

# **The Role of Civil Society in Peace Building and National Integration**

**PHUIREINGAM HONGCHUI**  
Assistant Professor (Guest Faculty)  
Miranda House, University of Delhi, New Delhi (India)

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper seeks to examine the role of civil society in the very process of conflict mitigation and conflict resolution in the North East of India especially within the context of national integration and democratization of the Indian State. Following which, in-order to understand the complex nature of conflict and the democratic process of peace building, it demands a critical understanding of the competing contestations, specificity, context, history and nuances to better understand the nature of conflict in the quest for conflict resolution, peace, development, security and national integration. However, this paper in a special way highlight the crucial role of civil societies not only in the mitigation of conflict but also in the facilitating the peaceful democratic process of peace building and conflict resolution. Accordingly, it is also noteworthy to mention that the civil society play a critical role in paving the way for the non- violent democratic process of dialogue, negotiation, reconciliation, agreements, democratization and national integration. Thus, it outlines that the very presence of active civil society to a large extent determine not only the very nature of conflict but also the outcome of substantive democracy and meaningful integration.

**Key Words :** Civil Society, Peace, Democratic Processes, Conflict Mitigation, National Integration

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the study on peace and conflict studies, one of the main concerns was not only to inquire what the root causes of the conflict are but in the process to also inquire what are the possible means and mechanism to address, mitigate and resolve this persisting conflict for the larger interest of peace, development and meaningful democracy. Accordingly, this paper examines the crucial role of civil societies in the process of conflict mitigation, democratization and national integration especially within the context of Naga insurgency in the North East and the Indian Nationhood. As such, in this particular conflict, some of the pertinent and the persistent history of political tension, conflict and violence revolves over the very question of autonomy, integration, self-determination and sovereignty.

Following which, in-order to understand the nature

and the trajectory of the conflict and the process of conflict mitigation, democratization and national integration in a holistic manner, it demands the overall examination of historical and political events, government policies, constitutional mechanism, autonomy, federal challenges and state formation, the nature of conflict and the process of conflict resolution through accords, agreements and political economy of development. However, the objective of this paper is on the nature of civil society in the process of conflict mitigation, and integration.

### **Conflict Definition :**

Moreover, since the theme primarily intends to examine the nature and role of civil society in peace building, it necessitates to delve and briefly define and take into account what is conflict and the nature of conflict. Considering the nature of conflict into account, Christopher Mitchell and Johan Galtung define and

'breaks conflicts down into situation, behavior, and attitudes, with each heavily influencing the others'.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly Mitchell define conflict situation as "any situation in which two or more social entities or parties perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Louis Kriesberg defines conflict as one that occur "when two or more persons or groups manifests the beliefs that they have incompatible objectives".<sup>3</sup> Further Tim Jacoby observe and holds that 'conflictive situation need not, however, be grounded upon actual issues or events. While realistic conflicts are based on past occurrences that have led to the perception of incompatible goals and conflicts of various intensities and scopes, unrealistic conflicts may emerge from misperceptions and confusion, or may be pursued for the sake of conflict participation rather than any particular goals.'<sup>4</sup> He also holds that 'the majority of conflictive situations contain both realistic and unrealistic elements.'<sup>5</sup>

### **Peaceful Democratic Processes of Conflict Resolution:**

Taking note of the complexity and contestations of the stated conflict into consideration, there have been numerous efforts, approaches and measure to address, mitigate and resolve the pertinent conflict. Being aware of the importance of geo strategic and security concern of the nation, the Indian state has primarily seems to view through the prism of security and thereby attempt to address through that mechanism. Accordingly studies show the dominance of viewing the persisting conflict within the prism of security in consonant with the Colonial framework of the politics of Geo-political mapping. This is reflected in the process of the geo political mapping of the region within the framework of security with little consideration of the socio-political, history and economic practices of the region.

