

# A Report

## MAKING WOMEN COUNT FOR PEACE: GENDER, EMPOWERMENT AND CONFLICT IN SOUTH ASIA



*Organized by The Calcutta Research Group  
In collaboration with The Peace Research Institute Oslo*



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*Making Women Count for Peace: Gender, Empowerment and Conflict in South Asia*



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## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

With a focus on Northeast Indian experiences and a comparative look at Nepal, this project addresses the role of women in local governance and politics, particularly within the context of peace and security processes, two of the thematic areas highlighted by the call. This is a collaborative effort by PRIO and six partner institutions in India and Nepal: Malaviya Centre for Peace Research (MCPR) at Banaras Hindu University, Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (CRG), WISCOMP in New Delhi, North Eastern Social Research Centre (NESRC) in Assam, Nambol L. Sanoi College in Manipur, and National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) North-South in Nepal. Our goal is to investigate what women's empowerment might mean in different contexts, i.e. in protracted conflict without third party mediation in Northeast India, and a post-conflict setting with heavy multilateral and international involvement in Nepal. Recognising the active but understudied and often unacknowledged role of women in conflict as well as peacebuilding, we approach this question by studying how gendered political power is transformed in conflict, assuming that differences in the forms and expressions of gendered power relations during and after conflict impact on how 'empowerment' might be achieved. By contextualising and tracing manifestations of gendered political power in conflict as well as post-conflict settings, our project will contribute new knowledge on processes of 'disempowerment' and 'empowerment' in conflict and peace building.

### **First Plenary Presentation**

The first presentation under the aegis of this program was made during IASFM 13 in Kolkata on 8 January 2013. India's Northeast has been the centre of ethnic unrest from the time of Indian independence. This region portrays that processes of democratic state formation may not lead to social justice. This is the focus of the longest state-versus-community conflict in South Asia and, therefore, a region of widespread and multiple displacements. The region has witnessed an escalation of violence to an unprecedented scale in the decades between 1990 and 2010. With increasing state-sponsored violence there is also a tremendous increase in sub-national militancy and suppression of women. What is also revealing are the coping mechanisms people resort to, at times of shock and conflicts, given the limited public infrastructure, depleting resources and constant threat to one's life. Being a woman in a conflict situation is particularly challenging, as she is more vulnerable to sexual abuses and forced trafficking. As a refugee she is expected to rebuild homes, resettle and rehabilitate families and protect the young, old and the disabled. The discussions were pegged around the theme of how migrant subjects articulate their rights and negotiate with the conflict environment. The need to articulate a pan-Northeast-Indian identity while asserting the gendered nature of forced migration despite internal differences was expressed.

What came out through the presentations on the theme of conflict and displacement and the role of women's groups is how narratives of violence and protests have come to consume the collective consciousness and structures everyday life in Northeast India. Pointing to the discontentment surrounding war and conflict in the Northeast, Rakhee Kalita, Associate Professor, Department of English, Cotton College

State University, Guwahati, India described the typical role played by women combatants in the region, their lives and misfortunes. She raised her concern about the fate of these women following the liquidation of their groups particularly in Assam? While male cadres get inducted into the mainstream, women disappear altogether. She revealed how some ex-women combatants have tried to cope with their predicament in a post-conflict situation. She pointed to the exemplary role played by these women in peace-building measures in the Northeast. She also raised the unfortunate issue that women are rarely represented in peace-building measures.

N Vijaylakshmi Brara, Associate Professor, Manipur Studies, Manipur University, Imphal, India pointed to ethnic markers as the paramount prism through which gender, class and individuals is understood in the Northeast. The way in which bodies, events and processes get instantly ethnicised is what fragments the body social. While self-determination is championed at the level of the community, yet these are forsaken leaving the society divided often leading to the collapse of the social order.

Khesheli Chisi, Former President, Naga Mother's association, Nagaland, and Gina Sangkham, Secretary General, Naga People's Movement for Human Rights, Kohima, emphasized on how conflicts in the Northeast have been between states and communities. The impact of these conflicts on women has been particularly devastating. The threat of violence as a result of the operation of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (Afsa) is a serious issue, since it has been instrumental in spreading different forms of violence upon women. In this context, women often begin to act as shields for the sake of their families with resultant vulnerabilities. The primary requirement is an awareness of the law.

Shiva Kumar Dhungana, Nepal Institute of Peace, Kathmandu spoke of how women constantly face threat of violence and are misled into human trafficking in Nepal. This is compounded by the fact that it is well-nigh impossible for these women to tell the world about their suffering. Repeated silencing of their voices and under-reporting of cases of intimidation and torture of women is widespread. Why, despite the presence of protocols to prevent and suppress trafficking in persons and measures to implement them, these have not led to better outcomes for trafficked persons? Such is the situation because implementation in itself is at low premium in Nepal. The institutional challenges to implementing effective anti-trafficking measures and protection for trafficked persons need to be further scrutinized. What is required, as Dhungana said, is capacity building and coordination of efforts at the regional, national and global levels against trafficking as well as strengthening gender-sensitive approaches to anti-trafficking efforts, so that women can participate in public affairs and stand up for their rights.

## **Research Undertaken**

Two principal researchers and two associate researchers were engaged in this study. Our researchers collected data with special reference to Indian's northeast to find suitable answer of the question: Are women emerging as separate force in peace politics?

Paula Banerjee visited Agartala, the capital of Tripura three times to meet Manik Sarkar, the Chief Minister of the state and had a long discussion on the situation of women in Tripura. She also met the commissioner and the members of the State Women's Commission; Phulan Bhattacharyay, the Social Development Officer; Sobha

Debbarma, Representative of Indigenous Women's Forum and some of the leading media persons of the state to understand the role of women in local governance and politics within the context of peace and security processes. She discussed the topic with some of the faculty members of the university and the students from Bengali and indigenous communities as well. Besides Agartala she visited Belonia and Dharmanagar. Anjuman Ara Begum visited different district libraries of Assam including the libraries of State Planning Commission, the State Women's Commission and the High Court to collect pamphlets and data in connection to this study.

It is to be mentioned here that CRG's earlier studies on "Women in Indian Borderlands", "Women in Peace Politics", "Peace Processes and Peace Accords" and "Abiram Raktapat: Tripura Narir Sangram" (in Bengali), have helped the researchers to understand the dynamics of the topic.

### **Publications under the Program**

The book entitled *Unstable Populations, Anxious States: Mixed and Massive Population Flows in South Asia* deals with the complexities of displacement that have created massive, mixed flows: refugees, asylum-seekers, illegal immigrants, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and other victims of violence, deprivation, hunger. Persecution and discrimination occur together and the old forms of protection are often inadequate. Against this backdrop this volume deals with the protection strategies in South Asia. This volume has published three interesting articles by Partha S. Ghosh, Paula Banerjee, and Shiva K. Dhungana which can be considered as valuable research material for our ongoing study.

The EPW Volume 49, issue no. 43-44, November 1 2014 published a *Review of Women's Studies*, edited by Paula Banerjee. This issue contained the following articles:

1. "Women, Violence and North-East India" by Paula Banerjee.
2. "Mothers and Activists in the Hills of Assam" by Åshild Kolås.
3. "Why So Much Blood?": Violence against Women in Tripura" by Purna Banerjee, Krishna Banerjee, Meenakshi Sen Bandyopadhyay and Jayanto Bhattacharya.
4. "New Conundrums for Women in North-East India: Nagaland and Tripura" by Paula Banerjee.
5. "The Woman Rebel and the State: Making War, Making Peace in Assam" by Rakhee Kalita Moral.
6. "New Fault Line in Conflict?: Women's Emergence as the Subject of Peace in the North-East" by Ranabir Samaddar and Anjuman Ara Begum.

# **A NEW FAULT LINE IN CONFLICT? SOCIETY, POLITICS, AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE BUILDING IN NORTH EAST INDIA**

**Anjuman Ara Begum and Ranabir Samaddar**

## **Introduction**

Women in armed conflict become a part of the conflict in different ways but mostly as victims or survivors. Available data suggests that women constitute a major portion of the reported victims of present day conflicts. While during the First World War, only 5 per cent of all casualties were civilians, during the 1990s civilians accounted for up to 90 per cent of casualties. A recent study estimated that 3.2 million deaths occurred in internal armed conflicts from 1990 to 1995<sup>1</sup>. As is to be expected, a large part of the civilian casualties will be women, children, the old and the infirm, unable to escape the scenes of conflict. Conflicts have also led women to refugee camps (where basic facilities are mostly non-existent), prostitution, and witness helplessly the loss of lives of their dear ones and livelihoods. During conflict situations gender roles change but not gender relation. Women are pushed to a situation in which they have to fend for their families during conflict situation but at the same time abide by the existing gender relation to maintain their families and existing equilibrium, even though as it is being argued now, women manage in some cases to change the power relations and refuse to be hapless victims. We are therefore reminded again and again of the figure of the Mother Courage in Bertolt Brecht's immortal play *Mother Courage and Her Sons*.

The UN Resolution 1325 adopted in 2000 and few other subsequent global resolutions, recognized women's contribution in conflict and post conflict situation and urged the States to adopt measures to ensure their participation in peace building. Besides these resolutions, in conflict literature and in sociological discussions on governance and peace building today it is recognized that in conflict situation, women often transform into activists or peace negotiators and in the process they address gender and human rights issues. During armed conflict and social collapse, women play an indispensable role in preserving peace and order. They hold community together by stepping out of socially ascribed roles and transform gender stereotypes and open opportunities for empowerment. Still in this discourse on impact of conflict on women, we do not have enough investigation and analysis of the structure of women's participation in peace building and reconstruction during conflict and post conflict situation. One of the puzzles of such an analysis has been, and possible less acknowledged and addressed is that when we recognise women as a subject of peace, have we not already made a conceptual shift from conflict template to a post-conflict template even when conflict and peace building may happen at the same time? Therefore while we may speak of the same group in the same historical time we are even if unknowingly speaking of two different registers. How shall we take into account the

double register when we want to understand women counting for peace? We hope to shed some light on this question towards the end of this article.

In North East India (NEI), armed conflicts are ongoing for last several decades. Women became a part of this conflict as victims and survivors, combatants, peace activists/ negotiators, household heads and women in different employments traditionally dominated by men. However, there are factors that marginalize women's participation in conflict mitigation and peace building. Women's status in the society and participation in decision making bodies is one such area. Women are rarely involved as equals as per men during peace building processes, despite women's tremendous efforts for peace. This is connected to the existence of gender inequality in society at large, which implies that women end up struggling to be seen and recognized as key partners for community development and peace building. This becomes conspicuous when we take into account the fact that modern development policies pursued by a neo-liberal state have resulted in a number of social features that have not left the women of the region unaffected.

The problem, which this essay seeks to explore to some extent, then is: What is the structure that frames women's participation in the politics of peace? In the North East (NE) what are the factors that facilitate and constrain women's public activism in the time of conflict? More importantly, how do these structural features impact on the general struggle for ending conflict and ensuring human securing, particularly how do these factors feature in the governmental map of peace building? In a scenario where peace building is dominated by public policies and governmental vision of peace marked by neo-liberal vision of development, what odds does women's peace activism face?

This essay will examine from this angle some of the aspects of women's social, economic, and political situation in North East India and analyze factors affecting women's meaningful participation in decision making in armed conflict situation. Conversely this description will also reflect on some aspects of government's pacification and peace building strategy.

There are certain caveats also in the present analysis. First, For the purpose of this essay we have left Sikkim out of this analysis. Second, the aspects we have presented here are partly selective. The essay is not comprehensive in its data coverage. Third, this essay is written as part of a collective research. Therefore it does not repeat the arguments and facts mentioned in other essays. Finally, this is not an article on gender inequality, though the theme of inequality forms part of the backdrop of this analysis. This is an initial attempt to understand the social constitution of women as the subject of peace.

## **Insecurity and Security in the Time of Conflict**

**Impact of Special Security Laws on Women in North East India:** The Government of India (GoI) has sought primarily to defeat or contain movements for self-determination in the NEI with military force. NEI is both highly militarized and under-developed because of this strategy. An estimated total of 500,000 armed police and military personnel are stationed in the region. The ratio of security personnel to the civilian population in general is high, even though accurate information in this regard is difficult to get. For instance, in Manipur the ratio of security personnel to civilians is 1 to 40.<sup>2</sup> The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) was enacted in 1958 to contain

militant protests and has been in force since then. This has been the reason behind many atrocities committed by state security forces and underground groups.<sup>3</sup> AFSPA's provisions grant the Indian armed forces extraordinary powers, including the use of lethal force, the right to enter and search premises without a warrant, and the right to detain and arrest suspected law-breakers.<sup>4</sup> AFSPA fosters a culture of unaccountability thus furthering indiscriminate killings. Lethal force is authorized against any person acting in contravention of any law or order and arrest and search and seizure of private property are allowed on the basis of "reasonable suspicion". The Act also grants immunity for the Indian armed forces by stipulating that "No prosecution, suit or other legal proceeding shall be instituted, except with the previous sanction of the Central Government, against any person in respect of anything done or purported to be done in exercise of the powers conferred by this Act".<sup>5</sup> Despite a Report by an official Committee that reviewed the Act in 2004 and recommended repealing it, the Act has not been withdrawn. For 20 years, various women's organizations and international human rights organizations asked for its repeal.<sup>6</sup> Recently, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders and Extrajudicial, Summary Execution joined this chorus of protest, recommending the GoI to repeal the Act.<sup>7</sup>

**Violence against Women under AFSPA:** In April 2013, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women visited India. During her visit to Manipur, women's network *Women in Governance (WinG)* submitted a long memorandum to her. Excerpts from the memorandum read as follows<sup>8</sup>: In Northeast India women are caught in between violence by state and non-state actors. In such prevailing situation, it has been proved that AFSPA fosters a culture of impunity in carrying out counterinsurgency operations and gives armed forces immunity to commit rape and molest and mutilate women under the cover of AFSPA. In this situation and given the existing patriarchal relations in the NEI, as conflict exacerbates the existing power relations, women suffer increased levels of gender based violence. In response to the insecurity, men have imposed even more stringent restrictions on women's freedom of movement. Discrimination against women is widespread in NEI and incidents of physical and sexual violence are frequent. Women suffer due to their identities as mothers and wives; they have been used as couriers and human shields during the conflict. Both state and non-state actors have resorted to gendered forms of violence such as rape and physical assault. In this generalized condition of war in the region women in the NEI have become the worst victim. In course of this article we shall come to some details on this.

Impunity for sexual violations committed by armed forces has been established as a *de-facto* norm. A member of the armed forces who has been accused of rape can only be tried by Army court. The Army Act 1950 severely limits the means to review judgments of the Army court by civil courts. A recent study by *WinG* found that out of the studied twenty five cases of sexual assault dating back since 1990 only two cases were processed so far. The remaining twenty three still await investigation and trial, years after having been submitted. In a recent judgment, the Supreme Court stated that crimes of rape should be excluded from the immunity clause<sup>1</sup> enjoyed by Indian security forces'.

**Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression (WSS):** A press conference in Delhi on December 10, 2012 highlighted the case of molestation of a girl in Assam by

armed forces deployed there.<sup>9</sup> WSS pointed out that “the impunity stemming from laws regulating the security forces such as the Army Act, which places criminal acts perpetrated by army men while on active duty, such as rape and sexual assault, outside the jurisdiction of the ordinary criminal justice system. The prior right of the army and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) to seek custody of accused personnel under their respective Acts, for prosecution through court martial, and not before the ordinary criminal court, is a complete violation of the victim’s right to remedy and justice. Court martial trials adjudicated by officers belonging to the same security force as the accused personnel do not pass the test of a trial by an impartial and independent court. These laws allow the security forces to be Judge, Jury and Prosecutor, encouraging impunity. These extraordinary powers and the immunity provided under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), and section 197 of CrPC ensure absolute denial of justice to the victims of these violations, including grave crimes of murder and sexual violence”.

The literature of the women’s groups has reported in details the impact of special security laws like AFSPA<sup>10</sup>

**Women’s Participation in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations:** Several studies have categorized women’s situation in such generalized condition of war and violence. Some categories that suit the situation in Assam are as follows:<sup>11</sup>

- *Women as victims and survivors:* Most of the victims and survivors are women and children. It can be stated that women bear the major burden of the violence in conflict affected areas.
- *Women as combatants:* In any armed conflict female combatants have been a constant presence though their voices are not systematically documented or their roles are overshadowed as compared with their male counterparts as combatants.
- *Women as peace activists/negotiators:* Several women turn into activists or peace negotiators in order to address gender and human rights issues. We can say that today there is a proliferation of women's local grassroots movements, as well as nationally and internationally organized movements, which are more coherent and more inclusive and representative of the interests and needs of diverse communities of women. During armed conflict and social collapse, women play an indispensable role in preserving a semblance of decency and order. They hold the community together by stepping out of the socially ascribed roles and thereby transform gender stereotypes and open opportunities for empowerment.
- *Women as household heads:* Killing of men and men leaving their homes to join insurgency movements have resulted in growth or increase of female headed households in an area where armed conflict has happened. As an example, the report of the National Commission on Women (NCW) on *Violence against women in Northeast India: An Enquiry*, notes that the conflict in NEI has resulted in an increase in female-headed households.<sup>12</sup>
- *Women in employment opportunities:* Gendered labour division has impacted on women and most of the time women are forced to take up meagrely paid jobs or compelled to subscribe to micro-credits schemes. Besides, trafficking

becomes obvious as women are in search of better opportunities and thus become the objects of direct physical exploitation.

