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**Armed Conflict, Small Arms Proliferation and
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by

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Armed Conflict, Small Arms Proliferation and Women's Responses to Armed Violence in India's Northeast

BINALAKSHMI NEPRAM MENTSCHEL

*Control Arms Foundation of India*¹

The human society is now drifting in the direction of a self-contradictory, multi-layered 'new middle age'... A world in which the significance of territoriality declines and the range of the claimed authorities and conflicting types of legitimization expands dramatically ... a world defined by the spread of plagues of private violence and permanent 'civil war' sanctioned by uncontrolled powers – new warlords, pirates, gun runners, gangsters, sects – to which the modern state was supposed to have put an end.

- John Keane²

Northeast India, comprising the seven states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura³, and 7.6 percent of land area and 3.6 percent of total population of India has been facing the onslaught of ethnicities based armed conflicts since the late 1940s. The region is home to more than 70 major population groups and sub groups, speaking approximately 400 languages and dialects. No other part of India or South Asia has been subjected to such a prolonged violent struggle, which have held development to ransom, as the Northeast India. Violent and vociferous demands by various ethnic groups for independence and for new states in the Northeast have been occurring over the past

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² Keane, John. 1996. *Reflections on Violence*, London : Verso Publication.

³ Sikkim joined the North-Eastern Council in 1999.

five decades. The fire of insurgency has for long engulfed this strategic region for the last half a century or more making it one of the South Asia's most disturbed regions. Bound by four countries namely Bhutan, Bangladesh, China and Myanmar, the region has immense geo-political significance.

One finds a large variety of conflictual dynamics in the Northeast ranging from insurgency for secession to insurgency for autonomy, from sponsored terrorism to ethnic clashes, to problems of continuous inflow of migrants and the fight over resources. Northeast India is home to a variety of turmoil. Socio-political instability and economic backwardness, isolation and inaccessibility compound the problem further. The cultural chasm between its people and those of the mainland is also so deep that this region is unlikely to be psychologically integrated with India for some time to come. Perhaps the map too, does not help in developing this mental state. While every other part of India is joined integrally to the mainland, the Northeast hangs on a 14 km "chicken neck" of land between Nepal and Bangladesh.⁴

There are about 272 tribes and more in the region, thereby earning the name of a 'miniature Asia'.⁵ Besides the tribes, non-tribes like Assamese (Assam) and Meiteis (Manipur) exist.⁶ No other region of India, South Asia or the world must have seen the existence of the numerous ethnic based insurgent outfits as it is the Northeast India, nor in any known part of the world, the proliferation and mushrooming of militant outfits as it is happening in this region thus forming a complex matrix.

1.1 Genesis of Ethnic Conflicts in Northeast India and Proliferation of Armed Groups

With an area of about 2, 55, 182 Sq. kms, the North Eastern region of India comprising is according to what Subir Bhowmick calls a "Colonial Construct".⁷ According to him, India's 'North-East' is a post colonial region created by the partition of the subcontinent. Ancient or medieval Indian geographical discourse has no reference to a 'North-East'.

In no Indian writing does the concept of 'North-East' figure anywhere in ancient and medieval times until the advent of the British. The British were the first to evolve the concept of a 'North-Eastern Frontier' for their Indian dominions after they conquered Assam and the other tribal and princely kingdoms located between Bengal and Burma towards the end of the nineteenth century.⁸ The regions were administered as a territorial appendage rather than as an integral administrative

⁴ Verghese, B.G. 1997. *India's North East Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance and Development*. Delhi: Konark Publications.

⁵ Meities form 60 percent in Manipur and they live in the Imphal Valley.

⁶ Break-up Tribes: Manipur-29, Meghalaya-3, Tripura-19, Nagaland-16, Arunachal Pradesh -110, Mizoram-15, Assam-more than 4.

⁷ Subir Bhawmik, "North-East India : The Evolution of Post-Colonial Region", in: Partha Chatterjee (Ed.). *Wages of Freedom*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, p.301.

⁸ Rustomji, Nari. 1983. *Imperilled Frontiers: India's North-Eastern Borderlands*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp.15-21.

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unit. It was only Assam with its oil and tea potential, which was partially integrated into the imperial economy and secured some marginal benefits of infra-structural investments like those in the railways.

The Kingdoms of Manipur and Tripura were left to survive as princely states with a degree of sovereignty, which went a long way in reinforcing their sense of distinctiveness. The rest of the tribal homelands around the Brahmaputra-Surma valley region, once they accepted British suzerainty, were left to live in their own way, somewhat frozen in a time warp. The tribesmen traded with their neighbours, sometimes fought with them and amongst themselves, but remained largely oblivious of the ways of the outside world until the Christian missionaries arrived to proselytize and educate them. The missionary efforts created many pioneers in the tribal societies and pioneers of discontent too. Missionary education not only started a new elite formation process in the North East, it also provided the emerging class with fresh aspirations and a world view.⁹ This world-view largely differed, in content and form, from India's new emerging, elites. The communication gap, thus created, persisted into the post-colonial era as India emerged from the British rule, divided but determined to protect its political identity as a unified nation-state, almost to the point of overlooking the limitations imposed by its enormous heterogeneity.

Then followed the Second World War, which brought the global conflict between the Allied and the Axis powers to the doorsteps of the North East. Some of the fiercest battles of the war were fought in this region-Kohima and Imphal ended up as part of the Great War folklore, its battles resembling the battlefields of Somme.¹⁰ The distinctness and identity of the region had already emerged. As the partition of the British Indian dominions became imminent, it was only natural for the people of the region to ponder about their future.

The British conquest of Assam and other princely and tribal lands between Bengal and Burma had given rise to the concept of a North Eastern Frontier. And after the withdrawal of the British, the process of partition led to the conversion of the region into a distinct region. When East Bengal became East-Pakistan, this frontier region was left completely isolated, hanging tenuously to the Indian mainland through a small 14 km wide corridor in North Bengal. It was this very general sense of isolation that gave the region the sense of being so different from the rest of the country.¹¹

Thus, as the British left India in 1947, the Naga movement led by Angami Zaphu Phizo who did not want to join the Indian union sowed the seeds of the insurgency in the region. This was followed by the Manipuris, whose seminal seeds of insurgency were sowed by what was called as the "unconstitutional merger of the

⁹ Baruah, Nirode K. 1970. *David Scott in Northeast India : A study in British paternalism* Delhi: Munshilal, Manoharlal.

¹⁰ Rooney, David. 1992. *Burma Victory; Imphal, Kohima and the Chindit Issue, March 1944 to May 1945*. London: Arms and Armour, p.148.

¹¹ Verghese, B. G. 1996. *India's Northeast Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance, Development*. Delhi: Konark Publishers, p. 2.

