

Final List of Paper Abstracts for Panel 22 on “Gender and Armed Conflict in South Asia” - 21st European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies (ECMSAS)

Convenors:

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Paper 1: Armed Conflict, Small Arms Proliferation and Women’s Initiative for Peace in India's Northeast Region

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For more than a century women and women’s organisations and movements have mobilised in support of social empowerment, economic justice, democracy, human rights and conflict prevention. It started as early as April 28, 1915 for the first time in history when nearly 1,200 women called “International Congress for Women” from warring and neutral countries came together to protest the conflict at the Hague in Holland. This later became the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

Northeast India comprising of the seven states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura is facing the onslaught of multiple armed conflicts since the late 1940s. 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. 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.

And it is not likely that this violence will end soon. In fact, the violence seems to be increasing with each passing day and the situation is becoming more and more complex. A level of militarization has engulfed India’s Northeast under the garb of insurgency and counter-insurgency. And in the process women are assaulted, humiliated, raped and murdered during conflicts which are not of their making.

Women groups in Northeast India have developed many a powerful programme of direct, non-violent, action designed to confront the armed violence of both insurgents and the security forces. However, most of their actions remain in "protest" form and after the initial action dies down, nothing much happens. The women’s movement in India’s Northeast that have emerged in response to the ongoing armed conflict is still now confined to "saving the sons of the soil" syndrome. We need to make ourselves, we the women in India’s northeast understand the issues of war, conflict, peace. We need to understand the political economy of violence, the militarization of Northeast societies. Besides, we also need to understand many of the internationally known United Nations Resolutions on women and peace building which remains just on paper such as United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820.

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 women’s movement in entire Northeast India. The other strong women’s movement that

came about was the establishment of Tangkhul Shanao Long (All Tangkhul Women's Association). The Naga Mother's Association (NMA) is the one of the best well known women's organisation in Northeast India which is working on peace issues. Mention may be made of the Bodo Women's Justice Forum, Kasturba Gandh Memorial Trust, Anchalik Mahila Samitis and Sajagata Samiti of Assam etc. 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. 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 family.

The proposed paper aims to draw a blue print for women in Northeast India to strategise an Action Plan for rebuilding peace, providing justice and political rights in a society ruptured by years of conflict. It will look at all the plans drawn up at the local, national and international level to end violence against women and see in what way women in Northeast can use the knowledge and empower themselves.

Paper 2 : Gendered Participation of Men in the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal

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Men form a significant part of CPN-M and its influential associate organizations like People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Young Communist League (YCL). 75 percent of PLA and about 80-85 per cent of YCL members are male. Therefore, it does appear that men are everywhere (in the Maoist organizations) but nowhere (in the existing scholarship). We know very little about men directly involved in violent conflicts like Maoist insurgency. Based on an ethnographic fieldwork among young men involved in 'armed struggle', this paper explores gendered involvement of men in the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. It attempts to analyze men's motivations to join the party, and to remain within it and the transformations in their lives. Based on how young men viewed their involvement in the insurgency, it attempts to understand the question of becoming and becoming a man in the Maoist organizations in Nepal. In this paper I will make an attempt to address the following questions:

- Who are the men who participated in the Maoist insurgency in Nepal?
- How did these men make decisions about joining the insurgency? What motivated them to join and become a part of militias and armies?
- Why do some men leave the village to join the armed struggle while others stay at home?
- How do men view their involvement in the Maoist insurgency? How transformative was their participation in the insurgency?

Paper 3 : Post Armed Conflict in Sri Lanka and Its Impact on minority women

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Sri Lanka is at a decisive cross road in relation to achieving a lasting and sustainable peace in which all ethnic and religious groups in this country can live in harmony and dignity. Although the government has declared a military victory over the LTTE, a lasting and sustainable peace remains elusive due to the continuing impact of the conflict on civilians and continuous growth of ultra Sinhala nationalism that refused address the root causes of the conflict. Former General who defeated the Tigers has been put forward by the opposition as a common candidate

for the forth coming general election. This itself shows how much Sri Lanka society has been militarized.