In short, in the condition of active armed conflict in the NEI since independence in 1947, the status of women status has changed overtime and their experiences have been multilayered. Women experienced sexual abuse, mental and physical violence; they got killed and lost near and dear ones. In the ongoing peace negotiations where government and the militant groups are engaged women are at times invited. But their voices are not included and their experiences are not taken into account while peace deals are drafted. Women are excluded in this way from the decision making process and their leadership capabilities remain unexplored and unexploited. On top of all these, patriarchal controls are clamped harder on women due to inter ethnic tensions in society, such as limiting their mobility and imposing dress codes on women.

**Militarization and Army Demography:** On 12 February 2012 the Chief Minister of Assam demanded 125 companies of paramilitary forces in Assam due to ethnic conflict in BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District) areas of the state as the 86 companies deployed in the state was "not sufficient".<sup>13</sup> This demand was made in addition to the existing state police force. The state of Assam has 330 police stations to cover 80,000 square kilometre area and senior security police officer demanded that 'ideally there should be one police station to cover an area of 150 to 200 square kilometre and one in 100 square km in the sixth schedule areas.<sup>14</sup> Tripura, where insurgency is countered successfully accordingly various claims of the government, still registers high presence of armed forces. According to a source number of security personnel in Tripura are as follows: State police: 10425, TSR: 13388, Home guard: 1421, SPO: 3566, CRPF: 30 companies, BSF: 90 companies, CISF: 1 unit, Assam Rifles: 28 companies and Paramilitary forces that are withdrawn from the state are as follows: CRPF: 3 unit (18 companies in 2009) and 1 unit (6 companies, in 2010) totalling 24 companies<sup>15</sup>.

However, the exact number of army personnel deployed in NEI is not known. Information about army deployment was denied even to the parliamentarians.<sup>16</sup> The region has remained under conditions of heavy militarization and state repression for a long period of time.<sup>17</sup> Information about army deployment and their operations are not in public and is protected by exemption under Rights to Information Act 2005. By an Assam government notification even information on state forces undertaking operation with the army is exempted from Right to Information Act 2005 (Orders by the governor no. PLA.38412005/54 Dated: 8th March, 2006 and No. PLA.384/2005/55 Dated: 8th March, 2006). This notification says that in Assam, Special Branch, Assam Police, Criminal Investigation Department, Bureau of Investigation of Economic Offences (BIEO), Assam Police Battalions, Assam Police Task Force, Indian Reserve Battalions, Commando Battalions, Assam Home Guard Battalions, Assam State Police Border Organizations are exempted from the purview of Right to Information Act 2005 and also information relating to deployment and movement of force, security arrangements in respect of individuals, organizations, and vital installations, also relating to operations against extremists, terrorists, insurgents, and their /outfits and anti-national elements, information on details of ceasefire and negotiations, identity of informers giving information on extremists, terrorists, insurgents and anti-national elements, information

as regards activities and movement of extremists, terrorists, insurgent and anti-national elements, identity of officers involved in operations against extremists, terrorists, insurgent and anti-national elements are exempted from disclosure. It is also reported that four of the NE States would have Counter Insurgency and Anti-terrorist Schools (CIATs).<sup>18</sup> Of the 20 CIATS to be set up, 13 schools have already been set up and are functional. In the North-east CIAT will be located in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura. Though militancy is on the wane in several NE States, these schools will be set up in order to deal with the future “threats which can never be ruled out”.<sup>19</sup> The process for raising all-women companies have also started by the government and army. It will take about three years. Some 3,300 women are expected to be recruited.<sup>20</sup>

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs data, 79 armed groups including splinter groups are active in north east India.<sup>21</sup> Groups of surrendered militants often comprise of a small section of women cadres. Statistics on women cadres is not available; however information on surrenders and MOUs (memorandum of understanding) signed gives a glimpse of women combatants. On 13 February 2013, three Meitei insurgent groups in Manipur signed MOU with the Government of India and the State Government of Manipur in order to join what a report called the “mainstream”.<sup>22</sup> The three groups joining the peace process and consisting of 197 cadres had women members also. Again, a total of 2,009 cadres of the Dilip Nunisa faction of Dima Haram Daogah (DHD-N) surrendered on March 9, 2013. Those who surrendered include 691 armed cadres (39 of them women) and 1,318 over ground workers known as “public relations officers”.<sup>23</sup> It is too early to comment if in this situation when gender roles change gender relations also change.

Trafficking in sex and labour in and from the region adds to the existing insecurity of women. Displacement leads to trafficking, and though we are not discussing here displacement of women (on which there are some research articles and reports<sup>24</sup>), we must take note of trafficking in the region as one of the worse forms of gender insecurity. Assam and Meghalaya have become what one report terms as “the epicentre of human trafficking” due to floods, disasters, and conflict induced displacements. Women and children are trafficked from camps. For instance in 2013 over 400,000 people became homeless in four districts in western Assam, two districts under the administrative jurisdiction of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) - Kokrajhar and Chirang - and two districts of western Assam (Dhubri and Bongaigaon) due to violence. Many took shelter in make shift camps which did not make the lives of the displaced any more secure. Here is one representative picture:

**Table 1: Children Missing in Assam 2011-2012**

<b>Missing</b>		<b>Traced</b>	<b>Untraced</b>
<b>Male child</b>	494	283	211
<b>Female Child</b>	1071	682	389
<b>Total</b>	1565	965	600
<b>Adult male</b>	687	356	331
<b>Female Adult</b>	1243	668	571
<b>Total</b>	1930	1024	902

Source: (accessed on 14 January 2014)  
<http://nedan.in/publications-1/Grim%20Situation%20of%20Trafficking%20in%20Person%20from%20Assam.pdf>

One report commented as the year 2012 was ending, “As Delhi convulses in deep anger and anxiety at the gang-rape of a 23-year-old last Sunday, quietly in the North-East hordes of women continue to be put up for sale - for work as bonded labourers, as wives to men around the country too old or infirm to get one, and as prostitutes in the brothels of the country. In fact, so blasé and open is the trade that there is a price fixed for each category -- Rs 1 lakh for marriage, Rs 1.5 lakh for prostitution and Rs 5,000-Rs 6,000 for bonded labour... Children from the North-East, mostly minor girls, are trafficked for being used as domestic helps in metros and are physically abused and sexually exploited as well. Every year, 4,000 children go missing from the state. On Thursday, Dispur police rescued a 15-year-old Assamese girl from Haryana. Earlier, the Hatigaon police arrested two men, Md Abdul Rashid and Rafiqul Islam, for selling two girls, hailing from the city's Hatigaon area, in New Delhi. Assam police have arrested 449 persons so far this year in relation to trafficking cases. According to state home department records, during 2012, a total of 2,109 cases of abduction of women were registered in Assam, of which 1,398 were rescued from various places. At least 894 women, mostly in the age group 15-30, were rescued from outside the state.

The largest markets for trafficked NE women are metros like Delhi and Mumbai, and states like West Bengal, Goa, Kerala and even Arunachal Pradesh. According to official records, 117 Assamese women were rescued in Maharashtra, 173 in the border areas of Arunachal Pradesh and 13 in Delhi between January and December 2012.”<sup>25</sup>

Another report from Meghalaya said, “The problem in the North East is quite distinct from the rest of India. We share many international borders, most of which are open and unmanned...Obtaining accurate numbers is difficult because human trafficking is an illegal enterprise. All statistics relating to human trafficking are either estimates or just reflect the number of cases reported, which is ultimately a fraction of the number happening. It is mainly thanks to accounts from rescued survivors and interviews with family members that the picture of human trafficking is slowly emerging and being explored gradually but thoroughly in the North Eastern states of India.”<sup>26</sup> And yet another report on Manipur roughly from the same time (1 May 2011) added,

After a large number of children who were taken out from Manipur illegally on assurance of providing better job or education facilities but found kept in inhumane condition in children homes in other parts of India or abroad, two young girls, who too have been taken away from Churachandpur district under similar condition 8 years back, have reportedly communicated to their family members to rescue them...

The two girls, who are related as sisters, have been allegedly taken by some members of Zomi Mothers Association after extracting the consent of their mother for keeping them at a children home in Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu in 2003. Although the sisters were lodged in the children home since 2003, family members could not establish any contact with them until Nov/Dec last year. All these time, members of Zomi Mothers' Association have been assuring the family members that the two girls are safe and sound and are living happy. However, the two girls have spilled out the beans in the

first opportunity of talking with their family members. The two girls have informed the family members that the children home they are staying in is like a jail... There are no facilities for medical treatment in case of illness and each of the inmates is allocated only one set of cloth. They are allow to stay and study only inside the campus of the children home and no other children from outside are allow to study along with the inmates in the same school. The inmates are also being ill-treated without any rhyme or reason. The two girls are the daughters of one Khupthianthang, who was killed in the Kuki-Paite clashes of 1997...<sup>27</sup>

What is noticeable in all these reports is the strong emphasis on the need for punitive measures against the traffickers without ever reflecting on as to why punitive measures fail. These reports ignore two aspects of the situation: (a) the thin line between trafficking in sex and trafficking in labour; and (b) the at least partial willingness of the girls and women to move away from what they consider as “trapped situation” to any possible work elsewhere. And all these happen in the backdrop of an increasingly vociferous policy from the top (the national and state capitals of the region) of deterrence, rehabilitation, and resettlement of the victims. The policy invariably fails. We must see the play of myriad micro-insecurities in this light: the insecurity on the ground of unemployment and exploitation and the insecure world of jobs elsewhere, while the macro-structure of security is increasingly elaborated and refined from the top.<sup>28</sup>

### **How are Women doing in this Situation? Issues of Insecurity and Violence**

In the NE women have resisted in a number of ways violence and the all enveloping insecurities of life and population. There are various reports and chronicles on this. One of the earliest studies done at the beginning of this century brought out in details the different ways women have mobilized for peace and security of life – in Nagaland, Assam, etc.<sup>29</sup> The present volume has a companion article chronicling the story of Tripura sharing the same approach in many ways. This report therefore will not duplicate those accounts. However perhaps it will not be out of order to begin our understanding of women working for peace in the region with a reference to the Meira Paibis of Manipur. Such a reference, even if brief, along with the accounts just referred to, will give us some idea of the challenges and obstacles women face in counting for peace.

#### **The Meira Paibis of Manipur and the Double Nature of Women’s Movement:**

One can trace back the history of today’s Meira Paibis to the days of the Nupi Lan or women’s war in 1904 and 1939. Beginning as a protest against price rise, the demand extended over to administrative reforms against the oppressive economic and administrative policies ruled by the Maharaja of Manipur and the Political Agent of the British Government. There were social sources of women’s power of this kind. We are not going into that discussion now. Only one instance will suffice. In the old days every male between the age of 17 and 60 was required to place his services at the disposal of the state, without remuneration, for a certain number of days. The male member of the family remained out of the house and women were thus compelled to engage in small

trading activities to maintain their families. In this way sections of the trade came under the hands of women in the form of Women's Markets. Historically speaking, the Meira Paibis were preceded by the Nisha Bandis who came into force in the 1970s. During that time, Manipur was flooded with drugs, narcotics, and alcohol as a result of which young boys and men succumbed to addiction. This gave rise to numerous crimes, public disorder, wife-beating and other forms of gendered violence. Meitei women took upon themselves the responsibility to control the rising disorder in the society. Ordinary women started forming groups and doing night vigils/ and patrols in their respective localities to restrain the drunken men. In late seventies insurgency began in Manipur. It was declared a disturbed area and the Armed Forces [Special Powers] Act 1958(AFSPA), was introduced in the state in 1980, which legitimized full-scale military operations, permitting even a non-commissioned officer to kill anyone on mere suspicion with guaranteed immunity. The Nisha Bandis or the women vigilant groups with firewood on bamboo sticks as torches marched on one occasion to a police station to get a villager released. With this, the Nisha Bandis turned into the Meira Paibis or Women Torch-bearers. The women then formed a forum called the All Manipur Women's Reformation and Development Samaj in 1980.

The women torch bearers are more organized than before. They work at state, district, and local levels. As an observer commented, "Every woman who is a Meitei is a Meira Paibi in a crisis situation".<sup>30</sup> If in any army combing operation a Meira Paibi gets the information that the army is coming to their village or locality, she will beat the electric post with a stone so that all others can come out of their houses and form a human shield to prevent the Army from entering their houses to search. Still, young men are randomly picked up, women raped, and people killed on suspicion of being insurgents. There are now more than one state level Meira Paibi organisation. Ideologically, the Nupi Samaj is supported by UCM (United Committee of Manipur) and the Poirai Leimaro by the AMUCO (All Manipur United Clubs Organisation). The structure of the Meira Paibis is loose and strong at the same time. When there is a crisis situation the women gather as Meira Paibis. The issues may range from stopping neighbourhood fights, theft, countering threat of extortion by underground groups, settling complications arising from extra-marital affair, to countering combing operations by the Army. Politically the women at the forefront of the Meira Paibis are mostly Meiti-nationalists. They have not taken any initiative to bring reconciliation among Meitei and Naga women in Manipur. In fact they have joined the general Meitei demand that T. Muivah (leader of the NSCN-IM) should not visit his home village Somdal in Ukhrul district of Manipur. On several other occasions the Meira Paibis played active roles to reinforce the demand of keeping the territorial integrity of Manipur intact. This should not be taken as unnatural when one sees that the Meira Paibis are parts of the apex bodies of the Meiteis, namely the United Committee of Manipur (UCM) and All Manipur United Clubs Organisation (AMUCO). As an observer has commented, the Meira Paibis are increasingly in the forefront of political mobilization, and while they stand for non-violence, in the current political turmoil of the Manipur State the forums they are parts of have justified the heavy deployment of armed forces in Mao gate region to suppress the Naga supporters assemble to welcome the Naga leader, T. Muivah.<sup>31</sup>

In some sense, the political challenges faced by the women's movement in Manipur are not unique to it. Paula Banerjee showed in her seminal work on women's

movements in the NE, women have organized as mothers, wives, daughters, and as sisters, as well as cadres of nationalist movements of the Assamese, the Nagas, the Meities, and the Mizos.<sup>32</sup> Thus it is difficult today for the women's movement to proceed in the form of the Meira Paibis in Manipur for peace and justice as it is caught in the triangle of three identities: nation, community, and gender. As a result, there is at times an absence of direction. According to one report, women torch bearers who in Manipur have for long shouldered the responsibility of defending human rights with the aid of the symbolic use of Meira (fire) as a weapon declaring a just war have now lost some momentum. "The ever increasing number of organizations in the name of women, mostly funded NGOs, seems to have stolen away from them not only the sanctity but also the very human resources from the Meira Paibis on which the latter thrived. The money of the NGOs has inadvertently played the part of leading the women away from classic Meira Paibi activism, the catalyst being the promise of capacity building and training of alternative means of livelihood, such as soap making, manure making, etc. Yet we must not sit on a judgment seat here. With conditions of unemployment and lack of other opportunities of social activism women do join with a purpose, though this a phenomenon linked to a broader question, that of globalisation. In such a scenario, however, doubt has been recently expressed if existence of Meira Paibis is under jeopardy".<sup>33</sup> While the criticism of the NGOs therefore may not be fully valid, the observation about the loss of focus may have some truth. The vulnerability of the Meira Paibi is evident in long-term campaigns. Without effective strategy planning efforts for instance against the AFSPA fizzle out, and women gradually become confined to welfare activities, with consequent lack of cohesiveness. The role of the educated middle class women becomes critical in such situation, while at the same time there is a lack of their participation in the Meira Paibi movement.<sup>34</sup> With globalization the conundrum posed by the middle class women to the traditional women's movement is acute.

The strength of the first Meiras came from the fact that Lourembam Ibomcha, the boy taken to the police station, was innocent and they rallied to save him. In the words of Ima Ramani, "We struggled because the boy was innocent. We came up as Meira Paibis to save Manipur (from being a land of blood and tears)",<sup>35</sup> and this inspired many women in successive years to come out of their homes to save the youth from many a death, disappearance, illegal torture and extra-judicial killings.<sup>36</sup> The words of these valiant Imas came true once again in the most powerful way 24 years later when on 15 July 2004 Ima Ramani and 12 other women stripped in front of the Kangla Fort to register their protest against the arrest, torture, rape, and extra-judicial killing of Manorama Devi. It was an act of defiance and courage that shook not only the Indian sub-continent but the world over. The accomplishments of the Meira Paibi movement have now been recognized as a lesson for the women's movement in the entire country and the NE in particular, and those who study it. With the iconic indefinite hunger strike by Irom Sharmila in support of demand for the removal of the AFSPA, which has made over 55,000 members of the Indian armed forces immune for any of their actions, and several other protests by women and the entire society, the armed forces had to vacate the Kangla Fort in 2004 after occupying it for 113 years since 1891. The area was handed over to the civilian authority and opened up to the public. The challenge is how to retain in this changing time this spirit which taught an entire generation of women and men to work fearlessly for peace – and we have to keep in mind amidst the impact of globalization, nationalist and ethnic polarization, not to speak of the vote mobilizing

politicians armed with money and other resources.<sup>37</sup> What makes the challenge acute is the fact that despite the leadership they have shown, the Meira Paibis at home continue to be subordinate to a highly patriarchal structure. Meitei women acknowledge that although they run the main markets and are visible in public spaces, they have no right to inherit property, the dowry system still operates, women's literacy levels are substantially lower than those of men (though the literacy gap in Manipur is coming down: in 2001 it was 18.17 and in 2011 it came down to 13.32<sup>38</sup>), and very few of them hold public office.

