

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Armed conflict is not a new phenomenon. It has been experienced by all civilizations throughout the history of human race. It has become one of the central issues among the academicians, social and political scientists, women and human rights activists etc. Globally, it has been realised that poverty and inequality are the fertile grounds for conflict in general and armed conflict in particular. There is no universally accepted definition of armed conflict.

It was for the first time, the definition of International Armed Conflict and Non-International Armed Conflict has been given by the International Committee of the Red Cross in one of its opinion paper in 2008. According to which International Armed Conflict has been defined as a conflict in which at least two states are involved. It further extended the scope of the definition to include conflicts in which people are fighting against colonial domination, alien occupation or racist regimes in the exercise of their rights to self-determination within the context of armed conflict. While, Non- International Armed Conflicts has been defined as those armed conflicts which are restricted to the territory of a single state, involving either regular armed forces fighting groups, armed dissidents, or armed groups fighting with each other. Following this, the scope of Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 has been expanded to include internal armed conflicts which take place in the territory of a High Contracting Party between its armed forces and dissident armed forces or other organized armed groups which, under responsible command, exercise such control over a part of its territory as to enable them to carry out sustained and concerted military operations and to implement the Additional Protocol-II to Geneva Conventions of 1949.

In other words, it can be said that armed conflict is an umbrella term which has been used to describe both international and internal conflicts and includes situations of war, insurgency, ethnic conflicts, or any uprising revolt

etc. which involves the use of arms, wherein one party must be a state or government. With this understanding of internal armed conflict, the present situation in the State of Manipur falls within the ambit of Non- International armed conflict as given under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and its additional Protocol II of 1977. It will be pertinent to mention here that the Government of India never considered that the State of Manipur or any part of the territory of India is facing the situation of armed conflict. The government of India considers such situation in any part of India including Manipur as a ‘Law and Order Problem’ or ‘Insurgency infested area’.

Whatever be the nature of armed conflicts it is an established fact that social and institutional structures are being targeted. It is equally true that the impact of armed conflict has been experienced differently by women and men in a culture that assigned different gender roles to women and men on the basis of their biological differences. Moreover, the structures of most of the societies are patriarchal in nature, where men are considered as bread earners and protectors of the family, society and nation, so men are usually found to be in the battle ground fighting with arms and armaments during the situations of armed conflicts, whereas women have been ascribed with traditional roles in the private sphere such as of nurturing and taking care of sick and wounded persons during the arm conflict , which is considered as the extension of household responsibilities.Hence, armed conflict has its gendered face.

Accordingly, there is a need to have an in-depth understanding of intersectionality between gender, class and ethnicity in order to understand the enormity of women during and after the armed conflict. This has been well endorsed by many organizations and institutions at international and national level. As a result many initiatives have been taken in the form of peace resolutions by various international and national organizations to protect women during the armed conflict or in post conflict situations; to name some international treaties and laws such as International Human Rights Laws; UN

Commission on Status of Women; Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women; Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict; Vienna Declaration and Programme of Actions. Beside this all the four UN Conferences on Women and its adopted documents including Beijing Platform for Actions and its follow up Resolutions Beijing +5, +10, +15, +20, United Nations Security Council, 1325 (2000) and its follow up Resolutions 1820 (2008), Resolution 1888 (2009), Resolution 1889 (2009), Resolution 1960 (2010), Resolution 2106 (2013), Resolution 2122 (2013) etc. Which ensure gender justice; meeting the specific needs of women affected by armed conflict; increasing the participation of women in peacekeeping, peacebuilding, pre- and post-conflict decision-making; addressing disarmament, illicit arms trafficking and landmines etc. Notwithstanding of all these efforts, armed conflict/wars are going among or between different countries. India is no exception to such situation. However, since India has not declared any part of its territory as an area affected by armed conflict, it considered some of its states with the disturbed law and order situation or insurgency infested areas, as a result, a few of the above mentioned initiatives are not applicable in these areas for example UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).

