

Women’s Empowerment, Insurgency Abatement and Peace Building: in Pursuance of an Inclusive Public Policy in Assam

Nitul Gogoi, Dr. T. R. Gogoi

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Science & Technology, Meghalaya

Professor, Department of Sociology University of Science & Technology, Meghalaya

ABSTRACT: Empowerment refers to the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one’s life and claiming one’s rights. Women’s empowerment includes the action of raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy and training. It is all about equipping and allowing women to make decisions in public as well as private spheres. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Women can play important roles in eradication of all social evils including violence. The insurgency problem in Assam and States of Northeast India can also be mitigated with the help of women’s empowerment in the region. Illiteracy and low level of awareness have crippled the women of the region from becoming a vibrant power. The study is based on two highly ULFA infested districts of Assam, viz. Dibrugarh and Tinsukia, and in-depth personal interviews with 30 respondents ranging from militants, women activists, academicians and police officers. Women’s associations can play the role of a peacemaker. This study is an attempt to find out a plausible alternative paradigm to the insurgency problem in Assam.

KEYWORDS: Empowerment, Awareness, Violence, Militancy, Insurgency.

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I. INTRODUCTION:

The term ‘women’s rights’ refers to freedoms and entitlements of women and girls of all ages. These rights should be institutionalized, but often ignored or suppressed by law, local customs and behavior in a particular society thereby interrogating the social fabric of human civilization.

Empowerment refers to the process of becoming strong and more confident, especially in controlling one’s life and claiming one’s rights. Women’s empowerment includes the action of raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy and training. It is all about equipping and allowing women to make decisions in public as well as private spheres ensuing of equal access to education for women and girls for social empowerment has been a goal of national policy for the empowerment of women (2001). An educated and trained woman is a confident woman. A confident woman can play crucial role in solving major problems of the society.

Since the beginning of what we call civilization, when men’s dominance over women was firmly established until the present day, our history has been marred with oppression of and brutality to women. The system of male domination, known as patriarchy, forced in all its forms, both subtle and overt from oppression, inequality, and discrimination to domestic violence, rape, trafficking, and forced slavery. The change the world is crying for, cannot occur unless women’s voices are heard. Democracy cannot work without equality for a woman that provides equal participation and representation (Gupta 2009).

Assam is an insurgency infested state. The ULFA insurgency has been there for the last four decades. In addition to ULFA, NDFB, DHD, KPLT, KLO etc. deviant organizations at some point of time caused major law and order issues. The counter-insurgency operations may be posited as one of the solutions to such problems. The army operations and other repressive measures adopted by the government have not brought about a permanent solution to the insurgency problem prevailing in the state. Here comes the role of the other stakeholders in the society. Women are the major stakeholders of such groups working out solutions for such problems.

In Northeast region women enjoy greater mobility and visibility than women of other parts of the country. Ill-practices such as dowry and ‘sati’ are not very prevalent in the region (Das, 2012).

Insurgency in Assam and Women Cadres:

The underground organization in Assam, ULFA has its female wing in which many young women cadres have been enrolled. The women cadres are utilized for cooking, housekeeping, watch and ward, and nursing tasks in the camps of the organization. The women members are also engaged in gathering the

intelligence information and the brainwashing of girls and women to enlarge the support-base of their organization in general public. In the organization, there are instances where a woman cadre has risen to the higher rank in hierarchy - Cultural Secretary, a member of the decision making body of the organization.

People's Consultative Group:

On September 8, 2005, the United Liberation front of Assam constituted a people's consultative group to initiate the talk process as mediator between the central government and the outfit itself with II members under the leadership of Dr. Indira Goswami popularly known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami. Mamoni Raisom Goswami was an Assamese Editor, Poet, Professor, Scholar and Writer. She convinced Paresh Baruah the self-styled commander-in-Chief of the United Liberation Front of Assam to come to the negotiation table with the Government of India. Mamoni Raisom Goswami was a respected person and that is why she was involved in by the ULFA leadership for negotiating with the Government of India. Mamoni Raisom Goswami was the only influential person whom the outfit trusted. There was also much progress in the talks with the government under her leadership. Women groups under such leader can motivate the insurgent outfits to shun violence and contribute to the idea or metaphor of nation-building.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

Gupta (2009) sheds light on how men's dominance over women has been firmly established and how our history has been marked with oppression and brutality against women. According to him, in traditionally patriarchal societies any improvement in the status of women has far-reaching consequences and does produce fundamental political changes.

