



## The Role of Gender in Peace Processes in Northeast India Specially in Manipur and Nagaland

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**Abstract:** The role of gender in peace processes is critical, particularly in conflict-affected regions such as in India and Northeast India. Historically it was Women who have been marginalized in peace process; but the involvement of Women has proven in achieving sustainable peace. The participation of women in peacebuilding efforts is played a very essential role not only for inclusive governance but also for addressing the unique challenges faced by their communities. Data from various peace initiatives indicates that women often bring perspectives that lead to comprehensive peace agreements, which take into account the socio-economic deterioration caused by protracted conflicts. UN Security Council Resolution no.1325, adopted in 2000, Declared the importance of women's involvement in peace process and security efforts, promoting their role in decision-making processes. Despite this, statistical reviews reveal that female representation in peace negotiations worldwide remains comparatively very low—averaging only 4% in signed peace agreements across various conflicts. In India, women's participation in peace processes is also very limited, particularly in the Northeast, where age old gender norms often exclude women from formal political participation. Studies reveal that when women are included, peace agreements tend to be more durable, success and last longer. Thus, fostering an inclusive dialogue that integrates diverse gender perspectives is crucial for achieving long-lasting peace in the North East part affected by unrest.

**Key Words: Gender, North-East India, Conflict, Peace, Participation**

Many parts of the world facing different types of conflict related situation and when the question arises about conflict resolution then Gender dynamics significantly influence peace processes. Ongoing conflicts in Northeast region of India provide a unique lens through which to evaluate women's roles in peacebuilding process. During

peace process, women in many societies often possess crucial perspectives that are vital for effective sustainable and long lasting of peace. Data says that involving women in peace process can lead to more successful and enduring peace agreements. Research by the Council on Foreign Relations indicates that when women participate in peace negotiations, the resulting agreements are 35%. This data emphasizes the need for a more inclusive approach to peacebuilding and also recognizes the importance of gender as a critical component in the process. A mother who's lost everything, her home, her family, all gone due to conflict related situation and this is the reality for many women in the world. It signifies why women's inclusion in peace matters. Can real sustainable peace exist without her involvement? For real change in the society, everyone must be involved. That's where gender comes in. Women's inclusion leads to lasting peace. This article argues it's key for India and Northeast India. Sustainable, inclusive peace requires her participation.

Women are facing unique danger situation during conflict time, like Sexual violence and harassment rises, Displacement happens more often, suffer economic hardship, along with losing support from her men and family. women possess unique insights into conflict dynamics due to their experiences as both victims and agents of change but men face different problems They may be forced to join in the group. UN Women, 2015 report indicates that women's involvement in peace processes leads to more comprehensive agreements and enhances community resilience.

### **Conflict in North-East India**

Northeast India, a region previously known for its insurgency and ethnic violence. The region has seen continuous conflict for decades, impacting both men, women and children's. Data published by different agencies indicate that while over 60% of people affected by conflict and violence are women



and children. The absence of women in peace negotiations means the issues they face such as gender-based violence, economic disparity, and social discrimination remain unaddressed. Organizations such as the North East Network and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom have been pioneering grassroots initiatives to integrate women's voices into peace dialogues despite 2019 study by the United Nations reported that women are involved in only 2.4% of peace negotiating teams in the N.E. Region. Different studies show that when women are involved peace deals last long, their contribution can change in the outcomes.

### **The Gendered Experience of Conflict in Northeast India:**

Conflict in Northeast India has disproportionately affected women and men in different ways, reflecting existing gender inequalities and societal norms.

**Direct Violence and Displacement:** Women are often victims of direct violence, including sexual violence, which is used as a weapon of war to humiliate, intimidate, and control communities. Displacement resulting from conflict also has a gendered impact.

**Economic Hardship and Livelihood Insecurity:** Conflict disrupts economic activities and livelihoods, disproportionately affecting women who are often dependent on agriculture, small-scale trade, and informal sectors. The loss of male family members due to death, injury, or imprisonment further exacerbates women's economic vulnerability, forcing them to take on additional responsibilities as heads of households.

**Social and Psychological Trauma:** Conflict-related trauma can have a devastating impact on women's mental health and well-being. The experience of violence, loss, and displacement can lead to depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other psychological problems.

**Erosion of Social Support Systems:** Conflict weakens social cohesion and traditional support systems, leaving women more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

### **The Multifaceted Role of Gender in Peace Processes in Northeast India**

Peace processes, aimed at resolving conflicts and establishing sustainable harmony, are complex undertakings that require a nuanced understanding of the socio-political landscape. Within this landscape, gender plays a crucial, yet often overlooked, role. Northeast India, a region

characterized by protracted ethnic conflicts and insurgency movements. The neglect of gender in peace processes stems from a historical bias towards viewing conflict resolution as a primarily masculine domain, focused on military strategies, power-sharing arrangements between male political elites, and the cessation of armed hostilities. Narrow perspective about Women have often been relegated to the limited boundary, seen as victims of conflict requiring humanitarian assistance rather than as active agents of change or capable of contributing to peacebuilding. overlooks the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls, their unique experiences of violence and displacement, and their potential as mediators, negotiators, and peace advocates.

