

WOMEN OF NORTHEAST IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL FIELD: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM AGITATION AND NAGA MOTHER'S ASSOCIATION.

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INTRODUCTION- Northeast India comprises of the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. It is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse region in India. The regions have a high concentration of tribal population in the hilly states of Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and also in the hill districts of the states of Manipur, Assam and Tripura. North-East is a small part of India, which has been considered as the most backward, marginal, and isolated in the entire country, is basically surrounded by hills except a portion of Assam (Brahmaputra and Barak valley) comparatively a plain area. The lives of the people of Northeast have not been easy as they have witnessed innumerable ethnic violence's, secessionist movements since a long time. Social ignorance, political negligence, economic exploitation experienced by the people of Northeast often has gone to snatch their rights. As we know that north-east India is a region which always remained aloof from the rest of the country, this region which is sparked by the feelings of marginalization and people who resides in this area have a profound impact on our society and its people. North east India is very famous for the matrilineal society it have in the state of Meghalaya among the Khasi and Garo tribe. However, in the other regions also the North eastern women enjoy more privileges and higher status as compared to the status of women in all India average. Northeast India has witnessed several strong women movements raising their voices against injustice and trying to bring change into the society, few examples where women portrayed their strong individuality are Anti-Afspa movement at Manipur, Mizo hmeichhi insuihkhawm pawl at Mizoram, watsu Mngdung at Nagaland, Nupi lan at Manipur etc.

DISCUSSION- In this paper we are going to discuss some of the famous socio-political movements of North east India where women came forward and showed the world how strong they are and left a mark for generations by showing their admirable courage.

- **ASSAM: ASSAM AGITATION-** From the early twentieth century Assamese women became visible in any political movement. The period from 1930 to 1934 saw the largest number of women in any social movement. It was followed by Quit India movement which was largely led by women, as a men congress leaders were arrested on the outset of the movement. However, the agitation of 1979 saw for the first time such large participation of women. The Assam Agitation movement which lasted for nearly six years and ended with the Assam Accord of 15th August 1985. The Assam Agitation also known as the anti-foreigners agitation was a complex political event, which demanded the government of India to detect disenfranchise and deport illegal aliens. It had far reaching consequences in the socio-political scenario of the state. This movement had created the platform for the rise of Regionalism in Assam. The United liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) was also an offshoot of the same discontents

The participation of women from the different class, caste, and communal background is one of the most important features of the anti-foreigners agitation of 1979-85. Women were spontaneous participants and they took part in all activities, be it Satyagraha, picketing and procession. In almost every corner of every locality, a women's association was formed and these women were not supporting the agitation but they were creating new avenues for self-employed and self-dependence. Weaving was the main source of earning. These women's helped the victims of the violence and also provided aid to the one who were involved in the agitation. They also contributed their savings, their jewelleries etc. to the All Assam Students Union's (AASU) coffer. This movement gave an enormous opportunity to girls to lead from the forefront. An example of such leadership was Rekha Rani Bodo, a tribal leader who was elected as the president of All Assam Tribal Women's Association in 1982 and was a part of AASU. The women's active during the agitation was decentralised organizations working at the grass root level. AASU and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) mobilised these women for different programmes and propagandas. Assam Mahila Sangha, Assam Jagrata Mahila Parishad were some of these women's groups that played a crucial role in mobilising women and strengthening them to carry on the agitation in the face of hardships.

Women also played a very active role in the peace making process as there were number of violations, in such situation many women's organization came up who urged for peace. Several Matribahinis (Mother Force) were created to assist those who suffered during the agitation. Samajsewa Matribahini (social Worker Mother Force) was one such organization who offered material help to those women who were either molested by Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawans or lost family members, by granting them hand looms to become self-dependent financially. Purbanchaliya Mahila Sanstha (North Eastern Women's Association) was another organization that was helping those who suffered due to the agitation, these group of women's went from place to place to help the people with medical and material support. Acharya Vinoba Bhave, a Gandhian leader, was concerned about the agitation and he advised some workers of the Sarbodaya Mandal to go to the Indo-Bangladesh border to create awareness and to find peaceful ways to stop migration into Assam. Accordingly, four groups of Gandhi followers went to border areas from different parts of Assam, on foot.