The dominance of the discourse and policy of security paradigm is seen in the materialization of the

term like the North East Frontier Agency, Excluded Areas and Backward Areas, imposition of extra Judicial measures like the Assam Disturb Area Act, 1955, Armed Forced Special Power Act, violation of the human rights and the consequent reorganization and mapping of the North East region in the Post-Colonial India. This also implies that the very notion of statusquosation of the region from the security perspective as a permanent frontier and peripheral space. Further, appointment of military General or person as the head of the Institutions like the NEC and DONER implies the dominance of the security over the concern of development, democratization and durable peace. As a result, viewing through narrow prism limits the scope for holistic understanding and development of the region.

On the contrary, the Peaceful Democratic processes of Dialogue, Negotiations, agreements and Constitutional mechanisms have to a large extent led to the mitigation of Conflict. Following which, there have been various measures and numerous agreements undertaken between the Nagas and the Government of India to tackle the long standing conflict. Some of the notable Agreements are the Nine Point Agreement, First Cease Fire Agreement in 1964, Peace Mission Proposal, Shillong Accord of 1975, Second Cease Fire Agreement in 1997 which was revised on January 13, 2001, recognition of the unique history of the Nagas, Framework Agreement of 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 2015 and the ongoing peace process with the NSCN-IM along with other NNPG's and Government of India (GOI).

However, there are different explanation, interpretation and understanding on the very meaning and the outcome of the various agreements and accords. This in a way implies the complex, multifaceted and the contested meaning of the very politics and rationale of the peace process. Consequently, some consider the signing of the accord could simply imply perpetuation of the conflict or metamorphosis into other form.<sup>6</sup> While,

1. Tim Jacoby, *Understanding Conflict and Violence: Theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches*, (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 19.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Tim Jacoby, *Understanding Conflict and Violence: Theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches*, (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 19.
5. Ibid
6. Samir Kumar Das, *Peace Processes And Peace Accords*, ed.in *South Asian Peace Studies: volume 2*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), 13.

some view the Agreements as a “technique of governance”<sup>7</sup>, other looked it as terrain and a subject of “contested meaning”<sup>8</sup>. Thereby, it in a way depicts the very ambiguity, vagueness and the contested nature of the Accord and Agreements. On the other hand, despite the limitations of the democratic processes and accords yet the civil societies in a significant way contributes to the very process of peace building, conflict mitigation and national integration.

### Role of Civil Society :

One of the important features of the Naga insurgency in the process of signing the various Accords and Agreement is the crucial role of the civil societies of the Nagas. Conscious of the importance of the peaceful democratic processes, the civil society played a crucial role in this very act of transformation from militant, violent confrontation and coercive mode of integration towards a peaceful democratic phase of negotiation, dialogue, agreements, conflict mitigation and integration since the very inception of the conflict.

Consequently, the history of the political conflict illustrates that there was an active engagement and support from various civil societies such as Naga People convention (NPC), Nagaland Baptist Church (NBC), Naga Mothers Association (NMA) (gender Justice perspective) Naga Hoho, Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), Naga Forum for Reconciliation(NFR) along with various tribal frontal organisations like the Naga Student Federations (NSF), All Naga Student Association of Manipur (ANSAM), United Naga Council (UNC) and Naga Student Union, Delhi (NSUD) for a meaningful and durable conflict resolution through democratic processes.

Considering the importance role of civil society, It is noteworthy to mention that when the political conflict,

violence, militarization and disorder deepens in the 1950’s, the Naga Peoples Convention (NPC) shoulder the responsibility to mediate between the two conflicting parties which in turn paved the way for the creation of Nagaland state in 1963.<sup>9</sup> The effort led to the signing of the 16 point agreement that resulted in the creation of 16<sup>th</sup> state of Nagaland in 1963. However, it is important to note that effort of NPC to bring the Naga revolutionaries to the negotiating table failed due to the differences between the underground Nagas. Thereby, the NPC took a centre stage and played a crucial role in the signing of the 16<sup>th</sup> point Agreement.