To know the larger picture of the achievements of and obstacles to the women's movement for peace in the NE we have to look into some of the other aspects of the scenario, because politics can tell us only this much about the security and insecurity of women's lives. In such background we must turn our attention to the society at large. This will also enable us to understand as to why peace politics begins in the NE with social criticism and as if in a paradoxical way politics only in the form of social criticism can oppose the existing politics of insecurity, powerlessness of the people, and their dispossession - precisely what the Meira Paibis and Naga Mothers' Forum (the other well known instance of women's activism in the region)<sup>39</sup> have practised through the years. To understand the exact location where women are in peace movements in NE India it is essentially to look at how much resources they garner. This is what we have done in the larger research work within the project.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> "Women, Peace and Security", United Nations 2002, available at - <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/eWPS.pdf> (accessed on 30 July 2013)

<sup>2</sup> Van Lierde (2011): 14.

<sup>3</sup> Paula Banerjee and others, "Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace, and Security" in the Context of Finnish Development Policy with case studies from Kenya, Nepal and North-East India", (Helsinki: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010), p. 255

<sup>4</sup> Redress, Asian Human Rights Commission and Human Rights Alert (2011), "The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 in Manipur and other States of the Northeast of India: Sanctioning repression in violation of India's human rights obligations", available at: [http://www.redress.org/downloads/AFSPA\\_final\\_180811.pdf](http://www.redress.org/downloads/AFSPA_final_180811.pdf). (accessed on 13 July 2013)

Reference text of the Act

<sup>6</sup> Banerjee and others, "Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace, and Security" in the Context of Finnish Development Policy with case studies from Kenya, Nepal and North-East India", p. 263

<sup>7</sup> "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Margaret Sekaggya's Mission to India (10-21 January 2011)", February 6, 2012 (publication details needed), paragraph 145

<sup>8</sup> Mimeo.

<sup>9</sup> See AFSPA, Army Act and the Police: The (Im)Possibility of Justice for the Citizen Victim?, Report of the Fact Finding Team on Sexual Assault in Dolopa, July 2012, available on [http://wssnet.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/dolopa\\_factfinding\\_report.pdf](http://wssnet.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/dolopa_factfinding_report.pdf) (accessed on January 27, 2013)

<sup>10</sup> Some of the writings are: Preeti Gill, The Peripheral Centre: Voices from India's Northeast (Delhi: Zubaan Publication, 2010), Roshmi Goswami and others, Women in Armed Conflict Situation (Shillong: North East Network, 2005), C-NES Study, Bearing Witness: The Impact of Conflict on Women in Nagaland and Assam, available on <http://www.c-nes.org/wp->

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<sup>11</sup> Anjuman Ara Begum, “Sexual Violence and Impunity in Assam”, (Guwahati: Women in Governance Publication, 2012)

<sup>12</sup> “NE conflict led to rise in female-headed households”, The Financial Express, New Delhi, Jan 28, 2005, available at <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/ne-conflict-led-to-rise-in-femaleheaded-households/125198> (accessed on November 28, 2012)

<sup>13</sup> <http://ibnlive.in.com/generalnewsfeed/news/the-meeting-attended-by-top-police-army-and-paramilitary/965505.html> (accessed on 13 March 2013)

<sup>14</sup> “Treat State law & order as national issue: DGP”, Report by R Dutta choudhury, Assam Tribune, 10 May 2013 -

<http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=may1013/at06> (accessed on 5 July 2013)

<sup>15</sup> Reply of Home Department of Tripura to MLA Bijoy Hrangkhawl on Date of reply 1-11-2010, Assembly admitted starred question no. 30.

<sup>16</sup> Lok Sabha unstarred question no. 3329, answered on March 16, 2000, answered by Ministry of Defence, source [www.loksabha.nic.in](http://www.loksabha.nic.in) (accessed on 15 August 2012)

<sup>17</sup> Ben Hayes, ‘The Other Burma’,

<http://www.tni.org/sites/www.tni.org/files/download/theotherburma-webspreads.pdf>

(accessed on 28 July 2013)

<sup>18</sup> Special Correspondent, “4 NE States to have anti-terror schools”, Assam Tribune, March 3, 2011

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Staff Correspondent, “Insurgency in NE on the decline: DGAR” – The Sentinel, 27 August 2011

<http://www.sentinelassam.com/meghalaya/story.php?sec=2&subsec=8&id=87361&dtP=2011-08-27&ppr=1#87361>

(accessed on 14 June 2013?)

<sup>21</sup> Lok Sabha unstarred question number 15738, April 30, 2013,

<http://mha.nic.in/par2013/par2013-pdfs/ls-300413/5738.pdf> (accessed on 13 February 2013)

<sup>22</sup> North East Newsletter, Feb 2013, Ministry of Home, Government of India

<sup>23</sup> South Asia Terrorism Portal Newsletter, 8 April 2013

<sup>24</sup> One of the earliest and comprehensive studies on this, Paula Banerjee, Samir K. Das, and Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhuri (eds.), Internal Displacement in South Asia: The Relevance of UN Guiding Principles (Delhi: Sage, 2005); Monirul Hussain, Interrogating Development – State, Displacement and Popular Resistance in North East India (Delhi: Sage, 2008); also Samir K. Das (ed.), Blisters on their Feet: Tales of Internally Displaced Persons in India’s Northeast (Delhi: Sage, 2008)

<sup>25</sup> “Traffickers target northeast Indian women, sell them like cattle”, a Times of India report by Pranjali Baruah, 23 December 2012 - [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-12-23/india/35981961\\_1\\_human-traffickers-ne-women-bachpan-bachao-andolan](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-12-23/india/35981961_1_human-traffickers-ne-women-bachpan-bachao-andolan) (accessed on 14 January 2014)

<sup>26</sup> “Human Trafficking in Northeast India”, Meghalaya Times, 1 October 2012 –

<http://meghalayatimes.info/index.php/archives-old/57-state/state/11555-human-trafficking-in-north-east-india>

(accessed on 14 January 2014)

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<sup>27</sup> “Human Trafficking”, <http://manipuronline.com/headlines/human-trafficking/2011/05/01> (accessed on 13 January 2014)

<sup>28</sup> On the theme of macro-security and micro-insecurities, see Ranabir Samaddar, “The Insecure World of the Nation” in R. Samaddar and P. Banerjee, *Migration and Circles of Insecurity* (Delhi: Rupa, 2010), pp. 1-69

<sup>29</sup> Paula Banerjee, *Borders, Histories, and Existences – Gender and Beyond* (Delhi: Sage, 2010)

<sup>30</sup> Shruti Mukherji, “Meira Paibis: Women Torch-bearers on the March in Manipur”, *Mainstream*, Volume XLIX, No 1, December 25, 2010 (Annual 2010) – <http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article2533.html> (accessed on 10 January 2014)

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>32</sup> *Borders, Histories, and Existences – Gender and Beyond*, op.cit.

<sup>33</sup> “Is the Meira Paibi Movement Facing Extinction?” –

<http://www.thesangaiexpress.com/tseitm-30311-is-the-meira-paibi-movement-facing-extinction/> (accessed on 10 January 2014)

<sup>34</sup> For figures relating to class, age, and rural/urban composition of the Meira Paibis, Oinam Shuraj, “Women’s Movement in Manipur: A case Study of Meira Paibi Movement”, Unpublished Ph.d thesis, Department of Sociology, Nagaland University, Lumami, 2007, pp. 152-156

<sup>35</sup> Quoted from a report by Binalakshmi Nepram, “A Narrative on the Origin of the Meira Paibis” [http://www.e-o.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=leisure.Essays.A\\_Narrative\\_on\\_the\\_Origin\\_of\\_the\\_Meira\\_Paibis](http://www.e-o.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=leisure.Essays.A_Narrative_on_the_Origin_of_the_Meira_Paibis) (accessed on 11 January 2014)

<sup>36</sup> Oinam Shuraj in the thesis, “Women’s Movement in Manipur: A case Study of Meira Paibi Movement”, documents 13 rape cases committed by security forces, 15 enforced disappearances, 41 extra-judicial executions, 19 cases of torture, and 14 cases of massacres by security forces. – *op.cit*

<sup>37</sup> See also in this connection <http://manipuronline.com/headlines/meira-paibis-link-with-militant-outfits-exposed/2010/10/18> (accessed on 11 January 2014)

<sup>38</sup> Figure for 2001 taken from the National Human Development Report 2001, and figure for 2011 from [www.indiastat.com](http://www.indiastat.com) – cited in Bidisha Mahanta and Purushottam Nayak, “Gender Inequality in Northeast India” (2013) – [http://mpr.aub.uni-muenchen.de/43846/1/MPRA\\_paper\\_43846.pdf](http://mpr.aub.uni-muenchen.de/43846/1/MPRA_paper_43846.pdf) (accessed on 15 January 2014); Table 1

<sup>39</sup> “The Naga Mothers Association (NMA) was formed in 1984 in response to the drug and alcohol addiction ravaging Nagaland at the time. “Every Naga tribe had a women’s wing, women were strong in the church’s activities. But with NMA they came together in an organised manner,” says Sano Vamuzo, one of the network’s founders and, at 80, an active adviser to NMA. NMA’s constitution mandates that every adult Naga woman is automatically made a member with an annual membership fee of Re 1. Leaders are selected from among members nominated by each of eight Naga tribes. “In the beginning, the biggest issue affecting homes was drug addiction,” says Abei-U Meru, also a founder and now NMA president. “The mothers came together because it was hurting every home.” Along with spreading information, NMA started a rehabilitation centre. In the 1990s, it played a pioneering role in tackling HIV and AIDS. In September 1991, recalls founder memberformer president Neidonuo Angami, they visited the HIV-affected in Manipur Jail. “Food was thrown at them, such was the stigma. We were the first to go in and shake the patients’ hands.”

Through the 1980s and 1990s, NMA addressed the violence that tore Nagaland apart: atrocities by the Indian army against Naga groups and civilians, and then years of fratricidal killings between various Naga factions. “Daily gun battles would see two or three boys shot dead outside our homes. We would bring the shrouds for them,” Meru recalls. NMA made ‘Shed No More Blood’ its motto — one the women have gone to great lengths to uphold. Every time tensions simmered, they took off in a car on barely-there roads into the jungles of Nagaland and

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neighbouring states to urge leaders of factions to talk; NMA's only demand that peace be maintained. Ever since the 1997 truce between Naga groups and the Centre, NMA's been active in negotiations to settle the vexed issue of a homeland for all Nagas. But the ceasefire hasn't meant an end to the violence. In 2010, the NMA helped calm one of the most tense situations in recent years after two young Nagas were shot dead by the army at Mao town on the Manipur border. "For eight days, villagers refused to claim the bodies, tensions escalated on both sides," says Rosemary Dzvichu, a university professor and NMA adviser. Stopped by the army at every step, Dzvichu and Meru pushed through security cordons, shrouded the bodies and took them to the boys' families." – A Times of India report by Rukmini Shrinivasan, 10 January 2013 - [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-01-10/india/36257221\\_1\\_nma-abei-u-meru-nagaland](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-01-10/india/36257221_1_nma-abei-u-meru-nagaland) (accessed on 15 January 2014); also see Paula Banerjee, Borders, Histories, and Existences – Gender and Beyond (Delhi: Sage, 2010)

## **WOMEN, CONFLICT AND GOVERNANCE: THE CASE OF TRIPURA**

**Paula Banerjee**

In a number of ways Tripura presents us with an interesting paradox. A very small state in the North-eastern corner of India, it is arguably considered as one of the best governed states of India. Yet in certain basic indicators it falls far short of what is the norm or what is expected from a state that is well governed. Given below are some indicators that will illustrate my point.

**Table1: Comparative Sex Ratio**

	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Tripura	904	932	943	946	945	948	961
India	946	941	930	934	927	933	940

Source: Compiled From Census Reports

**Table 2: Comparative Literacy Rates**

	INDIA	INDIA	TRIPURA	TRIPURA
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
2001	75.26	53.67	81.0	64.91
2011	82.14	65.45	92.18	83.15

Source: Compiled From Census Reports

**Table 3: Comparative Work Participation Rates**

	1993-	1994	1993-	1994	1999-	2000	1999-	2000
STATES	RU	RAL	UR	BAN	RU	RAL	UR	BAN
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Assam	497	409	515	101	422	310	399	100
Tripura	522	128	497	124	504	73	494	75
Nagaland	439	216	378	99	518	441	393	199
Manipur	477	308	434	223	495	253	445	211

Source: Human Development Report 2007

Tripura ranks higher than many of the north-eastern states in terms of sex-ratio and literacy rates as the tables above clearly portrays and it is definitely higher than that of the country as a whole. Yet in terms of work participation rate for women it is lowest in northeast India especially under a government that is considered as gender-sensitive. The Gender Development Index (GDI) is also reflective of this dichotomy as Table 4 portrays. Tripura is high up in the list of equally distributed education index and equally distributed health index. Yet in terms of equally distributed income index it is lower. Also Tripura is often described a well governed state with a “fairly honest” leftist government. Most social scientists make a correlation between good governance and protection for women. Yet Tripura has some of the highest crime rates against women. These dichotomies make it imperative that we do an in-depth study of Tripura, which is an under studied region compared to Assam, Nagaland and Manipur.

**Table 4: Comparative Analysis of GDI 2007**

	Equally Dist	Equally Dist.	Equally Dist	GDI
	Education Index	Health Index	Income Index	
Tripura	0.72	0.79	0.18	0.56
India	0.62	0.78	0.21	0.54

Sources: Compiled from Census 2001 and HDR 2007

Flanked by Bangladesh on three sides and Assam and Mizoram on one side Tripura is a picturesque land of hills, valleys and small rivers that mostly dry up in the winter months.

The partition in 1947 left princely Tripura with no choice but to join one of the two postcolonial South Asian nation-states – India or Pakistan. After much palace intrigue and political activity, the Regent Maharani Kanchanprava Devi decided to exercise the Instrument of Accession to join India. Tripura became part of India on 15 October 1949. For Tripura’s indigenous population this created a different set of problems. According to Subir Bhaumik a leading analyst of Tripura, “the Partition and Tripura’s merger with the Indian Union opened the floodgates of Bengali migration from East Pakistan that forever changed the demography of the erstwhile princely state, leading to a fierce ethnic conflict that ravaged the tiny state with more than three decades.”<sup>1</sup> Between 1952 and 1956 1,90,000 displaced persons entered Tripura.<sup>2</sup> Although that conflict is all but over it has left behind debris in the form of social tension, masculinisation and lumpenisation of society and crimes against vulnerable groups, which instruments of governance are hard pressed to tackle proving that without social justice there might be ceasefire but peace is difficult to achieve. Conflict might be kept in abeyance but other polarisations take over leading to enormous threat to the security of vulnerable groups of whom women are one.

## **Displacement and State Formation**

Tripura’s path to democracy was tortuous and it was incorporated as Part C state and was administered by a Chief Commissioner. Initially the state was turned into a centrally

administered area that was governed by an Advisory Council composed of two Congress leaders and a retired public servant. From the beginning the Congress leaders were pro-settlers.

**Table 5: Decadal Variation and Tribal Population**

YEAR	Total Population	Decadal Variation	Total Tribal Population	Percentage of Tribal Population
1921	304,347	32.59	171,610	56.37
1931	382,450	25.63	203,327	52.00
1941	513,010	34.14	256,991	53.16
1951	639,028	24.56	237,953	37.23
1961	11,42,005	28.71	360,070	31.50
1971	15,56,342	36.28	450,554	28.95
2001	31,99,203	16.03	993,426	31.05

Source: Compiled from census reports of GOI

It is said that the end of princely rule in Tripura left the indigenous population feeling marginalised. All through the pre-colonial period, the region faced successive migrations from the east and each successive group of Mon-Khmer tribe came and displaced the others. But during the time of the Manikya kings Bengali's were encouraged to come and settle in Tripura. Bengali's were expected to maintain the structure of a modern day administration. Routinely they were also issued jungle-avadi leases to clear out large tracts of forest land and initiate settled agriculture that had the potential to multiply revenue. Even before partition Bengali migration was substantial, but as Table 5 suggests partition opened the floodgates and changed the face of Tripura forever. Even 1921 reflected a decadal growth rate of 32.59 per cent. But in 1941 and 1971 the decadal growth rate reflected an all time high of 34.14 and 36.28 per cent. By 1951 the tribal population had reduced from 53 per cent to 37 per cent.

**Table 6: Displaced Between 1947 and 1971**

YEAR	No. DISPLACED
1947	8124
1951	184000
1952	233000
1957	57700
1964-65	100340
1967-68	12299
1969-70	4334
1971 (upto March)	5774
Total	6,09,998

Source:<sup>3</sup>

As the table 6 shows between 1947 and 1971 there were 609998 displaced people in Tripura. Initially the Congress leaders ruled Tripura and they were unabashedly supportive of Bengali settlers. Tripura faced popular uprisings almost immediately after independence. The Communists, who led the tribal uprising in Tripura, called off armed struggle in the early fifties and joined Indian-style electoral politics. But since the 1980 ethnic riots, Tripura has witnessed periodic bouts of tribal militancy, with the Bengali refugee population its main target. Under the Congress rule the tribal land was thrown open to refugee settlement, resulting in large-scale displacement of tribal people from forest lands. The Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms (TLR&LR) Act of 1960 was amended in 1974 to legalize the transfer of all tribal lands up to 1968.

