



Insurgency and Violation of Human Rights in Assam: A Study of ULFA

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Abstract

Insurgency is an organized armed struggle by a section of local people against the state usually with foreign support to achieve certain goals. India's North East Region has been weighed down by insurgencies since independence in 1947. Most violent amongst the armed movement had been the Naga National Council in 1950 and today NSCN (IM). States like Assam, Manipur also witnessed armed organized violence since 1960s and 1970s. The state of Assam has been under the grasp of insurgency for more than three decades. Insurgency began in Assam with the birth of United Liberation Front of Assam on 7 April, 1979 by some radical Assamese youth to fight against the "Indian Government" with the ultimate goal to achieve sovereign Assam. The insurgency groups of Assam had been involving in violent activities from time to time which had a enormous impact on the socio-economic life of people in Assam. This

paper tries to make an analysis the impact of insurgency on socio-economic life of people and violation of human rights in Assamese society based on secondary data.

Key Words- violation of human rights- violation of the women rights, violation of rights to education, violation of economic rights, violation of health rights, etc.

Introduction:

Insurgency is an organized armed struggle by a section of local people against the state usually with foreign support to achieve certain goals. India's North East Region has been beset by insurgencies since independence in 1947. Most violent amongst the armed movement had been the Naga National Council in 1950 and today NSCN (IM). States like Assam, Manipur also witnessed armed organized violence since 1960s and 1970s. Assam has been under the affect of insurgency for more than three



decades. Assam is situated in the strategic northeastern corner of India, it is part of a region which shares a highly porous and sensitive frontier with China in the North, Myanmar in the East, Bangladesh in the Southeast and Bhutan to the Northwest. Spread over 2,62,179 square km. the strategic importance of the North East India can be determined from the fact that it shares 4,500 km-long international border with four South Asian neighbours but is connected to the Indian mainland by only a famous 22 km-long land corridor passing through Siliguri in the eastern state of West Bengal.

Insurgency began in Assam with the birth of United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) in 1979. On 7 April 1979 six radical Assamese youths met at the Rong Ghor, the famous amphitheatre of the Ahom royalty and formed the ULFA oath to fight against the Indian Government with the ultimate goal to achieve a sovereign Assam. At the meeting of Rong Ghor in Sivsagar district of Assam, the youth agreed that the Indian state has been exploiting Assam's rich tea, oil, forest resources without benefiting the people of Assam. This was

the starting point of ULFA, insurgency or we can say insurgency in Assam.

The late 80s witnessed ULFAs influence in Assam reaching new height rebels of the outfit killed, kidnapped, and money demanded and threatened the tea planters and businessmen in the state to acquire funds to purchase weapons and to send its cadres for advanced training in many places of the world. A reign of fear and terror was prevailed as ULFA associated and threatened, kidnapped and killed businessmen and industrialist across the state.

Counter insurgency is also responsible for violation of human rights in Assam. There are many instances of violation of human rights for counter insurgency by the state. Government of India launched two army operations: Operation Bajrang (between 27 November 1990 and 10 June 1991) and Operation Rhino (between 15 September 1991 and 13 January 1992) against the outfit forced its leadership to take refuge in Bangladesh. As a result counter insurgency was emerged by the state sponsored armed forces to prevent insurgency from Assam. Many were tortured, injured and killed during counter



insurgency operations. ULFA also had camps in Bhutan, but in December 2003, a joint operation of Indian and Bhutanese military namely “Operation All Clear” flushed them out of the Himalayan nation. The outfit continued to launch periodic strikes in Assam, according to the report, mostly from its facilities in the Sagaing division in Myanmar. In 2009, there were reports of the ULFA setting up a base in China’s Yunnan province, established by the group’s military chief Paresh Baruah.

Dhemaji bomb blast on 15 August, 2004 had taken life of 18 people and injured many others. Most of them were students. In 2009 Arabindra Rajkhowa and other top leaders were arrested in Bangladesh except Paresh Boruah. As of now, though the outfit with the government, breakaway faction of the group led by Paresh Boruah known as ULFA-independent is still continuing its war against the state. Recently Anteshwar Mahanta(45) a small tea planter and BJP active member and his son were shot dead by suspected ULFA militants in Tinsukia District of upper Assam on 11 December 2017. A leading Assamese businessman’s son Arunav Phukan was kidnapped by

ULFA-I on December 15, 2017 but released after 10 days without any harming.

