULFA (Assam Naba Nirman Kendra):**

There are 9 (nine) designated camps of Pro-talks ULFA leaders in Assam in the name of Assam Nava Nirman Kendra. There are 360 men and 71 women cadres of Pro-talks ULFA in these camps.

1. Solmari (Banbhag) in Banekuchi, Nalbari: It has 30 members in the camp. It has about 93 bighas land, fisheries and agricultural farm. The in-charge of the camp is Hemanta Rajbangsi.

2. Nakhara (Natun Baniakuchi) of Tihu, Nalbari: About 230 members under the leadership of Benudhar Sarma and Parimal Barman. About 35 to 50 members are resides in the camp.

3. Noapara of Bongaigaon: There are 61 members under the leadership of Animesh Kakati and Pulak Das. It has 1 unmarried and 12 married women cadre. It has 365 bighas of land, three fisheries, crops and other agricultures. Among the members 36 members are in the camp and 25 members reside at home. There are 7 members of Pro-talk ULFA which were in Bhutan operation. There are 7 Muslim cadres and 6 Christians and remaining are Hindus.
4. Khardang in Krishnai of Goalpara: There are 39 members, including 7 female cadres. There are 800 bighas land at present. Sri Kuthuya Rabha is in-charge of the camp. In the camp, 2 cadres were HS pass and 10 were HSLC. There are no graduates among them. It has only one Muslim member.

5. Ghorabandha, Sipajhar (Madhya Mandal): It has about 30 members. Among the members 12 are female members including women. It is situated at club of the locality. The in-charge the camp is Dhiren Deka.

6. Morigaon: There are 19 members in the camp. Among the members 16 are male and 3 female members. The in-charge of the camp is Sri Bhagi Bora.

7. Sarimukhia of Lakowa in Sivsagar: There are 82 members in the camp. It was allotted 33 bighas of land. Among the land, 12 bighas of land has been donated to local society for public field. Sri Bidyut Baruah is the in-charge of the camp.

8. Moran: There are 22 members in the camp. There are 15 male and 7 female members. In the camp it has 20 bighas of land. The in-charge of the camp is Som Deau.

9. Kakopathar, Tinsukia: There are 86 members in the camp. Among the members 48 are male and 38 are female members. It has 30 bighas of land. The in-charge of the camp is Dibakar Moran.

According to them they have been received Rupees 3000 for per month as stipend which is also not regular.

(Source: Field visit and personal contact of the ULFA members of the designated camps).