



# Women's Participation in Post-Conflict Peace Processes in Nepal and North-East India: A Comparative Study

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## Original Research

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## Abstract:

Nepal and some parts of India (North-East) have been the site of most protracted intra-state armed conflicts in the region. Women have been affected severely in both these regions, mostly as victims or survivors but also as warriors or as peace agents. In Nepal, the decade of long Maoist insurgency ended in 2006 with signing a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Subsequently, by accepting the United Nations regime (UNMIN), Nepal became a party to the implementation of the Women Peace and Security (WPS) obligations, UNSCR 1325 (2000) and the post 1325 resolutions being the most outstanding manifestations of the same. Though women were not invited to the formal peace talks, but at the non-formal level women played a very important role. The armed conflict in the North-Eastern (NE) region of India triggered off since 1949 and currently has ongoing 17 formal peace talks (Women Peace Conclave, 2016), but there is no women participation in these peace talks. Here too women have been victims as well as peace agents. Yet, unlike Nepal, the Government of India has constantly denied the existence of an armed conflict, and has maintained that the region is only a disturbed area. This makes it interesting to compare the two situations. The present paper is a critical analysis of the impact of implementation of 1325 in Nepal and India, and compares gender activism in peace process in Nepal and India's North-East region.

**Keywords:** Armed conflict; Women; Peace process; Participation; Activism; UNSCR 1325

## Introduction

War has been a significant aspect of human history. However, wars between states are becoming less likely as the nature of war has changed in the contemporary world; nowadays intrastate armed conflicts have become more prominent. Consequently, women and children are adversely affected much more deeply than in the era of inter-state wars. This was fore grounded in the year 2000 when the UN Security Council adopted the resolution number 1325 that inaugurated what is now known as Women, Peace and Security (WPS) regime. This and the subsequent seven resolutions of the UN Security Council (UNSCR1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122 and 2242) make it obligatory for signatory governments to include women in all the peace processes.

Thus, women's participation in the peace process is a very important phenomenon in any conflict situation. Feminist Peace and Conflict Theory (FPCT) also maintains the need for inclusion in conflict transformation leads to a broader understanding of security issues (Weber, 2006) and a more sustainable peace regime.

Traditionally, the nature of the peace talks was more exclusive, where conflicts were negotiated between two or more states or warring factions, but current peace processes are more inclusive in nature, where not only the highest level of officials participate in peace negotiations but also all the factions, and parties involved in or affected by conflict become part of the peace processes. This is warranted to extend authenticity to the post conflict agreements. WPS foregrounds the effective and equal participation of women in these peace processes. They advance the argument that peace will be more substantial (thick peace) only when women are active agents in ensuring it. Women and girls are better equipped to negotiate peace and also as women and girls suffer most in war; it is in justice and fairness that women are included in the peace negotiations and other peace processes<sup>1</sup>.

1. Yet, very few numbers of women are present in peace negotiations. According to a study of 33 peace negotiations in 2008 only 4 – 11% (approx. 12 – 30) negotiators were women out of 280 negotiations (Fisas, 2008). According to UNIFEM (2012) there were 31 major peace processes in between 1992 to 2011, where only 4% of signatories, 9% of negotiators, 2.4% of chief mediators and 3.7% witnesses were women.

The UNSCR 1325 reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts maintaining peace<sup>2</sup>. Taking a clue from the Critical Mass theory (Dahlerup, 1988), the resolution urges all actors to increase the participation of women in decision making body<sup>3</sup>. Equally significant is to vest decision making powers in the hands of women<sup>4</sup>.

The neglect of women in International Relations in general, and in war and peace in specific, has been a subject of serious studies for a very long time (Elshtain, 1987; Enloe, 1989; Tickner and True, 2018)<sup>5</sup>. Almost simultaneously there has been serious attempts to trace women in various peace processes by scholars (Manchanda, 2001; Manchanda and Kakran, 2017; Parashar, 2018; Mullick, 2013; Paffenholz, 2015) where women have played significant roles in various levels of peace processes, despite being neglected in formal peace talks.

The North-eastern region of India has remained 'disturbed' ever since the Republic of India was born and has thus fascinated scholars and activists to study and explore the region. Of late there has also sprung up a rich literature on women's role in peace processes in this region. Whereas Mullick (2013) expatiates upon the courses of conflict in this region and role of various women's organization Hazarika (n.d) enumerates the repeated occurrences of state violence and women's enduring spirit to uphold peace through their participation in peace negotiations. The use of literary discourse to portray the impact of violence on women's lives has also been highlighted in Hazarika's writings.

