United Liberation Front of Assam- the Method of its Struggle
Shyamjyoti Saikia
Research Scholar
Centre for Political Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, INDIA.

Abstract: Since Independence secessionism has distorted the socio-political-economic profile of the North Eastern regions. Secessionist group ULFA, probably one of the largest in India came into existence on 7th April 1979. It was the radical fringe of six years long (1979-85) anti-immigrant movement in Assam, although it didn't share the immediate goal of Assam Movement, i.e. detect, deport and delete the immigrants. In this paper, focus is on the methods and processes whereby ULFA through a consistent yet changing ideology created a web of organisations that deeply penetrated the whole of Assam.

Keywords: ULFA, Assam, Secessionist, Immigration.

I. Introduction:
The formation of the ULFA demanded the restructuring the society by social ownership of the means of the wealth of production as certain kinds of reform or palliatives won't help in removing the economic contradiction inherent in capitalism. For last thirty five years, it has been fighting on the issue of "sovereignty" based on its ideology. Although its ideology apparently remained same, there has been a virtual kaleidoscope in the overall movement. In this chapter, we will try to single out what are the central ideas of the struggle led by ULFA and how it has been following it to develop a programme of action. It has presented "scientific socialism" as the way to achieve its goal which is the product of facts of history and truth of economic science. Identity in ULFA discourse is related to the irony of "colonialism" aiming at destabilising dominant mode of nationalism. It challenges the basic identity construct of being an "Indian" and works for the deconstruction of this self-image. Therefore, it undermines the dominant discourse of "Indian Identity" imbued with the idea of "right to self-determination." ULFA's identity issue relates to both aspects –political and cultural. It posits voluntary acceptance of language and culture as earmarks of "Assamese Identity". ULFA considers Teagarden monopoly companies, Non-Assamese traders and businessmen as its class enemy. Interestingly it considers such categories within Assamese groups as its allies. It considers "Indian" outside Assam as the "other". In ULFA discourse, the whole idea of identification of ally or enemy is problematic.

II. The strategy of Struggle:
The insurgency has both military and political components, Where the military component wages violence, the latter mobilise people by their grievances, against the government. ULFA was exercising militant segment, follows Mao's idea of armed struggle who considered guerrilla operation as a necessary part in the war of a revolutionary character. It can be described as the backbone of underground group.Here "mobility" is the most important criteria for the attack and counterattack as the targeted enemy of the groups is stronger in armaments as well as in techniques. It is a weapon that a nation inferior in arms and military equipment has sometimes tended to employ against a more powerful aggressor nation. The strategies of guerrillas warfare manifest ULFA warfare in an obvious way where "small units are acting independently play the principal role, and there must be no excessive interference with their activities." ULFA also follows Che Guevara's notion of Guerrilla warfare Considering guerrillas as fighting vanguard of the people that draws its forces from the mass of the people themselves. While it followed Che Guevara's model of rural guerrilla warfare, it has sometimes drowned on Carlos Marighela's model of urban guerrilla warfare. The guerrilla fighter needs full help from the people of the

2 Robert Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam (London: Palgrave Macmillan1966)
4 Ibid
5 Guerrilla warfare is a war of the masses, a battle of the people, see Guerrilla Warfare by Che Guevara, 1961.
area. It follows the strategy of warfare as mentioned by Guevara. The guerrilla operation is not independent of warfare; it is but one step in the total war, one aspect of the revolutionary struggle. It is the product of the clash between two classes, i.e., oppressors and oppressed and when the latter break out to protect its interest. ULFA posits itself in the second category and for protection of its oppressed strata of the society. According to it, guerrilla operations are a necessary part for war waged for the emancipation of a people who inhabit a vast nation. They are the inevitable result of the clash between oppressors and oppressed when the latter reach the limits of their endurance. To overthrow enemy, they follow the structure of Mao’s warfare - organisation, consolidation, and preservation of regional base areas situated in remote and difficult terrain. As for the guerrilla warfare mass support is a basic ingredient, it can’t be flourished or exists if it separates itself from sympathy and cooperation. ULFA sometimes draws on Lenin propositions on armed struggle.

