CHAPTER-V

MOTHERS ORGANIZATIONS: APPROPRIATING MOTHERHOOD AND STRATEGIES OF PROTEST

Women have been found to adopt the role of an activist within the framework of motherhood in many struggles across the globe. In the present study, two organizations, namely, the Naga Mothers Association (NMA) in Nagaland and the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust (KGNMT) in Guwahati, Assam, were chosen as two case studies, to explore how the potential of motherhood has been utilized in peace building in the states of Nagaland and Assam, respectively. The rationale for choosing these two organizations was that both have been working within a framework of motherhood to initiate efforts for social change, challenge social evils and work towards building peace in the conflict ridden contexts in both Nagaland and Assam.

Naga Mothers Association (NMA): An Overview

Neidonuo Angami, the first President of the NMA provides a succinct overview of how NMA was born and the circumstances that led a group of Naga women to establish NMA in 1984, to not only challenge the social evils plaguing the society at that time but also motivate the youth to work towards a brighter future.

The NMA was formed on February 14, 1984, at Kohima Local ground as a state level voluntary organization by a handful of concerned mothers to combat social evils prevailing in the state of Nagaland. According to Neidonuo Angami, it was set up with the idea of providing a common platform for the Naga women—as a channel of communication for their mutual interests and welfare—and to uphold the spirit of motherhood and dignity of human values and rights with its motto “Human Integrity.”

1 Angami, N Role of Mothers in Peace Building, Paper presented at the Peace Education Consultation for North East India, jointly organized by CFPEM and RAISE, sponsored by North East Council, Shillong, April 21-23, 2007
With financial constraints looming large on the horizon, the mothers of the Kohima village volunteered to raise funds by organizing and participating in a football match (on November 13, 1984). The match raised a sum of Rs.13,000/- which was enough to meet the immediate needs of NMA. Incidentally, the match was one of the first women’s football exhibitions to be played in Nagaland.

NMA launched movements to promote afforestation (to curb the rampant destruction of forests in the State) and also campaigned for electoral reforms. Angami states that NMA sent “directives to our women at the grassroots through the tribal women’s organization to exercise their franchise in the spirit of responsible citizens and not to be carried away by the false promises and unrealistic expectations. At the same time women were called upon to be vigilant and to participate pro-actively in their respective areas to ensure an environment conducive for free, accountable and transparent election.”

In the 1980s another problem that plagued the Naga society was the extensive use of drugs and alcohol amongst the youth that was threatening to tear the social fabric. Although, the mothers had no prior experience in dealing with issues of Alcoholism and Drug Addiction, they took it upon themselves to initiate anti trafficking movements. Elaborating on it further, she states, “.. it did not take us long to realize that just controlling the supply of drugs would not resolve the addiction problem. And so it was that sheer need to reach out to our young addicted boys that led us to the setting up of Mt.Gilead Home, one of the first rehabilitation centres in the State in 1989.”

With time, as the political imbroglio continued to get more complex in Nagaland, numerous youth were killed and large numbers of families were destroyed. During the 5th General Assembly of NMA in 1994 at Zunheboto, the focus was on the pain caused by the bloodshed. They adopted a resolution to set aside a day of mourning in memory of all those killed due to the political turmoil, irrespective of their identity. According to Angami,

The mourning day was observed on August 5 1994 at the Nagaland State Academy Hall, Kohima starting with church bells of all denominations,

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2 Ibid
3 Ibid

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tolling in funeral tones early in the morning. Banners and posters in black background with messages like “Mothers anguished over tragic killings and deaths”, “Forgive and Unite” were placed all over the capital town. About 3000 mothers representing all Naga tribes gathered together in tears and prayed for the spirit of God to heal our society. As an outcome of the day, the following resolutions were unanimously adopted:

1. Resolved to form a Peace Team under the banner “Shed No More Blood.”

2. That, the team shall appeal to all groups of Naga National workers, our brothers and sisters to stop killing one another in the spirit of forgiveness. While appreciating the selfless sacrifice to have rendered to our people, we also appealed to them to remember that each drop of bloodshed is draining the life blood of our nation.

3. To restore the broken society, we resolved to first set our homes in order through setting up of a family altar, which will create a space for families to come together for a heart to heart dialogue and for prayers for restoration of family life.