The dual patriarchy faced by women is deciphered in Banerjee (2001) work. Despite some North eastern societies having a matrilineal tradition women face two sets of domination: From the state or majority community and from non-state actors leaving women in a position of constant challenge.

These literatures are specifically based on the case study of Nepal and North East India but in this chapter, we attempt to compare women's activism in the cases so as to decipher how women comparatively successfully participated in Nepal's peace processes and what are the obstacles in the way of North eastern women to participate in peace process. Also, if the acknowledgement of the existence of an open violent conflict makes a substantial difference in

2. [urlhttp://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325](http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325)

3. Childs and Krook (2008), Dahlerup (1988) explore the concept of critical mass theory: Critical mass as a concept indicating women's descriptive representation, which further enhances women's substantive representation. This theory argues that if women grow from a few token individuals into considerable minority in the legislature, then they create major impact on legislative outcomes. Their increased numbers will women be able to work more effectively together to promote women friendly policy and they influence male colleagues to accept women friendly policies. For the present study this theory justifies women's representation in peace processes

4. That should we include women into peace process only on the basis of norms and idealism or can women really make peace process more influential. Women's inclusion is most beneficial to peace processes when they have decision making power because without decision making power, participation has no meaning.

5. Enloe provides a feminist analysis of tourism, militarism, nationalism, diplomacy, food production, domestic labour and how they affect global politics. Similarly, Elstain questions the essentialism that surrounds the feminist discourse of war and peace.

women's involvement in peace processes.

### Case of Nepal

Nepal has been a least developed, ethnically diverse and an extremely hierarchical society and for centuries Nepal has alienated majorities of its citizens from the nation building process, this creating a fertile ground for the spread of insurgency in Nepal (Upreti, 2004). The People's War was initiated by the Maoists to eliminate the feudal socio-political structures that existed at the time.<sup>6</sup> The armed conflict resulted in severe human rights abuses, killing more than 17,866 people<sup>7</sup>, and displacing more than 200,000 (Ariño, 2008; Falch, 2010a; Upadhyaya, 2014). Efforts to bring peace to the region had started in early 2001 that could only concretise in 2006 by the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord.

**Case of North-East India**-The North-East region of India consists of seven provinces, known as states: Arunachal, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, and has borders with China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Several fault lines in the making of modern India have resulted in the unrest in the region and have also given rise to insurgencies in the region<sup>8</sup>. What followed has been a state of continuous insurgency, creating very challenging situations for people of this region.

The AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Power Act) was passed in 1958 to combat an armed separatist movement in Nagas Hills. Later this Act was extended to all the North-Eastern states in 1972. Through this Act, extraordinary powers have been given to the Indian armed forces<sup>9</sup>. In such a prolonged protracted violent conflict women have been naturally the long-suffering citizens. But they have also been active agents for peace. Here too, peace initiatives were brought in place sporadically and various peace accords were signed in due course.

### Nepal and India's Stand on UNSCR 1325

United Nations Security Council (UNSC) acknowledged the changing nature of war in which innocent civilians (women

6. Uniting themselves as the United People's Front (UPF) the Maoist on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1996, the UPF submitted 40-point demand to the Prime Minister Ser Bahadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress government with a conditional deadline. Without waiting for the deadline, the Maoists declared 'People's War'. The war on 13 February 1996 that lasted till November 2006. The war ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in New Delhi, between the Six Party Alliance (SPA) and the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN)-shifting the ongoing conflict into the peace process.

7. The exact number of conflict related deaths is not known. According to the Informal Sector Serve Centre (INSEC) there were 13,265 deaths and according to the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction there were 16,278 deaths. However the above number is the most recent identification. See [urlhttps://scroll.in/article/897373/in-nepal-families-of-those-who-died-or-went-missing-during-civil-war-fight-against-forgetting](https://scroll.in/article/897373/in-nepal-families-of-those-who-died-or-went-missing-during-civil-war-fight-against-forgetting)

8. There have been diverse efforts in interpreting the phenomena. See, Srikanth and Thomas (2005)

9. The AFSPA gives wide discretionary powers to army officers to use force as a method of warning, to search any shelter that could hide out and to conduct searches without warrants. According to the report of Human Rights Watch 'The Act violates provisions of international human rights law, including the right to life, the right to be protected from arbitrary arrest and detention, and the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. It also denies the victims of the abuses the right to a remedy' (Human Right Watch 2008).

and children) are increasingly targeted and women are still excluded from participation in peace process. Thus, in 2000 UNSC unanimously adopted Resolution 1325. UNSCR stated, 'Reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and the need to S/RES/1325 (2002).

The government of Nepal decided to implement UNSCR 1325 as a mechanism for strengthening women's participation and involve women in the promotion of peace. Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) was established in 2007 for the implementation of 1325.

