ROLE OF WOMEN AS PEACE BUILDERS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NAGALAND

Triveni Goswami

PEACE STUDIES PAPER - 6

ROLE OF WOMEN AS PEACE BUILDERS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NAGALAND

Triveni Goswami

Introduction
Anuradha Dutta
Professor, Peace Studies

INTRODUCTION

In Northeast India, where violence has become a part of the day-to-day life, women in general have played a constructive role. Yet, women on the frontline of efforts to end — violence and secure just peace, seldom record their experiences, activities and insights. Each woman has a story which is inspiring, teaching lessons of values, integrity and compassion. They have often acted as the bridge between civil society and the group involved in the conflict.

Nagaland's history abounds with fights, inter-tribe and inter-group clashes. In this conflict-ridden society, Pukherila, ambassador of peace has been a unique institution in itself. Pukherila is a Naga woman who gets married to a Naga man from another village. Entrusted with a lot of responsibilities, these ambassadors can move freely in times of conflict and disagreement and it is their duty to remove the wounded and dead from the battlefields. There are a number of stories about how these Pukherilas tried to prevent conflicts between villages from the very beginning by physically trying to stop both the groups from fighting with each other. In this light, Triveni Goswami, a young research scholar, tries to bring out the stories of a few Naga women who have braved all odds in the contemporary world to fight for peace. In this study, the researcher adopts a qualitative method whereby she attempts to give space to the group of people who have been working behind the scenes. This can be termed 'feminist research' which is for women by women'. Peace here has been used as a 'positive concept' which indicates an environment where women have control over their lives. The scholar infact tries to establish the fact that women do not have to be economically independent to have control over themselves. The study covers three units of Nagaland. Each unit reflects findings about women's contribution to rebuild their communities. The scholar tries to show how with the help of self-help groups, they have been able to strengthen their position with

meaningful work. Women in these units have organised Action Committees to mediate conflicts that take place between communities. Such approaches are indeed very helpful in the development of a culture of peace.

It has been found that in one unit of the study units, Vidima in Dimapur district, there are Action Groups composed of three males and three females to mediate disputes. These local institutions are transparent and very helpful for the peace process. The women's groups cover a number of activities under peace efforts like economic reconstruction, empowerment of civil society, power sharing etc. In her discussion with the Secretary of the Women's Society of Vidima, the researcher realized that women groups were very much concerned about positive peace in the society. They believe that once there is development, there will be peace. In the course of her work she found many women who emphasised on peace education. Some of the case studies reveal that women identify themselves with peace. They believe that women must have the dignity and ability to initiate joint efforts to combat all evils.

This has been a very interesting study as women involved in the study though not highly qualified, are organized in groups in different units of Nagaland. The scholar very successfully brings out how women being engaged in different economic activities like agriculture and handicrafts emerge as reservoirs of social capital. Gender discrimination squanders trust, hinders family relations, and more importantly, restricts social network. Once women manage to consolidate the resolution process, they make efforts to involve everyone in the society in the ongoing process. When women are confined to their homes, at the community level social capital is not built. This process proves how women at the grassroots have come out of the boundaries of their homes and have successfully formed social capital and in the process have contributed to 'positive peace'.

Anuradha Dutta
Professor, Peace Studies

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The year long journey traversing through a myriad landscape of vibrant culture and people brought me to an understanding of an existent reality. This journey was made possible with the invaluable help of several people.

I am grateful to Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development (OKDISCD) for granting me the fellowship to conduct the research. The Director, OKDISCD, Professor A.N.S Ahmed, the faculty members of the Institute and my colleagues have always been very encouraging and helpful. The discussions that I have had with them have helped me immensely in crystallizing my thoughts. I am particularly indebted to Professor Anuradha Dutta, my supervisor, who has always been a source of inspiration for me, and who, through her valuable insight, has helped me to develop a deeper understanding of the problems inherent in society.

Dr. Chandan Rajkhowa, Director, National Research Centre Mithun, provided me with the logistical support for conducting my study in Nagaland. Dr. Anamika Sharma, Mr. Hitu Choudhry, Mr.R.C.Verma, Mr.S.S.Gadge and the other staff of Indian Council of Agricultural Research, took time out from their busy schedule to assist me in a variety of ways. Mr. Heikiding, Convenor, Union of Cooperative Societies, Jalukie, helped me in my interactions with the respondents at Jalukie. I thank them all. I would also like to thank the Kikon family in Dimapur who gave me invaluable support and made my stay in Nagaland very comfortable.

I am thankful to the librarians of the various Institutes for allowing me access to the materials in their custody.

Finally, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the participants without whose help and cooperation this work would not have been possible.

Triveni Goswami
Guwahati

CONTENTS

"And there the loom, seeking thread by thread,
reconstructed the flower, raised the feather
to its imperial scarlet, interweaving
blues and saffrons, the skein
of fire and its yellow power,
the lineage of violet lightning,
the lizard's sandy green.
My people's hands on the looms,
poor hands that weave, one by one,
the starry feathers that your
skin lacked, dark-colored Country,
substituting the sky fiber by fiber
so that man may sing his loves
and kindle grain on the gallop!"

--Pablo Neruda, Looms, from Canto General.