Pujari and Kaushik (1994) are of the opinion that women have lived in two parallel worlds ever since the first community – habitation, shelter or village. They have occupied the positions of eminence and authority, ever gone into battle, and they have also been objects of repression, uncalled for violence and the petty tyrannies of being the male breadwinner.

Mahajan (1991) stresses women's involvement in the economic and social development process in the country has remained comparatively neglected which shows that the Indian society has hardly bothered to pay due attention to its women folks.

Hirsch (1991) claims that violence is embedded in the fabric of American Society. According to him, the United States has been spawned in violence and still continues to be a basically violent society. He cites the example of Karen Siluwood, a young woman killed in an automobile accident of suspicious origin, was thought to have been "fingere" because she sought to call national attention to the dangers inherent in a facility processing nuclear materials.

Das (2012) is of the opinion that though about half of the world's population is constituted by women, they have not been treated with equal rights in the society. Gender differences, customs, traditions, social attitudes, etc. are mainly responsible for inequality between men and women.

Dutta (2018) analyses how the sufferings of women in any insurgency movement have been the focus of many women's rights and human rights groups these days. In the insurgency movements women continue to struggle as victims, as combatants, as peacemakers.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To examine the role of empowered women in insurgency abatement and peace building; and
2. To study the pursuance of an inclusive public policy in Assam for mitigating the insurgency problem.

III. METHODOLOGY:

A methodology is a set of ideas or guidelines about how to proceed in gathering and validating data of a subject matter. It also provides guidance for carrying out investigation relating to the topic. This study will use both primary and secondary data. The primary data will be collected from interview and questionnaires, while secondary data will be drawn from published books, journals, reports, and other printed material available, related to the study.

Field Sites: Tinsukia District of Assam is the field of study as that is an insurgency infested district.

Nature of Respondents: For the study the following respondents were interviewed for collection of primary data-

Categories of respondents	Number of Respondents
House Holder	10
Academician	05
Political Leaders	05
Militants / Ex- Militants	05
Police Officers	05
Total	30

Some Reflections:

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) in clause no. 3.1 has defined the role of women in decision making as- "Women's equality in power sharing and active participation in decision making including decision making in political process at all levels will be ensured for the achievement of the goals of empowerment, all measures will be taken to guarantee women equal access to and full participation in decision making bodies at every level including the legislative, executive, judicial, corporate, statutory bodies as also the advisory commissions, committees, Boards trusts etc." Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social political and economic life of the nation is also one of the goal and objectives of women have better understanding of the youths' mindset taking the path of insurgency. Therefore, women's involvement in policy making would definitely help in insurgency abatement and peace building.

Inclusive policy making relies on inclusive processes, evidence and structure to ensure that policies and their implementation reflect and integrate the perspective of diverse stake holders. This is supported by public transparency, openness and engagement mechanisms that inform citizens about government's intentions and actions and that provide them with ways to express their view on civil society and the wider public to be involved in policy making, regulation and service delivery.

In Assam, the inclusive public policy is the need of the hour to gain the trust of all sections of the society including the disgruntled elements. Involving of the women groups in the policy making and tackling the decades old insurgency problem will be beneficial to the state as well as to the society at large.

Thematic Analysis:

1. **Illiteracy:** Illiteracy is a major set-back in the path of empowering women. Literacy rate among women in rural areas is very poor.
2. **Social Traditions:** Social Traditions in rural society is a stumbling block in empowering village women. In a patriarchal society in rural Assam, women have little role to play.
3. **Poverty:** Due to poverty among the rural masses, the women folk have to fight for livelihood. Therefore, they have little opportunity or no opportunity for taking part in social reforms and change.
4. **Culture Conflicts:** Culture Conflict among different sections of the society result in gender discrimination.

Suggestions:

1. For bringing about empowerment of women, there has to be an attitudinal change in both men and women. The concept of women for household activities only should be replaced by equal partnership with men.
2. Women should be encouraged to participate in social and political activities. They should be made part of decision making bodies.
3. The Government machineries, Social organization, NGOs should be assigned the responsibility of educating rural women and men regarding women rights, significance of Human rights and empowerment of women.

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