Nepalese National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of 1325 resolution was already in place as early as February 2011. A Steering Committee constituted for the implementation of NAP, in which 11 out of 25 members were women, such as Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare, member of National Women Commission, Secretary of Ministry Women, Children and Social welfare, Representative of Women's Welfare Society, Women's Peace Group, Women Security Pressure Group, Women's Network for Peace, Power Democracy and the Constituent Assembly, Rural Women's Development and Unity Centre, Women for Human Rights, Single Women's Group (Nepal Action Plan (NAP), 2011). In Implementation Committee 3 out of 8 members were women (Nepal Action Plan (NAP), 2011). There was also a National Action Plan District Coordination Committee whose secretary was Women and Children Officer and two members were conflict affected women, who were assigned by the Local Peace Committee (Nepal Action Plan (NAP), 2011).

Whereas Nepal not only acknowledged the existence of armed conflict, but also formally negotiated the peace processes, and invited the United Nations to administer the implementation of peace process.

On the other side 17 years ago India ratified UNSCR 1325 but declared that it is not applicable on India as there is no situation of 'armed conflict' or post conflict situation here. India continues to maintain that it is India's internal matter where there are some 'disturbed areas'. The government, state, non-state actors, policy makers and general population continues to work within narrow perception of conflict. Their view about how conflict and insecurity affect women is narrower still.

Nonetheless in the North Eastern region various women's organizations have been demanding for the implementing of UNSCR 1325 and the leading organization in this regard is 'North East India Women Initiative for Peace' (NEIWIP). It is the first collective network of women, initiated by the Control Arms Foundation of India (CAFI) and Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network (MWGSN) for reducing armed violence and bringing peace in North East India (NEIWIP-leaflet).

In 2015 women leaders from all the eight states of North-East India organized 'First North East India Women Peace Congregation'. The aim of this congregation was to strate-

gies and develop a Regional Action Plan on Women Peace and Security with reference to UNSCR 1325. It also aimed to strategies for absolute participation of women in decision making bodies<sup>10</sup> (Manipur Times, 2015). Women leaders gathered again in Guwahati in 2016 to ensure women's participation in the peace process, peace negotiations, and decision-making body. This is called 'Women Peace Conclave'. The aim of peace conclave is to push participation of women in ongoing 17 peace processes (Women Peace Conclave, 2016). Therefore, all the women leaders highlighted the significance of UNSCR 1325.

In post-conflict period and during peace negotiation a big challenge in front of the outfit and state is to reintegrate these female ex-combatants into their homes and civil society. In this whole juncture transitional justice measures are still untried notion in India's North-East as well as South Asian neighbourhood (Moral, 2017). The only difference was that as most protected insurgency in Nepal famous women rebels have found political agency after the cessation of conflict. The informal groups of these rebel women demanding change, better livelihood and peace, whereas in North-East India, there is lack of women agency especially in this context. The situation of ex-combatants in Nepal is quite different in terms of social integration. Their future is uncertain but few women are quite successful in social integration and in livelihood security mainly because of their capability and support of the state, and families (Upreti and Shivakoti, 2018). In North-East India former women rebels are classified into four categories: demobilised, surrendered, some neither surrendered nor in camps and some were disappeared (Moral, 2017). It is noteworthy that when ULFA entered into ceasefire with GOI on 2011 the ULFA's charter of demands included the issue of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights but there was no demand directly related to women's rights (Hazarika and Sharma, 2014). The former female ex-combatants are demobilised not in a substantial meaningful sense. For real demobilization there must be fair and equal measure of impunity but the only relief these former rebels have received from the state is in terms of monetary compensation. That too is very meagre and not enough for a decent rehabilitation. As is expected some female rebels never even received any compensation too (Moral, 2017). The government adopted cash-assistance methods rather than an inclusive and participatory approach.

In Nepal, after the signing of CPA, the government of Nepal and CPN-(M) signed another accord 'Agreement on the Monitoring of the Management of Arms and Armies' (AMMAA) especially for managing ex-combatants. for this purpose, the Special Committee proposed three options in front of ex-combatants: integration into Nepalese Army, Voluntary retirement with cash and rehabilitation with special packages (Upreti and Shivakoti, 2018). A large number of women combatants (3,454) opted for voluntary retirement. Among them very few secured high positions in government, however a majority were left living miserable lives. Some were integrated into Nepalese Army, among them 4 secured officers' rank and 100 hold non-officer grade positions (Upreti and Shivakoti, 2018). They were the most

10. <http://manipurimes.com/first-northeast-india-women-peace-congregation/>

secured group of ex-combatants. Many faced identity problems, thus around 3000 women rebels came together and created a group named, 'Former PLA Women Foundation' to manage their problems. One important thing which is notable that those who actively participated in social activities were more accepted and integrated into society but those who were either single or remained isolated were less accepted by society.