No doubt, India is experiencing armed conflict zones in its different forms to name some major ones are the State of Jammu and Kashmir in the north, Northeast States, popularly known as seven sister states including Manipur, Naxal or Maoist affected areas like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and other parts of the Country. These States in India are conflict affected areas where groups/ organizations involved in the conflict or insurgency have been using arms and armaments. Sometimes even very sophisticated arms and ammunition have been used by them. One of these States is Manipur, which has been witnessing armed conflict for last many decades and people of Manipur have been facing the consequences of such

situation in the form of displacement, custodial killing, fake encounter, extrajudicial executions, murder, torture, rape, sexual assaults or harassment, forced pregnancy etc. In short, people of Manipur have been experiencing the serious violations and abuse of basic human rights and Constitutional rights due to armed conflict. Although the entire population suffers from the armed conflict situation, women and children are particularly affected in different ways because of their vulnerable status in the society.

In this context, the present study aimed to examine and analyse the impact of armed conflict on women in Manipur. It made a modest attempt to analyze the impact of armed conflict on women and men as victims with a focus on gender differences in their perceptions and experiences. Other aspects that have been covered under the study are to have an understanding of the extent of violations of their constitutional and human rights, different roles performed by women and the shift in their gender role, their priority issues, awareness and perception about property rights and other rights. The study also examined the role played by women combatants during armed conflict, why and how they decided to join the insurgent group/s, how they have been recruited, their role perceptions and performance, their position in the leadership hierarchy of their respective organization. Further it aimed to examine the role played by women as peace missionaries, their role perceptions and performance as peace builders and for the empowerment of women in the State of Manipur. To have a comprehensive understanding of the overall situation of women in the State of Manipur, the study attempted to cover women under three broad categories namely - women as victims; women as combatants; and women as peace activists. In order to have a gender perspective a group of men victims has also been taken as a category for analysis. The respondents were selected from the four valley districts of Manipur namely-Imphal West, Imphal East, Thoubal and Bishnupur districts, which were worst affected areas under armed conflict in the State of Manipur.

It is very essential to know and analyse the status of different categories of women and men respondents belong to. In assessing the factors responsible for their situation and condition, the variables of age, religion and ethnic group, caste, education, occupation, marital status, family, membership and association with organisations etc. were taken into account.

The general information about the respondents relating to the social variables revealed that majority of the respondents belonged to rural areas. About 70 per cent of the respondents are in their youth and belonged to the age group of 21-40 years. More than 64 per cent of the women victims were widows followed by men victims and women combatants. Maximum number of the respondents belong to the Meithei ethnic groups (non- Brahmin) practising Hindu religions, which is also a major ethnic group in terms of population living in the valley areas. 59 per cent of the respondents belong to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) followed by the General Caste, Schedule Tribes and Schedule Caste.

The number of women headed household in Manipur has increased to more than 48 per cent due to loss of male head of the household members during the armed conflict situation. As far as literacy rate is concerned it has been observed that contrary to the literacy rate of the Manipur State as per Census 2011, which records higher male literacy rate, the study reveals women respondents have a higher literacy rate at 80 per cent as compare to 75 per cent for men respondents. However, armed conflict has badly impacted the education of children in school as well as higher education institutions. As far as school education is concern, a significant percentage of children are found to be school drop outs, particularly girls because of two major reasons. One being the poor economic condition of the family, secondly, schools are not considered as safe place for children, as they are being targeted by the insurgent groups or other groups involved in armed conflict for the purpose of extortion of money, kidnapping of children for recruiting them in their

organisations. It has also been experienced that educational institutions were shut down due to frequent blockades, bandhs, strikes and curfews in the State, which sometimes disturbed the academic year of the students. As far as higher education is concerned, families who are in a position to afford the cost of higher education are sending their children to other parts of the country. It is relevant to record the feelings of some of the respondents as they remarked that education is essential for employment and good employment can only transform their family conditions.

