Chapter 7: Conclusion

Conflict is opposite to peace. Conflict can be peacefully resolved through negotiation without the use of a violent method. The failure of peaceful process leads to the rise of armed conflict. Assam, the most notable state of North Eastern India has been experiencing different kinds of conflicts in different times. Conflict in Assam is generally understood in the form of armed struggle, the struggle between the state and armed activists or militants. In the post 1980s ULFA, an insurgent organization had been creating a disturbing situation in Assam on the issues of underdevelopment and exploitative policy as well as the apathetic attitude of Government of India. Counter-insurgency operations had become the part of the day to day life for the people of Assam. With the help of various black laws, the state has tried to finish insurgency. As a result, humanity has been the worst victims both in the hands of state as well as non-state actors. In this situation women and girls were particularly affected because of their status in society and sex. The condition of women had become vulnerable. It has resulted in massive levels of harassment of women physically, psychologically, culturally and economically. Human rights of women were violated almost regularly. Human rights is a concept which tends to emphasize the worth of the individual and to recognize his or her rights against the society. Women have lost their human rights including right to life, liberty, security, freedom from torture and right to equality, freedom of movement, and right to property under armed conflict situation. Impositions of various black laws were responsible for the violation of human rights of women to a great extent.
Generally six categories of women are affected by this type of situation. They are housewives, women militants, women relatives of state armed forces, women relatives of armed activists, women shelter providers and women peace negotiators. The research area was Nalbari and Kamrup District. By giving various case studies, the researcher has tried to show how human rights of different categories of women are being violated. This study has also tried to show how human rights of relatives of victims of secret killings are violated. Insurgency has psychological, economic as well as social impacts. The diverse impacts of insurgency on women have already discussed here.

To make society violent free peace effort is necessary. Peace is opposed to antagonistic conflict, violence or war. Generally women are better equipped than men to resolve conflict. In this context, Michelle Bachelet, Under Secretary General and the Head of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) says, “Wherever there is conflict, women must be the part of solution”. The popular perception is that women have been endowed with qualities such of nurturance, endurance, strength, empathy, and compassion. In their diverse capacities women try to minimize the effects of violence. Women can play a key role in conflict transformation by initiating efforts to rebuild the community socially, culturally and economically. In every society, women make effort to bring peace in the society. In different countries of the world, a number of women organizations have been working for peace. In Assam also various women organizations have been working for conflict resolution and trying to bring peace in the society. In this context, the functioning of Sajagota Mahila Samiti, Matri Manch, Mahila Shanti Sena, Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Assam Branch and North East Network
have already been discussed here. Some organizations have lost their relevance in the hands of the patriarchal system. It is seen that woman’s role as a peace maker has been threatened by the concept of patriarchy. Women are not given the chance to be present or represented in the decision making and policy making processes regarding conflict transformation. The male dominated society has emphasized the role of women as mothers, wives, daughters and not as militant or insurgent and decision maker. It is believed that power is related to force and leadership is synonymous with masculinity. Even if some women join armed struggles due to various socio economic compulsions, they rarely get elevated to the position of leader. In ULFA, the highest post that a woman was holding perhaps Pranati Deka, who served the rebel group as cultural secretary. Mostly it is seen that they are the mere followers of male leadership. Women as peace maker in peace keeping operations can be explained along the lines of the feminist analysis of inequality, difference, and oppression. Women are more co-operative and less hierarchical as a result of the socialisation process. Unfortunately women who protest against state oppression are seen as the ‘overground agents’ of the underground non state actors, while women who raise their voices against non-state oppression are branded as ‘state agents’. It is seen that though women have played multiple roles in armed conflicts and peace but these roles have remained unacknowledged.

This study has also tried to show the role of Governmental Organizations as well as Nongovernmental Organizations in matters of conflict management. Activities of NGOs like Assam Public Works, MASS, United Women Protective Forum and Forum for Terrorist Victim Families have already discussed relating to the matters of conflict.
management in society. These organizations have been standing for the causes of families of victims under armed conflict situation.