They were led by Mrs. Lakshmi Phukan and one of the groups was all women and they were inmates of Kasturba Gandhi Ashram.

Numerous women clubs (Mahila Samiti) played a crucial role in organizing women to take part in the agitation. The women of Mula Gabhoru Santha set up primarily health care centres at Guwahati, women at local level organised themselves in associations such as Sanjukta Mahila Sangha (United Women's Association), Sankari Samaj Mahila Samiti (Sankari Society Women's Committee), Rongpur Mahila Chora (Rongpur Women's Platform), Nazira Mahila Samiti (Nazira Women's Committee), Bilasipara Sangrami Mahila Santha (Bilasipara Struggling Women's group).

Assam agitation led to uncountable loss of lives that fought against the discordancy in the state. They sacrificed their lives for the progress of their motherland. Many people were killed who always considered humanity as their religion. Women were worse affected. They were killed in huge numbers too. Even killing of any male member directly or indirectly affected the females in the family and society as a whole.

There are so many unsung heroes who lost their lives in Assam agitation. Although many of the martyrs' names have disappeared into thin air, here I have mentioned their names of a few of them as per the Government's list:

1. Renubala Nath (Baksa)
2. Tarini Bala Nath (Baksa)
3. Rajani Bala Nath (Baksa)
4. Fulmai Borkotoky (Nagaon)
5. Aity Tamuly (Nagaon)
6. Elora Konwar (Marigaon)
7. Jyotika Boruah Devi (Marigaon)
8. Prothomi Deka (Marigaon)
9. Aaghuna Medhi (Marigaon)
10. Tonkeshwari Deka (Marigaon)
11. Giribala Deka (Marigaon)
12. Kusumbala Deka (Marigaon)
13. Nirmali Borkotoky (Nagaon)
14. Nirmali Nath (Nagaon)
15. Horubala Senapati (Nagaon)
16. Dorika Das (Nagaon)
17. Tilomai Laskar (Nagaon)
18. Mukoli Bala Rai (Goalpara)
19. Saila Rabha (Goalpara)
20. Malati Das (Goalpara)

Naga Mothers came forward to form an organisation known as the Naga Mother's Association (NMA) to bring peace to the society. The Head office of the NMA is in the Angami city of Kohima. It was founded on 14th February, 1984. This Organisation aims at upholding womanhood, human rights and human values. It encourages human development through

education and tries to eradicate social problems and economic exploitation as well as work towards peace and progress. This organisation was formed by the Naga women out of concern for the increasing problems in the Naga society.

From the time of its formation, the NMA has actively worked towards achieving peace. They have tried to understand the root cause of the conflict and came up with the answer that it stems from the chronic underdevelopment of the people. They have tried to address the issue by becoming involved with the developmental problems and have had enormous success in this area. They have addressed issues such as malnutrition among children. They are the first group to counsel pregnant HIV women and also fought against drug abuse and alcoholism. Through all these efforts, Nagaland was declared as a 'dry state'. They have set up a rehabilitation centre, Mount Geliand Home, which operates in collaboration with the Kripa Foundation in Mumbai.

Now, if we talk about the political field the NMA mediated between the Government of Nagaland and the Naga Student's Federation (NSF) over the age limit for jobs and came to an equitable settlement. The NSF had wanted the age limit for jobs to be increased to 30 years and to lower the pension age to 57 years. After mediation, the Government decided to recognise the demand for minimum pensionable age. Another NMA achievement is the formation of the Peace Team in October 1994 to solve the deteriorating political situation. Their theme was "Shed No More Blood". The NMA peace workers started to work with the state Government and the agitator group to stop the existing brutality and bloodshed.