## **Ethnic Conflict and Women**

Militancy affected death of women is difficult to come by in Tripura. “According to figures furnished by Chief Minister Manik Sarkar who also holds the Home portfolio as well a total of 1,718 persons including women, children and members of security forces lost their lives in militancy related violence from April 10, 1993 to February 28, 2001. Apart from this, 1,961 persons were kidnapped by militants between April 10, 1993 and May 31, 2000.”<sup>4</sup>

## **Voices and Reports**

“That was a Ramzan month. Following our dinner I was gossiping with my grand daughter. Suddenly, one person called me from outside – Dadu (Grandfather) open the door. I saw Halflong Jamatiya and Chhalagazi Jamatiya entered. They asked me whether I had complained against insurgents in a peace meeting and then brandished a pistol and raped her before me.” This is how Sabuj Mia reported about the rape of his thirteen year old grand daughter to Meenakshi Sen Bandyopadhyay who represented the Tripura Women’s Commission.<sup>5</sup>

“According to Tripura Women’s Commission Report, first rape was committed on Meher Bibi (name changed). As she did not make any complaint Halflong and his accomplices Chhalagazi Jamatia, Afurai Jamatia and Kalagazi Jamatia became bolder and kept on prowling in the village for months.” No victim fearing backlash reported these incidents either to the local police station or the political parties.<sup>6</sup>

“Padmabati Debbarma was kidnapped from her father.s house in village Gayapara in West Tripura District in April 2001 by Rabicharan Debbarma, belonging to the banned insurgent outfit, NLFT. Forced to live with him as his wife Padmabati found herself completely stranded when Rabicharan was killed by security forces in an encounter. Her parents were reluctant to take back their daughter fearing for their own lives. The village they lived in was in the grip of another rebel faction, the ATTF. Taking advantage of the situation, Prasanjit Debbarma a middle-ranking leader of the INPT, gave her shelter. But under the guise of being her custodian and protector he allegedly raped her repeatedly. She has been unable to escape despite many futile attempts.”<sup>7</sup>

“Within Hejmara Block in Chonkhola and Chachu bazaar there was a case of molestation and rape that was investigated by the Tripura Women’s Commission. On 28/9/08 the members of the commission visited the area. Representing the commission

were Member Secretary Archana Bhattacharya and Srimati Shiuli Debbarma. They spoke to the victims and came to know about the involvement of two TSR Jawans. Both the Jawans were arrested.”<sup>8</sup>

“On 12 May 2007 8 tribal teenage girls were returning from the Dalak Mela when they were tortured and raped by a number of young men (the ethnicities of these men were not mentioned). The people of Tripura rose in protest against this heinous act. The members of the Women’s Commission rushed to meet these girls on a fact finding mission. They met the victim’s families. They investigated the incident thoroughly. They also advised the local government to compensate these 8 girls”<sup>9</sup>

The years from 1979 until 2009 were particularly difficult for women in Tripura. Each riot saw an escalation of attacks against women. It all came to public cognizance after the 1979-1980 riots. The Dinesh Singh Committee Report said that 1300 people were killed in these attacks. A massive 3,72,048 people were affected of whom 2,27,499 were Bengalis and 1,44,549 were tribals. 1,89,919 people were displaced and over 34 thousand houses were burnt. There was a property loss of Rs. 20,91,63,614. The state government did not accept the report but most respondents agree that the mayhem was massive. It all started on 5 May 1980 in Guliraibari village of West Tripura. 50 tribal men attacked a makeshift camp of Bengali labourers in the middle of the night. In that camp there were Manipuri labourers as well but they were not targeted, showing that it was a pre-mediated crime. The attack on Nirmala Sundari Debnath shows that even women were not spared.

The Guliraibari case was followed by the infamous Mandai massacre. After Nellie this is considered as the most infamous massacre in the Northeast. In Mandai, which is in West Tripura, 300 Bengali settlers were butchered. The tribal women who had married Bengali men were informed sometimes by the end of May 1980 that they should leave their husbands and home. Which shows that there was planning behind the madness. While the government slept these people were killed. The marauders did not spare either women or children. There were chilling stories of how pregnant women died slow bleeding deaths when their wombs were split open. After Mandai the relationship between tribals and the Bengalis were completely polarized. There were hardly any mixed villages and the government encouraged this practice. But perhaps more chilling was the case of Raiyabari where rebellion was transformed into systematic rape of women over days.

Other than rape and murder women were kidnapped, tortured and traumatised by opposing parties during this conflict largely with impunity. Even in the case of Raiyabari Halflong Jamatiya was found innocent of all these rapes by the government appointed commission. Although Halflong was later killed by the police. Even the Women’s Commission rather than putting pressure on the security forces to find the culprits wash their hands off the matter by compensating the victim thereby perpetrating a culture of impunity.

The one initiative, which involved a critical mass of tribal women and enabled them to gain direct access to economic empowerment in Tripura, is the much-discussed World Bank Aided India Rubber Project. The project technically started in 1993.

One of the key components of the project was the ‘Women and Tribal Development Plan’. An economic assistance of Rs.14,000/- was given to each family under the project who planted rubber to raise the income levels during the immature period of the rubber and formation of women Thrift Groups (WTGs) among women

members of beneficiary families. SHGs for male members of the beneficiaries in the name of Rubber Producers Society (RPS) were formed both for thrift and for group action as well.

**Table 9: Involvement in Rubber Cultivation**

	No	Total members	Corpus as on 30/9/99
1. RPSs	118	3891	48.28 lakhs
2. WTGs	122	2045	23.00 lakhs

Compiled from Reports of Tribal District Council

Generally each WTG consists of 10- 15 members who are normally from the same para or village. Two NGOs were engaged by the Development Unit to form these WTGs, and to create awareness and motivation. Development Unit exposed all the members of the WTGs to PRA techniques while forming these groups. The concept of WTGs is to save, borrow, and repay. The WTGs were provided a matching grant to their corpus by the governmental agencies. The group has a president and secretary who were chosen by them democratically.

WTGs paved way for entry of Tripura's rustic tribal womenfolk into economic management. Each WTG has opened a bank account in the nearest bank branch jointly by the president and secretary. The drawal of the money has to be authorised by the WTG meeting resolution, which is held once in every month. So far 12.15 lakhs was taken as loan by the WTGs and repaid 4.94 lakhs. Most of the Women took loans for economic activities like piggery, goatery, cashew, poultry, paddy cultivation etc. The interest on the loan would be decided in the group meetings.

The rationale to form WTGs for the project families was to involve women from beneficiary families in the project, which would have recognizing the role women play, in the success of the rubber project and encouraging them to act as advocates for rubber cultivation in their family and in the larger community. The focus was also to provide income-generating activities independently of RPS and to strengthen the household's ability to sustain during the gestation period of the rubber plantation and to create an institution for women at the grass root level.

NGOs in Tripura have followed the strategy of mobilising the women to form the WTGs by appealing to the solidarity and also showing the incentives of Rs.30,000/- as matching grant. The women were motivated through many innovative ways. Each WTG was provided with a volunteer by the project to interact with the group, and to foster group activity and group dynamics. The volunteer was also to interact with all the members to encourage them and to guide maintenance of accounts. Most of the members of the WTGs are aware of the balance in the bank branches. Activism turned into movement and coupled with political awareness later, women in Tripura made their presence felt in containing armed insurgency by figuring out an alternate means of existence amidst the boiling turmoil.

As per evaluation study of the WTDP, WTGs changed the lives of their female members in a number of ways. The income generating schemes of WTGs have either

increased incomes or increased the assets of the households. The confidence levels among women have increased considerably. Respect to women within the household has increased as a result of their access to money. The success of the WTGs in the project had a multiple effect among the tribal women of Tripura and as a result many organizations have formed WTGs in the state during the last two years. In terms of political initiatives too the Tripura government presents an unusual picture.

The Womens' Reservation Bill or Bill for 108<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution has been pending with constant delays in the Lok Sabha. The Bill which proposes for 33 percent reservation in all state legislative assemblies of the country, was passed in the Rajya Sabha on March 09, 2010. The Lok Sabha still awaits for its final word on it. Tripura set a precedent by passing its own Women's Reservation Bill. It empowered the fair sex of the state by providing 50% women's reservation in both members' and office-bearers' positions in the three-tier panchayat system. The reservation covers panchayati raj institutions (PRI), including Sixth Schedule areas. Panchayat Minister Manik Dey had claimed at the inception of the legislation that the decision would enhance the scope of women's participation in decision-making process and the empowerment of women in political sphere. It may be noted that the womens' reservation in elected public bodies was implemented before the February, 2011 election to village councils under the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council which widened scope of women's participation in the council as well.

Assembly election recently held in February, 2013, in Tripura, testified the growing presence of womenfolk in the political space – both as independent elector and the elected. Tripura elected the maximum of five women representatives out of the total 60 members in the legislative assembly, 8.33 percent to be more particular. With the demand for 33 percent reservation in legislature pending for long, the very fact that Tripura did consider women representation eligible to the highest extent in entire NE, is something in itself. The state has also made its own new record in enrolment as enumerators ahead of the recently concluded election. Ratio of women enrolled across the country stands at 943 per thousand males. Tripura enrolled 963 female voters per thousand males this election season. Long queue of women voters outnumbered their male counterparts in several polling booths of the state. Out of the total of 11, 98,970 male voters in the state, 90.89 percent cast their votes while 93.02 percent of the 11, 56,476 female electorates have exercised their franchise in the polls. The figures are the highest ever participation recorded from females in the state.

Participation of womenfolk of Tripura in active politics is no new practice. Death of Kumari, Madhuti and Rupasri in the struggle against 'Titun system' (bonded labour in monarchical Tripura) at Khamarpara in Padmabil under current Khowai district, activities of Tripura Rajya Nari Samity, which later graduated into Tripura chapter of the All India Democratic Womens' Association, death of Nari Mohini Tripura during struggle against torture of forest officials during Congress regime at Belonia sub-division, contributions of Late Nandarani Debbarma, founding president of the Tripura Rajya Nari Samity, massive participation of women in armed struggle of Tripura Gana Mukti Parishad etc all testify the age-old presence of women in political space. Formal recognition, however, came much with the passing of 50 percent womens' reservation bill in Tripura state legislative assembly. *Ajker Fariad*, a local vernacular daily, writes that Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samities run by female Pradhans are more scrupulous in their account maintenance.<sup>10</sup> The report, however, points out that female elected

public representatives have been merely executive personnel in their debut term. Given that the panchyats are declared women reserved on rotation basis, all female public representatives haven't been fortunate enough of holding the same post of panchayat pradhan for two consecutive terms. However, unlike the panchayats run by male Pradhans where stress is laid on newer ventures of exploring economic avenues, female run panchayats have been found to have laid stress on developing Anganwadi centres, safe drinking water facilities, institutional delivery of expecting mothers etc. The practice has indeed harvested tremendous results as child mortality rate has drastically fallen down.<sup>11</sup> Women are also benefitted tremendously from the Swarojgry schemes of the government.

Women's activism has resulted in improving Tripura's gender related indexes considerably. This is evidenced from the 2001 GDI of some select Northeast states and of India.

**Table 10: Comparative Analysis of GDI's of some NE states**

	Education I	Health I	Income I	GDI
Tripura	0.72	0.79	0.18	0.54
Mizoram	0.87	0.83	0.26	0.67
Manipur	0.72	0.85	0.18	0.58
Assam	0.61	0.76	0.10	0.49

Source: Compiled From Statistics Presented in Tripura HDR 2007

Recognition in political and economic space attained by women enabled them to participate in the erstwhile male dominated political decision making process both during and after the peak years of armed tribal insurgency in Tripura. Interviews with ten random female Pradhans of Gram Panchayats in different sub-divisions of Tripura have shown that none of them are aware of the United National Security Council Resolution 1261 (1999), Resolution 1265 (1999), Resolution 1296 (2000), Resolution 1314 (2000) or the Resolution 1325 (2000). Interviews with activists of the Tripura Mahila Shanti Sena (TMSS), who had an active role in counter-insurgency sensitization in the early 1990s and veteran activists of the Tripura Adivasi Mahila Samity (TAMS), veteran women political identities – Saraju Dutta, Mangaleswari Debbarma etc give an equally morose picture. Rajlaxmi Devi, former member of the Tripura Commission of Women and one of the veteran leaders of Shanti Sena in Tripura, says that they were not told about any resolutions taken anywhere with gender perspective in armed conflict management. Yet she says that women of Shanti Sena continued with their peace work. “ranging from racial conflict till (sic) domestic violence, the Shanti Sena has got widespread footprints in promoting peace and tolerance through initiatives of the womenfolk in Tripura. At Shanti Sena, we believe that women should get involved in social servicewith more sympathetic ends. However, as far as initiatives of women in mitigating racial and social conflicts are concerned they were not seen much in the post mid-decades of last century.”<sup>12</sup> From Rajlaxmi Devi's we can gauge that the radicalisation of women's participation in independent peacemaking is on the ebb.

It is heard that in the 80s and 90s women in Tripura, took a very active role in peacemaking. Kalyani Bhattacharya runs an NGO called Manabi. During the years of acute insurgency in Tripura, she, coupled with eminent women political activists like Fulan Bhattacharya, Panchali Bhattacharya and others and undertook an initiative to collect 1 lakh signatures solely from women. The signatures were sent to the Peoples' Republic of Dhaka through Bangladesh Visa Office in Agartala. Most hideouts of banned insurgent groups operational in Tripura have been said to be based in the neighbouring country for years. Current officials of the Tripura Adivasi Mahila Samity tell that Late Anurupa Mukherjee, chief of the TAMS till her death in 2000, remained the driving force in sensitization and containment against en masse joining in insurgent groups in several cases. Born in a conservative tribal family and married to a non-tribal (an officer of the Indian Navy), Mukherjee was a symbol of communal harmony in the state. Her commitment to the upliftment of poor tribal women has opened a new chapter in the evolution of NGOs in the development-driven administration of the state. She has played a significant role in the affairs of the state and at the national level in defining and vitalising the role of women, particularly from poorer sections, in community welfare, specially in the fields of education and social service. Mukherjee is said to have boarded tribal women and girls affected by armed insurgency in her residence, provided for their education and livelihood all by herself. The individual initiative was later dropped off and TAMS started organized support systems for such victims. Members of the Tripura Mahila Shanti Sena said that they held secret understanding with security forces and sneaked out into villages on foot in the night where insurgency had hit at its worst. Informal discussions, convincing initiatives on emotive grounds, offering small-scale alternative income generation avenues in such basic levels helped them to further the cause of peace.

It is said that one victory of the women's movement in Tripura is the increase of education among girl children and women in Tripura and an increase in their political participation.

<b>Table 10: Number of Literates and Illiterates among Population aged 7 Years and above and their change: 2001-2011</b>			
Literates/Illiterates	Persons	Males	Females
1	2	3	4
<b>Literates</b>			
2001	2,022,099	1,150,707	871,392
2011	2,831,742	1,515,973	1,315,769
Increase in 2011 over 2001	809,643	365,266	444,377
<b>Illiterates</b>			
2001	740,658	269,516	471,142
2011	395,235	128,540	266,695
Increase in 2011 over 2001	- 345,423	- 140,976	- 204,447

Source: Compiled from 2001 and 2011 Census, GOI

In terms of a number of indicators Tripura presents an unusually positive picture. An interesting feature of this is the parity of wages for male and female workers in the field of agriculture. The other indicator that speaks of a positive female role in Tripura is the low rate of child labourers. By 2001 children in the age group of 5 – 9 years in the urban areas were all going to school and not in any form of labour activities. In the rural areas in that age group no boys and only 0.6 per cent of girls were employed. Among children of 10 -14 years all were going to school in urban areas and only 3.1 per cent boys and 0.3 per cent girls were employed. Yet question remains as to whether in Tripura women could launch a successful women’s movement or not. According to Nandita Dutta, a well known journalist, no women’s movement has ever been built up in the state although in all democratic moves there was a definite participation of women.<sup>13</sup> The question that remains is whether the women’s movement in Tripura has become completely become governmentalised and has lost its critical edge? Allied to this is the question that whatever they improvement has women across communities have received it?

### **Tribal (Indigenous) Women in Tripura**

“As durpa grass with earth and Pothi fish with water.  
So, my love, I am with you.  
While chewing betel I measured the size of my mouth  
And found it is the same as your’s  
While crossing the floor I measured my chest  
And found it the same as your’s...  
I broke and kept a leaf in the laitai and then came  
Why then is your mother calling?  
I cut some wood and kept it in the borung and then I came  
Why then is your mother calling?”<sup>14</sup>

The situation of the indigenous women has changed considerably as a result of Bengali influx and subsequent conflict. The attacks against Jhumias and jhum cultivation has had profound effects on tribal communities. This is probably the first casualty of the tribal people’s brush with modernisation. During the age of Jhum cultivation it is said that there was prevalent bride price. This was indicative of the superior social status of women. Among the Reangs there was one practice and that is known as *jamai-khata*, that was advantageous to women. Yet that practice has become almost extinct today.

**Table 11: Distribution of Rural and Urban Tribal Women Workers**

Catagory	Total	Rural	Urban
Total Population	489106	476917	12189
Total Worker	183612	181365	2247
Main Worker	87272	85165	2107
Marginal Worker	96340	96200	140
Non-Worker	10374	10253	121

Source: Census GOI 2001

In a matter of fact there are a number of indicators that shows that the situation of Tribal men and women is quite good in Tripura. Yet there is a growing gender disparity among the tribal people. When compared with non-tribal women there are some palpable disadvantages faced by tribal women in terms of education and health. But in terms of work participation the tribal women are more advanced than other categories of women.