Similarly the activities of many Governmental organizations like State Human Rights Commission, National Human Rights Commission, and National Commission for Women, and State Commission for Women have already been discussed. Though these organizations are empowered with various functions in dealing with conflict management yet their role is not very effective and efficient. They have not done so much to resolve conflict like situation due to their various loopholes. The National Human Rights Commission is powerless in matters of investigating cases of human rights violations by the armed forces under Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act. They have no independent power of investigation; rather they have to depend on police and other state bodies for information. It is alleged that National Commission for Women, State Commission for women are busy in solving certain common important issues relating to dowry, domestic violence, property disputes, witch hunting etc. State Commission for Women has not done much relating to victims of the conflicting situation. Moreover, the Commission does not have rehabilitation programme for women who are tortured or raped. There are no proper legal or regulatory measures available for the victims of conflict. The legal proceedings are being criticized as lengthy and expensive.

Rehabilitation of the victims of proper position is the most urgent need of the time. In this regard, the Central Government and the state Government of Assam have taken certain measures. Through the project of AASHWAS, children of victims of insurgency have got educational rehabilitation. The Rajiv Gandhi Memorial Sangsthapan Yojana has provided education, vocational training, and income
generating schemes to widows and children of the victim of violence. Former Chief Minister of Assam Hiteswar Saikia provided for a scheme for surrender cum rehabilitation of Militants or 100 Percent Special Money Margin Scheme(1992-1997) and later another scheme for the surrender and rehabilitation of the terrorists of various outfits(1998). Through this two schemes surrendered ULFAs are being rehabilitated. The Department of Women and Child Development has provided a scheme namely Swadhar (2002) to different groups of women in difficult circumstances including women victims of terrorist violence. K.N Saikia Commission investigating the secret killing has recommended compensation of Rs 3 lakh and later 2 lakh per person killed by secret killers.

Like Governmental Organization, non-Governmental Organizations have also been trying to rehabilitate women. It is seen that various self-help groups like Bandhan, Rangdhali, Asha Deep etc are being helped by nongovernmental organizations to get micro credit for becoming economically self dependent.

Though the Governmental and non governmental organization have provided various beneficial provisions for rehabilitation of women under armed conflict situation yet they are not sufficient. Many are yet to receive benefits offered by governmental and non-governmental organization.

**FINDINGS:**

The findings of the present research study are based on secondary data, primary data collected through interview schedule and researcher’s personal discussions and observation during the field study.
Since the researcher has taken interview of six different categories of women victims for study, the findings from each category of women can be discussed separately:

1. From the analysis of the first category of Women (Housewives) it is found that for them militants are those who create violence in society. Everybody wants a society which is free from violence. Their human rights are violated in every step of their life. Though they went to the State Human Rights Commission, the Commission was not supportive them. They found the response of the Judiciary is also not supportive. Few numbers of NGOs like Forum for Terrorist Victim Families, Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti, Assam Public Works etc came forward to help them. The Government has been trying to rehabilitate them but this step also proved to be not sufficient for them. They are aware of secret killings. Few children from victim families have received grant from a Government sponsored project ‘AASWASH’ for study but it is also not sufficient.

The attitude of them towards life is positive. All of them believe in peace. They admit that the mindset of people towards insurgency has changed.