These have led to a situation where numbers of household across Assam have come to be headed by some individuals who have lost their meal earners of their families. Setting aside their own personal loss, some women often have to earn their livelihood, something venturing out to earn for a living for the first time in their lives. Widows of this kind of violence have to take care of the well being and education of their children as single parents, and determinedly create a cheerful atmosphere in their homes, so that the children can successfully emerge from their trauma to some kind of normalcy. These women have force to run their families in the face of heavy odds. These paper basically tries to trace the violation of human rights in general and particularly the rights of the women in the state of Assam.

Methodology and Materials Used

In preparation of this paper both descriptive and analytical methods has been used based on the resources available in different article, books and journals available in the internet. Apart from this the



whole research work is based on historical method and empirical in nature.

Results and Discussions

United Liberation Front of Assam(ULFA) was the insurgency group formed to achieve the ultimate goal of “sovereign Assam” from mainstream India. To achieve this goal ULFA involved in many violent activities across the state of Assam. Many were kidnapped and killed and many were lost their family member including father, husbands, and son. Counter insurgency was launched by the state and in counter insurgency many were tortured, injured and killed. The insurgency related violence raging in Assam has pulled many individuals into the zenith of conflict and violation of human rights. In the last two decades, insurgency has taken many lives and injured and disabled many others in the Assam. According to the report published in South Asia Terrorism Portal, between 1992 and 2014, 8,031 insurgency related victims were reported in Assam. Out of this, 4,172 were civilians, 822 were security force personal and 3,037 were insurgents. There are innumerable instances of some women losing their husbands, father, sons and brothers, besides women themselves getting

killed at the hands of their insurgents or the security force.

Violation of Women and Children Rights

The impact of insurgency on women is usually different from men. Reason is that insurgency and armed conflicts compel them to involve in different functions, play different roles, and shoulder different responsibilities on the situation demand. Violence and its by product can have serious impact on the lives of women and on their children as well. Amalgamate with emotional and psychological pressure, women become overwhelm with the immensity of responsibilities when circumstances force them to head a household and be the meal-earner of the family. Besides, many such women often meet with disapproval from sections within the society.

The state Assam, has been experiencing insurgency for more than three decades now, and the little wars’ or low intensity conflicts have been persistently disturbing the people of the State. Spread over an area of about 78,438 square km. and home to a population of 31 million the State is one of the hotbeds in South Asia’s insurgency theatre.



A large number of militant cadres belonging to the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and other insurgent groups have been killed by security forces during anti-insurgency operations. Similarly, insurgents have killed many security personnel and ordinary civilians. These incidents have left many women widows; many women lost their children, fathers, brothers and other family members. Because of these incidents, the responsibility to run the household fell in the hands of these women.

Violation of Socio-economic Rights Individuals

The loss due to insurgency violence that the individuals had to carry is not simply physical and emotional, caused by the loss of their near and dear ones. It always transfers to their social and economic spheres of life. In most cases, women experience a decline in social importance or legitimacy. The economic impact of insurgency violence or anti-insurgency operations and killings in Assam is visible by the increase in female-headed households—a sudden change both in the social and economic status of a family that was earlier supported by a man (a husband,

a father or a brother)—and now bound to be headed by a women who may or may not have the capacity to work and run the family as it was run earlier. It is just an after-shock to the affected women—the first shock being the death of her husband or son or father, the magnitude of which can only be felt by those affected women.

The socio-economic impact of insurgency also varies from lives of individuals at relief camps and outside the camps. Reports state that decades of violent insurgency in Assam have forced many women, including homemakers, to even take to prostitution after their husbands or close family members were killed or maimed in terror attacks. “Women hit by terror attacks are exploited very cruelly with some of them forced into nasty things like prostitution”, said Manumati Barman, the Coordinator of a women’s shelter home run by the Global Organization for Life Development (GOLD), an NGO in Guwahati. Insurgency is the root cause behind thousands of shattered families, orphaned children, widowed women, some of them forced to beg for making ends meet.