NMA has emerged as a respected civil society actor and is most well known for its active participation in the negotiations between the Government of India (GoI) and NSCN. They took part in the Consultations that took place both in India as well as in Thailand. NMA has developed linkages with the Naga People’s Movement for Human Rights, Naga Students Federation and the Naga Hoho in initiating a “Journey of Conscience” – to build bridges of communication with various civil society actors and stakeholders within Nagaland and elsewhere in India. NMA has also actively campaigned for the withdrawal of the draconian Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA).

Elaborating on the strength of the NMA, Angami states, “The strength of NMA has always been the tribal representatives. Every tribe has a woman’s organization, which sends its representatives to NMA. NMA conducts all its activities through its tribal organizations and we encourage every organization to respond to their own areas’ challenges and needs with their innovative initiatives. We still have a long way to go. From experience, we can say that, there is no syllabus to follow or no methods to

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4 Ibid
practice in peace-building work—we need to be constantly creative, responsive and proactive in our approach and must humbly accept difficulties and challenges if we want to make peace and justice prevail.”

Al Ngullie, a senior journalist with one of the leading dailies in Nagaland describes the NMA as “a social organization that plays the role of social assessors and social adjudicators.” Elaborating on the role of the NMA in the complex political scenario in Nagaland, Nikeu Iralu, an activist and an educationist, states “I believe NMA should develop its role as the conscience keeper and voice of compassion of Naga society and jealously guard its impartiality. It will then help our society in all fields including holding the political groups and factions within the sane bounds of human behavior.”

According to Article 5 of the Constitution of the Naga Mothers Association (NMA), that deals with the issue of Membership:

The NMA shall be a voluntary social organization where membership will be open to three categories as follows and an annual fee shall be fixed to determine membership.

a) Individual Membership: For any Naga mother or adult woman. The term ‘mother’ herein shall connote the state of adult womanhood where one technically attains “the status of motherhood” by virtue of Naga tradition, whereby one eventually bears the possibility of adulthood or motherhood, irrespective of marriage or childrearing.

b) Tribal Membership: For the eleven districts of Nagaland as per Government.

c) Supporting Member: For any Naga mother or adult woman whose free will or donation relationship to the NMA shall be considered as supporting members.

d) Annual membership fee of Rs.2/- will be collected from every Naga female by respective tribal units.

The NMA has been at the forefront of initiatives for social change in Nagaland. They are considered to be a respectable civil society actor who can usher in positive changes in the socio-political scenario in the State. The NMA has for long

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5 Ibid
6 Interview with Al Ngullie, Senior Journalist through email, December 10, 2011
7 Interview with Niketu Iralu, social activist through email, February 10, 2012
spearheaded the movement demanding 33% reservation for women in municipal and town council elections and despite facing stiff opposition from bureaucratic systems, the members of NMA have continued their movement unabated. According to Sarah Nuh, the present Vice President of NMA, “Political empowerment is yet to be materialized… even 33% of reservations for women in Town Councils and Municipality have not been implemented, for which the NMA has taken the Government to Court.”  

Meneno Vamuzo, a social worker and Sano Vamuzo, the Chairperson of Nagaland State Commission for Women have brilliantly captured the essence of the NMA’s role in peace building. They say,

The Naga mother has traditionally been a peacemaker not only within their individual families, but they also functioned as mediators between villages that were at war. This is continuing in the present context as the Mother in today’s context strives to bring peace within the broader context of the Naga family—every Naga army cadre is considered a “son” to the mothers…

The assertion that the Naga mother is akin to a ‘universal mother’ to every Naga ‘freedom fighter’ sums up the significance of the NMA as a social institution that plays a positive role as a facilitator in the process of peace building in Nagaland.

The Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust (KGNMT): An Overview

The KGNMT Assam was established on January 9, 1946 when Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi inaugurated the training centre of the Trust at the Sarania Ashram in Guwahati. Gandhiji’s vision for setting up KGNMT was a scheme based on self-help and self-maintenance and he entrusted the responsibility of the Trust upon Smt. Amalprava Das.