## Movement and Backlash

There is one indicator that levels much of the gains made by the women. This has to do with crimes against women. Both due to inadvertent masculinisation of society and backlash for women's voices report of the Tripura women's commission clearly shows crimes against women is on the rise.

“Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) found crime against women in Tripura is highest in the entire country. The NCRB report –‘Crime In India-2010’- said Tripura stands rank-one in cognizable crimes against women in the year 2009. According to the bureau in the entire country ‘crime against women’ during 2010 has gone up to 2, 13,585 from 2,03,804 in 2009 registering a 4.8 percent increase.”<sup>15</sup>

One reason for women's inability to handle violence against women of this magnitude is that the institutional Left politics of the state have subsumed spaces where movements such as women's movement or the movement of the indigenous people could exist.

## Conclusion

In Tripura women have won some battles with and against their male counterparts. Today there is a visible backlash. This has tremendously polarized society and the next fracture is on the lines of gender that is plaguing not just Tripura but much of Northeast India today.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Subir Bhaumik, “Tripura: Ethnic Conflict, Militancy and counterinsurgency,” *Policies and Practices 52* (MCRG, Kolkata, 2012) p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> HDR 2007, p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> Gaythri Bhattacharjee, *Refugee Rehabilitation and its Impact on Tripura's Economy* (Omsons Publications, Delhi, 1988) pp. 38-39.

<sup>4</sup> NCW Report,

<http://ncw.nic.in/pdfreports/The%20Impact%20of%20Armed%20Conflict%20on%20Women%20Case%20Studies%20from%20Nagaland%20&%20Tripura.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> *Abiram Raktapat: Tripura Narir Sangbad*, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Eyewitness*,

<http://books.google.co.in/books?id=ubVTbIN9UwsC&pg=PA78&dq=Dinesh+Singh+Report+women+Manas+Paul&hl=en&sa=X&ei=JPiYUYT0IsfprQegs4DICA&ved=0CDEQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Dinesh%20Singh%20Report%20women%20Manas%20Paul&f=false>

<sup>7</sup> NCW Report

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<sup>8</sup> *Jago Nari*, 3<sup>rd</sup> year No. 1, p.8 (Translation by the author).

<sup>9</sup> *Jago Nari*, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, No. 4, p. 7 (Translation by the author).

<sup>10</sup> *Ajker Fariad*, 12 March 2013. P. 1

<sup>11</sup> Most of the information gathered here is a result of author's interview with respondents in Tripura in June/July 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Authors interview with Rajlakshmi Devi, Member, Tripura Commission for Women, Agartala, July 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Author's interview with Nandita Dutta, Journalist *Ajker Fariad*.

<sup>14</sup> A Reang Jhumia song called "*Habai Durpaiba?*"

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.northeasttoday.in/our-states/tripura/ncrb-found-tripura-in-highest-crime-against-women/>

**REPORT ON THE  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GENDER,  
EMPOWERMENT AND CONFLICT IN SOUTH ASIA  
6-8 NOVEMBER, 2014**

The International Conference on “Gender, Empowerment and Conflict in South Asia” was organized by the Calcutta Research Group (CRG), in collaboration with the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) from November 6-8, 2014 in Kolkata. This was the final conference for a collaborative project entitled *Making Women Count for Peace: Gender, Empowerment and Conflict in South Asia*. Funded by the Research Council of Norway’s INDNOR and NORGLOBAL programmes, the project aims to generate new knowledge and debate on women’s empowerment and the challenges facing implementation of UNSCR 1325 in India and Nepal. With a focus on Northeast Indian experiences and a comparative look at Nepal, the project addresses the role of women in local governance and politics, particularly within the context of peace and security processes. It was believed that this conference will contribute new insights to the existing debates on issues of gender and empowerment in conflict-ridden societies.

**Day 1  
November 6**

**Panel Discussion: *Women in Peace: Men’s Voices***

As an inaugural session of the conference, CRG organized a panel discussion in the evening of November 6, at the Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata. It was thought to be an interesting academic gesture to initiate our discussions, debates and commentaries on gender and empowerment while listening to “Men’s Voices”. The inaugural session, therefore, was titled *Women in Peace: Men’s Voices*. Eminent academics and activists were invited to participate as panelists. Bhupen Sarmah, Professor and Director, OKD Institute of Social Change and Development joined us from Guwahati. Hari Sharma, Adjunct Professor, Nepā School of Social Sciences and Humanities, was invited from Kathmandu. Neingulo Krome, Secretary General, Naga People’s Movement for Human Rights was invited from Nagaland. Eminent scholar Roberto Carlos Vidal Lopez, Director, Law School, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana came to participate from Colombia. Atig Ghosh, Assistant Professor at Viswabharati University was invited to present a historian’s perspective.

Prasanta Ray, Professor Emeritus, Department of Sociology, Presidency University, welcomed all the participants of the conference and the audience to the inaugural session. Paula Banerjee, President, Calcutta Research Group, and Åshild Kolås, Research Professor, Peace Research Institute Oslo delivered the inaugural

address. Paula Banerjee mentioned that this conference was jointly being organized by CRG and Peace Research Institute, Oslo. Åshild Kolås shared with the audience how the project *Making Women Count for Peace* came into being. The session was chaired by Ranabir Samaddar, Director, Calcutta Research Group. He introduced the speakers and initiated the session.

The first speaker of the day was Atig Ghosh. He began by mentioning that in recent times, a growing presence of women, especially from developing or struggling economies, in a variety of cross-border circuits has been observed by experts. They include the illegal trafficking in people for the sex industry and for various types of formal and informal labour markets. The key actors giving shape to these processes are the women themselves in search of work, but also, and increasingly so, illegal traffickers and contractors as well as governments of home countries. These are, in many ways, old conditions. What is different today is their rapid growth and their internationalization. Atig Ghosh's paper, entitled *Feminizing Survival, Countering Globalization* tried to map some of the key features of these counter-geographies of globalization. In establishing systemic links between, on the one hand, the growth of these alternative circuits for survival, for profit-making, and for hard currency-earning, and, on the other, major conditions such as growth of unemployment, dispossession, conflict, etc., in developing countries that are associated with so-called 'development', particularly through economic globalization, the paper attempted to study the contours of what may be called the emergent feminization of survival.

The next speaker was Bhupen Sarmah. He addressed the theme of the session in the larger context of gender inequality and violence against women with special mention to Indian Northeast. He described how the counterinsurgency measures of the state often take a violent turn and put the women in these areas in a most volatile situation. He expressed his concern and stated that raising men's voices would be quite important in this context. One also needs to be cautious if state sponsored empowerment of women gets translated into substantive empowerment. The notion of empowerment is also quite gendered and different masculine considerations come into play while effecting certain seemingly benevolent measures like reservation for women. He concluded by saying that we need to look for alternative programmes while keeping in mind how the question of gender inequality is deeply intermixed with various other indices of social inequalities such as caste. The real challenge is to find a political subject who will be in power and position to counter these patriarchal systems and sentiments.

Taking a clue from Sarmah's discussion, Hari Sharma spoke about the experiences of insurgency and women's empowerment in Nepal in the last few decades of conflict. But, he pointed out, there is another scenario which is often neglected in the discussions about Nepal – the case of huge exodus of migrant workers from the country. The violence in the conflict with the state is often held to be the reason of this exodus. What is important here is to remember that men also suffered a lot in these conflicts and could be viewed not only as perpetrators but also as victims of state violence. He also called attention to the romanticisation of the participation of female combatants in the conflicts against the state. But, in a post conflict situation, the condition of these women is frequently overlooked.

Neingulo Krome, the next speaker started with narrating some of the stories from his own personal account. One of them tells how he was saved from the atrocities of the Indian Army by a group of women protesting on the highway on the eve of the

Independence Day. He mentioned a couple of more incidents which clearly show that women emerged as active participants in resolution of conflicts and peacemaking exercises in the Northeast. He expressed his gratitude to these women and commented that the men in this region would benefit a lot if they worked hand in hand with the women's groups who are actively involved in the peace processes.

The final speaker of the day, Roberto Carlos Vidal Lopez, also shared some of his own experiences. Rather than being analytical in his presentation, he chose to excavate his childhood memories in Colombia and spoke about his grandmother and her friends with whom he spent his formative years. All these women were widows whose husbands were killed in political conflicts. He heard from them the stories of their husbands' bravery and honesty. These women also participated in many rituals for remembering the dead. He also recounted fantastic tales about the wars which he had heard from them. Roberto said that now he could understand the solitude and the sense of loss these women had to suffer from in the absence of their partners. The men existed in their lives as ghosts and Roberto's own subjectivity was shaped amid the ghostly presence of these dead husbands and the lively rituals of remembering the past. These stories and rituals opened the possibility of the emergence of a new generation of Colombians enjoying life with their families and friends. They also taught them to celebrate living which, according to Roberto, is the purest form of peace.

The presentations were followed by a lively discussion of some of the issues that came up during the session. It was pointed out that the neoliberal agenda in general is gendered and its morality is shaped by the overarching structures of patriarchy. This structure also incorporates the hegemony of human rights leading to several paradoxes associated with the notion of empowerment. It was also mentioned that the division between globalization and its counter forces could be problematised by questioning the legal illegal binary that often precludes any possibility of overlaps. Some of the narratives presented in the session also came under scrutiny as the active role played by women in social transition seemed quite marginal in these narratives. Hence there could be a danger of essentialisation of the figure of woman as well as that of men's voices in representing it. Also, it was felt that there existed a major fault line between theories of peacemaking and practices of conflict resolution. One could only hope that this gap would come down eventually.

## **Day 2**

### **November 7**

#### **Partners' Project Presentations & Roundtable Discussion**

The second day of the conference was divided in two halves. The morning and afternoon was dedicated to the partners-only session (9.30 am – 3 pm) for presentation and discussion of the chapters for the upcoming edited volume that would be published at the end of the project on *Making Women Count for Peace*. In the evening a panel discussion was organized to be held at the Presidency University (4 pm – 6 pm).

After a brief welcome address by Ranabir Samaddar, Åshild Kolås initiated the morning session saying it would be conducted in the form of a workshop. The partners were asked to present their chapter drafts and deliver comments on each other's papers.

## Session 1: Papers on Nepal

The first presenter was Bishnu Raj Upreti, Executive Director, Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR). His paper was titled *Women in Post-conflict Constitution Making in Nepal: Reflection from the first Constituent Assembly*. This paper concentrated on women's participation in Nepal looking at its impact along with certain questions about its reasons and dynamics in discussing Maoists' effect on women's empowerment. The paper also asked the question as to why the dynamism of women's participation had shifted since the peace agreement. The following points were highlighted:

During the 1st conjunct assembly, primary data i.e. interviews with key stake holders revealed women's political engagement and participation have changed from 2006 because of the rural women's movement. During the 2nd conjunct assembly, the communist party was unable to deliver on women's empowerment and the Maoists have not proved to be much different from the other parties. Although the counter-argument was that they were in the right line, women leaders were found complaining that it was not enough and that the party structure needed to be addressed.

### Comments

Anjoo Sharan Upadhyay was assigned the task to comment on Bishnu's paper. She remarked that the chapter would fill a very big gap in the book. Women's contribution to the assembly has been great, even in terms of participation of a number of women, representing different backgrounds and experiences in the community as well as from among voluntary workers and activists who, it should be pointed out, are very different from the women nominated. The quality of the paper could be improved by looking at these groups of women in the Conjunct Assembly. There are some editing issues and repetition that need attention from the authors. It would be beneficial to look at the various histories of democratization in Nepal and how women have played a part in that process during the 1960s and '70s and again in the 1990s. Anjoo commented that more space needs to be given to the analysis of women's participation in the Conjunct Assembly which could be accomplished through the narratives of the women – those who have shared their views on what can be done – because it is important to get their voices heard.

Rita Manchanda commented that the author needed to be cautious of essentializing and homogenizing the women and recognize their intersectionality. Also, he was asked to keep in mind what was the specific intention of the Maoist movement towards having more women in participation. There is a speculation regarding one of the weaknesses that became a kind of disconnect whereby the Maoists had shifted the locus of the women's movement to the rural women after 2006 and 2008. What was the relationship between the women's movement (NGO and city educated women) and the rural women/Maoists? What was the set back or reasons for this disconnect?

This was followed by the observations by Hari Sharma. He found the analysis to be very important in helping the Nepalese to understand their process so the methodology should be carefully examined. The questions being raised about the difference between the 1<sup>st</sup> Conjunct Assembly and the 2nd Conjunct Assembly could help understand what led to the decline in the quality of women's participation. Why has there been this change? People learned or unlearned something and what could that be?

The social conservative aligned with the radical left in the name of nationalism and women were left behind as it was a union with a group that is very anti-women. How has the “threshold” option decided representation? The paper could examine how in the past federalism left out women’s contributions and address the questions of how the different forms of government affected women’s leadership roles.

Bishnu responded that it would be difficult to bring in the history of the movement because the plan was to have the focus on what is happening now bearing in mind that this is not about women’s issues but rather about politics.

The second speaker was Anjoo Sharan Upadhyaya. Her paper was called *Does International Aid Help Women in Nepal? Perspectives from Nepali Women’s Organizations*. This paper focused on each type of activism whether it was NGO or any other grassroots level organization based. Nepal was extremely dependent on aid and as a result had become crippled. The paper looked at questions of autonomy and empowerment in the grassroots activism versus international aid, thinking about development and long term projects and how that could cripple the process of becoming independent. Nepali women were being considered and constructed as a single unit and this was detrimental. The international community continues to do this with programs that are being supported in public but in private there are concerns being raised about projects not taking into consideration the various needs and how the Nepalese long term goals are different from the international community’s vision. Women working in development issues have a strong tradition in Nepal but one must consider their ethnic diversity. This diversity can be a big challenge as can be seen with the certain rifts forming between various women’s groups due to the essentialization of women’s issues. Donor agencies are prioritizing and influencing what women’s groups are asking for and what is being pushed in the legislation. The leftist movement is looking at exploitation against women workers and gender inequality. This is a voluntary women’s movement with many participants and leaders who have a commitment to social reform. These initiatives come from their own senses without all the interference from the international community. This paper suggests that Nepal should let international funders move away from being so bureaucratic and more focused on long term solutions for women’s empowerment. The paper also looks at how aid money works as an agent for certain political agendas with the party monies versus the NGO development money so basically the question remains as to whether NGO’s helpful or harmful. The conclusion provides a cautious note on the relationship between autonomy and dependency as it is related to international aid.

## Comments

Bishnu Raj Upreti remarked that in agreeing with the concluding points it should be noted that the role of donors has been previously discussed and while interviewing people it is possible to see the role of the instrumental international community in the 1st Conjoint Assembly. There is a question of whether or not the failure could have been because of this interference. There should be more transparency on this issue and documentation of this failure. The donor argument rests in how to have better research with clear goals and methodology without dependency on funding, what is the critical objective of the research, what is the generalization of this type of woman versus that

type of woman, there is so much control and power that perhaps this is damaging with a representation of the ethnic movement being created by the reigning groups and not reflecting the real concerns that you hear when you visit the field, the instruments for peace making and negotiations shifted to more political representations and less from the people so this contesting viewpoints lead to a disconnect in the presentation of women at the local level as compared to the political level, NGOs are so connected to political leaders it is hard to tease out what is happening and why, the Maoist are also looking for a way into this scene, the dollar is not Asian it is just the dollar, researching the role of the international activists on the local and national consciousness and the contribution during the entire process, donors are not interested in the land reform issues because it is not an immediate satisfactory response or tangible result, further critical lens on why it is not working in Nepal this donor culture

Åshild Kolås pointed out that the so-called international aid is packaged as building wells or schools which constructs an ideology or knowledge building that keeps the focus on helping the poor meanwhile the consultancy is focused not on how to aid but how to stamp an approval on agenda that shows results to the donors. What is the learning curve for international NGOs as it effects what is being seen as a crisis on the aid community?

Bhupen Sharma reminded that this was a common issue with NGOs as they are never apolitical and they come to a country with certain ideas and agendas. What are the political agendas that they come with? There is no state regulation so the donor culture can shift the political atmosphere and leadership. NGOs do not see development as a gradual process and progress but only as a series of goals to be met. This is not sustainable and the politicalization needs to be analyzed further.

Hari Sharma took over the discussion once again and said that most of the international agendas revolve around development with many players who take into consideration the strategic placement of Nepal as it sits on the world stage. The perpetual present crisis is always at the forefront whatever that may be at the time. Nepal is considered a success story for the women's movement but if you visit the country it does not always reflect that success. The question remains what is empowerment and this has to be discussed in order to understand how this idea is circulated and developed within the international community.

Paula Banerjee spoke from her experience that she had conducted a five-year study on international aid. There is always someone in the community who will accept this aid, she said. The point should rather be how to change the trend on aid and the development assistance process. The political formation of what is needed and how to use this funding needs to be analyzed further.

The final comment came from Ranabir Samaddar. He posed the question whether it would be important to keep in mind how to look at the question of representation after the conflict is over. The issues that were of much more urgency whether they are democracy or women's issues require immediate representation and that is often given by the international community. This was not always fair and causes regression or setbacks. What happens between the two constituencies is that stability silences other voices for the purpose of moving forward. The critics want immediate democratization without taking time to analyze the issues from the various perspectives. The author, in her response, said that she would take all of this into consideration for the editing process.