Northeast India, comprising states like Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Tripura, has been plagued by decades of armed conflict, primarily stemming from ethnic and secessionist movements and these types of conflicts have deeply impacted the social fabric, leading to widespread human rights violations, including sexual violence, forced displacement, and economic deprivation in the region. As like other parts of India the traditional gender roles in these regions often dictate that women are mainly responsible for domestic duties and childcare, while men dominate the public sphere and political decision-making. It is crucial to recognize that women are not simply passive victims but also, they are active participants in conflict, both as combatants and as peacebuilders, albeit often in informal and unrecognized ways. Understanding the role of gender in Northeast India the peace processes require acknowledging the specific socio-cultural contexts and the distinct forms of violence and displacement experienced by women. Historically, women have played a significant role in grassroots movements, advocating for peace and stability, her participation is not merely a matter of inclusion; it is essential for fostering sustainable peace for longer period.

In Northeast India, different women's groups and networks have been working in establishing peace. Women groups are often engaged in community-based activities that aim to address the root causes of conflict, such as ethnic tensions, displacement, sexual violence, loss of livelihoods, socio-economic disparities and breakdown of social structures. By facilitating simple and easy way of discussions and workshops, women leaders empower their communities to articulate their needs and aspirations, thereby creating a more inclusive environment for peace building. Women's groups efforts often lead to the



establishment of trust among conflicting parties, which is crucial for any successful peace negotiations.

The women participation in the peace process of Nagaland and Manipur, two most important states of northeastern parts of India with long-standing insurgencies and ethnic violence, is significant and multifaceted. Both these two parts have experienced about conflict for decades, with various ethnic groups seeking greater autonomy or secession from the Indian territory. The participation of women in the peace building processes is crucial as it brings a gendered perspective to the negotiations, understanding and ensures that women's rights and concerns are addressed in the post-conflict rehabilitation and governance structures.

#### **The Participation of Women in Peacebuilding:**

Despite the challenges they face, women in Northeast India have played a vital role in peacebuilding process.

**Grassroots Peace Initiatives:** Women have been at the forefront of grassroots peace initiatives, forming peace committees, conducting awareness campaigns, and facilitating dialogue between conflicting parties.

**Advocacy and Activism:** Women have also played a crucial role in advocating for peace and justice, raising awareness about the impact of conflict on women and children, and demanding greater participation in peace processes.

**Mediators and Negotiators:** While women are often excluded from formal peace negotiations, they have demonstrated their ability to act as effective mediators and negotiators in informal settings.

**Challenges to Women's Participation:** Despite their valuable contributions, women face numerous challenges to their participation in peace processes.

#### **Gender-Inclusive Approaches to Peace:**

To achieve sustainable peace in Northeast India, it is essential to adopt gender-inclusive approaches.

**Ensuring Women's Participation in Peace Processes:** Women must be meaningfully included in all stages of peace processes, from negotiation and mediation to implementation and monitoring.

**Addressing Gender-Based Violence:** Ending gender-based violence is crucial for creating a peaceful and just society.

**Promoting Economic Empowerment of Women:** Economic empowerment is essential for women's autonomy and security.

**Strengthening Social Support Systems:** Rebuilding social cohesion and strengthening traditional support systems are crucial

for healing the wounds of conflict and preventing future violence.

**Integrating Gender Perspectives into Peace Agreements and Policies:** Peace agreements and policies must be gender-sensitive and address the specific needs and concerns of women and men.

#### **Manipur and Nagaland**

Manipur has experienced multiple insurgency groups with different types of ethnic groups which seeking greater autonomy and self-rule. Manipur the land where Indias we can find highest number of extremist groups. In the peace process there are generally engaged the government of India, the government of Manipur, and different insurgent groups. The role of "Women's Action for Development" group has been instrumental in advocating against violence perpetrated by state forces during conflicts like those surrounding AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act). AFSPA was specially prepared by the central government to tackle the insurgent movement in Jammu & Kashmir and in the North-East India, through this act it may declare an area as disturbed area and granted some special powers to the arm forces. The campaigns of "Women's Action for Development" group have not only created awareness about human rights violations but have also fostered dialogue between conflicting parties. Women's organizations such as the Manipur Women's Gun Survivors Network (MWGSN) and the North East Network (NEN) have been working on peace process and conflict resolution initiatives. These organizations focus on healing and empowerment of women affected by conflict, as well as advocating for the inclusion of gender-sensitive provisions in any peace agreements. The 'Meira Paibis' (women torchbearers) one of the important and famous women organization not only in Manipur but in the world also played a very important role in the peace building process in the region. The collective of women's organizations, have been actively campaigning for peace and human rights in Manipur. These organization have led numerous protests and vigils against drug abuse, alcoholism, sexual harassment and violence, including the iconic "Nude protest" in 2004 against the alleged rape and murder of a woman by the security forces. The 'Meira Paibis' works not only pressured the government but also the insurgent groups to address these issues in the peace talks. The United Naga Council (UNC) included a woman in their team for the tripartite peace talks with the government of India and the government of Manipur in 2010.