*Women as household heads*-During conflict women came out from their prescribed traditional role and became head of their house, because before this woman have no participation in decision making process at home. For example, in some villages of western hill district of Nepal, men escape from their home because of fear to kill by Maoist or Police. In this situation women had to work outside to take care of her children and other family members. In the Maoist controlled areas in Nepal women built new self-reliant economy. Many women's groups organised in support of people's war by carrying out collective farming, raising animals, knitting socks and gloves and weaving cloths. During the insurgency the Maoist controlled areas gave a transient better deal to the women because before this woman did not have equal property right but now women have equal property right, property being divided into all the daughters of the family. Similarly, according to the report of 'National Commission on Women on Violence against Women in Northeast India: An Enquiry', there were increases in female headed households in Northeast India because the male person of the family either been killed or escape from the home.

*Women as Peace Activists/Negotiators*-In both the regions some traditional and cultural barriers set up for women within the society but these barriers break down during the armed conflict. Women played an active role in demonstrations campaigning for the establishment of peace and democracy. Initially, in Nepal women remained outside of the formal peace process. The head of the UN Mission to Nepal (UNMIN) Ian Martin (2007) said that, 'At all the political negotiating tables I have seen in Nepal during the peace process, not once have I seen a woman at the table' and perhaps this may have caused CPA to only include a single paragraph about women. Even though initially women were excluded from formal peace process but women made peace interventions during the war.

The pressure generated by the different international institutions compelled the state apparatus for Due to immense participation of women during conflict and in peace process they got representation in parliament. The following table shows the increased number of women in Nepal's general elections and they formally involved in post conflict decision making body.

This increased participation of women in decision making body was caused only because of the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325 and the pressure generated by donor countries to bring about quotas for women in the new Constituent Assembly. Women in Nepal were not only involved in the legislature, but there was a mandatory provision of 33% women's reservation in Local Peace Committees (LPC) formed in every district and municipality and Village Development Committee (VDC) (Nepal Action Plan (NAP),

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Elections	Women Participation
1991	2.9%
1994	3.4%
1999	5.8%
2008 (constituent assembly election)	33.2% (191 out of 575)

Source: <http://www.election.gov.np>

2011). The aim of establishing LPCs in districts of Nepal was to encourage and facilitate inclusive peace-making and peace building processes. According to the terms of LPC structure there were to be up to 23 members in which there had to be one-third representation for women. Though women got an opportunity of participating in the LPCs their participation and effectiveness was limited as at times there would be as less as just 6 – 7 women in the committee, a number too small for their voices being heard (Tendulkar et al., 2016).

Compulsory inclusion of women in government structures has been one of the biggest achievements for promoting women's political participation in Nepal peace process (Nepal Action Plan (NAP), 2011). It was after the UNMIN (United Nations Mission in Nepal) and the presence of various donor agencies that a lot of activism took place in Nepal. There were workshops, awareness camps, advocacy groups, activist volunteers that took the message of inclusion of women in peace processes across Nepal. Even though the patriarchal structures of Nepal remained resistant to including women in major places (Upadhyaya, 2014) there was no dearth of awareness that these activities generated across Nepal. This gives hopes for women's participation in post conflict reconstruction.

The narrative in North East India is very different and the efforts of making either peace processes or governance more inclusive is nowhere near the mark. In Nepal affirmative actions such as quotas and reserved seats for women turned out to be effective tools for accelerating women's representation in formal politics. Women there held a higher level of political position than ever before (Falch, 2010b). As far as the uses of affirmative action in north east India is concerned, the story is not impressive. The state of Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and two districts of Assam are excluded from 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of constitution<sup>11</sup>. According to one customary law women could not be a part of local or village council. Naga Mothers Association and Naga Women's Union have been trying to abolish these oppressive beliefs and practices for years, and in 2016, Supreme Court of India have passed an interim order seeking a directive from the apex court to the Nagaland state government to allow for women's reservation in urban local bodies, as in others state (Thaoson, 2017). The then Nagaland CM T.R. Zeliang decided to extend women's reservation in the next election but in December 2017 Nagaland Assembly passed a resolution unanimously revoking the provisions of 33 per

11. Due to existence of local self-government bodies: Village council and village development boards (VDBs) these states are excluded from 73<sup>rd</sup> amendments.

cent reservation for women in urban local bodies. The three leading Naga tribal bodies-Naga HoHo, Lotha HoHo and Sumi HoHo protested against 33% reservation for women in urban local bodies on the basis of argument that it is against their customary laws and against Article 371 (A) of constitution which allows them to follow their customary rules (Thaoson, 2017). Thus, the traditional tribal structures remain resistant to implementing quota system of any kind or affirmative action in favour of women. However, due to enormous pressure for women's quotas, the Naga HoHo yielded to nominate two women to the Naga HoHo bodies (Manchanda and Kakran, 2017). The only exception to this has been a quiet implementation of 25% women's quotas in the Village Development Board (Nagaland Village and Area Councils Act 1978).