According to Samiran Das, a rural workers’ training school was established at Sarania with the aim of imparting training to workers so that they could go to the villages and offer services in maternity care, child welfare as well as other development

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8 Interview with Sarah Nuh, VP of NMA, May 16, 2012
9 Interview with Meneno Vamuzo (social worker) and Sano Vamuzo (Chairperson, Nagaland State Commission for Women) through email May 9, 2012
activities\textsuperscript{10}. The training centre at KGNMT in 1946 was set up with seven trainees. On completion of the training, the trainees were to be absorbed in the \textit{Gram Seva Kendras}. By 1947, 14 such \textit{Gram Seva Kendras} were established all over Assam and keeping in mind the need felt in the villages, the curriculum was expanded to two years. During natural calamities too Gram Sevikas and workers from the Trust under the able leadership of Amalprava Das undertook relief operations\textsuperscript{11}

Elaborating on the expansion of the activities of the KGNMT, Samiran Das states,

\begin{quote}
J.P.Narayan and Amalprava Baideau toured different parts of Arunachal Pradesh. When they toured Subansiri district, they did not find a single lady teacher working in any school of that region. The local people did not send girls to school, thus depriving them of the educational facilities. So J.P.Narayan advised Amalprava to open Kasturba Centres immediately in the region.
\end{quote}

In 1963, Amalprava, with two of her fellow workers went to Hapoli, the head quarters of Subansiri district. They decided to open a centre at Hong village, four miles away from Hapoli. Amalprava with two other workers Hiran Hazarika and Seuti Rava formally started the centre there. Thanks to the untiring efforts of Amalprava baideau, the centre in the Hong village is now one of the best known centres in the North Eastern region.\textsuperscript{12}

According to Kusum Bora Mokashi,

\begin{quote}
At present, there are twenty (20) centres in the Northeastern region (spread over Meghalaya, Assam and Arunachal). Besides \textit{Sevika Kendras}, there are crèches run for low income families, whose parents need to go out to work. There are sixty four (64) \textit{sevikas} in total, amongst whom seven (7) are males (working as accountants, chowkidars and peons). Centres have been set up in several backward regions and, amongst tea labourers. The one in Hong village in Arunachal Pradesh is still functioning.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} Das, Samiran \textit{Amalprava Das}, Translated by Hiranmoyee Devi, Published by Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Sarania, Guwahati, 2004, pg.20
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid pp.24-26
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid pp.33-34
\textsuperscript{13} Personal Interview with Kusum Bora Mokashi, at KGNMT, Sarania, Guwahati on May 12, 2012
Communitarian Initiatives

The workers of KGNMT have had a long history of working towards social upliftment and maintaining peace during times of conflict. This was especially evident, when members of the Trust set up the Maitri Ashram near North Lakhimpur in the 1960s to promote friendship and harmony amongst people across the Indo-China border. After the devastating earthquake of 1950, they also set up a service centre catering to children and widows—Kasturba Kalyan Kendra—near Ananda Bagan.14

According to Samiran Das,

In June 1960, communal clashes broke out between the Assamese and Bengali communities on the language issue. Amalprava Baideau was greatly worried about the situation and tried her best to improve it. Saravodaya workers were instructed to play the role of ‘Shanti Sena.’ She went along with her workers to the affected areas to study the situation there….Programmes such as ‘Shanti Yatra’, ‘Nagar Pada Yatra’, formation of peace committees, were taken in hand for restoration of lasting peace in the region.15

Continuing the legacy of engagement with communities at the grassroots, KGNMT has made several attempts to initiate non-violent communiqués with the rebel groups in the conflict strife region of Assam. As a consequence of one such initiative, the Matri Samaj was set up within KGNMT in 1997.

Elaborating on the role of KGNMT’s dialogue with the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), Kusum Bora Mokashi, a former Pratinidhi of KGNMT stated,

Gandhians at several points in time had initiated communications with the ULFA leaders. We had written open letters to them through newspapers. Sushila Nair had also written to them. The ULFA had replied saying Assam had been meted ‘step motherly’ treatment by the Centre (referring to the Government of India) and they believed their path of revolution would achieve their stated goals. In 1997, when the insurgency was at its peak, a Matri Shanti Mouno Jatra was initiated from Sadiya to Kokrajhar. In

14 Das, Samman Amalprava Das, Trandated by
15 Ibid pp.44-45
Lakhimpur, a large group of people had congregated in a Namghar one day during the yatra. A couple of male cadres of the ULFA intimated two gram sevikas that they had been called somewhere. On reaching the appointed place, the Gram Sevikas were asked to put an end to the yatra at gunpoint and threatened with dire consequences. But the gram sevikas refused to relent and told the cadres that they were not afraid to die. After much persuasion, the cadres let them go.\footnote{16 Personal Interview with Kusum Bora Mokashi, at KGNMT, Sarania, Guwahati on May 12, 2012}