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state under duress” with the union of India on 21 September 1949. Then the Mizo insurgency followed suit in the 1960s and a decade later the Assam saw the rise of the United Liberation Front of Assam in the late 1970s.

Tracing the Origin of the Armed Struggle in India’s Northeast

Year	Happenings
1940s	Struggle for independence starts in Nagaland and Manipur. Struggle was by peaceful means.
Early 1960s	Groups of insurgents (Naga and Manipuris) go to China via Kachin Corridor for arms and training. China provides these free of cost.
Late 60s	Insurgents return with Chinese arms and ammunitions. Help also comes from Pakistan. Mizo insurgency starts off after the ‘Mautam’ famine episode.
1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of insurgents and supplies taken over by Burmese rebels... for a price. • Militancy in Assam starts in protest against illegal migration.
1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A prairie fire of insurgency engulfs the three states of Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram. • Drug addiction on the rise in the North East. • Boom time of opium cultivation in Myanmar and other Golden Triangle Areas.
1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First HIV case detected. HIV/AIDS epidemic spreads in the region due to intravenous drug using. • Ethnic clashes start occurring between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kuki-Naga (Manipur) Kuki Paite (Manipur) Tribals-Non-Tribals (Tripura) Reangs vs Mizo (Mizoram) Bodo vs Santhals (Assam) Assamese vs Illegal Migrants (Assam)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insurgency engulfs the comparatively peaceful states of Meghalaya, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. Mayhem unleashed in Tripura.

However, the 1990s saw the ushering of a new phenomenon in many parts of Northeast India and that was the taking up of arms by many other ethnic

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communities of the region within the state boundaries and their demand was autonomy within the Indian Union. A movement on similar lines is the movement by the Hmar people's Council (HPC), which started in 1990 led by Hming Chhungunga demanding a separate autonomous district council for the Hmar people. The outfit, Hmar Revolutionary Front (HRF) was formed to realise the Hmar's aim of an autonomous council. The HRF operates in Cachar district of Assam, northern Mizoram and Tipaimukh sub-division of southern Manipur. Further, a new outfit was formed called the Accord Implementation Demand Front (AIDF). This outfit has the same objective as HRF of pressurising the Mizoram government to fully implement the Hmar People's Convention Accord, but there are differences between the two outfits.

Another armed struggle, which emerged, was that of the Dimasas in the hills of North Cachar of Assam to achieve independent Dimarji, a kingdom which once existed under the Dimasa rulers. An outfit was formed called Dima Haram Daoga (DHD) on December 31, 1994 to realise this aim.¹² Besides the armed movement, the DHD is also carrying out measures to free the society of North Cachar hills from alcohol consumption and other 'evils'. Further, the DHD activists are warning the people to stop poisoning river water in the name of fishing. The DHD has reportedly also been getting support from the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Issak/Muivah) or the NSCN (IM).¹³ Another outfit emerging in Assam is that of Karbi National Volunteers.

Insurgency Related Gun Killings in Northeast India, 2002 - 2007

Year	Assam	Manipur	Tripura	Nagaland	Meghalay
2002	445	190	175	36	64
2003	505	198	295	37	58
2004	354	218	167	58	35
2005	242	331	73	40	29
2006	174	285	60	92	24
2007	201	125	15	59	1
TOTAL	1921	1347	785	322	211

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal

Another outbreak was that of the Kuki-Naga clashes which was followed by Kuki-Paite resulting in the formation of Kuki militant outfits, which started demanding a separate state for the Kukis within the Union of India. More armed groups means more small arms influx in the region. The proximity of the region the South East Asian country especially Myanmar is the main source of the weapons found in the region. And it is from such places that weapons are procured for the "Clash of Micro-civilizations". According to a study done by John Sislina¹⁴ et al, a

¹² *North East Sun* (New Delhi), 15-31 August, 1998.

¹³ *North East Sun* (New Delhi), 15-31 May, 1998.

¹⁴ Sislina, John et al. 1998. 'Pattern of Arm Acquisitions by Ethnic Group in Conflict December 1998', *Security Dialogue*, 29 (4), 393-408.

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systematic regroups analysis of arms acquisition pattern of disputing ethnic groups is lacking in the international level records; however according to him:

... 'Light Weapons' - Small arms such as AK-47 rifle, mortars and grenade launchers are the mainstay of ethnic conflicts.

For instance, the first batch of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) that consisted of 70 boys after their training with 600 other insurgents including the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur, were sent back with around 10 weapons of different make that included one Chinese AK-47 and some M-20s. Weapon training had included M-22, M-21, and M-20 pistols; NSCN cadres imparted the training. Later, ULFA got trained under the Kachin's expert guidance. Training include shooting, making bombs, and most of all, improvising the existing weaponry. More than 30 insurgent groups operate in the Northeast.

Even in a less disturbed state like Arunachal Pradesh, almost three insurgent outfits have sprung up of late. They are:¹⁵

- United Liberation Volunteers of Arunachal Pradesh (ULVA)
- United People's Volunteers of Arunachal Pradesh (UPVA)
- United Liberation Movement of Arunachal Pradesh (ULMA)

In Meghalaya too, three militant outfits sprang up. They are:

- Achik Liberation Matgrik Army (ALMA)
- Hynneiwtrep Volunteer Council (HVC), which has since changed its name to Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council
- Garo National Front

The hand of NSCN (IM) behind the formation of these two outfits has been proved. In Manipur, besides PLA and UNLF, other outfits, which are operating, are:

- Peoples' Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)
- Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL)
- Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)

PLA, PREPAK and UNLF have together formed the Manipur Peoples Liberation Army (MPLF).

Of late, a series of insurgent outfits are mushrooming in the region. Some of them are:

¹⁵ Hazarika, Sanjoy. 1996. Strangers of the Mist. Delhi: Viking.

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- United Tribes Defence Force (UTDF)
- Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF)
- Hmar Liberation Front/Hmar People's Council (HLF/HPC)
- Kuki National Army (KNA)
- Kuki National Front (KNF)
- Dima Halong Daogah (DHD)
- Karbi National Volunteers (KNV)

An assessment of these newly sprung up insurgent outfits indicate the emergence of a new phenomenon in the region i.e. the linkage of ethnicity with insurgency. Some of the tribes in turmoil are Bodo-Santhals, Bodo-Karbhis, Kuki-Naga, Kuki-Paites, Tamil-Kukis, Tribal-Non-Tribals (Tripura), Reangs and Hmars in Mizoram etc. Most of the clashes occur over territory and resources sharing.

