Chapter 6
Summary and Conclusion

In Northeast India, the fear of losing identity combined with an uneven distribution of economic, political and social resources resulted in movements for self assertion which at times took shape of violent insurgencies. While on one hand there is the campaign for one nation and one national identity, the centralised power in the country at many times failed to embrace the peripheral communities as integral part of the mainstream India. Economic backwardness, land alienation, unemployment, political representation and ethnic diversity are some of the major issues that have not been addressed properly by the Union Government. Questions of mindset and cultural factors do form important aspects of identity struggles in the Northeast. However, the link between economic underdevelopment and insurgent politics has not received due attention. All these accounted for rise of sub-national aspirations in the region. Strategies adopted by the government to douse insurgency conflict have not achieved desired result and peace has remained somewhat elusive in the region.

The aim of the present study was to examine the strategies and policies practised by the government while dealing with insurgency conflict in the region, particularly in Assam. The main goal of the current study was to determine the lacunae, if any, in the government's prevailing peace strategy with the militant groups. Another objective of the study was to explore the validity of the popular perception that the intense feeling of alienation has fuelled insurgency in the region. The present study was designed to determine the effect of the peace processes and accords signed in Assam and to identify the pre-requisites and parameters needed to be fulfilled for a lasting peace.

6.1 Summary of Findings in the light of Research Questions

The current study was carried out in two major stages: Document Review stage and Interview stage. In the first stage, a detailed assessment of the four peace accords signed in Assam was made by adopting the concept of the Peace Accords Matrix. A total of 33 relevant provisions were taken for each of the peace accords and the implementation or otherwise of the accord clauses related to those provisions was critically examined through a systematic review of the issues. The different clauses of

the accords are categorised under a set of provisions common to all the four matrixes. The matrix of the accords helped to point out several gaps related to the drafting of the agreement provisions and the process of implementation. In this stage, both primary as well as secondary data sources were used. While primary data included relevant interviews and unpublished government documents and reports, secondary information was obtained from various government publications, published news reports and other published writings related to the subject. This stage of the study also reflects the strength and weaknesses of the four accords.

The second stage was in depth Interviews, in which the empirical study intended to generate information on the perceived peace policy of the government, the nature of the government's approach in addressing insurgency, the outcome of the government's 'open door policy' and the importance of the government's policies in the context of the prolonged militancy and turmoil in the north-eastern region and particularly Assam. Analysis of the findings was supported by both primary and secondary data.

In the Document Review stage, the study scrutinized the primary as well as secondary data in order to evaluate the implementation status of the Memorandum of Settlement (Bodo Accord) signed in 1993, Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Accord 2003, Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed with UPDS in 2011 and Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed with DHD in 2012. One of the more significant findings to emerge at this stage is that there is a lack of sincerity on the part of the successive governments while framing certain clauses of the accords. There are clauses that have been found extremely faulty and ill conceived while some are vague. For example, Clause 3(a) of the 1993 Bodo Accord regarding the provision of boundary demarcation seems to be the root of all the continued conflict and bloodshed. Again, Clause 3.1 of the BTC Accord too could not solve the lingering problem. The study found that the government was not willing to touch the conflicting issues such as the clauses related to the provision of Territorial Power Sharing and that there is a tendency to postpone discussion on such issues thereby pushing decisions to an uncertain time. On the other hand, both the UPDS Accord and the DHD Accord have not yet been ratified by the Constitution. Another interesting finding regarding these

two accords is that the authorities did not even feel it necessary to change the text of the DHD Accord as it seems to be a copy of the earlier UPDS accord, barring few clauses. The research has also found that all the four peace accords did not include several important provisions like detailed implementation timeline, human rights, inter-ethnic relations council, dispute resolution committee, commission to address damage and loss, participation of civil society groups as witness signatories, representation and participation of woman, etc.

The Interview stage of the research establishes the fact that many insurgents have taken undue advantage of the government's 'open door' policy. Small bands of armed men who pass off as insurgent groups have actually been indulging in acts of terrorism. Outfits like the GNLA or the NDFB-S or the erstwhile DHD-J or the Black Widow fall in this category. Whenever the going gets tough, these groups offer to talk peace with the government. And the government too, often seems to be willing to entertain their pleas.

A section of stakeholders during the field interviews agreed that the government should declare a moratorium on peace talks, that negotiations are actually encouraging insurgency and its spread by formation of splinter or new groups. This view echoes what was stated in the Annual Report of the Ministry of Home Affairs: "The Government is ready to talk with any group/outfit, which is willing to abjure violence, lay down arms and agree to abide by the Constitution of India. However, if there is a splinter group in future, then Government will not consider talking to them" (Annual Report 2012-13). Still, few participants were of the opinion that there cannot be a moratorium on peace talks, though the government may decide certain yardsticks within which talks can take place.