2. Second category of Women is Militants or Wives of Missing Militants. For them, Militants are those who create terror in society. They generally don’t consider ULFA as a militant/terrorist group. At the initial stage, ULFA did a lot of community related work. For them they are the boys who came forward to create a state based on scientific socialism. Still they have full faith in the concept of ‘Swadhin Asom’. Most of them were being influenced by the ideology of ULFA. Some joined organisation in order to get rid of economic inequality at home. In rural societies, women are always subordinated to the family as well as in all the spheres of social, political, economic
and cultural life. The patriarchal structure of the society is the main reason behind the suppression of women. One respondent said that SULFA used to raid their house who physically tortured the members of her family indiscriminately in the name of searching her own brother, a ULFA militant. In order to get rid of that atrocity she joined the extremist organization. Some joined organization to lead an independent life. Involvement with the organization the respondents have told that they did administrative, cultural, domestic and mixed type of activities. They did not get high post at the administrative level. Though they were given equal training with male counterparts but in the implementation part they were assigned to play a supporting role. Women militants did not get monetary benefit in the organization. They left organisation because they became fed up with the ideology of the organisation, tired of tough life, they were caught by the army or their husbands were caught by the army, and their camp was destroyed.

The attitude of society towards them was not good. It was seen that nobody had come forward to marry them even after returning to normal life.

Though few have gone to the State Human Rights Commission for help yet they have not got any positive response. The response of Judiciary was not positive one. Still cases against them are going on in various courts.

The response of State Women Commission is also not positive.

For them, the imposition of AFSPA was responsible for the violation of human rights. Some were arrested under National Security Act (NSA), Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and relatives of some were arrested under Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA) etc.
They have knowledge about secret killings. Relatives of some of them became the victim of secret killings.

Except MASS, no NGO or Human Rights Organization, Mahila Samiti or any other self-help group have come forward to help them in solving their problems.

Only a small number of them have been rehabilitees at Naba Nirman Kendra in Kamrup and Nalbari District. Regarding the response of Government in offering financial assistance, their answer is negative.

They have stated that people’s attitude about insurgency has been changed at present.

Today most of them believe in peace. Everyone wants positive solution of the insurgency problem.

Society’s attitude towards them is not positive one. Women, who took part in the armed conflict, are facing social stigma and humiliation.

They are facing economic insecurity. Though they are engaging themselves in small activities, Governmental and non-Governmental organizations role in this regard is not positive one.

Some of them are now victims of mental disorder.

Till now, they keep touch with the parent organization and maintain good relation with it.

3. The third category of women is Wives of targeted State Government Officials, Police, and Armed Personnel. Most of them have no good feeling about militants. Everyone consider ULFA as a terrorist or militant organization which creates terror in the society through gun culture.
For them, the functioning of the terrorist organization has weakened. Nobody likes violence. Nobody accepts violence in society.

They describe themselves that they are the victims of armed conflict.

Most of them have knowledge about human rights. They admit underdevelopment, corruption as well as unemployment are the main reasons behind the growth of insurgency.

They admit that their human rights are violated at the time of facing any atrocity. Though some of them have gone to Human Rights Commission, yet the response of it is not positive.

Very few have gone to the judiciary yet the response of judiciary also is not positive one. For them, the proceeding of the judiciary is lengthy and expensive.

Most of them have stated that Mahila Samiti or any other self-help groups have not come forward to help them in solving their problems. But they are very much satisfied with Government’s positive step in this regard.

Being a wife or relative of a police officer, armed personnel or government servants they have got the government job or special grant from government or government aided organization as compensation. Children of two or three have got educational benefit from Organization like AASHWAS. The attitude of most of them towards the government is good.

Most of them admit that the attitude of people towards militancy has changed. Most of them have expressed doubtful attitude on the question whether peace will come back to the society or not.

85.7% have refused to give comment on the attitude of society towards them.
Compare to social or economic trauma, they have considered themselves as more victim of mental trauma.

4. The fourth category of Women is Women Relatives of Militants. Since they are the relatives of militants, most of them never consider ULFA as a terrorist organization. For them at the initial period ULFA did a lot of community related work including fishery, agricultural farming etc. Being a wife or relative of ULFA militant they had become the victim of physical or mental torture. For them, the reason behind the decline of the insurgent organization is lack of a common ideology and lack of people’s faith.

For them, unemployment is the main cause of the growth of insurgency. Most of them has heard the names of State Human Rights Commission yet they are not at all interested to go to the commission.

The economic condition of most of them is not sound. So they have not able to afford legal expenses.