**Assam Matri Samaj**

The Assam Matri Samaj was set up after the murder of Sanjoy Ghosh in 1997. All sevikas of the KGNMT can be members of the Assam Matri Samaj. Although it is not a registered association within KGNMT, it spearheaded the efforts to broker peace with the ULFA. Damayanti Devi, the present Pratinidhi of the Trust, explained how the Assam Matri Samaj had sent letters to the ULFA to end their spree of violence during the 1990s. Sushila Nair had also sent an open letter to the ULFA. In response to these letters, the ULFA responded by saying “Matri hoi aamar dukh buja nai! (Being a mother you have not made an effort to understand our pain). They also stated that they found the view adopted by the KGNMT to be biased (Ek pokhyo jen paun).\footnote{17 Personal Interview with Damayanti Devi, at KGNMT, Sarania, Guwahati on May 12, 2012}

Anima Dutta who has been carrying out remarkable work in Baksa district with the Bodo youth also described how Assam Matri Samaj has been able to initiate positive changes within the communities there. She stated,

Mothers do a lot for children. I used to speak with the male cadres about their mothers and what their opinion would have been on the path chosen by their sons. We organize meetings on Mahila Chetana Sibi (create awareness amongst women), Paribeh (environment) protection etc. Resource persons were taken from Guwahati to talk on issues such as health, education, schools etc. We tend to invite two to three women from each village during such meetings, such that they can go back to their village and disseminate the
information. We hope we can bring about social upliftment through Assam Matri Samaj.18

Matri Diwas

*Matri Diwas* is celebrated for a week every year between the 16th and 22nd of February. Kasturba Gandhi is regarded as “Rashtramata” or the “Mother of the Nation” by the members of KGNMT and a week long, series of events culminates in the celebration of *Matri Diwas* on the 22nd of February to commemorate her death anniversary. On the 7th day of the week long celebrations (22nd February), a meeting (*samaroh*) is organized within the premises of the KGNMT at Sarania, Guwahati. During the meeting, a brief description of the activities carried out in the last six days is provided, followed by a discussion/public forum on the activities/events chalked out in the pamphlet. The discussion is then closed by a follow up on the steps to be taken thereafter.

The objectives of *Matri Diwas* are three fold:

- Emancipation of women
- Self Awareness for their development.
- Awareness of their Rights and Education19

Every year a pamphlet is brought out by KGNMT outlining the significance and vision of the *Matri Diwas*; highlighting issues concerning the people as well as the ways to mitigate them. For example, in 2009, the issue highlighted was to work for peace within one’s community and in 2012, it was addiction.20 The pamphlet describes the essence of Motherhood as a natural extension of being a mother, with special emphasis being laid upon the virtues of unconditional love, self sacrifice, service above self etc.

*Matri Diwas* is celebrated to raise awareness on the significance of service towards ‘others’. Programmes during the *Matri Diwas* include prayers, *padyatra*, *Matri Shakti*

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18 Personal Interview with Anima Dutta, at KGNMT, Sarania, Guwahati on May 12, 2012
19 Personal Interview with Hema Bharali, at her residence, Sarania, Guwahati on June 18, 2010
20 Personal Interview with Kusum Bora Mokashi, KGNMT, Sarania, Guwahati on May 12, 2012,
Jagaran (an extension of Stree Shakti Jagaran), interactive sessions on teacher-student relations, mother-child relations and how to respect the elders etc.

Matri Diwas is conducted by involving the mothers and the youth in the following programmes:

- Discussions on the essence of Matri Diwas
- Cleanliness drive undertaken by school students and teachers in the school premises or the neighbourhood.
- Creating awareness amongst children regarding the need to help those who are disadvantaged.

The Programmes held on Matri Diwas (as described in a pamphlet) include the following:

- Children should begin their day by offering obeisance to their mothers as well as all mothers in their neighbourhood.
- Mothers should gather the children in their neighbourhood and conduct story-telling sessions—narrating the biographies of ‘great people’ and philosophers.
- An attempt should also be made to spread cheer amongst disadvantaged children, by distributing fruits, sweets etc.
- There will be a program held on the occasion at the premises of the KGNMT in Sarania, Guwahati and all women’s organizations are cordially invited for it.
- All the functionaries of the Panchayat and Gram Sabhas are also requested to spread the word about the Matri Diwas in their areas and make an effort to consolidate the information regarding the events on Matri Diwas in their areas.