Bishnu Raj Upreti then presented his second paper entitled *Women's Struggle and Political Participation in Nepal*. This paper looked at the history and why/how women have come into the various stages of change, gendered politics and the struggle for women's rights, ensuring women's participation is still a big challenge, resisting patriarchal society, since 1980 examining the political process what has happened and why, the effects and women's struggle, phases of the movement, the patronization by the panchayat which certain women being selected to represent and was a struggle showing the various pushing/pulling, 1990s political change and how that differed, start of the Maoist insurgency with parallel women's movement, democratic vs. radical, intellectuals vs. rural exploited women, 2006 forward showcasing the equal opportunities given to women in the negotiation and settlement there is nowhere in which this happening fully as it always a struggle to get that representation in place, changing the Nepali feudal system to more egalitarian is not from political action but the activists and grassroots formation, the political parties will negotiate with women's leaders when necessary and then there is backpeddling and contradictions in what they say and what they do, the local level suffers and leadership is hindered, some small successes are presented as being larger than they are, the grassroots movement have bigger convictions and they can get more results if allowed representation, mostly middle class women are being represented

### Comments

Shiva Kumar Dhungana commented that the paper should define what women's participation in Nepal has been, especially the protests and the women's rights movement, spanning almost 50 years and what real participation is in promoting and influencing political decisions. What is needed to be done, according to him, is to encourage women's participation in other areas of government, not just in number but in quality also. NGOs should "help" women in Nepal and not "empower" them as the latter encourages a macro framework, not supporting women in the rural areas. They must help encourage female leaders in grassroots movement.

The following presenter was Ranabir Samaddar. He presented his work conducted jointly with Anjuman Ara Begum. The title of his paper was *A New Fault line in Conflict? An Exploratory Analysis of Women's Emergence as the Subject of Peace in the Northeast*. The paper focused on women's emergence as public actors (subjects) in peace building efforts in the North East. It had many historical statistics on women and how they had been doing with different indices. Women were not doing badly during this time despite what some other studies pointed out and this is what created controversy on the generalization of the status of women. If women had not been doing too bad in the North East than the Indian state perhaps could evolve a type of government that stabilizes the situation and then of course the women's issue would a big part of that process. All of these social issues and development issues existed ensuring that women are doing well but there are all of these new extracting policies of natural resources in that region that are serving to transform women's labor and change the economic situation drastically. The government's policies and the stabilization of the conflict areas have become contradictory to the extraction economy agenda. There is this word "threshold" being used but this is the cusp of a situation where the segmentation of

women happens and only temporary alliances happen over issues of representation. What does it mean for peace politics and moving forward? The alliances are done to prevent Hindu upper caste domination in the political arena but the alliances between literate women and the government affects peace process. How so? This opens up further discussion on women as subjects of conflict with discontinuities as compared to women as subject of peace.

## Comments

Amarjit Sharma asked for some clarifications from the presenter. He commented that the paper covered many aspects and was very deep but it may not actually answer the question being asked: what are the structures that frame women's participation in the political scene and the struggle to end conflict? How is the government planting a myth of peace building and how are women's activities and roles seen or depicted?

The next comment came from Åshild Kolås. She expressed concern that asking the question "how are women doing" might place this paper strictly in the rhetoric and framework of development. A more pertinent question would be to ask what women are doing: their participation in the workforce and women's health issues.

Bhupen Sarma then suggested that there remained the question of women as active subjects in issues of both conflict and peace. Assam was an example of women belonging to two distinct categories as it pertains to unresolved issues of citizenry. The minority communities (Muslim in particular) were one section of women where there was ruthless exploitation. So the question remains: how can one quantify this when there were so many types of women in various situations? Where are the data coming from and what are the quantifiers being used?

Ranabir Samaddar responded saying that it was difficult to decide the quantitative dimension for assessing subjectivity and political agency. Numbers reflect some of it but mostly one must focus on material condition of a particular subject or even a collective subject. The other important aspect is the desires of the subject: one needs to find out what the subject wants and how institutional resources affect this or can be of help by correlating the war/peace situation with certain material conditions that determine the state of women. How the North-East is changing materially is something that has to be addressed. First, social governments are important with recovery and reform.

Paula Banerjee then discussed her chapter on women as political subjects in Tripura. Her empirical research was based on interviews of 30 women and 10 men along with archival work. The statistics depicted Tripura as an exception in the North East because of this supposedly peaceful life. However, she cautioned, it was important to realize that the area was very complex with many different races and ethnicities living with many other subaltern groups and various agendas and politics often come into play. The question of "what are women doing" is a complicated one because it could be subsumed by other issues. Women have only 8% representation in government. The women's movement had never really happened according to the women's groups. There had been constant conflict for many years and this had left a deep impression. The massacres and extreme violence in the last decade have stopped but there are other instances of conflict with fissures along the lines of tribe, religion, and caste causing considerable tension.

The violence against women is huge despite what the state government said. There was much impunity and denial from the parties and they continue to erase memory so that they can rebuild it along their political lines. She expressed her concern that Tripura women leaders with best intentions were being stymied by the government.

### **Comments**

Shiva Kumar Dhungana observed that the paper successfully highlighted the contradictions and paradoxes as they went against the statistics and numbers. It is true that more women voted in the last election and with the 50% reservation in place yet violence against women is very high. The ethnic conflict was full of kidnappings and rapes of women. The changing economic situation and the end of ethnic violence have led to more violence against women. He commented that it was a very critical and open ended paper. However, Shiva Dhungana suggested that the paper should address issues such as amendment 243D (the 50% reservation of women in panchayats) that had been ignored by tribal councils.

Bhupen Sarma raised some questions. What are the material conditions of life in Tripura? How and why are the villages polarized? He cited the example of one particular village in Tripura that had absolute communal harmony and this can be the example for the rest of the North East. It seems, he said, that women were much more conscious in Tripura than any other state but high rates of violence against women was certainly incongruent with this. How is it possible, he wondered, with all the development, there were still so many issues that needed to be addressed such as gambling, alcoholism, and domestic violence. Could it be this sudden influx of cash that causes the problems?

Paula Banerjee responded saying since it was also from the government that the money was coming and the women were conditioned to accept this money, new alliances were affecting the way Tripura was being governed. While the old groups were not funded, and the focus being on peace and ending insurgencies, the aid did not reach where these women lived.

### **Session 2: Papers on Northeast India**

The first speaker for the post lunch session was Rita Manchanda. She spoke of Nagaland being paradigmatic of India's conflict and peacemaking processes. In Nagaland, one could track the journey of a woman from being a victim to that of an agent. Such a journey had made the women's movement a symbol of social churning in Nagaland. The paper attempted to translate agency as demonstrated by women in peace work. The questions on which the research focused are 1) the limits and scope of peace politics in empowering and disempowering women 2) to see how ethno nationalistic politics has marginalized the role of women in society and in peace making by exploring the various sites of contestation, taking the nature of political economy in Nagaland into consideration and 3) the representation challenge among women who demand to be adequately represented in the political arena. The challenge in Nagaland had always been to find something new. Some of the areas that were picked for field research are Dimapur and Kohima. What came to light in the course of the research was the changing nature of the people in the field of play. The new middle class in Nagaland is characterized by plenty of conflict unlike the traditional tribal Naga household. The

focus of the NMA now was reworking power relations instead of witch hunting and beating up drug peddlers. The Forum for Naga Reconciliation that had been formed to enhance the peace process in Nagaland was a complete failure. In 2008 an attempt was made to revive this. Women in Nagaland are now active participants of this forum. Women have acknowledged their importance in changing the post conflict situation in Nagaland. Men are under pressure from traditional tribal authorities to ostracize women and end up more often than not, in doing just so.

### **Comments**

L. Basanti Devi raised three points in connection to this presentation. First, the conflict prevailing in Nagaland revolved largely around the ceasefire. Second, the researcher had chosen to use the word “post conflict” in her paper whereas this was a misnomer as the conflict was still on. Thirdly, she asked if there was any generation gap in the process of transformation among the women. The presenter was also asked to take into consideration the role of the Meira Paibes for her study.

The next presenter was G. Amarajit Sharma. His study focused on the women in Manipur. His paper was not about the victimization of Manipuri women. The paper strongly argued in favor of the idea of women’s agency and elaborated on how women took part in the current political situation in Manipur. It focuses on some key areas, namely what happens to the marginalized women. The researcher argues that since Manipur did not have any history of woman’s movement as such, the role of women in the peace process was one that became all the more complex. He intended to problematize the notion of space in his paper. He raised the question – how did the idea of space evolve in the study of women in conflict situations? For the marginalized community, the process of reconstitution involved women to re-define themselves within the circle of marginality. The paper had been divided into six sections. The concept of the political situation in Manipur was based on a certain understanding of the conflict situation. One could not see any major violence taking place in Manipur towards women. Men and women in Manipur are involved in a continuous process of negotiation.

### **Comments**

Ranabir Samaddar commented on Amarjit’s paper. He pointed out that in what sense the marginalized society in Manipur is a marginal one needs to be clarified. The main argument in the paper is that the Manipuri women have decided not to join politics. This could be is a political decision, a way of creating one’s own space. The social activism displayed by the Manipuri women raises the question as to the possibility of radicalization of women’s movement. The researcher should enquire as to whether the activism demonstrated so far shows an indication of a radical movement taking place among women in Manipur. One of the crucial points that need to be taken into consideration is that the border areas are always marginal in both the physical and metaphysical sense.

Laimayum Basanti Devi then presented her research on *Meira Paibis: Forms of Activism and Representation of Women in Manipur*. She spoke about the Meira Paibes in Manipur. The nature of conflict in Manipur had always been of a dual nature and more often than not, women have always been involved in protest movements after the occurrence of any incident of violence. The paper sought to examine the nature of women's involvement in the public sphere with reference to the Meira Paibi movement. Identifying the Meira Paibis therefore becomes quite crucial. The Meira Paibis were affiliated to voluntary organizations in Manipur irrespective of whether these were registered. Networking played a crucial role in Manipuri women's politics. The Meira Paibi movement was not one that was limited to mothers only. Streamlining is an important feature of the movement. The protest of the Meira Paibes was not against the AFSPA but against the masculine military machinery that prevails in the state in general. Their focus is on social and community issues rather than gender relations.

### **Comments**

Rita Manchanda expressed her views on Basanti's paper. The first comment mentioned that new dimensions have been introduced to the Meira Paibes question in the presentation. The two new areas are: (1) what success does a movement including the state's attempt to appropriate the Meira Paibes. The role of the state machinery is one that therefore needs to be more clearly highlighted. (2) There is this whole issue of strengthening the woman's movement through memorial activities. Is this a new phenomenon? Finally, the whole issue of the political economy of Manipur and its role in the involvement of women in peace processes is missing.

The final presenter of the day was Arunima Deka. She began her argument by saying that the 37th Amendment of the Indian constitution was an important step towards the empowerment of women in Assam. The paper wished to see the process of grass roots democratization as both an inclusive and exclusive movement. This paper would question the notion of women as a socially constructed entity. Such a notion was based on the idea of the powerful versus the powerless. The personal spaces of women were dominated by patriarchal norms in spite of the success experienced by women in the domain of political participation. The question that arose in the course of the research is why women need to prove themselves to be as capable as men.

### **Comments**

Commentator Priyankar Upadhyay reminded the presenter that women's empowerment was a concept that was full of possibilities. Empowered women promise household and community wellbeing. The paradox lies in the fact as to how in spite of sixty years of democracy, India still scores so poorly in women's studies on a global scale. Not much field work is evident in the research conducted.

## **Roundtable Discussion: *Experiences of Conflict, Gender and Transnational Justice: South Asia and Beyond***

In the evening of 7 November, CRG organised a Roundtable Discussion on *Experiences of Conflict, Gender and Transnational Justice: South Asia and Beyond*. The event was planned to bring the scholars, activists, journalists and students of Kolkata in conversation with scholars from other countries and facilitate a comparative discussion on various issues and approaches on the gender question in multiple contexts. The esteemed Presidency University of Kolkata was thus chosen to be the venue for this public event to make it accessible for a good number of students. Scholars from Colombia, Canada and Norway were invited to share their experiences and strike a dialogue on the fraught issues of conflict, peace initiatives and gender concerns. The speakers were Nergis Canefe, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, York University; Beatriz Eugenia Sanchez Mojica, Assistant Professor, Universidad de Los Andes Bogotá, Colombia; Roberto Vidal, Director, Law School Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Colombia; Åshild Kolås, Research Professor, Peace Research Institute Oslo; and activist Krishna Bandyopadhyay of Kolkata. The event was chaired by Anuradha Lohia, the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor of the University.

Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, Vice Chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University welcomed the participants and the audience to the event. He briefly introduced the project *Making Women Count for Peace* housed at the Calcutta Research Group and stated the details of the conference of which the Public event was a part. Anuradha Lohia, the Vice Chancellor of Presidency University expressed her enthusiasm about gender studies despite being a natural scientist herself.

The first speaker for the roundtable was Nergis Canefe. She talked about the movement of mothers in countries like Argentina and Turkey. These women whose children “disappeared” during different conflicts in these countries came together making claims on justice not only from the state but also from the society at large. These women did not represent any homogeneous group of mourning mothers; there were many layers to their constitution. Most of them experienced vulnerability from the beginning as they were married off quite early in their lives. The demand of justice was not only meant for the lost children, but also for the ones who were responsible for their disappearance. New grounds of passion and unusual claims could be observed in these movements as the real claimants had already disappeared. These unusual claims of justice opened possibility of a new form of society.

Beatriz Eugenia Sanchez Mojica, the next speaker, gave a lecture on women, reparation and transitional justice in Colombia. For over a half century, Colombia had faced complex armed conflict that led to the displacement of 5 million people. Women have been both involved in these conflicts but most of the time this participation was imposed upon them. They were also the victims of displacement and sexual violence due to these conflicts. Feminist organizations started to raise the topic since the 1990s. Various reports by them indicated the vulnerability of women at the face of sexual and other forms of violence. Illegal armed groups, for example, imposed codes of conduct on these women and relegated them to domestic services. It should also be kept in mind that violence against women is ingrained in the Colombian society where the men

manage property. Women do not even have the opportunity to grieve there. Some progress has been made to ensure transitional justice for women of Colombia through several legislations in 1997, 2005, and 2012. But greater importance is needed to be placed on the implementation of these laws and public policies. There should be more training programmes assisted with psychological care for the grieving and displaced women.

The next speaker was Roberto Carlos Vidal Lopez. He spoke about the guerrilla insurgencies in Colombia since the 1960s. His brief sketch described several peace agreements between these outfits and the state. The conflicts started once again when these agreements failed. According to civil society organizations, one of the reasons of the failure of these agreements was the negligence to include women's issues. Even the liberal agenda of the state could not address the question of women's agency and empowerment. New political spaces, Roberto believed, could be attained only by including gender rights and women's issues in the negotiations between the state and the insurgent groups.

Åshild Kolås, the next speaker, talked at length about the United Nations' notion of women's rights. She also highlighted the centrality of gender in peace research. The decade of 1990s saw a change in the outlook of the UN in dealing with women's issues. The year 2000 witnessed the landmark event of recognizing women as actors in peace processes by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. The issues of security of women and their participation in peacemaking exercises were made a part of the UN agenda for the very first time. But still there remains a huge area for improvement. Most countries including India, for example, do not have a National Action Plan for women in peace. It is the reason why the year 2015 is scheduled as the "year of review."

Krishna Bandyopadhyay, the last speaker of the day, shared some of her experiences as an activist involved in the Naxalite movement in West Bengal in the 1970s. She did not join the movement primarily as a woman but as a young student. But she was made to realize time and again by his male comrades that as a girl she should not take part in acts of violence directly. Later she and her friends were designated with nursing responsibilities as if the role of women in politics was only to look after their male comrades and nurse the wounded soldiers to good health. Whenever the female activists protested against these stereotypes they were criticized for having middle class sensibilities. Although she was made to feel unequal by her male comrades, Krishna clarified that she did not have any repentance for her participation in the movement.

The roundtable discussion was followed by feedback from the audience. Questions were asked about the state's reaction to the protests by the grieving mothers in Argentina and the similarity of such movements with the ones in Kashmir, India, where people are also reported to have disappeared. There was also a discussion about expanding the spectrum of the notion of gender by including LGBT communities. In response it was pointed out by one of the speakers that certain categories could not be simply reduced to simplified economic models.

**Day 3**  
**November 8**

### **In-house Discussion and Participants' Paper Presentations**

The third and final day of the conference was divided in two slots. In the morning (9am – 10.30 am), the partners gathered to have an in-house discussion on the publication of the edited volume that has been planned to be the final outcome of the project on *Making Women Count for Peace*. Åshild Kolås moderated the discussion and conducted a stocktaking of each partners' progress of work. The partners raised questions regarding logistics of publication and sought clarifications from the editor about deadlines, length of each paper and publisher's style sheet.

### **Participants' Paper Presentations**

The rest of the day was dedicated to the participants' (non-partners) paper presentations. Fifteen papers had been selected from the plethora of abstracts that were received in response to the call for papers. These were slotted under five overarching themes. The themes were largely designed with a focus on issues related to peacebuilding initiatives in post-conflict societies like Nepal, Northeast India and Kashmir. However, the conference also accommodated a session on the conceptual framing of issues on sexual minorities, to underline how fundamental the subject was for any discussion on gender and dissent. Subhas Ranjan Chakrabarty, eminent historian and a member of CRG, delivered the welcome address and initiated the sessions. There were two successive parallel sessions (sessions 1 & 2 from 11 am – 12.30 pm and sessions 3 & 4 from 1.30 pm – 3 pm ) followed by the fifth session (3.30 pm – 5 pm) and the valedictory (5.30 pm – 6 pm).