Militant Outfits Operating in the North East and their Reasons for Armed Struggle

Name of outfit	Cause for Struggle
1. United National Liberation Front, Manipur (UNLF)	Independence from India. Forming of Indo-Burman Front
2. National Socialist Council of Nagaland IM (Nagaland, now called 'Nagalim'), [NSCN]	Earlier: Independence from India. Now: cooperation with Government of India for a possible solution within the framework of the Indian Constitution
3. People's Liberation Army, Manipur (PLA)	Independence from India
4. United Liberation Front of Assam, (ULFA)	Independence from India
5. Bodo National Liberation Front, Assam (BNLF)	Autonomy within India
6. Bru National Liberation Front, Mizoram (BNLF)	Autonomy within India
7. Kuki National Front, Manipur (KNF)	Autonomy within India
8. Tripura National Liberation Front, Tripura (TNLF)	Loss of identity; fight against illegal migrants
9. Hmar People's Council, Manipur (HPC)	Autonomy within India

Under such circumstances small arms continue to proliferate in many parts of Northeast India. In a study conducted by the author, 57 types of small arms have been identified which have flooded Northeast India over the last several years. The origins of these weapons have been traced to various countries namely China, Pakistan, Belgium, Thailand, Russia, United States of America, United Kingdom, Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar and of late, Israel. The effect of this small arms proliferation on the Northeast Indian states has been alarming. Various young people have taken up the path of gun and violence resulting in death, decay and destruction in various fields – socially, politically and economically. On top of all these, due to the region's close proximity with Myanmar narcotic drug abuse and trafficking have also created havoc in the already war-torn region.

1.2 Proliferation of Small Arms in Northeast India

Many parts of South Asia, and in particular the Northeast region of India, the subject of the present study, can be termed a fragmented society that is run on guns and drugs. There is a frightening influx of small arms and narcotic drugs in the region. The proliferation of armed groups follows. Armed by China, Pakistan, Burmese rebels and other state and criminal groups based in South East Asia and outside, the inventory of the insurgent groups have gone up tremendously over the years. In Assam alone, a total of 729 weapons were seized from the ULFA between 1993 and July 1998. And in the entire Northeast India, a total of 928 weapons were seized.¹⁶

The box below lists types of arms seized in Northeast India

Types of Arms Seized in Northeast India		
1.	M 14	9. Pistols/revolvers
2.	M 16	10. Chinese hand-grenades
3.	M 20	11. Rocket-propelled grenades
4.	M 22	12. Rocket launchers
5.	G-series	13. Sten-guns
6.	AK-47/56/74	14. General purpose machine guns
7.	Light machine guns	15. Self-launching rifles
8.	Carbines	16. Air defence guns
Source: B. Nepram, South Asia's Fractured Frontier (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2002)		

¹⁶ Kartha, Tara. 1999. Tools of Terror: Light Weapon and India's Security. New Delhi: Knowledge World & IDSA.

1.3 Small Arm Routes in Northeast India

Following are the probable routes through which small arms penetrate into the Northeast Indian states, Myanmar and beyond. Over thirteen sources can be identified:

- Myanmarese insurgent groups/arms bazaar
- The Southeast Asian black market like Cambodia
- China
- South Asian countries' (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka) black markets
- South Asian militants outfits like LTTE, Maoist Communist Party operating in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Nepalese Communist Maoist forces
- Other parts of India like Uttar Pradesh etc and pilferages from legal gun factories
- Criminal gangs operating in India and other South Asian countries
- Indian security forces, home security guards are the most vulnerable
- Other international market e.g. Romania, Germany, USA, Israel
- Arms are obtained from fellow militant outfits
- Of late, some Northeast politicians have reportedly become suppliers of weapons
- The Indian agency RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) has been known to arm some outfits operating in the region

1.4 The Origin and Spread of Narco-Insurgency in India's North East

The phenomenon of arms proliferation is closely related to drug abuse and narco-trafficking in India's Northeast. This section will look into the emergence of narcotic drug abuse, HIV/AIDS and Narco-trafficking in India's Northeast. It is an area of concern too and many women groups in the region have started work to combat it.

Drug abuse is not a new thing in human history, nor in the Northeastern states. The abuse of alcohol, opium and cannabis has been known for a long time. Ganja (marijuana) is used all over India. However, a new phenomenon has emerged in recent years which is the consumption of narcotic drugs particularly heroin among the youth either by smoking it, or by injecting into the body. During a short span of

time, the problem of heroin addiction¹⁷ reached an alarming situation that hundreds of youths are falling prey to it not only in urban area but also in rural areas. Addiction to heroin has outstripped all other forms of drug abuse and the problem has acquired dangerous proportions with the discovery of HIV/AIDS amongst intravenous drug users of the region.

By the late '70s and early '80s, drug abuse became a common problem in North East India. It is interesting to note that it is around the same time that insurgency was at its height. It was those days of *Chinese red paper balloon* called *chebons* (referred to as in Manipur) were put up by the PLA in defiance against the authorities. It round the same time the PLA started its urban insurgency known to be one of the most effective in South Asia. In 1980-81, large areas of Imphal Valley were under their indirect control. In 1980, they were acclaimed the world over as the perfect example of Maoist Guerrilla fighters and it was they who ushered in India's first and Asia's second, after Saigon period of urban insurgency.¹⁸

Until the end of 1983, morphine was commonly used by drug users in the North eastern states particularly Manipur. But the trend changed suddenly, and the number of heroin addicts leap frogged ahead of all other narcotic drugs from the early part of 1984. Within two decades, the Northeastern States saw over 1,10,000 drug addicts and over 6,871 HIV positive cases, with the North Eastern state of Manipur contributing nearly 8% of India's total HIV positive cases¹⁹ and ranked third in India.²⁰ Its infection rate per 1 million population is six times higher than that of Maharashtra. The seriousness can be gauged from the fact that the HIV infection rate in Manipur alone increased from 0 percent to 50 percent in just one year during 1990-91. This shot up to 80.70 percent in 1997.²¹

It is vital to note that 76% of the HIV positive cases in Manipur were IDUs (Intravenous Drug Users)²² which is just the opposite with other states as there 76% of the HIV infections occur through sexual transmission. This is the kind of havoc drugs have created in a tiny state of Manipur, which has hardly 0.2 percent of India's population. It is agonizing to mention that the HIV AIDS epidemic in Manipur is not only confined to the state alone. There has been HIV positive cases in Nagaland, Meghalaya and Assam of late. Also, the infection is no longer

¹⁷ Once known as a 'miracle drug', heroin was earlier considered to have the ability to 'kill all pain and anger and bring relief to every sorrow'. A single dose seems to send the average abuser into deep and euphoric reverie, once heroin seen before " can reach heaven". The repeated use of its produces an intense physical craving in the body chemistry. This changes an average person into a slavish addict whose existence centres around his daily dose. Once a person becomes an addict, he or she will resort to any action, violence or crime for money to buy their dose.