However, the results of the investigation answered the second research question by conforming that the policy of peace talks with each and every militant group has been encouraging militancy by formation of splinter groups. Answers to the first and the third research questions regarding a lack of a holistic approach by the government in dealing with insurgency and whether there is a relationship between the long drawn

insurgency and the government's peace strategy have also been revealed affirmatively through the primary and the secondary data of the study.

6.2 Implications of the Findings

In general, therefore, it seems that the Government of India has a rather lackadaisical peace policy that revolves around attempts at trying to resolve violent insurgencies through the medium of peace negotiations with the concerned rebel groups. One can safely say that although the Government of India's 'open door' policy of engaging in political dialogues with insurgent groups is a loose one, this policy is the result of the government's firm conviction that insurgencies in the country, particularly those in the Northeast are home grown insurgency that requires a political rather than a military solution.

The statement on peace talks by the MHA, however, lacks the force of a legal policy. A fundamental problem faced by the government in dealing with insurgency has been the lack of a strong policy and institutionalised framework to address the problem. This has further resulted in an ad hoc nature of response or reactions. An implication of this is the possibility that a strategy of announcing a moratorium on peace talks with newer militant groups or splinter groups, even while taking the ongoing peace talks with the insurgents groups to their logical end, could be an option.

The findings of the study suggest that the two main causes for the rise of ethnic conflict in Assam are the failure of the state to ensure distributive justice and the rule of law. The policy of bringing 'peace' by providing exclusive territorial and political rights to particular ethnic groups merely because they are majority among certain smaller ethnic groups cannot be the solution. A theoretical implication of this study is that the government's strategy of granting autonomous councils to manage ethnic conflicts in the region has been falsified by the four case studies carried out by the research. The case studies that undertook the four peace accords signed in Assam as subjects proved that creation of autonomous councils alone cannot bring peace as none of the accords have been able to bring lasting peace.

A participatory development model for empowerment at grassroots and regular election under the proportional representation system are important elements in a

democracy. But, when plurality makes a strong nation, this cannot happen in the true spirit if the communities within a nation are not politically represented. There is a need to preserve and protect the culture and heritage of different ethnic communities in Assam. The provision of Upper House in the Legislative Assembly may help in solving the issue of representation.

This study has raised important questions about the ad hoc nature of the peace processes initiated by the government. The analytical review of the four peace accords has thrown light on the status of implementation as well as strengths and weaknesses related to the accords and the peace processes. Though both the Bodo Accords have clauses pertaining to minority rights, they do not contain sufficient legal provisions to safeguard the rights of non-tribal communities. When the BTC Accord provides reservation of 30 council seats for the ST population out of 46, the Bodos actually form less than 30 per cent of the total population. This implies that the accord has not treated all citizens as having equal rights. On the other hand, neither the UPDS nor DHD Accord includes the provision of minority rights. But the two accords do not provide any reservation for any particular community.

The fact that both the UPDS and DHD Accords have not attained Constitutional amendment implies that the development activities undergoing in the concerned districts do not really suggest implementation of the accords. The ad hoc approach of the government is reflected in clubbing together of the review meetings as well as reports of the meetings with these two groups. As these are separate groups claiming to represent different sets of communities belonging to different territories, it appears that they need to be addressed separately.

Relief and rehabilitation forms an important provision of any peace accord. However, no visible rehabilitation could be observed regarding UPDS and DHD cadres while rehabilitation of certain BLT cadres is still awaited. One main reason found to be attributed for this has been non-transference of the department of relief and rehabilitation to BTC from the Government of Assam.

Results of this study indicate that the pull factors for sustenance of insurgency can be economic, political and social in nature. The insurgent groups of Assam have been

capitalising on the general perception that the Central Government has been exploiting the resources of the State since Independence. ULFA has always been holding the opinion that the Centre has demonstrated a step-motherly treatment towards Assam and that the Central Government can allow Assam to fix the oil royalty, if it intends to. This realisation of deprivation and alienation acted as a constant push to ignite the fire of rebellion among the youths.

The politics of aspiration played a critical role in encouraging and sustaining insurgency. The insurgent group called Bodo Liberation Tigers was able to enjoy political power after signing a peace accord with the government. This has served as precedence to other insurgent groups.