8

INTRODUCTION

The nature of armed conflicts has undergone a dramatic transformation in the last couple of decades. Contemporary conflicts are fast adopting alternative methods of warfare, penetrating into towns, villages and homes of the common people. Armed conflicts denote not only wars but the entire gamut of resistance movements and struggles for self-determination. In many parts of the world, the use of systematic force through insurgency, reduction of democratic space, violations of human rights etc. have resulted in perpetuating fear and insecurity and thereby, fragmenting the emotional fabric of the community.

Living in a region of conflict has its own fallouts. Violence becomes a part and parcel of everyday existence and one almost becomes immune to it. It ceases to hurt or affect, unless one is personally involved in some way. Otherwise, it becomes just another news item- a regular dose of encounters, abductions and murders with the morning cup of tea- mere statistics to be forgotten about. It becomes so much a part of life, that it is seldom questioned.

An upbringing in an armed conflict situation makes one more intuitively aware of one's ethnic identity. The fear and anxiety aroused by the political consciousness in the environment outside, gets enmeshed within the self. Group consciousness impacts upon individual consciousness and the divide between the personal and the political gets blurred.

A growing sense of alienation from the mainstream, coupled with a desire to assert one's own identity drives one to question and focus on 'Ingroup- Outgroup' issues. Life in an armed conflict environment also makes one more aware of the presence of uniformed men in one's life. They are literally everywhere- an overwhelming existence- permeating the entire fabric of society. One often becomes

accustomed to the assaults and intrusions into one's space- both physical and psychical. Movement gets curtailed and one's sense of freedom gets inhibited under the constant gaze of the uniformed presence. In the area of my study, the state of Nagaland, for example, the presence of the men in the uniforms is very evident. Every few kilometres or so, one can locate a set- up of a contingent of the Assam Rifles or the Indian Army. Guardedness permeates through every detail of an individual's life and threads of insecurity and fear weave the tapestry of societal relations.

Peace does not merely imply the absence of war. Instead, it involves the creation of a secure environment by fostering fundamental societal changes focussing on safety and protection, particularly of the most vulnerable segments of a population. In such a scenario, women have been found to play to play a prominent role in rebuilding conflict-ridden societies and social resources. But while the role of a few organisations or their leaders is usually highlighted, the role of the ordinary woman is unfortunately sidelined. Ironically it is these women in the villages who have to put up a brave front to make ends meet; women who often have to straddle multiple roles, of a mother, a social activist, and a breadwinner in their day to day lives, as they continue to live in a strife torn community.

Apart from their day to day struggle for existence, these women undertake several activities in their efforts to re-build their community. In trying to cope with the fallouts of a conflict, they have to organize themselves to fight against the proliferation of societal evils such as alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, flesh trade and the biggest threat of all, HIV-AIDS.

These Voices are however seldom heard. Often marginalized, they are the peripherals, pushed away from the vestiges of public memory, to be forgotten and unacknowledged. It is these very lives that thread together a community. Whether it be through shared economic activities or taking action against anti social elements, the women are the backbone of their communities.

In recent years women are claiming a new voice in civil society by spearheading both reactionary movements and egalitarian movements for social change. Women community leaders in many parts of the world have shown exemplary courage in facilitating mediation and

10

reconciliation amongst warring factions, thus laying the foundations of a peace process. In Northern Ireland, for example, women's groups spent a decade building the trust between Protestant and Roman Catholics that served as the foundation for the final agreement. The experience of being marginalized within the societal framework allows the women to work for an inclusive and just society.

In fact, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan has said, that "women are always better equipped than men to present or resolve conflict. For generations, women have served as peace educators in their families and societies."[1] Recognizing the value of the role played by women in the peace process, the United Nations Security Council adopted a landmark resolution on 31st of October 2000 on Women and Peace and Security, that called for the inclusion of more women in peacekeeping negotiations and peacekeeping forces worldwide, as well as within the U.N. peace-building system. Security Council Resolution 1325 (31 October 2000) on Women and peace and security. SC/Res/1325 calls on all member-states and the UN to include women at the highest levels of decision-making, especially in peace negotiations. 1325 is the first time the Security Council officially endorses the inclusion of women in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements.[2]

The notion of peace-building has been defined by UNIFEM as "all external efforts to assist countries and regions in their transitions from war to peace, and include all activists and programmes designed to support and strengthen these transitions." According to Mazurana and Mc Kay,[3] "peace-building also includes gender aware and women empowering political, economic and human rights. It involves personal and group accountability and reconciliation processes that contribute to the reduction or prevention of violence. It fosters the ability of women, men, girls, boys in their own culture(s) to promote conditions of non-violence, equality, justice and human rights of all people, to build democratic institutions and to sustain the environment." Peace negotiations can include a plethora of activities, namely,

a) Power sharing agreements.
b) Economic Reconstruction.
c) Demobilization and Reintegration of soldiers.
d) Legislation on human rights.
e) Access to land, education and health.
f) Status of displaced people.

g) Empowerment of civil society.

It is in this context that the women's organizations engage as Civil Society Actors.