Activities Undertaken by KGNMT:

The website for the Assam State Branch of KGNMT lists the following as the aims of the Trust:

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21 Pamphlet on Matri Diwas (translated from Assamese)
22 Accessed from the website [http://kgnmtguwahati.org/About%20Us/aims_objectives.html](http://kgnmtguwahati.org/About%20Us/aims_objectives.html) on May 9, 2013
• To serve the five lakh villages of India by taking up such social service programmes that would bring succour to the sufferings of the poor, needy mothers and children of rural India.
• To establish dispensaries, health care centres, maternity centres, child welfare centres and leper homes etc. for women and children of backward villages.
• To take steps to maintain a clean environment for women and children and preventive measures against diseases.
• To endeavour to provide primary education facilities to the rural women and children with necessary impetus so as to make them inclined to avail of such opportunities. Also, to impart training in artefacts, cottage industries and other occupational arts.
• To train workers to impart such training.
• To take up such programmes which would help in successful attainment of the above objectives or by which women and children could be motivated to co-operate with such programmes.

The website also states that at present, the Kasturba Trust runs the following social service centres at its various centres: Creche, Village welfare centres, Maternity centres, Adult education centres, Pre-Basic Schools, Rural institute for higher education of women, Hospitals, Treatment and rehabilitation centres for lepers, Nutritious food centres and Welfare centres for children and women.  

The KGNMT centre at Sarania in Guwahati, houses a crèche for underprivileged children, a destitute home for widows and a training centre for gram sevikas. According to Kusum Bora Mokashi, the training curriculum for the gram sevikas at KGNMT has evolved over time. She stated that other than activities in the areas of health, education, agriculture (crops to foster self sustenance) and weaving Khadi (to make them self-independent), with the passage of time, as unrest grew in the State, a peace initiative in the form of a Shanti Sena was also introduced. The vision for such a programme was to bring about a feeling of amity/ ‘sadbhavna’ during times of conflict In fact in 2001, training for Shanti Sena was given to all Gram Seva Kendras,

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23 Ibid
across Assam. In 2009, KGNMT also began publishing a newsletter called *Shanti Doot* (Messenger of Peace).

KGNMT has organized numerous awareness camps (about 70 in total) throughout the state, on issues such as pollution control, health, education, role of the mother etc. They have also organized focused group discussions, *padyatras* on the concerns of peace, and social evils like *Dayani Hatya* (Witch Hunt) plaguing the society today.

As Kusum Bora Mokashi states,

> We have tried to dispel the superstitious beliefs regarding ‘*dayani hatya*’ by organizing meetings and talking to the community which has been a witness to such incidents. We have also set up Self Help Groups (SHG). The first SHG in Assam was set up by KGNMT in 1997. The gradual emergence of the lending facilities by the banks, and the introduction of the notions of the revolving fund and the subsidy soon found favour amongst the people. This brought about the eventual decline of the institution of SHGs. With it, the main goal of the SHG (as an institution to bring about amity amongst diverse social groups) disappeared. Besides these, the *Gram Seva Kendra* in Baksa district runs a herbal medicine garden where herbal plants are grown and products such as *Triphala*, *bel sharbat*, *mukho sudhi*, *powder of the bark of the Arjun tree* are sold for local consumption.

**Mothers as Activists and Strategies of Protest**

In many conflict situations, women have organized themselves around the notion of motherhood as they consider it to be non-threatening. The mother-activists need not necessarily be mothers in a biological sense but are women who identify themselves with the virtues of motherhood and are able to connect with the normative essence of being a mother.

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24 Personal Interview with Kusum Bora Mokashi, KGNMT, Sarania, Guwahati on May 12, 2012
25 Ibid
Melissa W.Wright (2007) in her paper *Femicide, Mother-Activism, and the Geography of Protest in Northern Mexico*, talks about how the strategy of the mother-activist, was adopted by women to counter the discourse of the public woman that was perceived negatively by society (as being contaminated and ‘fallen’ for having ventured out of her home). According to her, the Mother-activist in contrast “represents the woman who, motivated by her private experience as a mother, trespasses into the public sphere, not as a public woman but as a private one whose presence on the street indicates something is terribly wrong…”

According to Wright, mother-activists tend to be diverse in their form and strategies, but share,

something in common in their proclamation that their politics originates in their experiences as mothers. Their public life on the street, in short, always begins with the private one in the family. This point of origin is fundamental to mother-activism and its strategy for diffusing political hostility to its actions. It is an activism that plays upon the patriarchal concept of matronly woman as inherently apolitical—or as the opposite of virile male subversives—to present the image of mothers as “nonthreatening” to governing elites even as their demands often challenge the basic foundations of state and economy (Taylor, 1997; Scott, 2002).  