Poor governance is a major cause for sustenance of insurgency in Assam. ULFA could create a Robin Hood image during the early years of its formation by punishing criminals, helping the needy and the poor, capturing and punishing rhino poachers, making temporary embankment to prevent flood, constructing temporary bridges, initiating cooperative farming etc. mainly in the rural areas of the State. Poverty, competition for scarce resources and identity-based rivalries, lack of accountability of the government officials, corruption, siphoning of development funds to the insurgents are also responsible for continuation of the conflict. A vicious cycle is formed. Sustenance of insurgency resulted in increased dependency on security forces.

Political instability, absence of political will of the elected representatives to solve the problems faced by the people of the State are some other factors for the sustenance of insurgency movements in the region. In the absence of a holistic approach to the problems, agitations consolidated and transformed into violent armed insurrections.

6.3 Significance of the Findings

The findings of the present study complement those of earlier studies. Thus insurgency was found to be the consequence of decades of exploitation, neglect and alienation on the part of the Union government, fuelled by a notion of identity and aspirations among the people.   Even after Independence, successive governments have turned blind eye to the genuine demands of the people, expressed through democratic movements. When democratic protests led by liberal and mild people

failed to produce results, people's discontent has a tendency to find expression through violent protests.

The empirical findings in this study provide a new understanding about the lacunae in the government's peace strategies:

i. There is no clear policy to determine the representativeness and level of significance of a particular militant group. For example, it was the Central government that directly initiated peace talks with the ULFA or the NSCN-IM. But when the time came for talks with the NDFB, the Centre asked the Assam Government to take the initiative and carry the dialogue forward. The NDFB rejected the proposal forcing the Centre to initiate dialogue on its own with the Assam government being a party to it.

ii. Lack of inclusivity. For example, peace accords have been signed with particular insurgent groups, while other groups operating in the same territory have been excluded in the peace process. Again, while negotiating with an insurgent group, no attempt has been made to first unite the different factions of a particular militant group so that a comprehensive peace agreement could be reached. The result is that insurgency continues with the factions outside the purview of the peace process, often intensifying their violence.

iii. Insufficient understanding of the causes behind occurrence of conflict. This resulted taking hasty decisions while responding to insurgency violence. Such decisions often created multiplication of conflict. For example, when the central government extended ceasefire agreement with NSCN-IM to all the Naga inhabited areas in the neighbouring states in 2001, it created another round of conflict in Manipur because half of the state territory is mostly inhabited by Naga tribes. So the Meiteis in Manipur perceived it as a threat to territorial integrity of Manipur and resorted to mass protest. Such piecemeal solutions have produced negative results.

iv. Inadequate networking for peace. Peace networking in the region would go a long way to promote a culture of peace and dialogue, especially with the youth taking the lead role. It is expected to increase mutual understanding in the region by supporting different social and cultural dialogue and self expression through the modes of modern information and communication.

v. There is a need for capacity building for resolution and transformation of conflict in the region. The government by partnering with the civil society may take up projects that focus on areas such as conflict analysis and early response strategy, skill development for conflict transformation and a conflict sensitivity approach towards development.

vi. The study found that gender issues did not get adequate importance in the peace processes and policies. Women form half of the population and their role is important in ensuring lasting peace. Inclusion of women in peace processes and negotiations is significant.

vii. Low initiative in addressing post-conflict situations. The field data of the study revealed that when there has been visible emphasis on bringing an insurgency movement to a peace process, one may notice minimal emphasis towards addressing post-conflict situations such as different rehabilitation measures including trauma counselling, health and education, human rights violations etc.

viii. Insurgency and violent conflict has become a commonplace affair in the region experienced by several generations. Ethnic violence may attribute negativity and a dangerous future for the youth and children. The near absence of peace education campaigns is a cause of concern. In this context, peace education for the children and youth will be able to contribute towards peace-building.

ix. The findings also suggest that there is a lack of coordination between different state and non-state peace-building initiatives. This has also attributed to trust deficit among the peace actors.

The result of the findings suggests that an ad hoc approach falls short of addressing a serious issue like combating insurgency. A holistic approach involving all agencies operating on the ground with total support from intelligence gathering system and well trained and well equipped army will manifest a strong resolve of the government. This will instil confidence in civilians as well as security forces by causing panic in the rank and file of insurgent outfits.

Notwithstanding the relatively limited sample, this work offers valuable insights into possible flaws in the government's peace strategies and existing policies. The

methods used for this study may also be applied to future studies in a different place in the world.