Women and Peace-building in the Northeast

The Northeast, with its mosaic of entangled ethnic discontents, provides us with several examples of spontaneous women's initiatives to reduce the impact of conflict, thereby creating spaces for women to give vent to the anger festering within. Women in this region have created several such fields of protest. According to M.B. Kuumba (2003) [4], symbols and meaning systems that involve gender are often incorporated into the logic of the resistance movements and utilized strategically during the course of a movement. Symbols of mourning and motherhood, for example, are often used by women as strategies of protest. In the Northeast, women's organisations have played an important role in an effort to build peace in the region. Mention may be made of *Matri Manch*, an organization set up to protest against the rape of minors in North Lakhimpur in 1991. The *Anchalik Mahila Sajagata Samiti* and *Chapar Anchalik Mahila Samiti* have played significant roles in mobilizing spontaneous marches of protesting women against army atrocities. The Naga Mothers Association (NMA) was established in 1984, and their peace initiative represents the use of the notion of motherhood for the political mobilization of women. In 1994-95, when army atrocities and violence due to inter-factionalism reached a peak, the NMA launched its campaign 'shed no blood'. They called for a halt to all killings and initiated a dialogue with the state and the underground leaders for a ceasefire. The *Meira Paibies* (Torch Bearers) have created a legend of sorts by spearheading large scale protest movements in Manipur. Initially set up to combat social evils like narcotics and alcohol, they were soon in the forefront of struggles against human rights violations by the security forces. These are just a few examples, but it amply reveals that women in Northeast India have been playing a prominent role in peace building efforts.

Nagaland: A Brief History

Nagaland is a narrow strip of mountainous territory bounded by Assam in the west, Arunachal Pradesh in the north and Manipur in the south. It also shares its boundary with Myanmar in the east. It lies between latitudes 26 degree 6 minute and 27 degree 4 minute north of the equator and between longitudes 93 degree 20 minutes and 95 degree 15 minutes east. The capital of Nagaland is Kohima. The state of Nagaland comprises of 11 districts namely, Kohima, Dimapur, Longleng, Zunheboto, Mon, Phek, Wokha, Mokokchung, Tuensang, Peren and Kiphire. There are atleast 36 tribes and sub-tribes in Nagaland, each having its own language belonging to the Tibeto-Burmese of languages.
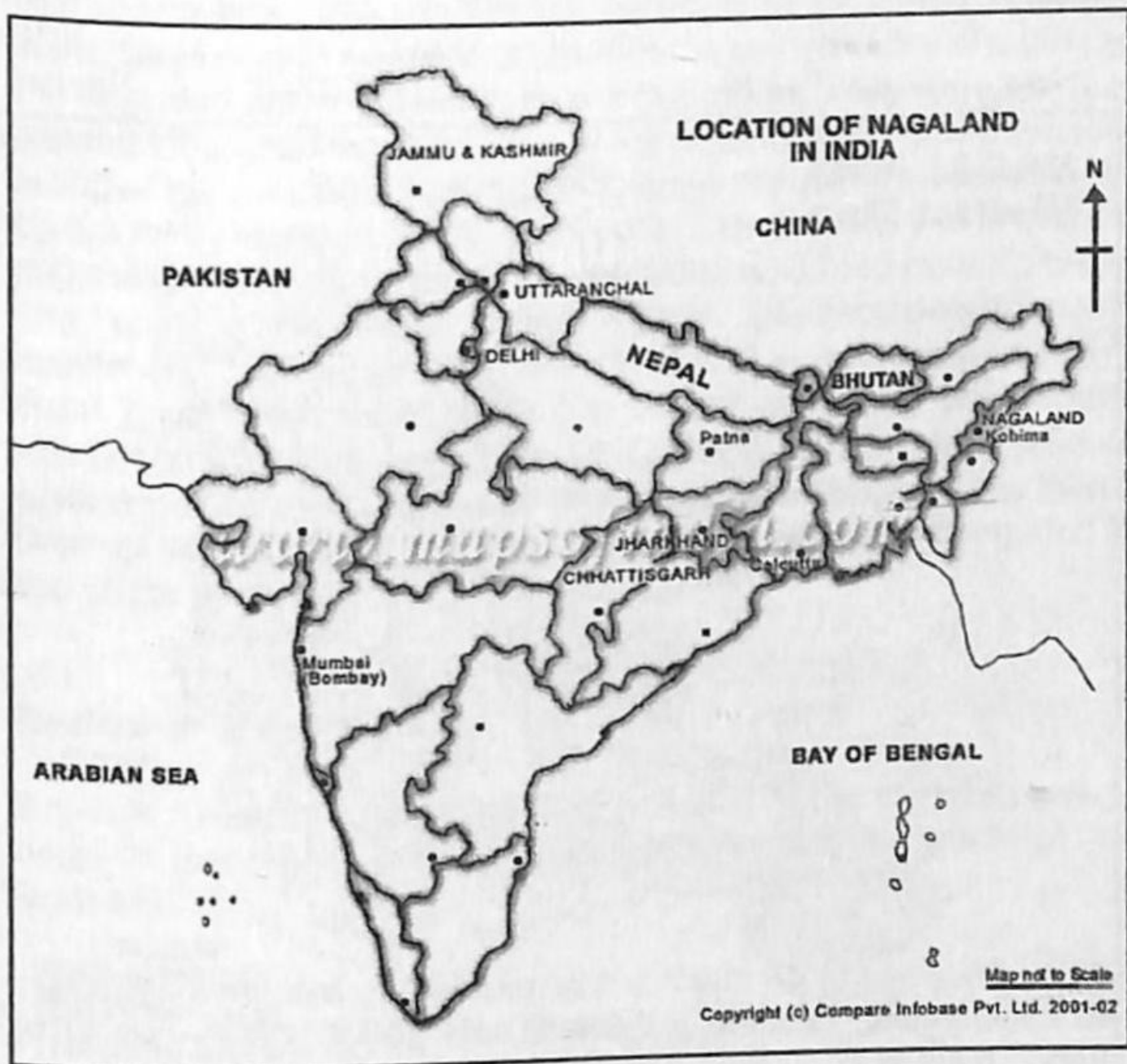
In 1879, the British came and conquered parts of Naga territory and called the area Naga Hills. When the Simon Commission visited Kohima in 1929, the Nagas pressed a demand for independence. Thereafter, according to the Indian Constitution Act of 1935, the Naga Hills was allowed to remain an "Excluded Area". On the 20th of February 1947, the Nagas demanded an Interim Government for a period of 10 years, to be effective prior to the departure of the British. A day before the Indian Union gained independence from the British colonial rule, on the 14th of August 1947, the Naga Nationalist Council (NNC) under the leadership of A.Z.Phizo, declared Independence and cabled this information to the U.N.O. On December 30th 1949, NNC made an announcement for a Sovereign State of Nagaland. On May 16 1951, the NNC arranged for a voluntary plebiscite to determine the unity of the Nagas. The results revealed that 99% were in favour of a sovereign state. On November 15th 1954, the Indian Armed Forces resorted to mass massacre in the "free Naga" territory. The Naga Constitution was approved of on January 14th 1956 and the Naga Federal Government was inaugurated on March 22 of the same year. [5]