The study further revealed that more than 80 per cent of the respondents earn their livelihood by working in unorganised sector. Working in unorganised sector means low wages and absence of regular employment, as a result they became economically more vulnerable and fall easy prey at the hands of insurgent groups. In addition to this they are less aware of their rights and privileges. Further it has been found that though women in Manipur are significantly contributing towards the income of household and in many cases they are the head of household, and enjoy the customary right to choose their life partner they were denied of their right to property. It has been observed, on one hand, that traditional and customary practices which are in favour of men are very strong in Manipur society and on the other lack of exposure to information and knowledge increases vulnerability of women to face gender based violence and abuse at the hands of their own family members as well as by the armed forces. It implies that though women have equal constitutional rights at par with men, their customary rights reinforce the patriarchal ethos in the society.

Gender theory talk about the binary of the society as public sphere and private sphere, where men have all powers to control the public sphere along with the private sphere by controlling the productive and reproductive rights of women, and women are allowed to manage the private sphere within the four walls of house. It implies that public domain is beyond the limits of women or

in other words women are not capable to manage the public affairs. But, the women of Manipur have challenged this dichotomy of public and private spheres, as it has been observed that armed conflict in Manipur has brought a shift in the gender roles of women. However, most of the time it has been experienced that the consequences of armed conflict on women remain unnoticed. They are not considered as direct victims of armed conflict as they have not been facing the conflicting situation in the field. The study recorded that women have assumed the key roles of being the head of the household and handling alone the burden of ensuring livelihood of the family members during the situations of utter chaos while coping up with their emotional breakdown especially when they had lost their husband/father/son or sole male earner of the family.

It has further been experienced that many women victims who have lost their male members were not even aware that their husbands/ father or sons were involved in the unlawful activities or associated with insurgent groups. It has been observed while conducting case studies that whenever any woman member came across that their males were involved in such activities they have protested against it, tried their best to convinced them that it is not a correct path and its going to bring insecurity and threat to the lives of their children, when their efforts failed, a few of them have even left their husband's house and started living separately. Out of which some received the support of their parents so they stayed with them while others live separately.

It must also be mentioned here that the position of women victims become more vulnerable when they did not received the support from their own family members including in laws. These women were left to their fate without any moral or emotional support, what to talk about financial help. This has led women to become the provider for subsistence for their family specialty for children and aged persons. Circumstances have transformed them from dependent to have a feeling of independence. Thus the conflict situation

enabled women, though not by choice, to leave the private sphere and participate in the public sphere.

Contrary to the situation, few women have become the targets of gender stereotyped attitudes encircled by patriarchal ethos of the society, where women are considered as a symbol of honour of the family and community. Yet they are being targeted by the hostile groups to dishonor their own women. On the other hand women have been sexually assaulted by the forces to dig out the information in case they belong to the family of an insurgent. In both case women became the target of sexual abuse and have to live a life with the social stigma as per cultural norms of the society. They have been blamed for the killings of their male family members, especially in the case where husband was killed in an encounter or so called fake encounter (as claimed by the respondents). The basic rights as wife of the deceased were denied by her own family members. She was deprived of her and her children's right to property, subjugated to social ostracisation, defamation. These women remained helpless and always encounter insult not only from the society but from their own family members. Because of such discriminatory practices and social taboos, women often went into isolation, lost their confidence and never able to overcome such situations.

These situations impacted the health status of women respondents, particularly of those who are heading the household. Women have been working untiringly for the survival of her family with dependents, without having any emotional or moral support. The condition of women respondents who had lost their husband and having small children are worst affected. Many of them have been suffering from severe depression, and are in need of medical treatment and counselling, which required time and money. In the absence of both requirements, they started taking local drugs as sedatives. In a few cases, to meet the need of two meals a day for their children, in the absence of work opportunities, they were forced to work as commercial sex workers.