Wright has coined the term ‘conservative radicals’ to describe these mother-activists, as “as they couch radical demands within the conservative demeanor of women defined as mothers within a patriarchal context that demands female obligation to the male-headed, domestic realm.”  

Thus, mother-activism provides women with an opportunity to carve a niche for themselves in the public sphere as well as offers them with a political identity, thereby enabling their integration into the political arena.

In the paper, *The Madres de la Plaza de Mayo: asserting motherhood; rejecting feminism?*, Sara E. Howe, talks about how the mothers in Argentina adopted a strong maternalist role, focusing their opposition to the repressive regime through their role.

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27 Ibid pg. 406
28 Ibid
29 Ibid
30 Ibid pg.421
as mothers, and the rights and responsibilities inherent to motherhood. According to Howe, women in Argentina, adopted the traditional role of the mother assigned to them by the regime which reflected the Catholic values of dedication to the home and family, and directed their efforts of protest from within this role. This enabled them to metamorphose into a non-threatening entity, thus allowing them greater access to the public space.

In the article, *Motherhood as a Space of Protest: Women’s Political Participation in Contemporary Sri Lanka*, the author, Malathi de Alwis has written about the origin and growth of the Mothers’ Front in the political landscape of Sri Lanka. Employing their emotive potential to full advantage, the strategies used by the Mother’s Front included amongst others—weeping, cursing, indulging in religious rituals, holding mass rallies etc.

Maternal activism can at times be generated from an experience of social oppression. Prevalent religious discourses can also mould the manner in which Motherhood is socially constructed and perceived by the people. While in the motherist movements in Latin America, the influence of the Catholic Church is quite distinct, within the context of Palestine, Islam can be seen having a similar influence. As Peteet states “In spite of cultural diversity and widely varying political economies in the Arab world, cultural notions of motherhood, and of mothers as sacrificial and devoted, are to a degree consistent. Islamic discourse elevates mothers to near saintliness and exhorts believers to honour mothers.”

In the paper, *Mobilizing Mothers for War: Cross-National Framing Strategies in Nicaragua’s Contra War*, the author Lorraine Bayard de Volo has employed a feminist approach to address the gendered nature of cultural politics and collective identity and has shown how, in the battle to win the hearts and minds of the people, both the State as well as the opposition have relied primarily on maternal images of

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31 Howe, S.E. *The Madres de la Plaza de Mayo: asserting motherhood; rejecting feminism?* Journal of International Women’s Studies Vol. 7 #3 March 2006
32 Ibid pg.45
women. Bayard de Volo has applied the Frame Theory to explain how maternal symbolism and imagery are used during conflict by opposing parties. According to the author, framing strategies such as maternal symbolism are often used by the States, especially during war when they have to mobilize support from the people. In the article, Bayard de Volo proposes that maternal framing benefits the militaries in at least three ways: (1) channelling maternal grievances, (2) disseminating propaganda through supposedly apolitical mothers, and (3) evoking emotions and sympathy nationally and internationally.35

In the paper *The Role and Example of Chilean and Argentinian Mothers in Democratization* by Wanda C. Krause, the author has highlighted how women have been given a raw deal by being relegated to the margins of institutional politics and have often been denied the right to exercise power as a decision-maker. In this context, the author particularly touches upon the Chilean and Argentinian women who through their roles as mothers in the 1980s played a significant role as actors in the social movements protesting against political disappearances and thereby, facilitated political changes in Chile and Argentina respectively. Responding to the widespread terror, women in both Argentina and Chile organized themselves as a collective to launch protest movements.

In Argentina, in 1977, a year after the military took over power, a group of middle aged women began to meet together and discuss strategies to locate their disappeared relatives. Their strategies included exchanging information, silent marches carrying candles and photographs of the relatives who had disappeared and wearing white scarves on their heads embroidered with the names of those who had disappeared. These women came to be known to the world as Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.36 In Chile, in 1974, a year after General Pinochet’s dictatorship began, the Mothers of the Association of Families of Detained-Disappeared (AFDD) was formed. The members of the AFDD began to create “arpilleras” or patchwork tapestries to denounce human rights violations in Chile. Other than the *arpillera* workshops, the other strategies

36 Krause, Wanda C. ‘The Role and Example of Chilean and Argentinian Mothers in Democratization’, *Development in Practice*, Volume 14, No.3, Taylor and Francis, Ltd on behalf of Oxfam GB, April, 2004, p. 371
used by the AFDD were marches, hunger strikes in public view and public mournings of the dead.  