The NNC, by successfully mobilizing the people of Nagaland, enforced a complete boycott of the 1952 General Elections in India. In 1956, the NNC under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo proclaimed the establishment of a government with its own constitution and a Naga Army. In the War of Liberation between the Indian Army and the insurgents that followed subsequently, large numbers of Naga soldiers
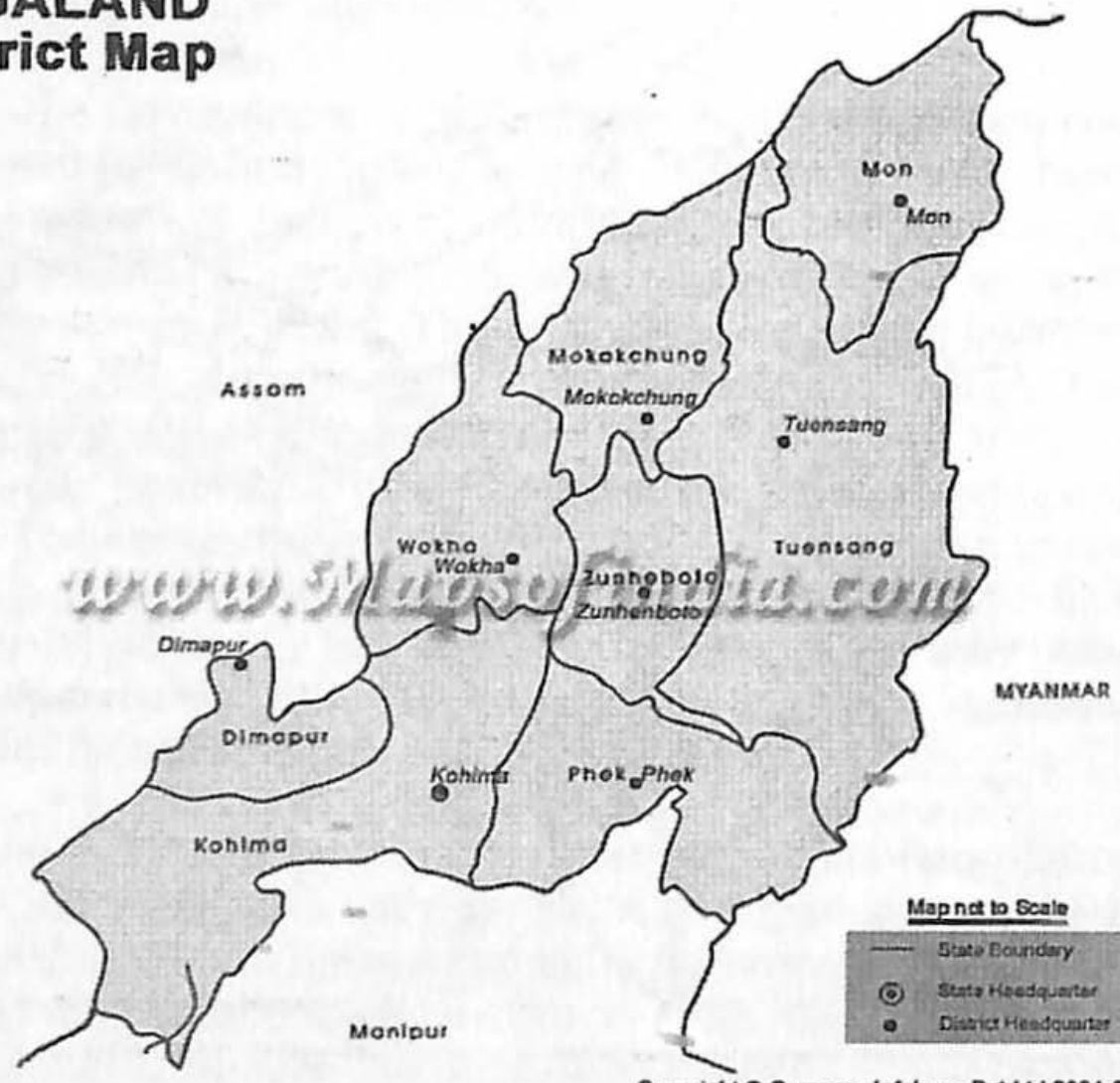
perished. In December 1963, Nagaland was conferred status of statehood within the Indian Union. Caught in the clashes between the Indian Government and the NNC, the common people suffered. This had serious fallouts, polarising not only the Naga people but the NNC as well, into moderate and extremist factions. The moderate elements favoured a negotiated settlement. Taking this as an opportunity, in an effort to usher in lasting peace, the Naga Baptist Church took steps to facilitate the formation of a Peace Mission in 1964. The Peace Mission comprised of Jai Prakash Narayan, B.P. Chaliha, the then Chief Minister of Assam, and Reverend Michael Scott. The Mission's recommendations were rejected by NNC and thereafter the Mission was called off.