Similarly, the Nagaland Baptist Church (NBC) pressed for peace and resolution of the conflict on account of the persisting conflict, violence and tension. Following which, Nagaland Peace Mission was formed in April 1964 as a neutral body to mediate for peace and a just solution. Although it was unsuccessful in mitigating the tension and yet it stress the importance of peaceful democratic process as a mean to deal the complex issue by keeping the mutual interest in mind for a durable peace and solution. Accordingly, on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1964, the first Ceasefire was signed between the Government of India and Federal Government of Nagaland to facilitate the peaceful process of negotiation to resolve the pertinent conflict.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, in 1974 the Nagaland Peace Council (NPC) comprised of Church Leaders and Sarvodaya Peace Observer to a large extent was responsible in paving the way for the signing of the Shillong Accord in 1975.<sup>11</sup>

Recalling the crucial role of the civil societies in the critical phase of militant, conflict, violence and escalation, again the various civil societies like the Naga Hoho, NMA, NSF, ANSAM, NSUD, and various tribal frontal organizations along with the Churches continue to support and play a crucial role in the peaceful democratic process

7. Paula Banerjee , in introduction to section II entitled “ Peace As Process” in *Peace Processes And Peace Accords*, ed. Samir Kumar Das in *South Asian Peace Studies: volume 2*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), 118.

8. Ibid.

9. The Naga People Convention as a civil society is formed in 1957 by a few concern Naga leaders to facilitate peace and democratic process of resolving the conflict. The effort led to the signing of the 16 point agreement that resulted in the creation of 16<sup>th</sup> state of Nagaland in 1963.

10. However the Naga Peace Mission failed to resolve the conflict due to the rigid stance from both the conflicting parties.

11. Once again the Nagaland Baptist Church initiated and persuaded the Government of Nagaland and the Naga revolutionaries to a negotiating table and as a result, Nagaland Peace Council comprised of Church Leaders and Sarvodaya Peace Observer was set up in 1974 that consequently paved the way for the signing of the Shillong Accord in 1975.

of engagement in the very search for conflict mitigation and conflict resolution. However, sensing the limitation of the precursors over their role in the past, the various civil societies are cautious of their role with greater realisation of the need for reconciliation, dialogue and understanding not only within the various factions and Naga National Groups and but also among the various civil societies in conjunction to dialogue and agreement with the Government of India for durable peace and meaningful solution.

Expressing the desirability of peaceful engagement to mitigate tension and conflict, the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) and the Naga Mothers Association (NMA) also initiate various consultative meetings with Naga National Groups and civil societies.<sup>12</sup> The Forum for Naga Reconciliation was specifically formed on 24<sup>th</sup> Feb 2008, was with the intention to mitigate the intense inter-factional division, violence, suspicion and distrust. Instead it seeks to provide the platform to build bridges for better understanding, mutual respect reconciliation and genuine forgiveness within the Naga society in the quest for peace and conflict resolution. Thereby, various covenants of reconciliation, agreements and the consequent materialization in a way has brought not only reduction of violence but also brought better understanding amongst the Naga National groups and also within the society. Similarly the Naga Mother Association facilitates and supports the reconciliation and at the same time interrogates the very nature and the content of the peace process as to whether it encapsulates the very question of gender justice in the very attempt to arrive towards an equitable and inclusive solution.

#### **Limitations and Relevance of Civil Society:**

Nevertheless, it is quite important to take into

consideration that despite the positive contribution of the civil societies in paving the way for democratic peace process and non-violent methods of delving the conflict, yet there are limitations within the role of the civil society itself especially within the context of the persisting Indo-Naga conflict. On a critical analysis, one of the drawbacks and criticisms seems to hints that they had failed to take into account the comprehensive, complex and holistic nature of the conflict. Thereby, in the process it oftenseeks to address the sectarian interest which later had an adverse implication as reflected in the perpetuation and intensification of the conflict. At the same time there is a continued pressure from different sections of civil society on the very outcome of the democratic processes of dialogue and negotiation. as exemplified in the celebration of Naga Day on 10<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2018 and Global Naga Mass rally (GNMR) on 23<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2019.<sup>13</sup>

It is also important and interesting to note that the politics of the region to a great extent is also shaped by the external linkage, support and connection with the neighboring countries. The Chinese invasion in 1962 in particular was one of the important determinants in defining the politic of the region. Consequently the 1960's was characterized by the increasing attention and renewed interest to the ethnic-linguistic people of the frontiers that lies between India and Burma so as to establish and consolidate power and control over the "southern slopes of the Himalayan Mountain barrier."<sup>14</sup>