Gradually this strategy as practised by ULFA led towards a huge shift from armed struggle towards anarchism as well as terrorism and it isolated them from the masses. It took help of neighbouring countries as well as other outfit organisations to achieve its goal in different circumstances. In 1985, ULFA shifted to Bangladesh, setting up its camp at Damai village in Moulvi Bazar district bordering the north-eastern Indian state of Meghalaya. Gradually its camps were extended into Bangladesh. By 1990, it becomes close to Pakistan. After the first military operation, the level of violence was increased. Their network got expanded once they settled in neighbouring states. Close nexus with the other insurgent groups like NSCN, Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Mizo National Front (MNF) and latterly its nexus with international terrorist groups like Pakistan Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) And also LTTE led to the expansion of violence in great measure.

III. Right to self-determination:

ULFA claims that it never was a secessionist movement since historically Assam was never a part of India. It considers that annexation of Assam to British empire was a fraud and this annexation was done forcefully and illegally. It refers to “Treaty of Yandabo” concluded between the Burmese and the British, whereby “on 24 February 1826 the King of Burma ‘renounced all claims’ upon, and agreed to ‘abstain from all future interference with the principality of Assam and its dependencies’, in support ULFA rejects the very idea of “Integrated pluralism” and therefore its struggle is against the dominant fantasy of “Nation” considering itself within the yoke of oppression and exploitation of nationalities.

IV. Illegal Immigration:

A large number of illegal immigrants from neighbouring state, mainly from Bangladesh is another irony in the context of Assam. The flow of migration increased gradually. The issue of illegal immigrant gained political currency since 1979 when All Assam Student Union and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad started a movement demanding detection and deportation of illegal aliens. ULFA formed in the midst of unrest during the Assam movement, and along with other issues it included anti-immigrant rhetoric concerning illegal immigration as a tool of the Indian ‘colonial occupation of Assam” to change its ethnic balance. But then massive immigration was

---

6 Guevara has pointed out the strategy of guerrilla warfare as
- it is necessary to analyse fundamentally what will be the enemy's mode of action,
- there are fundamental aspects to be studied: the armament, for example, and the manner of using this armament. The value of a tank, of an aeroplane, in a fight of this type, must be weighed. The arms of the enemy, his ammunitions, his habits must be considered; because the principal source of provision for the guerrilla force is precisely in enemy armaments,
- at the outset, the essential task of the guerrilla fighter is to keep himself from being destroyed.
- the enemy soldier in a zone of operations ought not to be allowed to sleep; his outposts ought to be attacked and liquidated systematically, see Guerrilla Warfare by Che Guevara, 1961.


8 Assassinating individuals, chiefs and subordinates in the army and police,
- confiscation of monetary fund’s both from the government and from private persons, see Lenin’s Collected Works, vol11 Progress Publishers, 1965.


11 During Kargil war, 1999, (ULFA) website was in tune with Pakistani propaganda.

12 The Telegraph, Tuesday, October 20, 2009.
not a major propaganda issue in case of ULFA as it believes that once it can make the region free from the “colonial rule” of India, it won’t be difficult to solve the problem of illegal migrants.

V. Conclusion:
Having taken the essential elements of its ideology from Marxism, Leninism and Maoism, ULFA in the last thirty-five years of its history has made its ideology into a systemic set of ideas to further its own goal. They have picked up the paradoxical notion of class-consciousness from Lenin with the assumption that the socialist consciousness in the workers’ movement had to be brought from the outside considering their role as “vanguard party” to raise the voice of common masses.

References:
Gohain, Hiren, AhanaxiAsomiya, Guwahati: Student Emporium, 1996
Mahanta, Prafulla, AsomiyaMadhyabittaShreneerIthias, Guwahati; Bhabani, 1991.