In 1972, the Government of India outlawed the NNC, Naga Federal Government (NFG) and the Naga Army. The Shillong Accord between the Government of India and representatives of the underground organizations was signed in 1975, which resulted in the laying down of arms by a section of NNC. The Accord was repudiated by both A.Z. Phizo and Muivah. Soon, Muivah parted ways with the NNC and formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). In 1988, there was a further split of the NSCN into the Isak- Muivah and Khaplang factions. The Konyak tribes formed the NSCN-K (Khaplang) under the leadership of Khole Konyak and S.S. Khaplang. The Tangkhul faction, the NSCN-IM was led by Isak Swu and T. Muivah. The rivalry between the two factions continues till date, creating fissures in the peace process in the region.

On February 23rd, 1996, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao offered to hold unconditional talks with the Naga insurgent groups. In June 1996, the United Front forms a Federal Government and Deve Gowda becomes Prime Minister. On November 5th 1996, NSCN (I-M) welcomed Prime Minister Deve Gowda's offer to open peace talks. Following a dispute within the coalition government, Inder Kumar Gujral succeeded Deve Gowda as the Prime Minister and on May 19th 1997, the United Front Government at the centre negotiated a ceasefire with the NSCN-IM camp, which later was also extended to the NSCN-K faction. The five-year-old process of negotiations with the NSCN-IM reached a high point in January 2003 when the leadership of the outfit collectively came to New Delhi for a round of talks. The ceasefire agreement with the Government of India has been renewed for the last couple of years. The latest development in the recent round of negotiations

LOCATION OF NAGALAND IN INDIA

NAGALAND
District Map

N

Assom

Mon
Mon

Mokokchung
Mokokchung

Tuensang

Wokha
Wokha

Zunheboto
Zunhenboto

Tuensang

MYANMAR

Dimapur

Dimapur

Kohima

Phek Phek

Kohima

Manipur

Map not to Scale

State Boundary

State Headquarter

District Headquarter

has been Muivah's agreement to scale down the demand for a sovereign Nagaland to a demand for Nagalim, an integration of the various Naga inhabited areas of India's North Eastern region.

Traditionally, Naga women are known to have played a pivotal role in stopping inter factional violence through the institution of the *Pukhreila*.[6] The woman who got married with a man of another village was known as a *Pukhreila*. During the era of headhunting as well as wars, the *Pukhreila* were entrusted with the responsibility of removing the wounded and the dead from the battlefield. They were the only persons who could move freely in times of conflict and disagreement, acting as the conciliator between warring factions. They were ensured complete protection while performing their duties and severe punishment would be meted out to anyone who tried to harm them. The Pukhreila were held in high esteem and accorded the same respect and privileges during conflicts as well as during peace-times. From time immemorial, they have been accorded the socially sanctioned status of a peacemaker. Carrying on with this tradition, women's associations in Nagaland like the Naga Mothers' Association, Dimapur Naga Women's Ho Ho and others are actively engaged in the peace process.

Review of Literature

A primary review of literature has revealed some significant work done on women as peacemakers. Mention may be made of the following:

* In a paper entitled *Put Women at the Peace Table* (Christian Science Monitor, Nov. 13, 2000), Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina stated that despite the effectiveness of women at the grassroots level, women are largely absent from high-level peace negotiations. For example,

a) Only 2 out of 126 delegates to the Arusha peace talks in Burundi are women, although women are seeking peace within their communities there.
b) Only 2 women serve on the 15 member National Council of Timorese Resistance in East Timor, although women sparked off that resistance.
c) Only 5 women are in leadership positions in the U.N. Mission in

Kosovo, although women have forged the way for most of the groups that cross ethnic barriers daily to rebuild their communities.