Another significant shift that has been observed in gender role was about women joining combatant groups. They work as agents and some of them have been actively involved in armed conflict related activities. The study reveals most of the women combatant belong to underprivileged families and had joint the insurgents groups due to discontent in their life and to earn some money to manage an easy way of life. They were mostly engaged with the supportive roles like carrying weapons, arms, extortion, delivering demand letters for extortions and activities like kidnapping children and preparing them as young soldiers of insurgents groups. While, some of the respondents were found to be very actively involved in the organisation with their ideological commitments for achieving a defined goal for which their organisation is working.

It is significant to note that women combatants have crossed the boundaries of gender stereotype roles and have actively involved as combatants which is earlier considered as male bastion. A few of them were successful in making their respectable space in the organisation, yet they remain invisible at the top leadership positions of their organisations. All the prestigious and top ranking decision making positions were occupied by male members of the organisations.

Another significant observation of the study is that many women respondents became more visible within the family and community as male members of the family have been absent for longer periods of time either to earn their livelihood they have migrated to other place, or to side step when the situation in their village or locality get tensed due to armed groups. However, out of compulsion these women became the breadwinners and primary decision makers not only in their family but they also play equally important role of decision making at the community level. One such example for this is, they come out of the private sphere and raise their voice against injustice and atrocities in the society. They express solidarity with their fellow sisters.

Women having been entered in public sphere they became active and their participation in public affairs has also been increased. Having realised the

hardships they have been facing due to the breakdown of the political structures and economic systems, they realised the strength of mobilisations and organisations. They joined various organisations and led peace movements and women's rights movements at grassroots levels also. Women understood the importance of peace and security of human life. Though they have been very actively involved in the peace movements they are hardly found at the decision making processes. They remain invisible at the negotiating tables and therefore unable to construct a more peaceful society.

It has been found that women having challenged gender roles, they were actively involved with different organisations. In order to combat the situation of armed conflict in the State of Manipur, many women organisations and NGOs have been working for establishing peace. To name a few like Meira Paibi, Integrated Rural Development Service Organisation, Human Rights Initiatives (HRI), Environment and Economic management Association, Women Action for Development, Rural Service Agency, United NGOs Mission-Manipur etc. Women under the banner of their organisation, of which, special mention may be made of Meira Paibi, have been confronting many difficult situations and also facing the consequences for challenging the patriarchal norms as well as questioning the armed groups. They have been fighting the issues such as poverty, unemployment, education opportunities, corruption, lack of development in the State and negligence by the authorities, which are the causes as well as the consequences of the situation of armed conflict in the State. Consequently, widen the gender gaps and inequalities in the society and had also destroyed the peaceful fabric of the State. These organisations have been playing an important role in facing the challenges posed by the armed conflicting groups. They have been working for the welfare of women by providing services like, skill training, creating awareness, medical help, legal services, counselling providers, etc. It has been found that women respondents are also engaged in dealing with the cases of domestic violence, and fighting against the menace of drug abuse and alcoholism. These efforts of women were hardly been recognized by the society.

In addition to this, a few suggestions may be offered which can go a long way in dealing with the situation of armed conflict and promoting peace in the State of Manipur.

First, the primary cause of insurgency in the State of Manipur is the non-inclusion of communities, ethnic and social groups in the development processes. Therefore, the governments should adopt more inclusive development policies, so that no section of the society feels that they were excluded from the development process and it will help to create a conducive environment for development.

In order to reduce economic inequalities, governments- both State and Union, should take up initiatives to implement anti poverty programmes in an affective manner, so that the discontent of people can be minimized. It requires efforts to check lopsided economic growth and uneven distribution of resources and it also need to create more employment opportunities for the youth so that their potential can be used for the productive activities and their energy can be channelize to build a strong self reliant State and Nation.

This needs a quality investment in education, which in return will provide educated potential and talented young citizens to contribute for the sustainable development of the Country. So there is a need to increase the budgetary allocation for education. There is a need to strength school education and to maintain the academic year so that there should be no loss of academic year of students. Higher education system also need to be evaluated and there is a need to identify the priority areas which requires immediate attention. There is a need to start vocational or job oriented courses so that unemployment and underemployment can be reduced.

