

## **Minutes of the seminar on gender justice and Peace conflict in NE India**

**Organized by Northeast Network in collaboration with TISS Guwahati**

**Venue- TATA Institute of Social Sciences Guwahati**

**Date- 27-28, October 2014**

### **Day one**

#### **1<sup>st</sup> session**

The seminar was called into order with a formal welcome address from Jaya, member Global symposium. In her speech she briefly introduce of the objective of the Global symposium in introducing the role of Boys and Men for gender justice. She said that the first global symposium was held in Rio in 2009 where 600 delegates across the globe among 300 delegates only from India were delegating during the then Symposium. She further claims that this seminar organized in TISS Guwahati is a 3<sup>rd</sup> regional academic seminar of its kind, aiming at gathering delegation for the next global symposium to be held in New Delhi on November this year.

Following the welcome address is the speech from Monisha the Director of Northeast Network. In her address she emphasise that Gender and peace study in NE India needs to be looked taking into consideration the understanding of cultural ethnicity and inclusiveness of the region as main parameters.

The general consultation proceeding was kicking off with a formal brief self introduction from all the panellist and participants.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> session**

The second session was proceeded with a presentation from Mangesh, founding member of Forum to Engage Men and lecturer in political science, Pune University, on Gender issue. In his speech he emphasizes on masculinity construct which reflect on the gender nature of one self. According to him masculinity can be broadly understand in term of gender relationship which always associated with power, dominance and self assertion. He further presented the types of masculinity which are hegemonic masculinity, subordinate masculinity, and marginalised masculinity. He however pointed out that Indian university could do much better like Cambridge and Oxford University in term of Research work on gender issues as study of men and masculinity has not been paid much attention to.

This session was heated with the question raised by Sanjay, Lecturer of TISS guwahati, on “ how can we raise the interest for conducting research study on gender issue in NE India as far as politic of location is concern”?

### **3<sup>rd</sup> session**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> session of the seminar was begun with the general discussion on the following questions raised by Shalima Lecturer of TISS Guwahati:

- How can we look to get an appropriate vocabulary to explain the technical terms (as some technical terms might not be able to understand by the student) on giving lectures about gender education in the class room?
- How can we include gender studies or sexuality education in the curriculum?
- How can we look to have a triangular networking between academic institutions, students and NGOs?
- How can we look at the functioning of Committee against Sexual harassment (CASH) in all the academic institutions?

### **4<sup>th</sup> session**

Address on violence against women by a lecturer from Guwahati University

Her address she emphasized on two key points which she feels will help to reduce violence against women

- To sensitize children at the school level on the issue of gender violence
- Role of education through workshops, seminars, consultations etc should be incorporated to raise concern on the respect of value and dignity of individuals despite perception of ethnic differences

The above address on violence against women was followed with the discussion on the question raised by the student social workers on discrimination against NE people by people of main land India:

- Is it the physical appearance of the NE people which discriminated them when they are outside northeast?
- Is it the remoteness of NE from the mainland India which prevents others to learn about Northeast diversity?
- Is it the non inclusion of cultural study in the educational syllabus creating lack of knowledge and information about cultural diversity of India which discriminates NE people?
- Is it the unrest violence in North-eastern states in the past decades of years which create a stereotype attitude in the mindset of people about NE people?

### **5<sup>th</sup> session**

This session was marked with an address on culture and violence by one Lady from Arunachal Pradesh

In her address she cited the case study of the culture of Arunachal Pradesh where she pointed out some of the distinct feature of her own society:

- Perpetuated patriarchy- where social history is constructed through male line and culture itself sanction stalling and confining women until she is ready to marry to a particular man arranged by her family.
- Kinship relation- it leads to polygamous practice and due to customary law women have no rights on land and ancestral property
- Identity assertion- celebrating the tradition by revitalized what has been historically present

She concluded by saying that traditional structure itself play the role of discrimination of women

## Day 2

**Speaker: Vijaylakshmi Barara**

### **Points of discussion:**

#### **Peace**

The speaker emphasised on importance of Peace which ideally cannot come without justice, understanding and introspection. The entire idea about North East being a flawed idea in the sense that Individual identities of specific states are ignored and entire region is clubbed as one.

The concept of North East India is debatable and there are two trajectories to it. First is that there has been no social reform movement in this region except for Assam during the Bhakti Movement and the second is that inspite of having many women organisations in this region, there has been no women's rights movement in North east India. Examples from the context of Manipur were cited; especially of Meira Paibis who are working in the lines of Justice yet not advocating for women's rights in the region, example of Irom Sharmila's 14 years of strike was also cited to explain how struggle is a breakthrough in this region.

**Self Introspection:** The speaker stresses on the responsibility of each individual to self introspect within rather than playing the blame game for every small little issue. North East being an extremely sensitive arena, most times the reasons and cause of issues are shifted towards the central government but we tend to forget the inter community, inter ethnic causations. We forget to analyse the dualities within ourselves in terms of understanding and acknowledging how much of orthodoxy and conservatism we cope in the course of adhering to cultural relativism and restraining ourselves within set paradigms.

**Reasons for Insurgence:** The speaker cited example of how Manipur being a princely state was forcefully merged into the idea of India as nation post independence. Manipur apparently had an elected Government during the time India got her independence from colonial rule yet the nation did not respect the democratic decision of the state. Even today 15<sup>th</sup> of October is a Black day in Manipur because it was the day way back when Manipur was annexed to India.

Another reason of resilience is the attitude of Government and others in common to sideline issues of North east as one in the larger frame of the picture. The demand for recognising state specific issues is more than the clustering of all issues of all states in North east as one.

Violence as such stems from Insurgency which takes different forms be it inter ethnic conflicts, or armed conflict orchestrated by the State. The counter effects of such issues are:

- Vulnerabilities faced by locals in terms of losing out on their identities, living under constant fear of death.
- Increase in Domestic Violence, rapes, kidnapping etc
- Women related issues are completely ignored when it comes to framing policies by the state for eg women and aids.
- Violence has become an industry owing to free flow of funds and financial packages.

**Idea of Matrilineal Society:** The speaker broke the myth of matrilineal being a common practice entirely in this region. Matrilineal societies do exist in Meghalaya but the picture is a blurry line between the power relations within such structures. Examples of how Khasi men resort to alcoholism, child marriages came up during the discussion. Another important feature was that of women's political participation and how no women are visible in village committees in Meghalaya.

Some good examples came up:

- Student bodies issuing dictums of wearing traditional dresses by women
- The idea of wearing a hizab in Islam and how cultural assertion can come in the way of personal choices for a women
- The concept of 'dry state' and how vague is the idea of it.

The speaker stressed on understanding 'Peace' in terms of structural Violence and the nuances of it. The cause of structural violence reinforces patriarchy and stereotypes. In such cases, violence manifests as a whole irrespective of genders and most times the line is blurred in the sense of masculinity equating with violence.

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The seminar was closed with a short valedictory address from Vijaya taking the honour to embrace with gratitude to the participation of all the participants and the host Institute. The seminar is expected to grace with new achievement to rise to a new height of fighting for Gender justice and Peace in NE India within the framework of academic institutions and NGOs.

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