* In the paper *While Men Make War, Women Wage Peace* (2001) by Swanee Hunt and Cristina Posa, the authors have cited the following:

a) In the South of Sudan, women working together in the New Sudan Council of churches conducted their own version of shuttle diplomacy and organized the Wunlit Tribal Summit in February 1999 to bring an end to the hostilities between the Dinka and the Nuer people. As a result, the Wunlit Covenant guaranteed peace between the two communities, who agreed to share rights to water, fishing and grazing land, which had been the key points of disagreements. The covenant also returned prisoners and guaranteed freedom of movement for members of both tribes.

b) Since 1994, the Pakistan – India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy has worked together on specific initiatives. In 1995, for instance, activists joined forces on behalf of fishers and their children who were languishing in each side's jails because they had strayed across maritime boundaries. As a result, the adversial governments released the prisoners and their boats.

c) Women in Northern Ireland have helped calm the often deadly "marching season" by   facilitating mediations between Protestant unionists and Catholic nationalists. Women bring together key members of each community as mediators to calm tensions.

d) In Columbia, women were so persistent in their demands for information regarding 150 people abducted from a church in 1999 that the army eventually gave them space on a military base for an information and strategy centre.

*In the paper *Local Initiatives for Peace: Community Level Conflict Resolution,* by Murray Thomson, Kenneth Bush and Barbara Shenstone, the authors have cited several examples of initiatives for peace taken up by small communities around the world. They have suggested that local initiatives for peace are context specific, shaped

18

by social, cultural, political, economic and security factors. In this paper, they have identified three models of local peace initiatives namely,

a) Initiatives taken entirely within and by the communities themselves.
b) Initiatives stimulated by outside factors such as aid transfers, but in which the communities are active participants.
c) Community initiatives largely influenced by national, regional or international organizations.

In conclusion, they suggested that peace couldn't be imposed; it must be cultivated from within –from the community to the state level and from the state level to the community.

* Rita Manchanda's book, *We Do More Because We Can: Naga Women in the Peace Process* is a study based on the work of the Naga Mothers' Association and Naga Women's Union of Manipur. The study is divided into two sections, the first part dealing with the historical emergence and progression of the Naga movement and the second part dealing with the Naga women's role and impact on: -

1) Negotiating with state and non-state armed actors to protect their communities.
2) Mobilizing for peace and reconciliation between warring factions.
3) Sustaining the ceasefire and peace process: bridging the inter community divide.
4) Mobilizing mass support and democratising the peace process.

* The book *Analyzing Gender: A Handbook of Social Science Research* (Ed. by Beth B. Hess and Myra Marx Ferre), chapter 19 'Feminists Thinking About War, Militarism and Peace' (by Cynthia H. Enloe) deals with the gendered aspect of war, militarism and peace. According to the author, those women in the world with the most pressing need to discover the underlying causes of war and peace are the ones, who reeling under a state of subordination are often perceived as "threats to national security". Patriarchy often promotes and sustains military values and needs. Two principal non-feminist theories on militarization are:

a) Militarization as a logical consequence of capitalism.
b) Militarization as being caused by the inherent inclinations of the state regardless of the nature of its economic system.

According to the author, several analysts propose that the reason why women are often excluded from the institution of the armed forces could probably be that, combat per se is at the core of masculine uniqueness, so that sharing this experience with women would diminish their identity as masculine creatures (Goldman, 1982; Chapkis, *et al,* 1982, 1985). The author believes that although peace is commonly understood to be the absence of violence, it is not that simple. Peace is a process and it must be able to produce itself. The *Feminists define peace as women's achievement of control over their own lives and believe that such achievement is fragile unless processes are created to reproduce it.*

*In the book *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*' (Ed. by Caroline O. N. Moser and Fiona C. Clark), Chapter 10 'Social Organizations: From Victims to Actors in Peace Building' (by Isabel Coral Cordero) deals with the activist role of women's popular movement in resisting the Peruvian armed conflict in the 1980s. According to the author, three years after the armed conflict began; the Peruvian army came into the scene unleashing indiscriminate repression. Trapped in the crossfire, the civilian population took it upon itself to face the challenge head on. They began to organize themselves as alternative networks involving the basic nuclei of the society – the family, interfamily and community spaces. Women thus organized themselves on two main fronts: as a women's movement and by linking up with other new social actors. They organised assistance to vulnerable population groups through emergency programmes and led the rebuilding of community organizations. Thus, they achieved dual roles- as women and as activists – in community organization.

*In the book *Autonomy Movements and Federal India* by Bhupinder Singh, Chapter 3 'The Naga Insurgency' deals with emergence of the insurgency in Nagaland. The author clearly outlines the progression of the movement and the form it currently takes in the political consciousness of the people in the region. The roots of this movement have been traced to the late 1940's with the birth of the Naga National Council (NNC), which was originally set up with an agenda for social

welfare and later took on political hues. The Naga Baptist Church played a significant role in initiating a dialogue for peace by forming the Peace Mission in 1964. The Shillong Accord was signed in 1975 between the Government of India and the moderate faction of the NNC, which was later repudiated by both Phizo and Muivah. Muivah's faction formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). Inter-tribal rivalry led to the further division of NSCN in 1988. According to the author, the desire for peace has acted as a powerful incentive for renunciation of violence. In 1997 as well as 2001, concerted efforts on both sides led to the declaration of ceasefire. The author concludes on an optimistic note stating that there is a latent aspect of a possible Naga Settlement.