### **Session-1: Revolution, Rebellion and Women**

The first session included three papers dealing with the issues of gender in post-conflict Nepal. The panel was chaired by Khesheli Chishi, the former president of Naga Mothers Association. Shiva Kumar Dhungana (design, monitoring and evaluation specialist, Search for Common Ground Nepal) discussed the papers for this session. The three speakers were Amrita Pritam Gogoi, Amy Charlotte Soar and Lorina Sthapit

Amrita Pritam Gogoi, who is an Assistant Professor at Dibrugarh University and a PhD fellow at TISS, Guwahati, presented a paper on *Troubled Identities: Women Combatants in Post-Conflict Nepal*. The paper focused on the female fighters of the Maoist movement in Nepal. The paper argued that the women combatants were traversing difficult terrains, struggling to balance between public and private space, yet they could not liberate themselves from patriarchal constructs. The “woman question” had become an essential part of the Maoist movement and many controversial and seemingly liberating decisions such as forbidding arranged marriage and encouraging inter-caste relationships were being foregrounded. But this resulted in an odd juxtaposition of revolutionary ideology and conventional marriage and family. Many hierarchies still existed despite these radical changes and suggestions. The paper pointed out how women combatants were expected to be the face of liberation and at the same time

remain faithful to certain gender roles. In post conflict Nepal, Amrita showed, the women combatants have to face social rejection and disrespect for the choices they made under Maoist influence. Their identity was constantly in question and their experiences were many times belittled. The paper narrated women's experiences as they shifted from revolution to tradition and questioned Maoist claims of radicalising gender relations.

The second paper by Amy Charlotte Soar, who is associated with the UN Political Team, was entitled *A Postmodern Feminist Intrigue: Maoist Legal Discourse and Practice in Nepal*. Her paper analysed political and legal documents like the 40 point demand, the appeal of the CPN to the people, and the comprehensive peace agreement from 2006 to understand the implicit notions of gender. Amy's research deployed postmodern theory of feminism which says that women have various experiences that cannot be lumped together, that oppression is shaped by language and experience is constructed. She demonstrated how there were multiple references to "women" with no recognition of diversity or pluralism along with other confident uses of language including the terms "patriarchy" "discrimination" "oppression." There was a lack of integration of women into the Maoist design and the official announcement of the war was complex and full of jargon which could not serve to include the uneducated women of rural Nepal. The language of the documents was apparently gender neutral and yet "women" were for the most part interchangeable with "daughters." Also, she argued, terms like "women", "gender", and "females" were often used interchangeably. The conclusion of the paper was that these documents showed a clear lack of understanding for women's concerns with no mention of freedom and liberty or political agency for women.

Lorina Sthapit, gender, monitoring and evaluation specialist of International Fund for Agricultural Development in Nepal, was the third speaker for this session. Her paper was on *Roles and Experiences of Female Maoist Combatants during and after the People's War in Nepal*. This paper cited interviews and shared experiences and memories of women combatants in Nepal. Why did women join the fight, what did they actually gain – Lorina asked her respondents. She gathered that each woman could have a different answer. In many cases the women were swayed by the Maoist promise of equal educational opportunities for boys and girls. Many women wanted to break free from patriarchy and free/liberate Nepali women. She showed the journal of a woman combatant with photos depicting female combatants being trained in the same training space and with the same weapons as the men. Yet, the paper argued, the People's War was unable to bring about any structural transformation in the patriarchal system and thus the women combatants were unable to reintegrate into the post conflict society without serious consequences. One stark instance was that many women tried to get back to a normal life in their communities but were forced to divorce their "war husbands" because it was an inter-caste marriage.

At the end of the three presentations, the chair of the session Khesheli Chishi presented a comparative perspective. She remarked that in Nagaland there was no discrimination against female combatants, they were respected and treated the same as the men with equal ranking. There was never a particular focus on the "women's question" during the Naga conflict so it was quite a different experience than Nepal. The Naga women continue their struggle to actively participate in political decision making.

Shiva Kumar Dhungana discussed the three papers in detail. For Amrita, he suggested a deeper research including some psychological inquiry while not relying on media sources or public opinion. With regard to Amy's paper, he questioned the very idea of a Maoist document. The peace agreement was written by the Nepal government and was thus, according to him, not necessarily a Maoist idea but rather a mix of many different politics. Also, he cautioned her that certain points require a more nuanced understanding. Like, the use of "daughter" could be a Nepali and not a Maoist usage. For Lorina's paper, Dhungana felt that there was a need to focus a little more on the recruitment of women in the war and how they overcame difficulties. He suggested a deeper analysis of the "success story of the war in Nepal."

## **Session 2: Gender, Sexuality, Dissent**

The parallel session was chaired by Ruchira Goswami, Assistant Professor at National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata. The discussant was Samata Biswas, Assistant Professor at the Haldia Government College. The three speakers in this session were R. Vaishno Bharati, Saayan Chattopadhyay and Sucharita Sengupta.

R Vaishno Bharti, Research Associate at Aneka, Bangalore, presented a paper on *Powering Empowerment: A Case of the Aravanis in Chennai*. Her paper was based on ethnographic work that she carried out among Aravanis in Tamil Nadu. She attempted to locate the instances of empowerment and agency among this group of extremely marginalised and vulnerable people. And interestingly, in contrast to Sucharita Sengupta, the third speaker, she located both the agency and empowerment within spaces that the community created, the support of family or friends and that of employment opportunities. She presented a nuanced analysis of these formative moments. Through a reading of their experiences, Vaishno tried to understand the epistemic advantage that the Aravanis would have in dealing with their own community and hence can empower others. She spoke of political assertions being made possible, especially in Tamil Nadu, through mobilisation of groups leading to the setting up of a welfare board by the government and acquiring the right to vote. She located agency and empowerment in these discourses. She also invoked the very recent NALSA judgment and emphasized the need to reconceptualise agency keeping on board this judgment, both at an individual and a collective level.

Saayan Chattopadhyay, Assistant Professor at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, presented a paper on *Realigning Agency: New Media and the Urban Women's Movement in India*. He explored how urban women can come together, collaborate and take collective action using online media in the Indian context. Saayan referred to the Pink Chaddi Campaign [the pink panties campaign], and the SlutWalk India campaign as two specific cases to examine the interrelationship between modern urban women in India, their use of new media, and the intervention of the paternalistic nation-state to question the emancipatory sphere of social networking in relation to women's movement. He sought to locate the politics of urban Indian women in heterogenous time, in the domain of unbound serialities that made possible imagined alliances that transcend the obligation of direct acquaintance. Looking into the discursive space that the new media provides, he basically revisits the discourse on modernity, nationalism and cultural hegemony and its implications for urban women's activism. He pointed out that a critique of either the Pink Chaddi campaign or the *besharmi* Morcha

could not be on the terms of saying how this is not the fight for Indian women – since it does not cut across class caste and religion and does not bring up basic questions like that of survival.

The final paper by Sucharita Sengupta, Research Assistant at the Calcutta Research Group, was entitled *Freedom from the Closet?: Voices of the Sexual Minorities” in Kolkata*. She attempted to contextualise “sexual minorities” in India, keeping in mind that “minority” was a governmental category. This paper was written in the immediate aftermath of the landmark judgment by the Delhi High Court that albeit for a short time, and she tried to trace, through interviews of community members and NGO/CBO workers, what changes they foresee with the aftermath of a favourable ruling by the court. She argued that even though a decriminalisation of homosexuality would probably make it possible to get married and jointly own property, it was unlikely that legal decriminalisation would change deep rooted cultural and social prejudices, every day forms of discrimination and acts of violence. She invoked the case of the techie who was booked under 377 last month. Thinking through this case, she argued, might be useful to locate the needs of a legal framework. But after the Supreme Court undercut the previous High Court judgement, a significant section of the LGBT community have questioned the validity of legal framework and rights based politics.

In her discussion of the three papers, Samata Biswas noted that Both Sucharita’s and Bharti’s papers invoked Foucault. This notion of empowerment, she emphasised, was one that brings to a position of power groups that had earlier been in relative positions of power and was also key to Sayan’s paper. Sucharita used the model of panopticon to explore how the “implications of criminality, the intimidating silence and the penetrative gaze sufficed to push the sexual minorities to the margins and not so much the enforcement of the law itself”. For Bharti, power was productive, as at every instance of its occurrence it also generated resistances to it. Keeping this productive capacity of power, she then located power in empowerment, to enquire how at every instance of the working of power, for example, in interpersonal relationship – how empowerment became possible. At this juncture however, Samata suggested, one needs to question the logic of empowerment itself. She proposed: ‘I do not know whether empowerment as a concept is available outside of the statist discourse, and if one were to appropriate it, as Bharti does, then one probably should use different registers for the empowerment that she is interested in, and the ones that state sponsors.’

### **Session 3: Militancy, Autonomy, Experiences**

The third session was on questions of militancy and women’s empowerment in Kashmir. It was chaired by Meenakshi Gopinath, Honorary Director, Women in Security, Conflict and Peace. The discussant was Sumona Dasgupta, a well-known scholar and researcher on Kashmir. The three speakers were Sarbani Sharma, Bhavneet Kaur and Seema Shekhawat.

The first speaker Sarbani Sharma, a doctoral student at the Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, raised the issues related to post conflict Kashmir in her paper *Finding Azaadi in Kashmir: Locating Gender Politics in a Local and Global Kashmir*. Her paper tried to examine the location of gender politics amidst the wider discourses of nationhood and autonomy in Kashmir. She attempted to grapple the question of everyday micro politics through a detailed ethnography of everyday life in a girls’ hostel

of Kashmir University. She also dwelt on the fraught terrains of *hijab* politics and reading of Quran to understand the technologies of everyday resistance. The formation of solidarities around the notion of *azadi*, she observed, was indicative of the performative character of activist subjectivities. She argued that in Kashmir, even the most determined articulation of political goal followed a certain ethics of faith in order to contextualize the performance of protest. Her paper tried to establish that a study of everyday choices and necessities could be helpful in critically engaging with the debates on forms and content of life practices, sociality of the language of protest and push the debate on *Azadi* beyond Islam vs. modernity dichotomy.

The following paper was by Bhavneet Kaur, MPhil student at Delhi School of Economics, entitled *Gendered Practices of Resistance in Indian Administered Kashmir*. Quite in tune with Sarbani, Bhavneet also deployed the lens of ‘everyday’ to understand women’s role in the resistance struggle in Kashmir. Through a study of life narratives of women, she teased out elements of resistance in the ambiguities and rhetoric of the everyday, the ordinary, the mundane, the scattered and the unconscious. She posited women’s narratives as interpellations, as eruptions in the political discourse that broke the order of authorized historical narratives of victimhood. She highlighted the life story of Parveena Ahangar who initiated the movement against Enforced disappearance in Kashmir. Bhavneet attempted to identify women as active participants and agents of the resistance movement. She delineated practices of resistance in language and memory and highlighted how personal grief was maneuvered in public campaigns against state oppression. The ‘political experience’ of women in the context of Kashmir, she argued, had been shaped, encapsulated and conveyed through heterogeneous and discontinuous everyday practices of direct confrontations, waiting, banal tricks, tactics and ruses, deep emotional responses, even silence and mourning and their affects. She called it the politics of emotion.

The third presenter Seema Shekhawat, independent researcher based in Jaipur, presented her paper on *Condemned to be Invisible: Locating Women in the Peace Process in Kashmir*. She argued that the Kashmir case provided ample evidence of the prejudiced nature of peace making, which glorified women as linchpins of the movement for independence from India but later did not hesitate in pushing them to the fringes of the peace process. She raised the question - where is the locus of women in the peace building process in Kashmir? Although never involved as direct participants in combat operations, Seema’s paper depicted that women contributed in various other ways ranging from nursing to assisting in covert operations as spies. However, Seema’s paper echoes a sense of betrayal in articulating that the ‘face of militancy’ had been denied the opportunity to become the face of the peace process, women were completely invisibilised during the peace talks.

Sumona Dasgupta teased out the important points from the three papers and discussed their significance. She appreciated the presenters for the rich ethnographic narratives of the everyday, dealing with the intersections of history and memory, something that had not earlier been adequately represented in any research done on Kashmir. She further added, when the gaze was shifted from the table of negotiations to the everyday, the true meaning of women in peace keeping could be understood. When different aspects of social relations were critically looked at, one could get some deeper insights into areas such as resistance and agency. To Sumona, it was important for such perspectives on everyday politics not to lose sight. The political economy of the social

reality, the violence, the constitutional forms of protest had been crucially addressed in the paper of the session.

The chair Meenakshi Gopinath wrapped up the session reminding the audience that the crucial question that came up from the presentations was that who defined the peace process in Kashmir and how to grasp the issue of agency. More importantly, she cautioned, that it would be extremely necessary to grasp at what point notions of agency and considered choice overlapped.

#### **Session 4: Spaces of Citizenship and Creativity**

The fourth session of the final day of the conference included three papers on different experiences from northeastern India. Åshild Kolås, Research Professor, Peace Research Institute, Oslo, chaired the session and Sanjay Barbora, Associate Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati discussed the papers. The three speaker were Anungla Aier, Jayanta Madhab Tamuly and Atom Sunil Singh.

The first presenter was Anungla Aier, Principal of Zisaji Presidency Government College, Kiphire, Nagaland. The title of her paper was *Gendered Citizenship, Representation and Peace Negotiations in Naga Society*. She tried to inquire into the perceptions of citizenship as experienced and practiced by women as members of a given tribal community in Naga Society. Her aim was to locate gender within the accepted ideas of citizenship to understand the inherent patterns of inclusions and exclusions. She elaborated how the idea of citizenship in Naga society was essentially entangled with the notion of personhood by distinguishing terms which meant ‘citizens of the village’ and ‘people of the village’. These shaped the kinship structure that essentially alienated women from mainstream social and community issues. Anungla argues that the de-recognition of women as an accepted representative of the clan disfranchises them from exercising their civil rights as citizens on equal terms with men and this leads to disempowerment. Women organizations like Naga Women Hoho, Mothers Association, Eastern Naga Women Hoho are still subject to the operation of the traditional power structure between the genders because the apex tribal Hohos are all controlled by men. Anungla forcefully argued that a radical change in the fundamental structure, on which traditional notions of citizenship are based, was needed.

The second speaker was Jayanta Madhab Tamuly, Doctoral Student, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies and Management, Sikkim University. His paper, *The Silent Activists: Women Writing for Peace: A North eastern Experience*, was a literary study on the subject of conflict, peace and women’s empowerment. Jayanta emphasized the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach and introduced his paper to be a study of the rhetorical and emotional aspects of conflict and peacebuilding as opposed to academic and policy studies. His work dealt with a new wave of writings in Northeast India that began addressing issues of ethnicity, identity, nationalism, immigration, marginalisation or human rights from the later decades of twentieth century onwards. A group of women writers have been quite active in highlighting these themes in their works. Jayanta takes up the works of six such writers from Nagaland, Manipur and Assam to understand the role of women writers of Northeast as agents and activists of peace. They were Arupa Patangia Kalita and Ratna Bharali Talukdar from Assam, Temsula Ao and Easterine Arlu from Nagaland and Irom Sharmila and Ningombam Sunita from Manipur. Jayanta depicted how their works speak of the failure of

militarized security, looks into the aspects of human security in Northeast, issues of trafficking and also often strongly criticize radical separatist ideas to fundamentally unsettle the common sense on conflict and peace.

Atom Sunil Singh, postdoctoral fellow at Jawaharlal Nehru University, was the concluding speaker of this session. His paper, *Geographical Significance of Khwairamband Bazaar: Rethinking Emergence of Women's Movements in Manipur* highlighted the symbolic value of the space of Khwairamband Bazaar, which is a market run by women, in facilitating women's movements in Manipur. In public memory, the market remains a place where various forms of women's movement originated, including Nisha Bandh (anti-alcoholism) movement, Meira Paibis (Torch Bearers), Nupi lan (women's war) etc. Atom showed how women acted as pressure groups, lobbying for various demands, protesting against everyday occurrences like domestic violence, abuses by the police and the army etc. in course of the various movements. In this process they negotiated with both state and non-state actors. In such a context, the importance of a women's market lay in the fact that it served both as a space for economic subsistence of women as well as political mobilizations.

Sanjay Barbor, the discussant, reminded Jayanta that it would be necessary for him to talk about the politics inherent in the literary works. One has to remember, he cautioned, that any literary work ultimately tries to make a statement, narrate an event or tell a story which is not politics per se. Again, while talking of the bazaars in Manipur, he observed that the idea of bazaar as occupying a definite space in time was assigned in advance. He further suggested that it would also be crucial to track the changes and transformations of the market area over time instead of taking space to be a frozen entity.

## **Session 5: Protest, Participation, Agency**

The final session of participants' presentations was chaired by Paula Banerjee, President, CRG. Nasreen Chowdhury, Associate Professor, Delhi University, was present as a discussant of the papers.