¹⁸ *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 24 February 1981.

¹⁹ Morung Makunga, Minister of Health, Government of Manipur speaking in the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs Panel on Drug Abuse and HIV/AIDS, New York, June 9, 1998. [Courtesy: Free Press, Imphal].

²⁰ 1st is Maharashtra followed by Tamil Nadu.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Addicts who inject heroin by syringes into their veins are called IDUs. Sharing of syringes leads to HIV infection.

confined to Intravenous Drug Users (IDUs). It has now spread to the female sexual partners and their children.

Nagaland has around 10,000 and above drug addicts, Mizoram has below 10,000. Meghalaya too saw the rise in drug addiction amongst its youth and Manipur has 50,000 estimated drug addicts. In Manipur, 16,000 people are HIV positive and till 2005, 350 people died in Manipur due to AIDS.²³

1.4.1 Narcotic Trafficking: The North Eastern Region Scenario

The first district affected by heroin in the region is perhaps Chaurachanpur located in the southern part of Manipur bordering northwestern Myanmar.²⁴ The Imphal Tiddim²⁵ road passes throughout Churachandpur right upto Manipur-Myanmar border point at Behiang in the district. The road was a creation of the Second World War times. It was in Churachandpur that drug addiction amongst the youths as well children (some 13-year-old boys) started. A team of investigating doctors from Imphal detected them in different parts. Most of the drug addicts sadly belong to the age group of 15 to 30. This is a thing to worry about.

The North Eastern India is situated next to Myanmar that belongs to the Golden Triangle group, a drug producing area where 68 percent of all known illicit opium production and refining take place. Though Afghanistan has taken over Myanmar in 2007 as contributing to 82 per cent of the global opium cultivation²⁶, the North Eastern region has a 1643 kilometers border with Myanmar which was once the main bread basket of the opium trade. It's sixty-nine plus tribes have earned their living for over centuries patronized by the various insurgents group. 90 percent of the mountainous terrain is under poppy cultivation. Myanmar accounts for 65 percent of estimated total world opium poppy cultivation and 60 percent of estimated total potential opium gum production. 163,100 hectares of opium poppy was cultivated in Myanmar in 1995-96, which had the potential of producing up to 2,560 metric tons of opium.²⁷

According to Sunita Kumar, "The majority of Myanmar's opium poppy cultivation traditionally has been in the mountainous regions of the Shan Plateau. Since 1989 after the dismantling of the BCP cultivation extended to the West Bank of Salween river. Until 1996, heroin was produced in large, relatively immobile refineries in the Shan state which were ensconced in ethnic enclaves protection by drug trafficking armies like Shan State Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) (Kokang), Kachin Defence Army (KDA), United Wa state Army (UWSA) and Mong Tai Army (MTA) ... these protected enclaves were left intact often the government's cease-fire agreements with these drug militias which led

²³ Burma bordering Indian states face drug abuse and HIV, *Niranjara News*, 1 May 2007

²⁴ Tarapot, Panjaobam. 1997. *Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in North Eastern India*. Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.

²⁵ Tiddim is in Myanmar.

²⁶ *World Drug Report 2007*.

²⁷ Kumar, Sunita. 1998. 'Drug Trafficking in the Golden Triangle', in: Singh, J. (ed.). *Asian Strategic Review*. Delhi: IDSA.

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the production of more drugs”²⁸. According to the US Drug Enforcement Administration, Myanmar produces 80 percent of the heroin in South –East Asia and is responsible for 60 percent of the world’s supply. In the United States alone, Myanmar is responsible for roughly 75 percent of the smack (a drug) in New York City streets. Myanmar’s drugs are also increasingly finding their way to Western Europe too as new smuggling routes open through China and former Soviet Union.²⁹ The demand for Myanmarese drugs is because of its high purity. The region of North East too falls in the trafficking route of Myanmarese heroin and many of the heroin labs are located near the border.

Myanmar is an important consumer of heroin itself. Drug abuse is rampant in the country. While some estimated put the drug addict population at 60,000 the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) put the estimates at least five times that figure. Heroin, like in the North Eastern States is the most popular drug used and its intravenous use is contributing to the rapid rise of HIV/AIDS, particularly in the Kachin and Shan States.³⁰ There are more than 39 trafficking routes from Myanmar and North East.

An official report prepared in August 1989 pointed out that Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland together accounted for the ‘smuggling of at least 20 kgs. of heroin everyday’.³¹ Intelligence reports reveal that all heroin smuggled into the region was not for consumption in the area. Bulk of it is sent to different parts of the country for various destinations including foreign countries like United States, Europe and major parts of India. Heroin is sold under different brands such as ‘two lions and a globe’, ‘double globe’, ‘five stars’, ‘dangerous’. Some of the important trafficking routes in North Eastern India are:³²

1. Behiang-Singhat-Chrachandpur-Imphal
2. Behiang-Singhat-Tipaimukh – Silchar
3. Mandalay-Tahang
4. Tamu-Moreh-Imphal
5. Homalin-Ukhrul-Jessami-Kohima
6. Mandalay-Tahang-Tiddim-Aizwal-Silchar
7. Homalin-Kamjong-Shangshak Khullen-Ukhrul
8. Myitkina-Maingkwan-Pangsau Pass-Namnpong-Jairangpur-Digboi
9. Putao-Digboi-Pasighat (Arunachal Pradesh)-other destinations
10. Tmanthi (Myanmar)- Noklak (Nagaland-Myanmar Border)-Kohima-Dimapur.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ US State Department, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, 1997.

³¹ Op cit n 18.

³² Ibid.

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11. New Somtal (in Chandel district)-Sugnu-Churachandpur-Imphal-Kohima-Dinapur.
12. Kheinan-Behiang-Charachandpur-Imphal-Kohima-Dimapur.

Apart from those well-identified routes, there are numerous jungle tracks, which are used by smugglers for illicit trafficking of heroin. Once, the heroin or other narcotic drugs reach Imphal, Aizwal, Kohima, Silchar or Dimapur, it is ready for its onward journey without much problems³³ While parts of the smuggling heroin often remain in the region for local consumption, the remaining goes to cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Madras or Bangalore, and abroad. The lack of security posts at border points coupled with inadequate security staff and 'connivance of some officials' have led to the "freely entering" of heroin into the region. The involvement of some security personnel in smuggling out of thousands of kilograms of ganja in truckloads from Manipur to other states like Bihar and surrounding areas have been reported.