There are hundreds of widows of insurgency in Assam who have not got the promised ex-gratia payments or jobs



promised by the government. "I have not received any money from the government. I have four children and without any financial support from the government, life is simply like hell," said middle-aged Khudija Khatun who lost her husband, Mohammad Arab Ali, to militants' bullets in 1998. In Assam, whenever there is an insurgency violence causing casualties, it has been a government exercise to announce an ex-gratia (since 2008 the amount has been raised to Rs.300,000 from Rs.100,000) and sometimes to promise jobs to the next-of-kin of those who died in such attacks. While some of the women were lucky to receive the ex-gratia amount, jobs have been actually provided to only a few.

Widows of men related to militants seem to receive a negative approach from the administration and the society at large. While these women may be deprived of their due ex-gratia and job, the people around them may avoid visiting them for the fear of security forces or being tagged as sympathizers of insurgents. When Dimba Rajkonwar, brother of the then ULFA chief Arabinda Rajkhowa, was gunned down from behind by two motorbike riders on 11 August 1998 at Dibrugarh town, his wife Bharati Rajkonwari was deprived of the ex-

gratia payment of Rs 100,000. Shattered after the shocking death of her husband, she became a single parent, saddled with the responsibility of looking after the three young children. Bharati believes that the authorities decided to deprive her of her ex-gratia payment just because she belongs to a family, one of whose members is a militant leader. "My only resolution after the tragedy was to bring up my children well and make them independent in life", she said. In spite of all the odds, Bharati was keen to form an organization to help those women widowed as a result of violence in Assam.

Violation of Rights of Education and Health of Individuals

In conflict situations, the girl child is often asked to sacrifice her education on grounds that it is unsafe to venture out of the camps to attend schools. Personal safety is quoted as an example. Relief camps do not have facilities for education. Economic reasons also compel families to stop the education of their children. But it is also true that many schools in the locality of the conflict are taken over by security forces for their temporary shelter. This further diminishes the opportunities for education of girls. Assam is a good example of such type of hostile impact of violence on education.



Children from households headed by women often have to drop out of school to supplement the family income. This may create a psychological and mental block that affects them throughout their lives. No school or state institution has surfaced to help deal with the hidden trauma that such children suffer.

During anti-insurgency operations, there have been increased mobilizations of army and paramilitary forces leading to increased sexual harassment and loss of privacy even within the four walls of the house, often regarded as so called safety zone. There are many instances of such incidents during counter insurgency operation in Assam. Women face psychological trauma, physical violence, casualties and even death. Women have special medical needs in conflict circumstances such as extra nutritional requirements and food during pregnancy and breast feeding. Moreover, as fatalities of sexual violence, the affected women are prone to sexually transmitted diseases as well as unwanted pregnancies.

Psychological Impact on Individuals

Insurgency results in violence that has both concrete and insubstantial effect. Violence could be either threatened or actual

use of force which may be physical, emotional, sexual or social, against oneself, another person or against a community. While in general, violence always results in loss of personal dignity, liberty and the right to self-determination. In the case of women it has been oppressively directed against them in order to regulate their lives and behaviour. The United Nations General Assembly offered the following definition of violence against women in its Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women: “Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”

In 2006 the UN Secretary General stated that women experience all forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated by both State and non-State actors during times of armed conflict. In general, the state responds by formulating strategies to address the visible impact of insurgency violence by paying compensation to the victims or their next of kin in case of death. But such compensations do not take into account the social and



psychological needs of the affected people. The plight of women victims at conflict times and after is something that is mostly ignored and unattended. Very often, when peace returns in an area of conflict, even if it is temporary, the general tendency is to forget the subtle effects that violence brought about to the lives of the women. People believe that life goes back to normal. But does it really?