Objectives:

Taking a gender perspective, the objectives of the present study are:

1) To find out how the notion of peace is constructed in the popular imagination of women in the region.
2) To find out the extent to which women are involved in the peace process.
3) To study the gendered aspect of decision-making and conflict resolution.
4) To study the contribution of women peacemakers in the economic and social reconstruction of civil society.

Thus in the present study, the researcher has made an attempt to focus on the grassroots-level initiatives taken by the women in the villages and towns of Nagaland, far away from the public glare, in their effort to rebuild their communities. The researcher hopes that the study will shed some light on their struggles to create and assert their distinctive identity and be acknowledged for who they are.

*****

Chapter - I

INSIGHT

The notion of Peace has been defined in more ways than one, by several different theorists. A commonly accepted notion of peace is the absence of war, which is termed **Negative Peace**. The noted 20th century French intellectual, Raymond Aron, was thinking of negative peace when he defined peace as a condition of "more or less lasting suspension of rivalry between political units".[1] Negative Peace may nonetheless include prevalent **social violence** (against women for instance) and **structural violence** (in situations of extreme inequality, for instance).

The other aspect of peace is **Positive Peace** which is used to describe an 'alternative vision'. Noted researcher of Peace and Conflict Studies, Johan Galtung, defines it as a condition where not only all types of violence are minimal or non-existent, but also where the major causes of future conflicts are removed. In other words, Positive Peace denotes a situation when major conflicts of interest as well as their violent manifestations are resolved.

According to Betty Reardon, "Peace is the antithesis of exploitation, marginalization and oppression and the indicators of conditions of justice and equity that comprise positive peace."[2] Donna Pankhurst believes that some ideal characteristics of a society experiencing positive peace are an active and egalitarian civil society, highly and inclusive democratic and political structures and an open and accountable government.

Positive peace is a long drawn process and may be more difficult to achieve than negative peace. This is because it focuses on peace

building and establishment of non-exploitative social structures. It is an all-encompassing notion, including in its fold, efforts to re-frame the community and societal networks to promote harmony, transparency and social justice.

Armed Conflict

An armed conflict is a **contested** incompatibility, which concerns government and /or territory and which involves the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, and results in at least 25 battle- related deaths.

The separate elements of the definition can be operationalized as follows:

1) **Use of armed force:** Use of arms in order to promote the parties' general position in the conflict, resulting in deaths.

   Arms: Any material means, e.g., manufactured weapons but also sticks, stones, fire, water etc.

2) **25 deaths:** A minimum of 25 battle – related deaths per year and per incompatibility.

3) **Party:** A government of a state or any opposition organization or alliance of opposition.

   3.1) Government: The party controlling the capital of the state.

   3.2) Opposition organization: Any Non-Governmental group of people having announced a name for their group and using armed force.

4) **State :** A state is

   4.1) An internationally recognized sovereign government controlling a specified territory,

   or

   4.2) An internationally unrecognised government controlling a specified territory whose sovereignty is not disputed by another internationally recognized sovereign government

previously controlling the same territory.

5) **Incompatibility** concerning government and/or territory the incompatibility, as stated by the parties, must concern government and/ or territory.

> 5.1) **Incompatibility**: The stated generally incompatible positions.
>
> 5.2) **Incompatibility concerning government:** Incompatibility concerning type of political system, the replacement of the central government or the change of its political composition.
>
> 5.3) **Incompatibility concerning territory:** Incompatibility concerning status of territory, e.g., the change of the state in control of a certain territory (interstate conflict), secession or autonomy (interstate conflict). [3]

Such a definition, apart from providing a comprehensive account of what an armed conflict is, debases the very essence of humanity – by reducing the loss of life to a mere statistic. Secondly, by stating that "*at least 25 battle related deaths should take place for a conflict to merit the label of an armed conflict*", it demeans human existence per se. The definition seems to imply that the deaths of one or two people are of no consequence, there has to be at least 25 deaths for **someone** to take notice of it.

Although the North-Eastern region of India has been bearing the brunt of several armed conflicts waged by the various ethnic elements in the region, the conflicts have never developed into full fledged wars. The nature of these conflicts has been that of Low Intensity Conflicts. The term **Low Intensity Conflicts (LIC)** has been variously defined. One such definition of LIC is "political or military confrontation between contending states or groups, below conventional war and above the routine peaceful competition among states. It frequently involves protracted struggles of competing principles and ideologies. LIC are often localized, generally in the Third World but contain certain regional and global security implications". [4] It is seen that in such situations

women have played a very dominant role in the peace process

Women, Conflict and Peace

In their diverse capacities, women try to minimize the effects of violence. Caught amidst conflicting situations women often acquire liberation from the old social order. They have to take on roles never thought of possible previously. They become the breadwinners of the family, breaking age-old traditions, moving out of the rigid societal norms to engage in activities, which were earlier thought to be a Man's sole domain. . A woman's involvement in a conflict is often multi-layered. She can be a mother, a wife, a combatant and a breadwinner of the family – shifting from one role to another – to safeguard the interests of her community. Women in their new-found roles, often take initiatives to facilitate changes within their communities, as their efforts make a meaningful dent in the peacemaking process

In experiencing a new life and having to take on new responsibilities, the notion of freedom too undergoes a change. Thus, more often than not, conflicts lead to the reworking of the societal framework, allowing new avenues and spaces for women to grow and explore their untapped potentialities. But, these positive transformations, can in no way justify a conflict. In such a scenario, the concept of peace defined as reverting back to a pre-conflict state will no longer be desirable. Instead, as Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake has noted that "peace necessarily constitutes a creative remaking of cultural meanings and agency – a third space between a familiar, often romanticized past and traumatic present".[5] Thus the notion of peace implies a space incorporating elements of transition and flexibility, reworking rigidities and embracing new changes to the societal order.