Though they have heard the names of various acts relating to terrorism yet they don’t understand fully the details of the acts.

They admit that most of their relatives have been arrested under TADA, NSA, and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act etc.

Most of them have stated that no NGO or Human rights organization, Mahila Samiti or any other self-help groups have come forward to help them in solving their problems. Most of them have not got rehabilitation facility from the Government. They admit that only some relatives of SULFA militants have got Government jobs and economic help. No organization has come forward to provide positive help. Few
members of militant families have got help from MASS (Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti).

Most of them have knowledge about secret killings. The members of many families became the victim of secret killings.

Most of them admit that the attitude of people towards insurgency has been changed.

Most of them express their doubt on the question of any chance of peace returning to Assam.

They admit that the attitude of society towards them is not good.

Being a relative of militant, they have faced social torture, economic insecurity, educational loss and mental torture. They have been suffering from various mental diseases. Due to poverty they cannot bear medical expenses. Most of them still try to keep good relation with the organization (ULFA).

5. This category of women is Women Shelter Providers. Most of them do not understand the meaning of militants. They generally assume militants are those who create terror in the society by showing the gun. They have stated that militancy is some kind of threatening. Women who have given shelter to the militants as a result of pressure, threatening etc. admit ULFA as a terrorist organization. Those, whose children had relation with the organization, gave shelter to them as a result of compulsion, out of emotion etc. They never consider ULFA as a terrorist organization. Instead, they consider it as ‘son of soil’.

Most of them admit that they do not understand the details of various acts. But few of them have heard the names of TADA, NSA etc. They admit that some of their relatives were arrested under such acts.
Most of them have knowledge about secret killings. Family members of most of them became the victim of secret killings.

No organization, Governmental or non-governmental have come forward to help them except MASS (Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti). But they are not satisfied with the activities of MASS.

Most of them have no knowledge about human rights. They misinterpret right to life as a human right. They admit that the District Administration has not taken any step for raising human rights awareness among women. Most of them have not heard the names of State Human Rights Commission, State Commission for Women etc.

For them, peoples’ attitude towards militancy has changed. For them, lack of ideology or lack of the common ideology is the ultimate reason for the decline of the insurgent organization.

Most of them express their doubt whether peace will return to Assam or not. They allege that the attitude of the government towards them is not positive one.

6. The last category of women is Women Peace Negotiators. For them, militants are those who create terror in the society by showing gun. All of them admit that ULFA is a terrorist organization. The ULFA militants came generally to their place for shelter, money, food etc.

Because of raising voice for peace in the society, these categories of women became the victim of both the militants as well as the armed forces. As a result, they became the victim of physical as well as mental torture.

Most of them have knowledge of human rights. They have heard the names of State Human Rights Commission as well as State Commission for Women. Few have gone to Commissions yet they have not got any positive response. Few have gone to
court yet they are not satisfied with the proceedings of the court. For them, the legal proceeding of the court is lengthy as well as expensive.

Most of them have knowledge of Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act and the other acts. Relatives of two or three were arrested under various acts. They have knowledge about secret killings. Relatives of two or three became victim of secret killing.

No non-governmental organization has come forward to help them. They think that if the members of a non-governmental organization help them, they themselves may lose the government grant.

They are not satisfied with the negative attitude of the government.

For them the main reason for the decline of the militant organization is the lack of ideology. Nowadays the attitude of the people towards insurgency has been changed.

Everyone of this category believes in peace. They are very hopeful that at last peace will return to Assam.

**SUGGESTIONS:**

1. People expected Indian state should abide by ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights).

2. The Central Government should initiate unconditional dialogues with the militant outfits or insurgent groups instead of extending acts.

3. Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) must be withdrawn. Since, it is a symbol of militarization, the rights abuse, and impunity.

4. Though NHRC has limited authority in this matter, yet it should review the act for greater benefit of the people. Suitably amend Section 19 of the Protection of
Human Rights Act 1993 to make the verdict of the Human Rights Commission more binding and remove restriction on Commission of Jurisdiction over the Armed forces.

