

Chapter-VI

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter is an attempt to sum up the analysis and to see if any conclusion can be drawn or any recommendation may be put forward from the study. It incorporates multitudes of problems and various conditions of women in conflict situation and the role of media in highlighting those issues.

6.1 A Brief Summary

The study procedure is designed mainly to examine the position of women in conflict situation and the coverage of media in portraying the women related issues in conflict situation. For this purpose, the study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter contains the introduction of the study, conceptual and theoretical perspectives, objectives, methodology, significance of the study and review of literature. The second chapter gives an overview of the background of conflict from the global, national and regional perspective. It also highlights different kinds of impact of conflict on women along with the manifestations and various dimensions of those in aftermath of conflict. The third chapter includes the field studies undertaken in the selected areas to examine the conditions of women in conflict situation. The fourth chapter contains the role of media and trends of conflict reporting as well as the challenges of conflict reporting with an overview of media reporting through gendered lens. The fifth chapter highlights the media coverage of conflict situation and projection of women issues.

The demographic structure of Assam is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-regional. Different ethnic groups and communities in the state such as Assamese, Bengali, Muslim, Bodo, Mishing, Nepali, Karbi, Santhali, Garo, Rabha and so on have been coexisting by intermixing with one another by sharing each other's language, culture and tradition through ages. The assimilation and amalgamation of these people and the unity and harmony among them are significant features of the state. But the bonhomie is shaken up, and the peaceful region turns into turmoil when the people belong to different ethnic groups and communities involve in violent conflict as a result of ethnic conflict. The state has experienced many ethnic movements, either peaceful or violent since independence. During the recent past, the region has been witnessing many incidents of violence as a result of insurgency, counter-insurgency movements and ethnic conflicts. During ethnic conflict, the cord of unity among the common people suddenly becomes loose and that gives ways to hostility and mistrust among communities. Factors like identity crisis, feeling of insecurity, deprivation and alienation, discriminatory government policies, underdevelopment and political corruption are considered as underlying reasons for the breaking out of ethnic conflicts among these communities. The disbelief or doubt among the ethnic groups and communities born out of ethnic violence engender discord and disharmony tearing apart the social fabrics of bonding.

Human rights of the affected people are violated by conflict situation. Infrastructure of a place is severely affected and damaged as an effect of such violence. Though all sections of people witness devastating experiences of conflict situation, women are the worst sufferers due to their physiological differences and societal status in a patriarchal set up. Women are

susceptible to physical, social, psychological, health concerns and sexual harassment in conflict situation. Women face innumerable problems related to health, shelter, sanitation and security during displacement induced by conflict.

The thesis incorporates a field study undertaken in Kokrajhar and Biswanath districts with a view to examine the impact of ethnic conflict on women. It was a memorable and noteworthy experience of meeting those conflict victims living in the remote villages of the conflict-stricken districts. These women are disturbed even now in the sense that they have been haunted by the fearful memories of those heinous experiences of conflict situation. Most of them burst into tears when they spoke about those days of violence. The impact of those gruesome incidents set in their memories keep on disturbing them as horrible nightmares. As they had experience of going through the vagaries of conflict situations several times, they got affected by the same set of problems again and again. The demolished infrastructures, loss of shelter, lack of security and other problems related to health and sanitation accentuated by conflicts made women the worst sufferers. Interview of these conflict ravaged women was conducted during the field study. The field study conveys that the problems of these women victims are loss of shelter, economic insecurity, loss of livelihood, lack of healthcare facilities, lack of proper sanitation and pure drinking water, health threats due to unhealthy atmosphere of the shelter camps and insecurity of life.

The women who happened to lose their husbands during conflict had to become the heads of their families. These conflict widows became the sole earner of their families besides having loaded with the other household responsibilities. In such situation, these widows had to live life

paving through many odds amidst insecurity of life and livelihood. These conflict affected women also came across all the challenges that had emerged after conflict. They had managed to cope up with what conflict had induced to their lives. They have been carrying on life with the trauma of experiencing conflict. A sad fact found out from the field study in Biswanath district was that, the women who were at home during the attacks became the victims of the brutal killing. When the violence took place, conflict escalates to violence suddenly. This fact reiterates the vulnerability of women in conflict situation.

The field studies undertaken had to encounter a few limiting factors. A few women, who were attempted to interview, did not want to recount their traumatic and unfortunate experiences of conflict. Hence, they had been excluded from the interviews. Another limitation was that, the study was physically limited to Kokrajhar and Biswanath district and these two districts were presupposed as the representative area for investigating the impact of conflict on women.