The psycho-social vulnerability of women makes them worst-affected victims of violence. Women suffer as wives, mothers and daughters. Stress, strain, anxiety, hysteria, depression, high blood pressure and other psychiatric illnesses increase manifold. Women have to shoulder the responsibility of supporting their families after the death of a husband, a father, a son or a brother. Their injuries are deeper than physical injuries and unlike men, they do not share their tragedy with anybody and that makes them all the more ill. On top of it all, they also face the added problems of abuse and harassment at home or locality. According to a study conducted by the Centre for Northeast Studies and Policy Research among women in conflict-ridden areas of Nagaland and Assam, the women survivors of violence in Assam were

found suffering maximum trauma from Bodo insurgency, the anti-foreigner movement and ULFA insurgency. In Dhemaji, many villages were attacked and burnt during the 1983 anti-foreigner riots because they had settlements of a sizeable population of the Bengali-speaking migrant community. In Kokrajhar, women from the Bodo community had suffered in the vicious cycle of insurgency and political violence, which disrupted entire families. While many women victims seemed deeply traumatized, their children, too, appeared to be similarly affected. Families had fallen apart in instances where the sole bread-earner had been killed; the associated stigma of the killing had compounded societal problems, the report said.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder of the Family Members

Post-traumatic disorder of the family members because of armed insurgency conflict in Assam can be understood through some incidents cited by psychiatrist, journalist in their respective works. Such an incident cited by Sangeeta Goswami, counseling psychologist and president of MIND India, an organization working on positive mental health cited in the article “Women Worst Hit in Strife” published on



16 September 2011 “Sujata unable sleep. She wakes up in a cold sweat at night remembering the gory sight of burnt human flesh, working over dead bodies of her family members to reach a safer place. It clearly shows the density of impact of insurgency on women and post-traumatic stress disorder in Assam. After the incident children of victim suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, which led their mother to depression and distraction. In this regard, can give another incident cited by Wasbir Hussain in his book “Homemakers Without Men: Assams Widows of Violence” published in 2006. A seven year old Forid, son of a local political hailing from Tengakhat in Tinsukia district, who shoot dead by militants on 20 January 1991, who watched his father crash onto the ground when hit by bullet triggered by unknown gunman, is a classic one. In the aftermath of the incident, the child was hit by post traumatic stress disorder, he used to keep repeating the number of the car apparently used by his father killers, and would often said, “that’s the car they used”. For a long time he refused to go to the school. Another incident again cited by Wasbir Hussain in the same book is that Premadhar Konwar(53) was shoot dead on 27 July 1993

by armed insurgents in Namrup, three lives were affected the most of his wife Hemprova and the two sons, Preeti Bhushan and Bibhuti Bhushan. The impact on 14 year old Preeti worried his mother, who herself was in daze after the tragedy. Preeti was getting increasingly restive. He began to talk revenge. He kept asking why his father was killed, why anyone would want to do that. Preeti was suffering from post- traumatic disorder and in the absence of any professional counseling the family was unable to calm him down. Hemprova stopped visiting anybody in case they thought that she had gone to them to seek help. She also hesitated to venture out in the market as people started ask question about her husband dead, which hearted her.

The above mentioned incidents clearly show that the magnitude of impact of insurgency on both man and women in Assam. There are more than thousands of unpublished incidents in the villages Assam which will shock any individual of the society.

Conclusion

As we know that Assam under the grip of insurgency more than three decades. Above mentioned incidents shows the intensity of insurgency related human rights

violation in Assam in general and in particular on women. The incidents show that impact of insurgency on women is different from men. For losing their near and dear one's and the meal earner they had to bear the responsibility of their family. So they have to involve in nasty things like prostitution for supporting their child. So, both the insurgency groups and state should take necessary peaceful measures for not repeating such tragic incidents.

Insurgency groups are formed for achieving certain demands. They should fruit full initiative by compromising with government. The government should also take necessary steps for calm down them by understanding their demands. Conflict is never an expectation of any individual as it cannot establish peace in the society. Finally, the insurgency groups and the government should make pledge through negotiation not to repeat any such terrific incidents further upon individuals like the incidents- Khajida, Sujata, Hemoprova, Bharati etc. faced.

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