**NMA and their Strategies of Protest**

The NMA has adopted non-violent means to register their protests and make their voices heard. As Al Ngullie, a senior journalist with a leading daily in Nagaland states, “Their strategies are usually peaceful and democratic —utilizing the media, public platforms and civil mobilization. Any other method would certainly be unbecoming of them for their role as social adjudicators.” 38 This statement reflects an underlying expectation of how a social actor (in this case, the NMA) should conduct itself in the public gaze.

Elizabeth Inti, a young assistant professor in a college, states that “the strategies adopted by NMA have not been extremist like other women groups in the North East but more on neutral grounds. They have not gone out much like the Manipuri women protest movement but have centered themselves more to conference halls, seminars, silent processions, public events etc.” 39

Meneno Vamuzo, a young social worker and Sano Vamuzo, the current Chairperson of the Nagaland State Commission for Women have provided a concise overview of what they perceive are the strategies adopted by NMA. They state,

> The NMA appeals to their “brothers,” who are the men/ leaders in the various factions, and pleads for protection and cessation of bloodshed as many of the mothers’ “sons” lives are being taken away. Taking their stand as mothers, they are able to take on a non-threatening position, which allows them to be heard, as most people can relate to their own mothers, unless there are some exceptions. So when their appeal is made through the stance of motherhood, then it is received well by the leaders of the various factional camps. Also, when a person dies, there is a Naga tradition of covering the dead body with a traditional Naga shawl. The NMA has over the years collected shawls from their various tribal units, and covered the bodies of

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37 Ibid
38 Interview with Al Ngullie, Senior Journalist through email, December 10, 2011
39 Interview with Elizabeth Inti, Asst. Prof, through email January 15, 2012
numerous Naga soldiers who have been killed, as a sign of their love and caring for the fallen.\textsuperscript{40}

Throwing light on the innovative strategies adopted by NMA, Niketu Iralu states, “The one I remember most was the “Shed No More Blood” campaign launched during the worst days of the inter-faction conflicts. NMA produced buttons declaring the slogan and they were widely worn all over Nagaland. It made an immediate impact because it made people to talk about the campaign theme. Another strategy was Naga mothers coming out in their finest traditional vivid shawls and meklas which always added immense emphasis to the issues for which the protests were taking place.” \textsuperscript{41}

The opinions gathered from 35 respondents across Dimapur and Kohima (in Nagaland) on the strategies of protest adopted by NMA has revealed some interesting insights. The majority of the respondents believed that Peace Rallies/Marches were the most preferred mode of protest for the NMA. This was followed by talks, mediation between rival factions (which included reconciliation meetings, dialogue etc), appeals for peace, use of the media, devotions, prayers, protests (Shed No Blood campaign) and lastly, confrontation with the security forces. One of the respondents spoke about an innovative strategy, which he termed “Kitchen Politics”, which is adopted by the NMA to mediate with the rebel groups. Elaborating on it further he stated, “The women have devised a strategy for negotiations whereby they invite the rebel members of their tribe to their house and speak frankly with them, explaining how violent actions could lead to the withdrawal of support from the Naga people.”\textsuperscript{42}

Thus, it is seen that the strategies of protest as well as efforts at building peace for the NMA are largely rooted within a non-violent framework. They have also made an attempt to incorporate innovative strategies when the need has arisen.

**KGNMT and their Strategies of Protest**

KGNMT is based on the ideology of Gandhian non-violence and hence its approach to peace building has been greatly influenced by the principles of ahimsa and truth.

\textsuperscript{40} Interview with Meneno Vamuzo (social worker) and Sano Vamuzo (Chairperson, Nagaland State Commission for Women) through email May 9, 2012

\textsuperscript{41} Interview with Niketu Iralu, social activist through email, February 10, 2012

\textsuperscript{42} Interview with V.S, Self Employed, Dimapur, September 26, 2012
Kusum Bora Mokashi states that “Gandhiji always wished that women should run the Trust. He believed that women can and will be able to establish a non violent society. Undeterred by popular criticism, Gandhiji always held the view that women have the strength and will learn through trial and error. One of the foremost activities etched out for KGNMT was welfare and education of women and children.”