During the last 30 years of war women in general and Tamil women in particular have faced various grave forms violence including abductions, disappearances, torture, grave injuries and gender based violence. Various state and non state actors have used sexual violence as a strategic weapon to spread terror, destabilize societies and breaking down the resilience of women. Heavy and systematic militarization of the society has limited the space of local women's organizations and civil society activism. There is zero tolerance for dissent and many journalists have been murdered. There is no space whatsoever for women's engagement with the on going resettlement, reconstruction and develop process since these activities are heavily militarized and tightly controlled by the state to hide the corruption and misuse of Rajapakse Regime.

While recognizing that two mayors elected in the north and east happened to be women they are unable to function and put forward women's concern since these local bodies are heavily ruled by politico- paramilitary groups thus cutting off people participation at the local level development decisions.

The conflict has also been characterized by recurrent cycles of displacement of hundreds and thousands of people and the end of war was marked by further displacement and civilians being forced into internment camps. Currently there are more than 500,000 internally displaced persons in Sri Lanka, 300,000 of whom were displaced during the weeks leading to the defeat of the LTTE in May 2009. Many of these people have experienced multiple displacement, family separation and loss of family members. From January to May over 20,000 people have been killed, many thousands have been injured and maimed. After Vanni civilians' escape from LTTE clutches, the government has forced them into detention camps that are barb-wired and under 24-hours military surveillance amounting to collective punishment. Mobility of these people are completely taken away, Families are separated, injured are not given immediate medical attention, elders and feeble ones died due to starvation and dehydration, women got rapped and murdered, children have been constantly snatched away from their mother by para-militaries and youngster were taken away for investigation and have been not returned back in these so-called government "welfare" villages.

Potentially more dangerous is happening in the east right now. It is the growth of Islamic fundamentalism, as the north and eastern war affected Muslims strive to forge a sense of independent identity. More women in the east wear the long black *abaya* and ultra-orthodox Islamic groups have grown more popular. The conflict in Sri Lanka gives the global revival of Islam a particular flavour. Whereas the mostly-Hindu Tamils and mostly-Buddhist Sinhalese have language and history as well as their faith to unite them, the country's Muslims are defined only by their religion and young Muslim women pay the ultimate price for this new identity seeking tendency.

At this panel I would like to discuss few points that concerns war affected minority women especially in the north and the east. In the course of militarization and war, women occupy and move between a variety of, often overlapping, categories whether legitimate and/or illegitimate, centered and/or marginalized. I will be talking about six broad categories of women (ex-combatants, sex workers, widows, female heads of households, disabled women, and internally displaced women) and how are these women currently centered and/or marginalized in society, and as subjects of national policy/international aid.

Paper 4 : Women and Armed Conflict in India's Jammu & Kashmir

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In Jammu and Kashmir, we have a unique challenge. It's not a typical post conflict situation, neither a complete military offensive. We have on one hand an elected government, economic and political institutions are slowly reviving, and on the other hand the formal peace processes and dialogue have become interminably protracted. There have been renewed and often escalating violence ever since the first cease fire was declared by Hizbul Mujahideen which is Kashmiri militant group, in the holy month of Ramzan in 2000.

Despite the ceasefire and peace process which included a composite dialogue and several confidence building measures, the ground situation vis-à-vis infiltration, militant activity, security forces including local police's responses and counter action has not change. In fact the peace process at India-Pakistan level and Centre-Separatist level in Kashmir have gone through lengthy and circular dialogues, talks and negotiations with the composite dialogue and prime minister's roundtable not being able to produce tangible outcomes. The human and material cost of a peace process which has come to a dead end after the Mumbai attacks has pushed people to wariness. These developments also tend to often push people/groups to take hardened and rigid positions.

Caught between 'political, military and identity crossfire' within Jammu and Kashmir, is women's honor, security and liberty at stake. Athwaas (Kashmiri word meaning a handshake) , a local women's group from different political ideologies, regions, religions and holding a different end picture for the resolution of Kashmir have been working for the last nine years in building women's peace constituencies . The group is supported and facilitated by Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP). The paper will focus on the following:

1. Impact of the conflict directly or indirectly on women
2. Women's role and understanding of the conflict and peacebuilding.
3. Exclusion of women from the political peace process.