As mentioned earlier, Champhai, a border town in Mizoram and other border points have become floodgates of heroin from the North West part of Myanmar. The routes identified are as follows:

1. Tahan-Tiddim-Melbuk (all in Myanmar) – Champhai-Aizwal – Silchar-Calcutta; also Aizwal-Bairab Tripura-Bangladesh.
2. Tahan-Tiddim-Hnahlan-Aizwal
3. Tohan-Vaphai-Khawlailung-Serchhip-Aizwal
4. Tahan-Falam Dawn-Nagharchhip-Khawlailing-Serchhip-Aizwal.
5. Falam-Daun-Thaingsai-Hnahtial-Lunglei.
6. Falam-Lungbun-Saitha-Bangladesh.
7. Churachandpur-Ngopa-Aizawal.

A Mizoram Government Report points out that the heroin are smuggled from Golden Triangle via Myanmar by almost half a dozen syndicates. The report further states that at the back of them [drug smuggling] are various powerful ultra groups of the strife torn [Myanmar] country.

The rapid increase of drug smuggling in Mizoram appears to be due to its strategic location having a 704 km international border with Bangladesh and Myanmar. Of late, some inhabitants of the hilly terrain of Indo-Myanmar border in Aizwal and Chhim Tuipui districts had cultivated opium poppy under cover of thick jungle. Another note to be taken is the smuggling of acetic anhydride from India via North

³³ Ibid.

East region to Myanmar. Acetic Anhydride is required for the manufacture of heroin.

1.4.2 Does the Phenomenon of Narco-Insurgency Exist in the region?

With the happenings in the region and around and with Myanmar by its side, with the very same Myanmarese insurgents who trained the Manipuri, Naga, Assamese, Mizo, Kuki and others involved in narcotics production; and also the fact that the insurgents use sophisticated weapons such as AK 47s, M 16s, from 'foreign countries', one is compelled to ask the question: Are the insurgents operating in North-Eastern India involved in trafficking of heroin?

Some top security officials posted in the region view that insurgents operating and belonging to well-known groups in the region 'might have been involved' in illicit trafficking and smuggling of heroin. But it is a known fact among the people of the region that various insurgent groups in the region have been campaigning against drug trafficking and drug abuse. Prominent underground organizations like UNLF, PLA have been fighting against drug trafficking and addiction ever since the problem started.

In their anti-drug campaign, they have shot hundreds of drug addicts and peddlers. They would first 'warn' the addicts, peddlers or traffickers to give up consumption or selling it. If their warning is ignored, the extremists would shoot them below the thigh or in the leg and if still doesn't heed, he/she is shot dead. But according to P. Tarapot:

...Although they have intensified anti-narcotics campaign since the early 1990s they have not been able to eliminate any drug kingpin operating in the region.

In spite of everything, the drive against narcotics by the insurgents has received favourable response from the people. The armed insurgents have even 'talked' to parents of addicts to keep their addicted children, whether at drug deduction centres or in jails.³⁴ Even the NSCN (IM) has been known for their 'harsh action' against drug addicts and drug traffickers. It is very difficult at this moment to suggest the 'involvement' of any underground outfit operating in the region.' However, a home ministry publication said:

... so far as North Eastern states of India are concerned, there are clear intelligence reports to indicate that the Naga underground organization (name withheld) is involved in trafficking of drugs and precious stones since 1981. The insurgents group (real name withheld) of Manipur is also involved in the trafficking of drugs.

³⁴ In the state of Manipur, many parents keep their sons in jail for refusing to leave drugs.

It is not understandable as to why the Home Ministry who has issued strong statements and pamphlets against the North Eastern insurgents should be withholding 'real names' of insurgents involved in drug trafficking.

1.5 Women and Armed Conflict in India's Northeast

According to a study conducted by an NGO, the North East Network, "The more egalitarian tribal culture of the North East region, coupled with the absence of some of the rigid practices of other parts of India, like seclusion (purdah) and dowry amongst the non tribal populace of the region, certainly gives the women of the region an edge over other women. Concepts of solidarity, amongst women's groups, are fairly strong"³⁵. However, women constitute less than 48 per cent of the total population of India's Northeast. And the percentage of female literates is much higher than the national average of 39.4 per cent. In the words of Paula Bannerjee, "The Northeast poses a central paradox; its female-male sex ratio is decreasing, all the more surprising because of the matrilineal character of many of its societies. How far is violent conflict a factor".³⁶

Literate Population as percent of Total (2001)

State	Total	Male	Female
Arunachal Pradesh	54.74	64.07	44.24
Assam	64.28	71.93	56.03
Manipur	68.87	77.87	59.70
Meghalaya	63.31	66.14	60.41
Mizoram	88.49	90.69	86.13
Nagaland	67.11	71.77	61.92
Tripura	73.66	81.47	65.41
All India	65.38	75.85	54.16

Source: Census of India 2001 Provisional Tables

It is estimated that close to 90 per cent of current war casualties are civilians, the majority of whom are women and children, compared to a century ago when 90 per cent of those who lost their lives were military personnel.

³⁵ North East Network. 2005. Women in Armed Conflict Situations. Delhi: North East Network.

³⁶ Bannerjee, E. Paula. 'Between Two Armed Patriarchies: Women in Assam and Nagaland: Women, War and Peace in South Asia. Delhi: Sage Publications.

The Platform for Action, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, identified the effects of armed conflict on women as one of 12 critical areas of concern requiring action by governments and the international community, and stressed the need to promote the equal participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels.

Women have been, in internal war, the targets of sustained and frequently brutal violence committed by both parties of armed conflict. Both the sides often use violence to punish or dominate women believed to be sympathetic to the opposite side. Women have been threatened, raped and murdered.³⁷

In most cases, rape is used as a weapon of war and a tool of political repression.³⁸ "Rape and sexual assault of women in situation of conflict have been viewed as the spoils of the war than as illegitimate acts that violate humanitarian law. Not until the international outcry rose in response to reports of mass rape in the former Yugoslavia did the international community confront rape as a war crime. Human Rights watch investigations in the former Yugoslavia, Peru, Kashmir and Somalia have revealed that *rape and sexual assault of women are an integral part of conflict*, whether internal³⁹ or international in scope. And according to the United Nations Special Reporteur on Violence against Women, "[Rape]... remains the least condemned war crime; throughout history, the rape in all regions of the world has been a bitter reality".⁴⁰

Rape in conflict or under repressive regime is neither incidental nor private. It routinely serves a strategic function and acts as a tool for achieving specific military or political objectives. Like other human rights abuses, rape serves as a means of harming, intimidating and punishing individual women. Far from being an isolated sexual or private act unrelated to state agents' violent attacks on others, rape often occurs alongside other politically motivated acts of violence.