Roma Dey, Doctoral Student, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, was the first presenter. Her paper *Re-imagining the Protesting Mother: Counter Narratives of Women as Citizen* wished to examine "mother" as an evolving category for protesting women. She depicted that the last few years saw an increasing rise in protest by "mothers", a category in itself on different issues worldwide. The chief concern of her study was to trace how this particular figure of "mother" came to be identified as political entities and scrutinize what forms of negotiations this enabled in the political sphere. Briefly recounting the nationalist framing of the iconic image of a mother, she entered into the discussion on the protest staged by the Meira Paibis, a women's collective in the state of Manipur, against the rape of Manorama, alleged to be a member of the banned People's Liberation Front. She observed that this particular event marked a rupture in the political imagination of the "mother" figure in particular and women in general in Indian democracy. The aim of her paper was to argue in favour of the efficacy and need for re-imagining protesting mothers as citizens, especially in conflict zones. To establish this, she tries to grasp how, in a matriarchal society, certain spaces are made available for women to negotiate as citizens in a militarized "state of

exception”. She critically engages with the question whether this destabilizes the hegemonic notions of women and citizenship in newer forms.

Dolly Phukon, Assistant Professor, Dibrugarh University presented a paper on *Contested Space of Democracy and Women’s Movement in Assam*. Her paper tried to locate and analyze the nature and trends in women’s movement in Assam within the larger rubric of emergence of various social movements in India and their efforts in securing democratic spaces for women. She attempted to find out how far women’s movement in Assam was able to establish its own space in this functioning democracy. First she delves into the long history of articulation of women’s rights and formation of women’s organizations at various junctures beginning from the reform movements in colonial Assam right to the recent forms of protests by Meira Paibis. Analyzing the trends of women’s movement and its nature, she raises the sceptic question that to what extent women’s movement could help bring about broader shifts in women’s consciousness and mobilization around issues of gender and ‘re-democratize our democracy’ on gender lines, when most of the activities of women’s organizations are fundamentally based on identification with traditional notions of womanhood. In her conclusion she suggested that the solution lay in reconfiguring women’s movement with an autonomous intellectual vision for women’s rights along with a collaborative endeavor with other progressive civil society movements.

The final paper by Dolly Kikon, Postdoctoral Fellow, Stockholm University, was entitled *Memories of Rape: Cultural Impunity and Politics of Agency in Nagaland*. To understand the culture of impunity that sexual offenders enjoy in Naga society, Dolly first briefly discussed the history of militarization and state violence that has deeply transformed Naga society. Then she moved on to share her ethnographic findings drawn from personal memories, interviews and conversations with survivors of sexual violence, counselors, and women activists on their experiences of sexual misdemeanors by the armed cadres/officials of various Naga insurgent organizations or just ordinary Naga men from the neighborhood. She examined the accounts of rape survivors and witnesses to interrogate the unexamined and uncontested nationalist construction of ‘tribal’ women. She shared her own experiences of growing up in a Dimapur suburb and how that influenced her perception about the naturalization of violence against women in Naga society. She specifically explored the everyday processes by which certain forms of social impunity to sexual offenders had become entrenched in Naga society. To illustrate her point she documented the legal and social career of a particular case of domestic rape of a 12 year old girl. The aim of Dolly’s work is start a dialogue of an inclusive vision of justice and human rights. She cautioned that as long as violence against women and children were decontextualized from notions of rights and empowerment, the vision of a just future would remain a fractured one. She underlined the urgency to generate a counter narrative of justice, rights, and solidarity in opposition to the Indian state and the Naga nationalist project, which, she argued, were both exceedingly masculine and militaristic.

Nasreen Chowdhory, the discussant of the panel, connected the three papers thematically and discussed their potential. She commented that protests, participation and agency were the three concepts that were discussed in the papers at length. She thought Roma’s effort to understand the concept of women as “Mothers” was quite crucial to understand the gender – state problematique in the backdrop of AFSPA. She suggested Dolly Phukon to articulate a little more on how she prefers to envision the

idea of Indian democracy and how she identifies the gendered space in social movements. The discussant remarked that Dolly Kikon's paper was important to understand the history of impunity in Nagaland and quite detailed in its ethnographic reach.

The Chair of the panel Paula Banerjee concluded the session by observing that it would be good to arrive at a proper definition of women in politics which could be deployed as a conceptual optic to read the experiences of violence in conjunction with ideas of conflict and peace.

## **Valedictory**

### **Women for Peace: Many Voices**

The valedictory panel was designed to accommodate two speakers who could share some insights on the so-called "other" and "marginal" voices. The panel was titled *Women for Peace: Many Voices*. The two speakers were Mandira Sen, Director, Stree-Samya publication house and Khesheli Chishi, former president, Naga Mothers' Association. Samir Kumar Das, Professor, Department of Political Science and Dean of the Faculty of Arts, University of Calcutta, chaired the valedictory session.

Mandira Sen spoke briefly about Dalit women in India. She reflected that Dalit women had never been a part of any dominant discourse on women's movement in any meaningful way. Denial of caste was the root of discontentment. The political class had remained indifferent to Dalit progress. This malign neglect has been seen as a conspiracy among the Dalits. She talked about the different phases of the Dalit movement in Indian history. She reiterated Urmila Pawar's argument that Dalit movement had always been very hierarchical in nature and that Dalit women have created a revolution in politics. Within the movement of lower caste groups, patriarchy has been quite stark and oppressive.

Khesheli Chishi shared with us the experiences that she gained as a former president of the Naga Mothers' Association. For her, the role played by the NMA had always been one that was characterized by team effort. She was born and brought up in the midst of the conflict situation in Nagaland and continued to be in the same situation even today. Naga women felt that it was imperative to find ways by which they could contribute to the political situation in the state. She said that armed conflict was accompanied by a conflict within communities and that different kinds of strategies had to be deployed to attain peace. Every effort was made on the part of the NMA to ensure that its activities were result orientated. No state machinery in Nagaland used the NMA for its own agenda.

Chair of the valedictory panel Samir Kumar Das observed that the two brief presentations were quite fitting as concluding remarks and they aptly summed up the proceedings of the workshop. He added two brief points: firstly, it is only very recently that the Bhadrak community had started showing crevices and the Dalit movement itself was not without its schisms. Mandira Sen had not spoken of Dalit women who were lesbians. It would be crucial to understand how the articulation of difference would influence and shape the voice of justice, Professor Das iterated. He further said that Khesheli Chishi's presentation underlined a few key concerns that had emerged out of this workshop. She spoke in respect of the inalienability of the human voice. It is respect for human life that transcends the various categories of human existence.

## **ANNEXURE 1**

### PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

<b><i>Thursday, November 6</i></b>	
<b>Public Event: Panel Discussion</b> <b>Venue: Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata</b> <b>6 pm – 8 pm</b>	
6 pm – 6.05 pm	<b><i>Welcome Address</i></b>
	Prasanta Ray Professor Emeritus, Department of Sociology Presidency University Secretary, Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group
6.05 pm – 6.15 pm	<b><i>Inaugural Address</i></b>
	Paula Banerjee Associate Professor, University of Calcutta President, Calcutta Research Group
	Åshild Kolås Research Professor, Peace Research Institute Oslo
6.15 pm – 8 pm	<b><i>Panel Discussion</i></b>
	<b><i>Women in Peace: Men's Voices</i></b>
	<i>Chair and Moderator:</i> Ranabir Samaddar Director, Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group
	<i>Speakers</i>  Atig Ghosh Assistant Professor, Visva Bharati University Member, Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group  Bhupen Sharma Professor and Director OKD Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati

	<p>Hari Sharma Adjunct Professor Nepā School of Social Sciences and Humanities</p> <p>Neingulo Krome Secretary General Naga People’s Movement for Human Rights</p> <p>Roberto Carlos Vidal Lopez Director Law School Pontificia Universidad Javeriana</p> <p>Sujato Bhadra Human Rights Activist</p>
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<b><i>Friday, November 7</i></b>	
<b>Project Partners’ Research Presentations (Partners Only)</b> <b>Venue: Hotel Monotel, Salt Lake, Sector 5</b> <b>9.30 am – 3 pm</b>	
9.30 am – 9.45 am	<b><i>Welcome address</i></b>
	Ranabir Samaddar
9.45 am – 10 am	<b><i>Tea</i></b>
10 am – 12 pm	<b><i>Session 1</i></b>
	Presentations of Draft Book Chapters (Partners Only)
	<b><i>Nepal</i></b>
	<i>Chair:</i> Paula Banerjee
12 pm – 1 pm	<b><i>Lunch</i></b>
1 pm – 3 pm	<b><i>Session 2</i></b>
	Presentations of Draft Book Chapters (Partners Only)

	<b><i>Northeast India</i></b>
	<i>Chair:</i> Anjoo Sharan Upadhyaya Adjunct Professor Malaviya Centre for Peace Research Professor of Political Science & Director Centre for the Study of Nepal
<b>Public Event: Roundtable Discussion</b> <b>Venue: Presidency University, Kolkata</b> <b>4 pm – 6 pm</b>	
4 pm – 4.10 pm	<b><i>Welcome address</i></b>
	Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury Vice Chancellor, Rabindra Bharati University
4.10 pm – 6 pm	<b><i>Roundtable Discussion</i></b>
	<b><i>Experiences of Conflict, Gender and Transnational Justice: South Asia and Beyond</i></b>
	<i>Chair :</i> Anuradha Lohia Vice Chancellor, Presidency University
	<i>Moderator:</i> Paula Banerjee
	<i>Speakers</i>  Nergis Canefe Associate Professor Department of Political Science York University  Beatriz Eugenia Sanchez Mojica Assistant Professor Universidad de Los Andes Bogotá, Colombia  Roberto Carlos Vidal Lopez Director Law School Pontificia Universidad Javeriana

	<p>Åshild Kolås Research Professor Peace Research Institute Oslo</p> <p>Kalpana Kannabiran Director Council for Social Development Hyderabad</p>
6 pm – 6.05 pm	<b><i>Vote of Thanks</i></b>
	<p>Iman Kumar Mitra Research Associate Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group</p>

<p><b><i>Saturday, November 8</i></b>  <b>In-house Discussion &amp; Participants' Paper Presentations</b>  <b>Venue: Hotel Monotel, Salt Lake, Sector 5</b>  <b>9 am – 6.15 pm</b></p>	
9 am – 10.30 am	<b>In-house Discussion on Logistics and Publication</b>
10.30 am – 10.50 am	<i>Tea</i>
<p><b>Participants' Paper Presentations</b>  <b>10.50 am – 6.15 pm</b></p>	
10.50 am – 11 am	<b><i>Welcome address</i></b>
	<p>Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty Eminent Historian and Member, Calcutta Research Group</p>
11 am – 12.30 am	<b><i>Sessions 1 &amp; 2 (Parallel Sessions)</i></b>

Session 1	Session 2
<b><i>Revolution, Rebellion and Women</i></b>	<b><i>Gender, Sexuality, Dissent</i></b>

Chair: Kshesheli Chishi Former President, Naga Mothers' Association	Chair: Ruchira Goswami Assistant Professor, National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata
Discussant: Shiva Kumar Dhungana Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, Search for Common Ground, Nepal	Discussant: Samata Biswas Assistant Professor, Haldia Government College Member, Calcutta Research Group
1. Amy Charlotte Soar, Assistant desk Officer, UN Political Team <i>A Postmodern Feminist Intrigue: Maoist Legal Discourse and Practice in Nepal</i>	1. R. Vaishno Bharati Research Associate, Aneka, Bangalore (Human Rights Organisation) <i>'Powering' Empowerment: A Case of Aravanis in Chennai</i>
2. Amrita Pritam Gogoi, Dibrugarh University and PhD Fellow at TISS, Guwahati <i>Troubled Identities: Women Combatants in Post-conflict Nepal</i>	2. Saayan Chattopadhyay, Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Baruiipur College <i>Realigning Agency: New Media and the Urban Women's Movement in India</i>
3. Lorina Sthapit, Gender, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, International Fund for Agricultural Development, Nepal <i>Roles and Experiences of Female Maoist Combatants During and After the People's War in Nepal</i>	3. Sucharita Sengupta, Research Assistant, Calcutta Research Group <i>Freedom from the Closet? : Voices of the "Sexual Minorities" in Kolkata.</i>
12.30 pm – 1.30pm	Lunch
1.30 am – 3 pm	<b>Sessions 3 &amp; 4 (Parallel Sessions)</b>

Session 3	Session 4
<b><i>Militancy, Autonomy, Experiences</i></b>	<b><i>Spaces of Citizenship and Creativity</i></b>
Chair: Meenakshi Gopinath Honorary Director, Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace	Chair: Åshild Kolås Research Professor, Peace Research Institute, Oslo

Discussant: Sumona DasGupta Scholar and Researcher on Kashmir	Discussant: Sanjay Barbora Associate Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati
1. Sarbani Sharma, Doctoral Student, Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi <i>Finding Azadi in Kashmir, Locating Gender Politics in a Local and Global Kashmir</i>	1. Anungla Aier, Principal of Zisaji Presidency Government College, Kiphire, Nagaland <i>Gendered Citizenship, Representation and Peace Negotiations in Naga Society</i>
2. Bhavneet Kaur, MPhil Student, Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi <i>Gendered Practices of Resistance in Indian Administered Kashmir</i>	2. Jayanta Madhab Tamuly, Doctoral Student, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies and Management, Sikkim University <i>The Silent Activists: Women Writing for Peace: A North eastern Experience</i>
3. Seema Shekhawat, Independent Researcher, Jaipur, India <i>Condemned to be Invisible: Locating Women in the Peace Process of Kashmir.</i>	3. Atom Sunil Singh, Post doctoral Fellow, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi <i>Geographical Significance of Khwairamband Bazaar: Rethinking the Emergence of Women's Movements in Manipur</i>

3 pm – 3.30 pm	<i>Tea</i>
3.30 pm – 5 pm	<b>Session 5</b>
	<b><i>Protest, Participation, Agency</i></b>
	Chair: Paula Banerjee
	Discussant: Kalpana Kannabiran
	1. Roma Dey, Doctoral Student, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi <i>Re-imagining the Protesting Mother: Counter Narratives of Women as Citizen</i>
	2. Dolly Phukon, Assistant Professor, Dibrugarh University <i>Contested Space of Democracy and Women's Movement in Assam</i>
	3. Dolly Kikon, Postdoctoral Fellow, Stockholm University <i>Memories of Rape: Cultural Impunity and Politics of Agency in Nagaland</i>

5 pm – 5.30 pm	<b><i>Tea</i></b>
5.30 pm – 6 pm	<b><i>Valedictory</i></b>
	<b><i>Women for Peace: Many Voices</i></b>
	Chair: Samir Kumar Das Professor, Department of Political Science and Dean of the Faculty of Arts, University of Calcutta
	Speakers:  Kheseli Chishi Former President, Naga Mothers' Association  Mandira Sen Director, Stree-Samya
6 pm – 6.15 pm	<b><i>Vote of Thanks</i></b>
	Paula Banerjee  Debarati Bagchi Research Associate, Calcutta Research Group
6.30 pm onwards	<b><i>Cocktail and Dinner</i></b>
	<i>Welcome Address:</i> Ranabir Samaddar

## **ANNEXURE 2**

### **LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

**Amrita Pritam Gogoi**, Assistant Professor, Dibrugarh University and PhD Fellow at TISS, Guwahati

**Amy Charlotte Soar**, Graduate Intern, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London

**Anjoo Sharan Upadhyaya**, Adjunct Professor, Malaviya Centre for Peace Research and Professor of Political Science & Director, Centre for the Study of Nepal

**Anjuman Ara Begum**, Member of Women in Governance (WinG), India

**Anungla Aier**, Principal Zisaji Presidency Government College, Nagaland

**Arunima Deka**, OKD Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati

**Ashild Kolas**, Research Professor, Peace Research Institute, Oslo

**Atig Ghosh**, Assistant Professor, Visva Bharati University and Member, MCRG

**Atom Sunil Singh**, Post doctoral Fellow, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

**Beatriz Eugenia Sánchez Mojica**, Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, Universidad de Los Andes

**Bhavneet Kaur**, MPhil Student, Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi

**Bhupen Sarma**, Professor & Director, OKD Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati

**Bishnu Raj Upreti**, Executive Director, Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR)

**Dolly Kikon**, Postdoctoral Fellow, Stockholm University

**Dolly Phukon**, Assistant Professor, Dibrugarh University

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**Sucharita Sengupta**, Research Assistant, Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group

**Sujato Bhadra**, Human's Rights Activist

**Sumona DasGupta**, Researcher and scholar on Kashmir



Ranabir Samaddar and Atig Ghosh. 6 November, Panel Discussion.



Bhupen Sarmah and Ashild Kolas. 6 November, Panel Discussion.



Anuradha Lohia and Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury. 7 November, Presidency University, Roundtable Discussion.



Roberto Vidal Lopez, Åshild Kolås, Krishna Bandyopadhyay, Nergis Canefe, Beatriz Sanchez Mojica. 7 November, Presidency University, Roundtable Discussion.



Ashild Kolas, Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty, Paula Banerjee. 8 November, Welcome Address.



Anungla Aier, Atom Sunil Singh, Jayanta Madhab Tamuly, Åshild Kolås, Sanjay Barbora.  
8 November, Session 4.



Nasreen Chowdhury, Paula Banerjee, Dolly Kikon, Dolly Phukon, Roma Dey. 8 November, Session 5.



Debarati Bagchi, Samir Kumar Das, Khesheli Chishi, Mandira Sen. 8 November, Valedictory.

For details visit our website <http://www.mcrgh.ac.in>



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