The health facilities in the State, especially in the far-flung areas, need to be improved. The major tribal inhabited areas lack proper medical facilities and there is a need to strengthen the network of heath service provider through well equipped Health Centres which include facilities like counselling for those with mental/psychological problems.

State should have zero tolerance for the violations of women's human rights in the situation of armed conflict. There is a need to raise the level of legal awareness among women, it is suggested with the help of Women's Studies Centres and other women organisations legal awareness camps should be organised for women.

To provide income generating facilities to women for their self sustainability, small scale industries (Handicraft, Handloom, Bamboo works, Weaving) and other traditional skills need to developed. This will enhance the income generating avenues for many skill workers. Besides, a market platform and even export of these traditional items must be promoted by the government.

Since this small hillock state has many scenic and serene tourist places, it will attract many domestic and international tourists hence, tourism industries in the State must be promoted. This industry can provide employment to many unemployed educated youths of the state and enhance the economy of the State.

lastly, Armed Forces Special Power Act has been facing serious resistance from all corners of the State of Manipur including political leaders and civil society. Irom Chanu Sharmila is an icon for the protest against the enforcement of AFSPA in the State. People of Manipur termed it 'draconian law' and considered it as an instrument of 'state terror' and repression by the Government of India. In this context there is an urgent need of review. It is important to realize that AFSPA does not permit the armed forces of the Union Government to commit fake encounters, sexual abuse, rape, molestation, custodial abuse or custodial deaths. Further, there is a need to understand that the Act does not provide the armed forces of the Union Government any kind of immunity against the law; they are equally accountable to the Union Government. However, there are misinterpretations about the Act and it need to be monitored so that proper administration of the Act takes place. In order to cheek the misuse of the AFSPA by any personnel or agency, there is a need to develop a strong monitoring mechanism, in which any violation by any responsible personnel should be made accountable. Every arrest should be made public; care should b taken to protect the rights of the arrested person in jail. Further there is a need to cheek custodial deaths, for any custodial death the authorities should

be made accountable with the aim to win over the trust of the people. Any incidence of sexual assault, fake encounter or killing should be reported to authority for appropriate action against the officer or person and it should be made public in order to have transparency of issues. This will necessitate winning the trust of the people of Manipur and ultimately helping in establishing peace in the State.

Considering the situation of families who have lost their earning hands due to armed conflict it is suggested that the government should ensure full redress support for families of victims and expedite the process of disbursing compensation, including the right to restitution, reparation, and rehabilitation, as per human rights norms. This can bring some relief and good will among people and will help to win over their confidence. The children of victims should be adopted by the State and they should be provided free education as they are the innocent citizens and they should not suffer for the doings of their parents. It will help in raising these children in a good environment, so that they should not grow in an environment which inculcate in them the feeling of revenge and feeling of disbelief towards State.

The special schemes and programs to eradicate poverty; welfare schemes including a pension scheme for widows and others launched by the Union Government or State Government properly implemented and effectively monitored so that the benefits should reach to the targeted group at the lowest level within a time period.

In the end it could be said that insurgency is a political issue which requires a political solution. Hence, political will is required to find solution that should be inclusive and amicably accepted by the parties to the armed conflict, as well as Union and State Governments. This necessitates strong Centre –State civil and military relations so that a comprehensive policy for the management and resolution of peace in the State and region can be formulated. Any effort for repealing the AFSPA by the government will be highly appreciated. It will enable restoration of law and order and civil administration in the State. It will further give a great relief to the people in general and women in particular of Manipur. In the end, it could be said there still a long way ahead to establish peace in the State. It is an arduous task to attain gender just society by eliminating inequalities. The most difficult part of the mission will be to change the mindset of the people involved in the armed conflict and to question the

socio-cultural norm that perpetuate and reinforce patriarchy. As gender equality is a necessary condition for peace and development. To say in the words of Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Each gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed and those who are cold and are not clothed”