In Kashmir, there has been an increase in the number of rape by the militant groups. Extremist militant groups seeking to enforce an "Islamic" code of behavior have launched other violent attacks on women. A 1990 July report cited frequent threats to women by one group "warning the women that severe action will be taken if they do not maintain purdah". Women who have challenged the attacks have been attacked. On May 13, 1993, members of the women's militant organization, Dukhtaran-e-Millat (Daughters of the Nation) issued warnings to women in Srinagar not to come outside without wearing *burqas*. The militants reportedly sprayed paint on women who defied the order, such that four students were hospitalized with dye injuries from the point.⁴¹ In the Northeastern State of Manipur in India, the Manipuri women at one point of time were "instructed" by

³⁷ *Human Rights Watch*. 1998. *Global Reports on Women's Human Rights*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Internal Conflict* defined as conflict between a recognized government and on armed insurgency.

⁴⁰ *United Nations*. 1994. *Violence Against Women, its causes and Consequences*.

⁴¹ *Human Rights Watch Report*.

the insurgent outfits not to wear any mainland Indian dress like *Salwar Kameez* or *Saris*. Those who wear it were shot in the leg or in the stomach. The women were told to wear only "phaneks" a traditional Manipuri dress.

Rape by Indian security forces most often happen during crackdowns, cordon-and-search operations during which men are held for identification in parks or school yards while security forces search their homes. Besides rape, women have been used as *human-shields* too. On March 11, 1996, provoked by the attack by the NSCN, the 20 Assam Rifles used women as human shields by placing the muzzle of their guns on the women's shoulders. One Ms.Kanchungla was made to cover Captain Sharma with a Naga Shawl while the army was approaching Huishu village.⁴²

Rape whenever it occurs is considered a profound offence against individual and community honour⁴³. Soldiers or police can succeed in translating the attack upon their communities because of their emphasis placed in very culture on the world on women's sexual purity. It is the premium placed upon protection and control over women's purity that renders them perfect targets for abuse."⁴⁴

Besides, the violence experienced by women in conflict zones, especially in internal ones, women experience ambiguous transformation due to the scattering, displacement and break down of their families and communities.⁴⁵

Besides⁴⁶ the impact of armed violence on women and that of the ambiguous⁴⁷ transformations, which occurred, a lot of women seemed to be joining the armed insurgent movement. It is perhaps the history of women's oppression to wit, seclusion in the family, political exclusion, and exposure to male violence, which instituted the dangerous association between active violence and the urge for separation. According to Susanna Ranconi:⁴⁸

Feminism will never translate into a 'separate' militancy. However, it will reinforce in a visceral manner the conviction that there is a radical alternative to the reigning social and cultural model... It will give full meaning to the term 'liberation' in which subjectivity becomes 'strength' against the paralyzing objectivity of marginalization [and exploitation].

The hostile affection of women, freed of the consciousness of their own suffering, having seen their near and dear ones being killed, the desire to work for a cause for

⁴² *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 11 May 1999.

⁴³ *Human Rights Watch Report*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁵ Senanayake, Damini. 'Displaced Women in the Hidden Economies of Armed Conflict in Sri Lanka'. [Unpublished paper].

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸ Neuburger, Luisella and Valentini, Tiziana. 1996. *Women and Terrorism*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

the welfare of her society may be some of the reasons why women join the insurgent movement.

1.6 Responses of Women in India's Northeast Against Armed Violence

In India's Northeast, women have always played a major role in many social movements. Concepts of solidarity amongst women's groups, are very strong in the region. This is often illustrated in the existence of self-help groups, traditional cooperative systems, women's markets and other forms of cooperative village action. Women's contribution in the economic sphere is great and women have some amount of economic autonomy⁴⁹.

One hundred Years of Struggle: Women in Manipur

The first ever-organised women's protest in entire Northeast India has its origins in the first Nupilal or 'Women's War' of 1904. This took place in the state of Manipur and became a landmark in the history of not only Manipur and entire Northeast India. Women in Manipur angered by the oppressive measures of the then ruling British authority that entailed imposition of forced labour for reconstruction of British property came out in thousands and launched a big demonstration that affected the day to day life of the state and the government had to call in army from outside. In the words of Saroj N. Arambam Parratt, 'The first Nupilal or 'Women's War' in 1904 had effectively forced a former British Political Agent to rescind onerous demands he had imposed on the population and this set in a train a tradition of women's political protest which continues till today'⁵⁰. The 1904 'Women's War' was followed by the Water Tax Movement of 1932⁵¹. This agitation was again led by the women of Manipur in protest against the increase of water taxes. The government had then issued an order on 16th October 1932 that those who failed to pay taxes would be arrested and put into jail. Women led the movement and finally the reduction of water tax took place and also exempted widows and the poor from the payment of the tax.

The second Nupilal or 'Women's War' of 1939 followed the Water Tax Movement. This women's movement became one of the most important events in the colonial history of Manipur. The agitation began in 1939 at the main market in the capital, Imphal. According to the then Political Agent, Christopher Gimson, over 2000 women traded there beneath the covered sheds and double that number in the open air outside. The bazaar traded in many items but most important of all, was the sale of rice. However, during that time, there was scarcity of rice in the market due to the export policy of the British and the milling activities of the Marwaris. Women

⁴⁹ *North East Network*. 2005. Women in Armed Conflict Situations. Delhi: North East Network.

⁵⁰ Parratt Arambam, Saroj. 2001. 'The Second 'Women's War' and the Emergence of Democratic Government in Manipur', *Modern Asian Studies*, 35 (4).

⁵¹ Mairembam, Rita. 2002. A Socio-Political Study of Women in Manipur. Ph.D Thesis submitted to Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences, Manipur University.

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of Manipur thus rose in protest against the creation of artificial food scarcity. The movement became so powerful that the demands of the women were fulfilled within a short span of time.

In 1972 Manipur attained statehood and it was around this time that alcohol abuse became a common feature, affecting families and societies in a way that never happened earlier. It was then that the women of Manipur started the movement in Kakching Turel Wangma for the prohibition of liquor known as Nisha Bandh movement on 30 December 1975. The movement later spread to other urban areas of Imphal such as Haoreichamba Leikai, Kwakeithel on 21 April 1976⁵². Many committees were formed in different parts of the state in different areas calling upon people to stop the use of alcohol. These Nisha Bandh groups belonging to different localities formed an organisation known as All Manipur Women Social Reformation and Development Samaj. This later led to the formation of the Manipuri Meira Paibis.

This will be explained in a later paragraph. According to Northeast Network, "This great spirit of the women is evident today in the Meira Paibis or Torch Bearers' Movement. Started in the 1970s initially as a women's movement against alcohol abuse related public disorder, the Meira Paibi's focus is the community as a whole. Its genesis has been the impact of crises on women and as such the outreach has gone far beyond the management of alcohol related trauma and abuse"⁵³.