The study is designed to assess the role of media in representing the impacts of conflict experienced by women. The role of media is interlinked with the outlook of the society as media acts as a mirror of the society. Media is a very powerful tool as it reflects the society to the masses through conveying news. It can shape the mindset of the masses and can also configure the perception towards women. Hence, media has the power to contribute towards the women victims of conflict by giving voice to their unheard stories. It can create the image of women in a society. But media persons and media houses are influenced by the values prevalent in the society. They cannot proceed by ignoring the societal and cultural set-up. In our Indian patriarchal society, women are being considered as inferior to men in status and position

throughout history. This perception of Indian society still continues to prevail, and women are regarded as a deprived and neglected group. Indian media follows such attitude of the society and works within this societal set-up. Being a part of the patriarchal attitude, media in Assam also operates within the same sphere. Women issues are covered in media, but the number of these issues is low in comparison to other issues. Besides the patriarchal attitude of the society towards women acts as a factor behind media portrayal on woman, another fact is limited number of woman journalists working in the media houses. In Assam, the media houses especially, print media organizations employ a smaller number of woman journalists. The male domination in the field of media also acts as a factor in the negligence of covering women issues in media. Regarding the plight of women in conflict situation, print media in Assam reflects a desperate picture. The content analysis of five selected newspapers on the portrayal of the ethnic conflicts during the period 1996-2014 proves the fact that the role of media in depicting the plight of women in conflict situation is not satisfactory. These selected newspapers published an ample amount of news and photographs covering the incidents of conflict. But the particular problems of women in conflict situation were ignored or not recognized. It is seen from the content analysis that media presents a despairing picture in depicting issues of women in conflict situation. It is found through the content analysis that, *The Sentinel* and *Sadin* did not publish any coverage on the women related issues during conflict. *The Assam Tribune*, *Asomiya Pratidin* and *Dainik Asam* covered news and photographs related to women issues in conflict; yet, the frequency or number of reports of coverage on these issues is very minimal. Among these selected newspapers, *Asomiya Pratidin* carried the highest number of coverage on women in conflict. An article

published in *Asomiya Pratidin* after the Bodo-Muslim conflict in 2012, was a deep analytical discussion on the problems of the displaced women in conflict and it was thought provoking as it focused on the intervention of legal procurement for improving the life of the woman conflict victims. The other coverage stories carried by *Asomiya Pratidin* on women issues in conflict did not highlight the hidden problems encountered by women in conflict situation. These news items or photographs published by the newspaper were just fact-based coverage without any critical discussion. The problems faced by women at the shelter camps regarding health, sanitation and the maternal deaths for lack of sufficient healthcare services were covered. But these coverages depict only the news of the deaths of women due to contagion of diseases or at the time of childbirth. The causes behind the death and the problems faced by women during their stay at the shelter camps were not covered analytically. The innumerable difficulties at the shelter camps faced by pregnant and lactating mothers were ignored by media. Not a single editorial portraying the plight of women in conflict situation found from the content analysis. No investigative news stories were published assessing the conditions of conflict affected women. *Sadin*, being a weekly newspaper, has tremendous scope of analyzing and investigating facts, it did not cover any investigative story on women in conflict. A monotonous approach was found in covering the conflicts which contained only the incidents of ethnic violence, number of deaths, condemnation of violence by various associations, situation of unrest at the affected areas, providing relief materials by government and several organizations and the steps undertaken by administration for the conflict victims. It has been found from the study that media covered some contents incorporating the plight of children and the miserable conditions of the victimized inmates at the

shelter camps. But the plight of the extreme sufferers of conflict situation is not properly depicted by media. The psychological trauma faced by women victims of conflict, their insecure life and livelihood after losing their spouses and social consequences on women victims are neglected by media. Media often fails to investigate the hidden realities behind a conflict situation. As a result, the society remains unaware about the serious issues encountered by the women victims of conflict. As media has a strong role in generating awareness among the masses towards an issue, this drawback of media acts as a factor for not being able to motivate the masses to think about these women sufferers of conflict. Such unfair role of media also acts as a barrier for the government and policy makers to oversee the plight of women affected by conflict and taking necessary steps for them.

6.2 Suggestions and Recommendations

On the basis of the research findings, some recommendations can be suggested.

- Media should be democratic in representing the happening of a society
- Interpretative and investigative reporting on women issues should be encouraged
- Media needs to be more analytical and investigative to explore the hidden realities of a situation or event
- Media persons should focus in portraying the problems of the marginalized sections of the society
- Media needs to focus on revealing the facts responsible for ethnic clashes among the communities. Media should try to explore the post conflict lives of the women sufferers in remote areas

- The overall outlook and attitude of the society towards women need to be changed by media through projecting women related issues
- Media organizations should encourage recruitment of more woman employees in their organizations for fair representation
- Guidelines should be formulated by media regulatory commissions for democratic coverage of media as well as the proper portrayal of women issues in media
- The editorials of the newspapers should focus widely on women related issues

6.3 Conclusion

In the conclusion it can be said that, print media of the state has failed to portray the plight of women in conflict situation in a proper perspective. It raises a serious concern that media does not try to bring to light the unheard voices of these women. Media has not tried to draw the attention of the policy makers towards these women sufferers of conflict for providing help and assistance to overcome their problems induced by conflict. The study reflects that media is influenced by the patriarchal ideology prevalent in the society. This attitude is reflected in media coverage on women in conflict situation. The pathetic conditions, pain and agony of the women survivors of conflict have been ignored by print media in Assam. The study depicts a gloomy picture of media portrayal on women issues in conflict situation. The selected newspapers published scanty coverages related to women in conflict situation in comparison to other news items on conflict. Moreover, the coverages related to women are only fact-based news and photograph. No investigative coverage and analytical articles on the conditions of women in conflict is found from the study. Media has failed to cover the plight of the conflict-ridden women

as narrated by the women victims in the study area. The patriarchal attitude of media in the global scenario has been reflected in the media coverage of women in conflict situation in the state. In conclusion, it can be suggested that, media needs to be democratic as well as proactive in portraying the realities of the society.