In the NE customary laws are a great barrier to women's participation in politics that have emerged as a result of patriarchal interpretation of laws by men<sup>12</sup>. Traditionally women are known for the peace broker's role and they have been described as 'bridge-maker'. Especial mention can be made of *Pukrelia*<sup>13</sup> a role traditionally played by women (Manchanda, 2004). If women were married in a rival clan or village, they acted as bridge makers of peace and persuaded their men to stop enmity. Women also mobilize other clan's women to stop the men from killing each other. Women organize prayer meetings in churches and demonstrate for peace. These activities of women recognize the importance of women in peace dialogues<sup>14</sup>. Women do lots of work for mobilization but still go unrecognized because they are still excluded from formal peace committees.

In case of Assam, Government of India in order to suppress insurgency resorted to 'Operation Rhino' and 'Operation Bajrang' to suppress United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). Indian government approached ULFA for peace talks but ULFA never responded positively due to lack of confidence in the government. A peace process was initiated in the year 2004 (Phukon, 2017) through the initiatives of Mamoni Raisom Goswami (a Professor). Due to her immense efforts ULFA agreed to create People's Consultative Group (PCG), in which Goswami became its Chief coordinator, a group that fumbled on various issues.

In 2007 India declared that UNSCR 1325 would not be applicable in India because there is no situation of armed conflict. Therefore, neither the formal inclusion of women in the peace process in India has taken place nor has there been any formal action plan in place. Nonetheless the involvement of women in Assam was seen in the form of resistance and protest movements the peace process as in

12. In Naga case women were not accepted as legitimate representatives of the community, village or clan to negotiate with authorities. Women were excluded from the notion of citizenship. Aier (2017) study shows that there is linkage between notion of citizenship and right to represent the community. Citizenship means not only right to vote but 'entitlements, rights, responsibilities and agency' and women are excluded from this outreach. Hence, in Naga society women activism for peace is characterised by informal and non-political (ibid).

13. Pukrelia is a tradition in which women holding Y shaped sticks are known to burst forth between warring clan in an effort to stop them killing each other.

14. Thus, two women, out of 14 (now 34) are included as members of Forum for Naga Reconciliation (2008), one from Nagaland and another from Manipur.

different (Banerjee et al., 2010).

Some women writers also used the literary discourse as a tool to protest the conflict (Hazarika n.d.). This is the story of a woman who was surrounded by ethnic violence. The protagonist comes out from the domestic space and fights against the injustices and brings out her husband from police custody. Another story is *Bhandari*<sup>15</sup> written by Lakshminath Bezbaruah. This is the story of a woman who goes through domestic violence by her husband but in spite of this, she rescues her husband from prison and forgives her husband (Hazarika n.d.). These stories show the inspirational profile of women. How conflict affected women's lives and how women remained actively involved as agencies.

Women also used their 'Bodies' as a site of protest. One of the examples of such type of protest is the nude protest by Meira Paibis against the rape case of Manorama Devi. Manorama was raped and killed by Indian Army in Manipur in 2004. After this incidence a non-violence resistance movement started in the state. A group of 12 women started naked protest (known as 'Mothers of Manorama') in front of Indian Army headquarters carrying banners 'Indian Army Rape Us' shouting 'Rape us, kill us and take our flesh'. Due to heavy protest for withdrawal of AFSPA in North East India, central government appointed a five-member committee headed by Justice B.P Jeevan Reddy to review the provisions of AFSPA in north east India<sup>16</sup>. Second Administrative Committee also recommended the repeal of AFSPA but these recommendations have not been implemented.

Irom Sharmila is another strong woman who protested the injustice of the military, fasted for 16 years for the repeal of AFSPA. She ended her fast in 2016, and continues to fight against the same. She said (2006), 'I have no other power. I do not have economic power or political power. I have only myself... This is the only way I have to get my voice heard.' In spite of this, Manipur government has not agreed to repeal of AFSPA. It is evident that women in North-Eastern region of India may not have participated in formal peace talks, their interventions for peace have been very innovative and thus remarkably significant. However, due to a lack of formal commitment of the government to involve women in the peace processes, their participation in formal politics has been extremely marginal.