Nagaland another important part of India facing violence before independence. NSCN (Naga Socialist Council of Nagaland) one of the strongest terrorist organizations of North-East India. "Naga Mothers' Association" (NMA) was formed in 1984 and it was one of the famous women organizations of Nagaland which has been played pivotal role in mediating discussions among various factions involved in Naga insurgency conflicts. Their emphasis on reconciliation rather than retribution has led to innovative approaches towards building trust among communities historically divided and displaced by violence. NMA has pressured the government and insurgent groups to end the conflict and build peace in Nagaland. Another women group Naga Women's Union (NWU) also have been at the forefront of advocating for peace in the region. The activities of both NMA and NWU believes in non-violent protests and public rallies have brought attention to the human rights violations and the plight of civilians, especially women, during the conflict. While women of Nagaland did not directly involve in the formal peace negotiations but they have made significant contributions to the political landscape of Nagaland. Now women are politically aware and conscious so that they are participating in the election of state legislature and local bodies, these participation helps women to get their voices in the peace process.

To enhance the effectiveness of women's participation in peace processes in Nagaland and Manipur, it is essential to understand that inclusion of women in all levels of peace negotiations is essential. Ensure that gender-specific impacts of the conflict, such as sexual and gender-based violence, and include provisions for justice and reparations in peace agreements must be addressed. Women must be Recognize and support in peacebuilding efforts by providing them with the necessary resources and protection. Strengthen women's leadership and capacity building programs to empower them to participate effectively in the peace process.

women in Nagaland and Manipur have played significant roles in advocating for peace and addressing the social impacts of conflict. Their involvement in the peace process is vital for achieving long lasting peace and ensuring that the unique challenges and needs of women in these regions are met.

### **Conclusion and key points regarding the role of gender in the peace process in these regions:**

1. Impact of Conflict on Women: In Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland, women have been disproportionately affected by the insurgencies and

ethnic tensions. They have had to bear the brunt of the violence, including sexual assaults, disappearances of male family members, and the burden of supporting their households in the absence of men. The peace process must address the specific needs and rights of women as victims and survivors of conflict.

2. Women's Participation in Peace Processes: Women have historically been underrepresented in formal peace negotiations and decision-making bodies in these states. However, there have been efforts to include women in the peace process, such as the formation of the Naga Mothers' Association in Nagaland and the 'Meira Paibis' in Manipur, which have advocated for the end of armed conflict and the protection of human rights. These groups have played a vital role in raising awareness about the impact of the conflict on women and children and pushing for a gender-sensitive approach to peacebuilding.

3. Gender-Sensitive Peace Agreements: The inclusion of women in the peace process is essential for ensuring that peace agreements are gender-sensitive and address the specific concerns of women. For instance, the Naga peace accord recognized the role of Naga women in preserving the cultural identity and values of the society, which is a significant step toward acknowledging their contributions and ensuring their participation in shaping the future of the region.

4. Women as Agents of Change: Women have been active in various informal peacebuilding initiatives, such as community dialogues, reconciliation efforts, and the promotion of non-violence. Their involvement in these grassroots movements has often led to significant changes in societal attitudes and behaviors, fostering an environment conducive to sustainable peace.

5. Gender and Development: The peace process in these states is closely linked to issues of development and governance. Ensuring gender equality and empowering women economically and politically can contribute to long-term stability and peace. Programs focusing on education, healthcare, livelihoods, and political participation for women can help address the root causes of conflict and facilitate reconciliation.

6. Transitional Justice: Gender-sensitive transitional justice mechanisms are necessary to ensure that women's experiences and voices are heard and that perpetrators of gender-based violence are held accountable. This can help in healing communities and restoring the confidence of women in the peace process.



7. Security Sector Reform: Reforming security forces to be more gender-sensitive is crucial for protecting women's rights and ensuring their participation in peacekeeping efforts. This includes training security personnel in gender issues and increasing the representation of women in the security forces.

8. Women's Leadership: Encouraging and supporting women's leadership in the peace process can lead to more inclusive and effective peacebuilding strategies. Women's involvement in political and peacebuilding institutions can help to challenge stereotypes and promote gender equality.

9. Addressing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: The prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence during the conflicts in these states necessitates a focus on justice, healing, and prevention in the peace process. This includes implementing laws and policies that protect women's rights and support services for survivors.

10. Peace Education and Awareness: Educating the population on gender issues and the importance of gender equality in sustaining peace can help to change attitudes and behaviors that contribute to conflict. This is particularly important in addressing the social norms that often underpin gender-based violence and discrimination. Recognizing and integrating women's contributions in peace processes in India, particularly in Northeast India, is vital for achieving lasting peace. By fostering an environment where women can actively participate in decision-making, society can build a foundation for resilience, understanding, and stability, a cornerstone of sustainable peace. The journey towards inclusive peace processes is long, but it begins with recognizing the indispensable role women play in shaping a more equitable and peaceful society.