In Manipur, various other ethnic communities too established women's societies. Mention may be made of the Leishiyer Tangkhul Women's Society that was established in 1968⁵⁴. It was set up to encourage Tangkhul women living in the urban town of Imphal to organise themselves and participate in different social activities such as launching anti-liquor campaigns and fight against anti-social activities such as substance abuse and also extend help to orphanage and seek to promote the sick and the needy. It aims to improve the social life and to enhance the cultural life of the society. In the words of Lucy Zehol, "No record shows that there was an organised movement of women in the traditional society. What the present day inherited is "yar" or "yarnao". These are age-old clubs whose activity is mainly social, to help each other in distress and merriment such as "yarra kashak" once a year in the month of April".

The other strong women's movement that came about was the establishment of Tangkhul Shanao Long (All Tangkhul Women's Association). The Tangkhul Shanao Long origins can be traced to the March 1974 tragic event in Manipur where a Border Security Force officer molested several girls in Grihang and Nagaprum villages and among them was a girl called Rose. Rose had a boyfriend that time and hoped to marry him but the molestation led her to commit suicide. Her death sparked off a wide protest. A meeting was called and an Action Committee was formed to press for an impartial enquiry into the crime. An

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ North East Network. 2005. Women in Armed Conflict Situations. Delhi: North East Network.

⁵⁴ Zehol, Lucy. 1998. Women in Naga Society. Delhi: Regency Publications.

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indefinite hunger strike was launched. This and other later events led to the formation of the Tangkhul Shanao Long⁵⁵. The main objectives of the group are:

- 1) To maintain the dignity and safeguard the rights of women
- 2) To enhance the cultural life of the society
- 3) To promote lively and active participation in community life

The Long also launches anti-liquor and anti-drug campaigns and extends help to destitute women and orphans. It also established wool-knitting and tailoring schools to impart knowledge to women.

In the Tangkhul society, women put in a 14–16 hour workday on agricultural tasks, domestic tasks and weaving. In 2000, 15 members of the Tangkhul Shanao Long, visited project areas in Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, where informal credit and savings groups (called self-help groups or SHGs) were operating. The visiting women studied group operation and learned from it. The concept spread quickly. There are now 69 groups operating in 22 villages of Tangkhul inhabited areas. Sizes of the self help groups ranged between 15 and 23 members, with a total of 1 375 women members⁵⁶.

Mention may also be made of another women's group that came about in Manipur called Naga Women's Union, Manipur. It was formed in 1993. Unlike the women's groups in the valley, the activities of the women's groups in the hills who are mostly Christians are bound by Church rules. The Church has strong influence in almost all walks of life in the hills. The influence of the tribal customs is also equally strong. Traditionally women are treated as inferior in the tribal society. Only recently some women's groups like Naga Women's Union, Manipur have started challenging the traditional roles for women in their society. According to Ms. Moala Kashung, "it is high time for the Church to think seriously about restrictions it has imposed on women entering to full time ministry because of their sex. Where a woman shows that she is being called by God and is capable and committed, the church should not refuse her valuable services on the sole ground that she is not a man." The historic declaration of 1993 as the "International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples" on 10th December 1992 and its commemoration by the Naga people as, "Naga Week" on December 1-5, 1993 at Kohima, led to the formation of the Naga Women's Union, Manipur⁵⁷.

Emergence of Women's Movement in Nagaland

The Naga Mother's Association (NMA) is the one of the best well known women's organisation in Northeast India who are working for peace issues. It was formed on 14 February 1984. The organisation aims at upholding womanhood, human rights

⁵⁵ Zehol, Lucy. 1998. *Women in Naga Society*. Delhi: Regency Publications.

⁵⁶ Nongbri, Tiplut. 2000. *Empowering Women through Self-help Groups: A Case Study of Three Naga Villages, Manipur*. Rome: IFAD.

⁵⁷ *The Imphal Free Press* (Imphal), 26 April 2002.

and human values. From its inception, the NMA has rendered valuable service for the cause of peace⁵⁸. In October 1994, NMA formed a Peace Team to help wrest the deteriorating political situation amongst the various armed groups. With the slogan "Shed No More Blood", the members of the Naga Mother's Association started a series of work to bring peace – namely, they initiated dialogues with the armed groups as well as the state government; public rallies for peace were organised with religious leaders, and appealed to both parties to stop the killings that were going on. In a pamphlet dated 25 May 1995, it was written, "the way in which our society is being run whether by the over ground government or by the underground governments have become simply intolerable...the assassination man may be a husband, a father, a son, or a brother. His whole family is shattered by his violent liquidation no matter what reasons his liquidator choose to give for snuffing out his life"⁵⁹. The NMA has been active against alcoholism and drug abuse to which many of the unemployed youth have fallen victim. The NMA also coordinates with different churches in Nagaland to give momentum to the ongoing peace process between the union government and the NSCN-IM. It has also participated in meetings and conferences with the Naga Students' Federation, the Naga Hohos, and the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights.

Emergence of Women's Movement in Assam

Assam has also a long history of women's activism like in Manipur. It was as early as 1915 when the Mahila Samitis were formed primarily for the cultural, economic and educational empowerment of women and children. This was followed by the formation of Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti in 1926. With this women came to play a larger role in the national political life in Assam.

In the second and the third decade of the 20th century, the first group of educated Assamese women such as Chandra Prava Saikini, Hemaprava Das, Amalprava Das and Punyaprava Das joined hands with women from elite families such as the Chaliha family from Sibsagar and the Agarwal family of Tezpur to form women's organisations⁶⁰. In order to boost the women's movement in Assam, Chandraprova Saikiani supported by her co-workers took the lead in the formation of a provincial women's organisation in Assam, called Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti (APMS) with its branches spreading all over Assam⁶¹. According to a North East Network report,

Although APMS was initially concerned issues child marriage, child and widow remarriage, they also worked with reformatory and welfare works like promotion of women's education. Gradually they joined the National Movement, playing an active role in boycotting foreign goods and in the promoting the use of Khadi. The women of Assam, irrespective of status and position, came out in hundreds and thousands to participate in the Satyagrahas and various programmes of the Indian Freedom Movement. They took out processions, Prabhat

⁵⁸ Manchanda, Rita. 2001. Women, War and Peace in South Asia. Delhi: Sage Publications.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Pheris, picketed liquor and foreign cloth shops, educational institution etc. Women not only took part in large number in the "Quit India Movement", but also joined the Mrityu Bahini, or the underground. Many women were killed while involved in active resistance and were declared martyrs. Unfortunately the contribution of the women of Assam towards the Indian Freedom Movement is little known and their sacrifices and valour have not been given due recognition nationally⁶².

Women from Assam also participated during the Indian freedom movement between 1921-1947. Many women lost their lives and many were jailed during these agitations. Post-independence, these movements lost its tempo however, in the wake of International Women's Year in 1975, efforts were made to revive back the women's movement that emerged in the beginning of the century. There was the revival of old village Mahila Samitis and subsequent formation of new state level organisations.