In North East India from 1949 to 2015 several peace accords were signed but in these accords all the signatories were men and if we analyse these accords in terms of references related to women security, we find that there are also no references related to women as is evident from the

15. Bhandari is a short story written by Lakshminath Bezbaruah, that revolves around the domestic life of two protagonist Shishuram and his wife Bhandari who got engaged in a fight but this time it was a severe attempt of taking Bhandari's life from her. The story is clear glimpse of a woman who has faced severe domestic violence but still want to live with her husband [http://www.academia.edu/12395853/Women\\_in\\_Conflict\\_Situation\\_in\\_Northeast\\_India](http://www.academia.edu/12395853/Women_in_Conflict_Situation_in_Northeast_India)

16. The Committee said that the Act is a "symbol of oppression, instrument of high-handedness" and recommended that AFSPA should be repealed and appropriate provisions should be inserted, Act should be specifying the powers of armed forces and grievance cell should be established. <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/repeal-armed-forces-act-official-panel/article18485943.ece>

## Table ??

On the other hand in Nepal the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) signed in 2006, which ended ten year old Nepalese Civil War, though none of the signatories were women, clause 3.5 of CPA clearly mentioned that the peace accord will '...address the problems related to women, dalit, indigenous people, janajatis, madheshi, oppressed, neglected, minorities and the backward by ending discrimination based on class, caste, language, sex, culture, religion, and region and to restructure the state on the basis of inclusiveness, democracy and progression by ending present centralised and unitary structure of the state' (3.5 clause of CPA).

### Role of women organization in post-conflict peace process

In both the regions many organizations played a crucial role in promoting women's participation in the peace process. In Nepal, Shanti Mallika, Sankalpa, Sancharica Samuha and other NGOs worked for the inclusion of women in post-conflict political sphere (PRIO Policy Brief 2010). Shantimallika was established in 2003 with 150 women peace builders for implementing UNSCR 1325 & 1820 (ADB Report, 2013). In 2006 'Women Network for Peace and Justice' had engaged in promoting 33% women's reservation in government. This network was trying to build bridge between civil society and political parties for the fulfilment of their objective.

SANKALP is another local NGO who worked for women's participation and representation in Nepal's peace process and peace structure. It also worked for implementing the National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 & 1820 in collaboration with ministry of peace and reconstruction (ADB Report, 2013). The network of 36 women's NGO groups, Women Acting Together for Transformative Change (Women Act), encouraged women to participate in the political process through advocacy and interactions.

Initially there was no amity between local level women's groups and national level women's group and national organizations were not even aware about the plight of war. Thus, they were not helping each other especially in terms of relief work, but as war reached in western and northern parts of Nepal, women activists started focusing on helping each other and providing relief work for the conflict victim. For example, Rita Thapa who initially worked for Canadian government relief agency but after that she realized

that there is need for an indigenous organization that could helped various women's groups of the country and then she established TEWA for providing resources to all women's group across Nepal and relief help to conflict victims (Upadhyaya, 2014). Similarly, Chandra Bhadra, Sangeeta Thapa and others created *Nagrik Awaz* in 2001. *Nagrik Awaz* gave training to young men and women about peace education and about life skill then these young people send to different districts for peace work. Some women network also plays an important role to maintain peace without the help of international peace agency. For example, 'Women's Alliance for Peace and Justice' created by Arzoo Rana Dueba and Rita Thapa, mobilized women for peace through various marches and demonstrations during conflict. They also met then Prime Minister of Nepal for demanding cease-fire. Another organization 'Centre for Women and Politics' demanded women inclusion in politics and peace process. Likewise, *Fatima Foundation-Nepal* (2004) worked for education for Muslim women of Nepal and *Feminist Dalit Organisation* (FDO) (1994) working for empowering dalit women of Nepal (Upadhyaya, 2014).

Similarly, in North East India there have been 17 formal peace talks (Women Council 2016) and there is no women's participation in the peace talks, but there are some women's peace groups, NGOs and organizations that protect and promote the rights of women. Some of them are Assam Boro Women's Justice Forum, Nagaland's Naga Mother's Association, Naga Women's Union, Manipur Hamar Women's Association, Manipur's Zomi Mother's Association etc. these women's organizations have helped the women deal with pain and torture due to armed conflict, they also worked for the economic empowerment of women affected by conflict (Upreti, 2004).

In North- East India, during the course of movement women used symbols and meaning systems to give logic to their resistance movements (Goswami n.d.). Symbols of mourning and motherhood are used by women as strategies to protest. *Matrin Manch*, one of the important organizations was set up to protest against the rape of minors, way back in 1991. The *Anchalik Mahila Sajagata Samiti* and *Chapar Anchalik Mahila Samiti* have played important roles in protesting women against army atrocities.