In KGNMT, the vision of the mother has been borrowed heavily from the Bhagvad Gita. According to Mokashi, “a mother’s heart is ‘sapta sakti rupe nihoto’! The seven values inherent in a mother are Khyoma, Dhriti, Satya, Doya, Medha, Smriti and Sri (Forgiveness, Patience, Truth, Sympathy, Intelligence, Memory and Power). Matri egorakir sakti samajor proti prabhat pelabo pora (A mother through her inherent strength can shed light on the darkness prevailing within the society).”

One of the main strategies towards peace building for the KGNMT is Matri Shakti Jagaran (as an extension of Stree Shakti Jagaran)—to awaken women for their empowerment, development and growth.

KGNMT has a rich legacy of working with communities at the grassroots—empowering them through localized initiatives (both economic and social) as well as honing their skills in mediating conflicts between warring groups. The formation of the Mahila Shanti Sena was the outcome of one such effort. According to Mokashi, “With the passage of time, as unrest grew a peace initiative in the form of a Shanti Sena was introduced. The vision for such a program was to bring about a feeling of amity/ ‘sadbhavna’ during times of conflict In fact in 2001, training for Shanti Sena was given to all Gram Seva Kendras, across Assam.” They have extensively worked with communities in conflict (during the ethnic hostilities in Udalgari and Mongoldoi for example).

As a mark of respect for Kasturba Gandhi, her death anniversary is commemorated every year as Matri Diwas and efforts are made to celebrate the significance of the role of the Mother and the virtues of Motherhood in peace building. The functions of the Matri Diwas include prayers, meetings and padyatras (marches).

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43 Personal Interview with Kusum Bora Mokashi, KGNMT, Sarania, Guwahati, May 12, 2012
44 Ibid
Their peace efforts also include initiatives to communicate with the ULFA. In 1991, a protest march on foot (padyatra) touring Assam was initiated for peace (against the ULFA upsurge), for 5 years (1991-1995). On April 18, 1991 the padyatra began at Lakhipathar. In 1997, when the insurgency was at its peak, a Matri Santi Mouno Jatra was initiated from Sadiya to Kokrajhar. Meetings were held at various conflict ridden locations and they interacted with the local populace there. Many a times, these meetings were attended by the cadres of ULFA.  

Besides these efforts, KGNMT is presently undertaking a project on Conflict and Disaster Management and is also running a program with UNICEF called Mukto Aakash, where they are imparting skills on journalism to young children to be reporters and help them create a newsletter (reporting news from their neighbourhood). In 2009, KGNMT also begun publishing a newsletter called Shanti Doot (Messenger of Peace). They have also organized shishu panchayat (children’s parliament) to bring young children into the fold.

Thus we see that the strategies most commonly adopted by KGNMT are padyatras (marches/rallies), meetings, camps, jan sampark yatras etc. But unlike NMA, very few people are aware of the activities undertaken by KGNMT. In the opinions gathered from the civil society in Guwahati (30 respondents in total) in this study, only nineteen (19) respondents were aware of its existence and only nine (9) respondents were aware of Assam Matri Samaj. This is in sharp contrast to the comparative visibility of NMA in Nagaland. NMA’s overwhelming visibility in the Naga consciousness drives home the fact that very little attention has been paid to highlight the work carried out by Assam Matri Samaj that has been established under the aegis of the KGNMT.

On asking why this was so, Kusum Bora Mokashi stated the following, “Amalprava Das, under whose tutelage KGNMT expanded, believed that we should not direct focus on ourselves and our work. That is the reason why publicity has never been

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46 Group Discussion with Kusum Bora Mokashi, Damayanti Devi and Hema Kakati, KGNMT, Sarania, Guwahati, on June 18, 2010
47 Personal Interview with Damayanti Devi, at KGNMT, Sarania, Guwahati on May 12, 2012
sought for the work we have undertaken. But, I increasingly feel that there is no reason why we should not focus on the positive aspects of our work.\(^\text{48}\)

Thus we see that both NMA and KGNMT have successfully been able to make their presence felt in the efforts at building peace within their respective communities, through the adoption of non-violent strategies. This reflects the significance of peaceful, communitarian initiatives that can go a long way in fusing the fissures and weaving a cohesive social fabric.

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\(*\text{48} \) Personal Interview with Kusum Bora Mokashi, at KGNMT, Sarania, Guwahati on May 12, 2012