6.4 Limitations

The scope of this study was limited in terms of peace accords, insurgent groups, geographies and time horizon. The delimitation has helped to focus the study for relevant research findings. The study has not provided any detailed discussion on the insurgencies and peace processes in the other north-eastern states such as Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram and Nagaland because it was not possible for a lone researcher to cover such a broad area within a limited time period. Therefore, the present study concentrated mainly on the government's approach to peace by exploring the implementation process of the four peace accords signed in Assam as well as on the different dimensions of the insurgency conflict and its treatment by the state.

Given the sensitive nature of the issue, primary data collection for the study has been a difficult task. The small sample size of the Interviews did not allow to cover all the possible perspectives of diverse stakeholders in the region. Moreover, the study continued over an extended period of time during which the political situation as well as the ongoing peace processes experienced several twists and turns.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The present research has thrown up many questions that require future investigation. Further research should be undertaken to explore into the issues that remained unanswered at present. Issues or problems that may be taken up for future research include:

1) ULFA's claims concerning the whole of Assam and the increasing aspirations and claims of different ethnic groups within the territory of the state have potential for further conflict in the state.

2) It would be interesting to compare insurgency related experiences of individuals within a particular community at various levels of the society.

3) Another possible area of future research would be to explore further how the concept of non-territorial autonomy could be a possible solution to ethnic insurgency in the region.

6.6 Policy Recommendations

For the realisation of India's peace-building potential, the country needs to have a comprehensive and viable peace strategy. It is only through a policy framework that this strategy and a vision for peace can be achieved. The policy framework must take cognizance of the provisions of the Indian Constitution. It should include both human security and national security as inseparable issues that require linkage between state security establishments and peace-making institutions. There has to be a continuous engagement between policy makers and peace building actors.

6.6.1 policy guidelines.

Initiatives for peace must be guided by certain norms, values and principles. A framework for peace policy has to guide stakeholders in working towards sustainable peace. A regional perspective in the framework is expected to address varied nature of the conflict. The peace policy should aim at preparedness, prevention, alleviation and resolution of conflicts at local, district, state, regional and national level. The policy must contain a vision and mission with focus on peace and security of the country and strive for sustainable peace through collaborative institutional network between the government and the non-state actors. Implementation, monitoring and evaluation of conflict sensitive planning should form the guidelines of the policy. Some other policy guidelines include:

➢ Respond to early warning and emphasis on prevention of conflict, rather than waiting to respond a conflict after it escalates. Networking between the state, private organizations, general public and civil society is crucial.

➢ Every citizen is entitled to live in a peaceful and secure environment. During policy interventions, it must be seen that human rights are respected and protected in accordance with international human rights laws.

➢ Peace initiatives and actions must take into account the political, economic and social dimensions of the conflict. Interventions therefore must be sensitive

towards the cultural values and practices of the concerned communities. In the process of helping different communities, there can be cross cultural activities which can further promote unity and brotherhood among the communities.

➢ The peace policy should be participatory in nature where the civil society and all the stakeholders can be involved.

➢ Gender sensitiveness, transparency and accountability are other important aspects to be covered by the policy.

➢ The policy must be unambiguous, deriving its legitimacy from the consent of the Parliament and should leave some degree of flexibility to the government to modify its strategy from case to case basis while upholding the basic tenets of the national peace policy intact.

6.6.2 structural components of peace-building.

i) National Peace Council

There has to be a joint effort by the government and the civil society organisations for the formation of a National Peace Council. This is a multi-agency organization that may coordinate and deal with all the peace related activities in India. It will build inter-group trust and confidence; create space for dialogues, negotiations and reconciliation at state and community level. Its aim is to manage and resolve the conflict in non-violent ways. The institution must include the Prime Minister's Office, all government ministries and departments and umbrella civil society organisations.

ii) State level Peace Secretariat

iii) Peace Forums at District, State and National level

iv) Village and Block level Peace Committees and Units to support mediation

Each of these components should be designed as independent and complimentary in nature. As far as policy review and policy updates are concerned, it depends on the dynamics of the conflict. If this structure becomes a part of a formally approved peace policy, stakeholders across the region will be encouraged to work more intensively on peace building initiatives and adopt a collaborative approach towards conflict prevention, management and transformation. Such coordinated peace-building intervention plays significant role in resolving conflict successfully.

Recurrence of violence in different parts of the region is a result of uncoordinated efforts to manage the conflict. It is believed that formation of a peace policy would go a long way to improve coordination in the prevention, mitigation and management of conflicts. At the same time, this will ensure that peace processes are participatory, culturally sensitive, transparent and accountable. Further, the peace policy will provide a legal framework for allocation of resources to peace interventions by the government. This will help the government as well as the civil societies to address the conflict issues in a timely manner.