Naga Mother's Association (NMA) established in 1984 used the notion of motherhood for political mobilization of women and these mothers were fighting against the use of drugs. The Naga women believed that without development

Table 1

	Peace Accords	Signatories	References related to women Security
1.	Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord (1947)	All men	No
2.	Shillong Accord (1975)	All men	No
3.	Assam Accord (1985)	All men	No
4.	Mizoram Accord (1986)	All men	No
5.	Bodoland Territorial Council Accord	All men	No
6.	Nagaland Peace Accord (2015)	All men	No

there cannot be peace so that firstly, they wanted to remove all the taboos of the society (Banerjee et al., 2010) and then they entered into the political arena. Naga Mother's Association participated in Naga Peace Negotiation but they did not have right to vote in the negotiations. Similarly, *Meira Paibi* (Torch bearers) of Manipur are another woman's groups, active in North East India. They are active to eliminate a wide range of social problem such as sexual violence and rape. Initially they protested as 'Nishabandhi' against the consumption of alcohol and through their immense protest Manipur was declared as a dry state (Banerjee et al., 2010; Devi, 2017). There was a debate over the identity of Meira Paibis among Meitei women because of its earlier reformist works but the nude protest of Meira Paibi showed that it is an organized movement and has defined set of goals. The goals are political in the sense of engaging the state and the violence, and saving people from such violence. The protest by Meira Paibis exposes this truth as stated in *The Telegraph*<sup>17</sup> July 25, 2004 that the 'excesses were committed by the security forces in the state'.

If we analyse the working nature of women's organization in both the countries then we understand that in North East India Women organization adopted a strategy that firstly, they empower women economically and socially and then women will be able to enter into the political arena. In Nepal women's organizations used the WPS regime and the UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions as a tool to legitimize their demands for greater presence of women in the political sphere.

Some of the women movements in north-east India conducted by women's organizations especially in Assam retained sporadic and issue-based struggles. Women were inspired by a sense of nationalism but when the movement ended, they returned to their traditional spheres. Thus, their participation was never recognized nor institutionalised. Women's victimhood was reported widely but their agency-hood were underreported (Phukon, 2017). For example, during the Assam movement, women's organization such as *Sadou Assam Nari Sanstha*, *Mula Gabharu Sanstha*, *Assam Jugral Mahila Parishad* protested against cases of rape and domestic violence. These organizations were associated with All Assam Students Union (AASU). These organizations provided platforms for women to raise their demands and problems (Mahanta, 1988) but women's contributions in AASU were ignored whereas sometimes women even became 'human shields' between agitating students and armed forces (Phukon, 2017). Some women organizations such as Nari Mukti Sanstha, affiliated with CPI (ML), also raise some cases of rape and publicized it but for them it is difficult to create feminist platform within party structure because majority of the patriarchal nature of the party. In concise, women's organization in North-East India worked under the umbrella of apex organization or party structure rather than independently, thus their voices were never heard. The role of small women's groups or organizations into movement was only superficial<sup>18</sup>.

17. She Stop to Conquer'. 2004. The Telegraph, 25 July. [http://www.telegraphindia.com/1040725/asp/look/story\\_3533201.asp](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1040725/asp/look/story_3533201.asp).

18. In the past too, women helped their fellow leaders and motivated rural women to join movement. After signing of Assam Accord in 1985

International Support- International support is another point of differences in both conflict situations. Nepal not only implemented UNSCR 1325 but also welcomed the support of the international community or organizations. In contrast, India declined to accept 'outside' involvement in its internal matter, resulting in a very painful prolonged struggle of women's involvement in peace processes.

The countries like China, Switzerland, Finland, European Union, Denmark, Germany, and UK including India have played important role in promoting and maintaining peace in Nepal. External funds have undoubtedly been an important source of support for women's organizations, and instrumental for the development of their operational capacity. After the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the Nepal Peace Trust Fund (NPTF) was created in 2007. Led by the MoPR through its Peace Fund Secretariat, as a platform for dialogue between the government and donors it has combined government and donor funding to support Nepal's transition from civil war to peace (European Union Delegation to Nepal, 2015). It is a fund for interested donor agencies and governments to give financial support to the peace process of Nepal. Germany, Finland, Denmark, the UK Switzerland, Norway and European Union participated in NPTF as donor countries.