This raises certain other questions – Do women have an affinity towards peace? Are they inherently peaceful? Why are women accepted as an embodiment of Peace? To find answers to these questions, we must first try to understand how the notions of Feminity and Masculinity are culturally constructed and accepted by the society at large. Since time immemorial, certain characteristics have been associated with being a Male or a Female. When such an understanding is transmitted down from one generation to another, it begins to be accepted as a cultural given.

The notion of masculinity is often characterized by aggression and dominant behaviour and it has become a cultural norm to expect a man to be aggressive, dominant and play the role of a protector. On the other hand, femininity as a notion is culturally constructed to include characteristics such as nurturance and passivity. Thus, these very definitions mould the way a community thinks and expects a man and a woman to behave. According to Goldstein, "killing in war does not come naturally for either gender, yet the potential for war has been universal in human societies. To help overcome soldier's reluctance to fight, cultures develop gender roles that equate 'manhood' with toughness under fire. Across cultures and through time, the selection of men as potential combatants (and women for feminine war support roles) has helped shape the war system." [6]

Women have for long been subjugated and excluded from structures of power. Knowing and living through these experiences, have shaped them into strong individuals – giving them an impetus to work for justice and peace. It is women, at the grassroots level, who can, through their lived experiences, initiate efforts of peacemaking to reconstruct a strife-torn community. It is in this sense that women can emerge as peace-builders, as catalysts for social change.

Women and Peace-building

Peace-building is the construction of a new environment, transforming deficient national structures and capabilities and strengthening of new democratic institutions. Peace building creates and maintains beneficial conditions sustainable (life-enhancing) social, economic, political and spiritual development of all people. [7] Thus the term peace- building refers to a complex web of processes - incorporating within it, different strategies, roles and interventions employed by individuals at different stages post- conflict.

John Paul Ledarach has proposed a model of peace-building. He articulates this in the form of a pyramid on the basis of where individuals (the conflicting parties and peace builders) are located in a system and the approaches that work best in a particular sector or level of society. [8] In the model, the pinnacle represents the top- level leadership or track one (policy makers, politicians, military, diplomats) who employ high level negotiations or mediations as strategies of peace-building. The middle range leadership comprises individuals

representing NGOs, educational institutions, humanitarian and relief organizations, the academia and the media and they utilize approaches such as problem solving workshops, form peace commissions etc. The base represents grassroots workers (members of indigenous NGO's, psychologists working with trauma victims etc.) who are directly affected by the conflict. They engage in psychosocial work in post-war trauma, grassroots-level training and form local peace commissions.

Women can play a key role in peace-building by initiating efforts to rebuild the community- socially, emotionally and economically. According to Anuradha Chenoy, women invariably combine the political, the social and the personal in their politics. Women can bridge the gap between the civil society and the powers to be and be effective leaders at the grassroots level. The post conflict social milieu can be fraught with uncertainties. In such a scenario, women have an added responsibility to redefine and re-negotiate gender roles and interpersonal relationships. The greatest challenge of all is to rehabilitate the social sector and create conditions for long-term social integration of the community.

The difficulty in making women's peace activism visible is that women themselves see their activity as non-political and an extension of their domestic concerns as 'stretched roles'. Their activism is dubbed 'accidental activism' so to speak.[9] Women often seek out informal spaces within the societal framework in times of conflict, to give vent to the anger and frustration festering within. In doing so, they surpass the private-public divide, that is, they transcend the private space and participate in the struggle, as social actors.

Much of the activism is at the local, grassroots level. Women's activism is most visible when politics are less hierarchically structured. Rita Manchanda[10] has rightly stated that, "because women's peace activism is grounded in the informal space of politics, it gets undervalued and as post conflict politics moves into formal space, it gets marginalized." This raises the issue of their access to power; how politically empowered they are really and how seriously their opinions are taken. Are women relegated to being mere props in any movement of change or are their voices also heard?

In the North Eastern region of India, women have been used as an

instrument for asserting authority by the opposing forces and are acknowledged as a strong pressure group in the society. Their role is confined to carrying out processions; sit–in demonstrations and other similar modes of protest. Yet, when it comes to formal, decision-making settings, women are excluded and marginalized.

Women perhaps have a better understanding of pain and conflict because they experience it so closely in their lives. They view conflict differently and can thus enrich the entire process of negotiations and peace-building, by contributing new perspectives from their day to day experiences. Thus, including women in formal discussions can lead to a more integrated and gendered perspective of what constitutes peace, conflict and human security.

*****