5. Human Rights Education (HRE) is another area which should be spread among the mass to raise their voices against any army atrocity and such coercive laws. There should be provision of human rights education in the training period of security forces.

6. Civil society organizations have much to do in this regard. Their role should be crucial as far as rights of individuals are concerned.

7. Women should be conscious about their rights. They should know about the constitutional provisions regarding this.

8. To promote peace through education can accomplish through the incorporation of the universal values of peace, non-violence, tolerance and respect for human right into all education circular and method. Peace Education should be introduced in the curriculum of schools, colleges and universities which should include a gender dimension to change the mindset of the people against gender discrimination. Peace education is a means to help a community to move from a culture of violence to one of non-violence. One way to ensure it is to include peace education in formal and non-formal education in the form of human rights, democracy, conflict resolution and justice.

9. Compensation should be given to relatives and rehabilitation of those affected should get priority. Resettlement and rehabilitation programmes should be made available for all women victims.
10. The Government along with voluntary organizations should take up concrete steps to uplift the women status by providing safe, secured and peaceful life for women.

11. Sufficient fund should be allotted for all the states to start industrial and economic progress for full employment.

12. Trauma Counselling must be made available for women and girls from conflict-affected areas.

13. Workshops relating to Women’s Convention should be organized as well as training relating to human rights should be given.

14. Legal literacy campaign for the women should be undertaken.

15. Network of women’s groups working on violence against women and human rights in the region should be strengthened.

16. Every state security forces should be trained in humanitarian law and sensitized to gender issues before being deputed in conflict situations. Education programmes should be trained to develop skills necessary to resist orders from higher-ranking personnel to commit sexual assault.

17. Every State should conduct immediate investigations into complaints of rape by security forces. The results of the investigations conducted, prosecution and punishment should be widely published in order to convince the people that the governments are committed to upholding the rule of law and humanitarian principles.

18. Gender issues must be given priority during the peace and constitution making process through the sub-Committee on Gender Issues.
19. Welfare schemes and skills training programmes must be implemented for women affected by the conflict.

20. Women and girls affected by conflict must have better access to education and employment, and be afforded and protection from all forms of harassment.

21. The NHRC and SHRC should be empowered independent in matters of human rights allegations. Appointments to the NHRC and SHRC must be depoliticised. There is an urgent need for the NHRC and the SHRC to have greater powers of both investigation and enforcement. Their role should not be limited to a mere recommendatory one; all decisions of the NHRC should be binding and have equal force to court decisions.

22. Non-Governmental Organizations should conduct workshops/training on human rights.

23. State Commission for Women should make more functional.

24. In many insurgencies affected areas women were victims of different forms of crime. Little effort has been made to address the problems of these women in difficult situations. To address all these problems in their true perspective, a State Policy Action Plan for empowerment of women of Assam is urgently required.

25. Insurgency problem should be solved in a peaceful manner. It requires a more humane approach.

Women of various categories were directly or indirectly involved in ULFA’s Armed Rebellion against the State and counter rebellion against ULFA. Though they could not take an active role in this armed rebellion due to the existence of the
patriarchal system of society, their presence can’t be ignored. They were the victims from both sides. Unfortunately, no substantial studies relating to women victims were done to replicate the conflict situation of Assam that had been facing during the period 1980-2003. After that ULFA has been gradually lost its moral support from common people due to increasing of insurgent activities on innocents. Various peace efforts have been made to bring positive solution to the problem of ULFA through PCG (People’s Consultative Group) talk, Sanmilita Jatiya Abhibartan etc, yet it has not got any success. Now it itself is divided into three groups over the issue of ‘Sovereign Assam’. This limited study has tried to focus the role of women in armed conflict situation of the above mentioned period. It is hoped that this type of study would help in the future discussion and the various suggestions given by the researcher would also help future policy formulation.

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