One of the international community's key tools to prevent conflict in Nepal was UNMIN, which was deployed from 2007 – 11 to support peace process implementation (Einsiedel and Cale, 2017). This mission has aimed to providing technical assistance for the election of a Constituent Assembly, monitoring weapons and armies on both sides, and supporting the monitoring of non-military aspects of the ceasefire. In 2005 OHCHR<sup>19</sup> mission was deployed in Nepal, which brought increased international attention and scrutiny of abuses committed by both the Nepal Army and the Maoists. It helping to reduce violence, provides a degree of protection to key leaders on both sides of the conflict, and creates an environment in which national actors could push for a pro-human rights and democracy agenda (Rawski and Sharma, 2012). 'Women Network for Peace and Justice' is the network of 11 women's groups, which is supported by USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and this network, raised their voice for 33% female representation in government structures (Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2013). Women Alliance for Peace, Power, Democracy and Constituent Assembly was initiated by the government of Norway in 2007, which was later known as Sankalp. Similarly, United Kingdom's Department for International Development and CARE supported peace pressure groups in Gorkha.

district in Nepal who have issued citizen charter in the area to eliminate domestic violence against women (Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2013). Asian Development Bank is a regional development bank in Asia that has also supported Nepalese post conflict peace pro-

the agitating leaders formed a regional party Assam GanaParishad (AGP) and when it comes into power it nominated only two women as candidates for state elections. Women activists formed a women's wing of AGP under the banner of Assam Mahila Pradesh but this wing was not separated from the party's political ideology.

19. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

cess through their various infrastructural projects. The ADB projects works in 18 districts, benefiting around 70% of the population, 11% of the families are women headed (Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2013). ADB has launched water and sanitation projects in several conflicts affected districts and these projects was operated by Nepalese women's groups and women were also engaged in road building projects. These post conflict developments have brought some positive transformation in women's political participation. According to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNDP women's involvement in infrastructure is a new phenomenon in Nepal. These achievements have not been a panacea for women's involvement in peace, yet an institutional effort is in place to identify women's agency hood and involve them in justice and fairness.

On the other hand, Government of India has been under a constant denial mode. Thus, the readiness with which women could be included in peace processes is almost negligible. Their efforts to bring peace persist, but the official acknowledgement of women as agencies in peace processes is negligible. The area remains shrouded from the international glare and little commitment of implementing the women and peace regime prevails in the region.

## Conclusion

Violent conflicts on the one hand victimises women, but also opens spaces for women's peace agency hood. Nepal and North-eastern India are no exception. The protracted violent conflict in the Northeast and Nepal are no exceptions. However, the level of involvement of women in the peace processes in both situations is significantly different. In the case of Nepal, the struggle of women for space in the restructuring of Nepal has been partly generated by the support that was extended to them by the international community in various ways, and also by the readiness of the state and the civil society of accepting this opportunity. Not only did Nepal accept the UN Security Council Resolutions concerning Women Peace and Security, related National action plans too were brought in place promptly. Subsequently the global international pressure, and support in terms of monetary and human resources were channelled to propel women's participation in the post conflict peace processes. In North East India, partly due to the dual patriarchy (by the state and the society) to open up the post conflict spaces for women and partly due to the resultant lack of international pressure to include women, they could neither be involved in peace processes formally and nor could they participate in peace building in various non formal ways. Thus, the only space that was left for women of Northeast was in the form of protest movements. They protested against atrocities of the armed forces, the repeal of AFSPA Act, against social evils such as the use of drug or alcohol, for according dignity by punishing perpetrators of sexual violence, and they also raised their voices to implement UNSCR 1325 in India through various peace congregations. In the absence of resources, both financial and human, their struggle has remained a very uphill task. Considering the protracted and festering nature of violent conflict in the Northeast, the task of peace and reconstruction becomes all the more arduous.

No sooner than the people's war broke out, efforts for peace negotiations were attempted<sup>20</sup>. Once the peace agreement was in place, Nepal appealed to the UN for an observer mission and also opened its gates for donor agencies. The change therefore was rapid as well as comprehensive.

In India as there was a culture of denial of any armed conflict existing, there was no such window. Though the women of India's North-East undertook some commendable work towards establishing a more just and equitable society, the odds were much against them – the most significant among others were the financial constraints. Though the appeal of UNSCR 1325 has been universal, in the absence of any National Plan for Action by India, the situation remains far from satisfactory. In the Northeast experiences show that women played pivotal role in bringing warring parties to the peace table and this has been well recognized and appreciated, yet they are rarely invited to the formal peace talks and still more sparingly nominated into formal peace committees. India needs to reconceptualise the concept of 'armed conflict' and UNSCR 1325. They must be implemented in the region. The first step towards this could be to ensure 33% seats for women in decision making structures. If women are included in decision making bodies in respectable numbers, this descriptive representation will definitely enhance their substantive representation. This will transform outcomes of policies in favour of women.

### Availability of data and materials

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

### Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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20. Negotiations for peace were attempted in 2001, 2003 and finally in 2005 and 2006.

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