Post-independence Assam experienced a number of social movements related to different social issues such as demand for oil refinery, to make Assamese an official language of the State, demand for a second oil refinery etc, in all of which women took part in large numbers. Similarly in the famous six year 'Assam Movement' of the 1980's which was a protest against inclusion of names of foreign nationals in the voters list and against the draining of mineral resources from the state, women from all walks of life agitated alongside the men. In many instances women formed 'human shields' between the agitating students and the armed forces⁶³. However, in the words of Kunja Medhi and Anuradha Dutta, "Women's movements retained a sporadic and issue based character. In both pre-independence and post-independence struggles, women were inspired by a sense of nationalism. But when the movement ended they found that they had not gained much. Against them worked not merely the state but also their own patriarchy which legitimised its actions by perpetuating the myth that Assamese women were not interested in politics. Women continued to be marginalised in representational politics"⁶⁴. Other efforts by women continued in the field of peace building in Assam. Mention may be made of the Kasturba Gandh Memorial Trust, Anchalik Mahila Samitis and Sajagata Samiti. Some women's organizations have been active on specific issues of human-rights violations, but they have not sustained their efforts. More consistent has been the Bodo Women's Justice Forum, founded in 1993, which has organized various meetings around the issues of peace and human rights.

⁶² North East Network. 2005. Women in Armed Conflict Situations. Delhi: North East Network.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Women in other Northeast Societies

In the matrilineal communities of Meghalaya women have a certain degree of control over economic resources and together with the women of Manipur and Mizoram play a very important role in trade and commerce. The strength of women's groups in the region has also been adequately tapped by the Christian missionaries and we find women especially in the Christian dominated hill states contributing greatly towards church work, both social work and evangel. In Mizoram the women have been the key mobilisers for financial resources for the church through the practice of *buhfaitham*. This consists of putting aside a handful of rice for the church for every handful that is consumed by the family⁶⁵.

1.7 Critical Aspects

Despite all these above mentioned women's solidarity and movements that have emerged in many of the Northeast states, a lot needs to be done in terms of women's participation in the political process of the region. Women's role in many states decision-making remains minimal. Most of the traditional institutions of governance accept women as an integral part of the institutions and in many areas, traditional customary laws and practices are strictly adhered to and land and property rights and custody of children are strictly given only to the males.

It is seen that women in situations of armed conflict may be positioned differently in the conflict. However, regardless of the role women play, all women are uniformly discriminated against, although the dimensions of violation may differ. It is seen further that the underlying thread running through the violations and discriminations that women suffer, is the unequal power relations between men and women and the stereotyped, socially determined roles or images that women have to fit into. In order to address the full range of needs of women in these situations and in order to put into place corrective measures and affirmative action to change the ground realities, it is important to pay attention to each of the categories and surface the depth and dimension of the violations and the causes underpinning these. Thus according to a study conducted by the North East Network, in the situation of armed conflict in North East India, one has to address the violations and needs of all the following categories of women viz.,

Women relatives of armed activists – Mothers, wives, sisters, daughters and partners of armed activist who are in the struggle by choice or without choice but impacted upon in the same way and also especially targeted by the state.

Women relatives of state armed forces – Mothers, wives, sisters, daughters and partners of the police, armed personnel and targeted state officials and others, who have no choice in being part of the conflict and who often remain the forgotten and invisible 'other' category.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

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Women militants or combatants – Women who are actively involved in the struggle, (a) by choice, (b) through coercion, or (c) who have become part of the struggle because of circumstances.

Women as shelter providers – Women who provide food, shelter and labour (as porters) to the combatants either as sympathisers or through coercion but either way, extremely vulnerable.

Women as victims of sexual and physical abuse – Mostly uninvolved, innocent civilians but also any of the other categories, belonging to any age group and targeted by both state and non-state abusers.

Women as peace negotiators – Women leaders who have taken the initiatives, not always supported by the community and extremely vulnerable to suspicions and attacks by all factions of non state actors as well as state actors.

Women's rights activists – Women activists who raise critical questions on issues relating to decreasing democratic spaces, political violence, increased control over women's bodies and bodily integrity of women, are extremely vulnerable. Raising disconcerting questions about society, about communities, families and about norms and attitudes these women are often targeted in insidious ways both by the state and by the non state actors directly or through appointed individuals.

Conclusion

The happenings in the Northeast region of India cannot and should not be seen in isolation. In fact, besides the origin of the tension in the region, the situation there is severely aggravated by the happenings in the entire South Asian region. And therein lies the need for the formulation of confidence-building measures for the entire South Asian region and beyond to bring about peace, stability and development in the Northeast. It is only when these efforts are made that the influx of arms and narcotics in the region, which has its repercussion not only in the region but in India and in South Asia at large can be curbed. As already noted earlier, the resolution of conflict and its prevention involves the whole person, the nation or identity group of the person, the political system and the physical environment. Deep-rooted conflicts like the influx and proliferation of small arms and narcotics is a problem which has permeated at all social levels and in all cultures on a scale not previously experienced resulting in violence and mayhem every where. Thus, in order to hunt for long term solutions in the North East region of India, one has to work at a level which reaches down to an individual in the region to bring about long term solutions to the problem before the whole region becomes a Necropolis or the City of the Dead.

The massive proliferation of small arms and narco-trafficking in Northeast India calls for greater thinking, research, intervention and change. Till date no state government has undertaken any policy or programme in this direction. Efforts should be made in this direction. Scholars in the Northeast state of Manipur have started writing about the issue. It is extremely important to be able to collect and

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collate data on small arms from various places in Northeast India. It is important to enhance cooperation and information exchange between researchers, journalists, intelligence, customs, common people, young people (especially young boys as they are very much aware about small arms. Not only are they aware, they are also very keen to share information) police, army and other law enforcing agencies. It is extremely important to constantly improve information and data on the illicit trafficking of small arms.

Besides research, the following steps need to be looked into in the efforts to curb the small arms proliferation and narco-trafficking in Northeast India. These are also the steps that have been worked at internationally by bodies like United Nations, Oxfam, Amnesty International and International Action Network Against Small Arms.

And most of all, it is very important to involve women's groups in the Northeast like the Meira Paibis, Kuki Mothers Association, the Naga Mothers Association etc in the whole process of containing small arms proliferation and narcotic abuse and trafficking. Besides the women's groups, young people and other civil society organizations, it is very important to engage in dialogue the 72 armed groups that are operating in the region. To evolve strategies for containing small arms proliferation and narcotic drug abuse in a highly fractured society like that of Northeast India needs a committed effort by all concerned, especially women of India's Northeast.