However, despite the international support and especially the external support of China in particular to the Naga insurgency yet many civil societies are also critical of the ideological implications of such support as reflected in the irony of the discourse which mentioned that the "Chinese interest in the Naga Affairs while boosting the morale of many Nagas also understandably

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12. The Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) was formed on 24<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2008, with the support of 39 Naga Frontal Organisations, the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC), and the Council of Naga Baptist churches (CNBC). The argument and the standpoint of the NMA is based on the interaction of the representatives of the association with the Naga Scholar Association in 2017.
  13. On January 10, 2018, the Nagas without Borders come together to celebrate the Naga Day to commemorate the submission of the Memorandum of the Naga club to the Simon Commission on January 10, 1929. Again on 23<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2019, thousands of the Nagas participated in the Global Naga Mass Rally with the support of various civil societies and frontal organizations like the Naga Hoho, NMA, NPMHR, Nagaland Tribal Council, NSUD. These civil societies protest against the prolong peace process and the political conflict that has lasted for more than six decades and thereby demand an early solution that is just and honourable.
  14. M. Horam, *Naga Insurgency: The Last Thirty years*, (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1988), 105.

alarmed many other Nagas.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the insistence of civil societies for democratic freedom in preference to the communist ideology to a large extent further reinforced the very process of national integration within the Indian state.

Furthermore, recognizing the geostrategic importance of the region especially within the context of the border disputes with China and Myanmar and the continued expansion of Chinese in the Indian Ocean Region also necessitates the active role of civil society for peace, stability and development in the region for national security, maritime security. Besides, cross cultural engagement with varied civil societies, communities, state and different stakeholders from the rich cultural heritage of the Naga society in particular and the North East communities in the region in general would also facilitate in the deepening of Indian democracy.

Besides, civil society through the democratic process also provides the conditions for peace, security, trade and economic integration and development in the form of cooperation and collaboration for better connectivity through the ongoing construction of four lane highway from Dimapur to Kohima,<sup>16</sup> signing of MoUs between Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and India so as to avail 400 Cr as loan for Nagaland Forest Management Project<sup>17</sup> and other undertakings. Moreover, Japan also provide Official Development Assistance (ODA) loan of 2500 Cr for the North East Road Network connectivity improvement Project Phase (2)<sup>18</sup>. Similarly,

the peaceful environment of the richly endowed resources and wealthy biodiversity of the region will eventually paved the way for the growth and development of the North East and the nation as a whole.

**Conclusion:**

Hence, the active engagement of the civil society in the peaceful democratic processes is crucial in the very peace-building and mitigation of the conflict. On the other hand, the oversight of the non-violent democratic and mediatory role of civil society in facilitating a viable conditions of settling disputes in consonant with the neglected obligation of the society and conflicting parties in the course of the history of conflict incurred huge loss of life, resource, time and property. Further, the disregard of the advocacy of civil societies paved the way for another three decades of intense conflict and the realization of pointed essence of dialogue and negotiation paved the way to eventually sign the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ceasefire agreement in 1997 since the signing of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ceasefire Agreement of 1964. Thus, the role of civil society is critical to a large extent not only in providing a space for peaceful democratic process, better understanding, conflict mitigation and reconciliation across civil societies, communities and various stake holders but also in shaping the very process of peace-building, development, democratization and meaningful integration within the Indian state.

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- 15. M. Horam, *Naga Insurgency: The Last Thirty years*, (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1988),.105. M. Horam pointed out that there was fear of domination from the Indian state and at the same time there was an opposition to the ideology of communism among the section of the Nagas that also includes prominent leaders of the church.
  - 16. The Economic Times, May 23, 2013.
  - 17. Extract from the Morung Express, April 6, 2017
  - 18. The Shillong Times, April 4, 2018,. Earlier japan had also provided an ODA loan of 4000 Cr for the development and improvement of the North East Road Connectivity Project Phase 1. Even in the future the country is willing to invest in the infrastructural development of viability road connectivity as contribution for the realization of North East as the Gateway for the South East Asian and East Asian Countries as a part of the Look East and Act East Policy.