The NMA spoke about the killings done by the Army as well as the rebel groups. The NMA appealed to both the parties to stop killing, as the assassinated man may be a husband, a father, a son or a brother. It did not matter what reason for the assassination is forwarded, but the only thing that mattered is that the assassination destroyed the entire family and brought them to a rock-bottom stage.

In 1995, the NMA President sent a request to the Governor of Nagaland and the Head of the Eastern command, Lieutenant General K.L. Seth, to discuss any incident involving army violence against women and children with the NMA. In some cases, the commanding officers at the local and district levels have consulted with and listened to the advice of women leaders on these issues.

The members of NMA work as mediators in the factional violence to their traditional position as respected mothers in the community. "We are mothers, and we work as mothers. Our advantage (with the underground troops) is that we approach them as mothers and therefore we are trusted by all sides", NMA President Neidonus Angami. In September 1999, a 12-hour shooting confrontation took place between the Khaplang group of the NSCN and the Isaac Muivah faction terrorised the villagers. No one intervened for which the village women took the initiative and appealed to the NMA and the Angami Women's Association, who then went to the warring factions. "Finally they listened to us and stopped firing that day", the local women said. (Red Cross society and the Government Officials too appealed for the ceasefire).

This Organisation has started a dialogue, with no opposing factions- the NSCN-IM and NSCN-K. It is only through their intervention that a conducive environment was expected to come up between the two groups.

NMA, attempts to deal with the range of social problems, particularly ethnic and tribal violence. The NMA believes that violence against women will continue unless other forms of

violence are also stopped. NMA is working hard to solve the problems. NMA has done a number of good works which has attracted the attention of International society and many human rights organisations.

CONCLUSION:

Here, I have cited two references i.e. The Assam Agitation where the women of Assam came out in the need of time to protect their land from illegal immigration and exploitation and The 'Naga Mother's Association' which is a voluntary organisation formed by the women of Nagaland to bring peace to their land which was disrupted from the on-going conflicts occurring since ages. I took these two examples because one of them showed us the rise of North-eastern women (Assam) when the discordance in the state demanded for it and the other is an organisation which is helping the state, Nagaland to overcome the disharmony and chaos in the land. Both these events brought up the true picture of the North-east showcasing the potency and strength of North-Eastern women.

North-East is said to be more liberal towards women when compared with the other counterparts. And yes, it is true North-Eastern women enjoy many privileges as in North-East there is no dowry system; there are matrilineal societies etc. They have also come forward and and took a stand equally with the men when the time was required. Be it in Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram etc. they have portrayed their strong stand towards the goal. They have shaped the state into a more positive form be it the Naga Mother's Association, Nagaland, Meira Paibr of Manipur or Mother's union of Meghalaya. Ironically, their work is presented before us the way it should be by this patriarchal society.

For example, if we talk about Assam Agitation a large number of women suffered, fought and won but when the time came to give them the respect, representation and position they deserved, they received none. After the Assam Accord was signed the Assam Agitation came to an end and a new regional political party the 'Asom Gana Parishad (AGP)' came into existence in 1985 and took part in the election of the Assam Legislative Assembly held in the same year. The irony which happened then was that only two women got the opportunity to file nomination as candidates of AGP in the election despite millions of Assamese girl students and women participated in the Assam Movement.

NMA was at the forefront in strengthening peace process after the cease fire agreement was signed in 1997. Again, in support of the ceasefire, a peace team of four members of the NMA and the Naga Women's Union of Manipur (NWUM), met the NSCN Khaplang faction to appeal for talk with the NSCN-IM factions. With NMA working actively for peace, they were able to influence the Naga politics to some extent and they are the only women group in the South Asia who has participated in the ceasefire negotiation.

Ironically, when the government of India signed the framework agreement with the NSCN-IM on the 3rd August 2015 (The Economics Times, August 3, 2015) the women groups were nowhere to be seen and were completely left out.

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