

## **Media, Gender and Peace Initiatives in Northeast India: An Analysis**

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Northeast part of India has always been in the news and public discourse for ongoing conflicts and violent events occurring from time to time. In such a context, the role media plays for resolution of such conflicts and restoration of peace cannot be ignored. Years-long, this part of the country has been suffering due to conflicts of various sorts and this has led to the loss of human lives and property of unaccountable proportion. Moreover, there are instances of such conflicts later resulting in civil wars and larger humanitarian crisis with people of one community perpetrating violence on the other. In such situations, women who are considered to be the most vulnerable among all have suffered the most. In this backdrop, the paper is a content analysis of six newspapers published from three selected states from the northeastern part of India. It looks at the way media, more specifically the print reacts to conflict situations and peace processes in northeast India. Apart from that, the paper also reflects upon the perception of the journalists towards the role print media is playing in conflict situations in Northeast India.

**Keywords:** Conflict reporting, dialogue, peace, media coverage, Northeast India

The essential and crucial role played by media in conflict situations makes it a very interesting field of study among media researchers and professionals alike. Apart from that, we live in a world dominated by media discourses on issues ranging from war to politics in both global to local contexts. Conflict, which is an offshoot of the evolutionary process of our civilization, seems to be all-pervasive spanning across cultures, communities, and regions of the globe. Conflicts often germinate around cultures and cultural practices associated with socio-political categories such as class, caste, race, religion, gender, community, identity, nation, and nationalism and the larger politics surrounding them. There are instances of such conflicts resulting in civil wars and large-scale violence leading further to the loss of human lives and other valuable resources on this earth. Moreover, the intensity and regularity of such conflicts and violence have even become many folds now due to some uncertain and undefined reasons. Constant mediation and remediation have increased the scope of such conflicts and violence as much as it has opened doors for their effective resolution and restoration of peace. In such a critical juncture, media has certainly a responsible role to play for initiating dialogues and negotiating between parties affected by such conflict situations through citizen engagement. In such a macro context of mediation, remediation, symbolic production, cultural consumption, and media representation of events and incidents related to conflict and violence, the present study underscores the existing relationship between media, conflict and violence, and generate

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ideas and theorize the situations in the direction for resolving them through initiating dialogues and citizen engagement.

To begin with, we must understand the fact that media and conflict establish an interesting relationship. Due to the inherent news value of conflicts, media today is playing a significant role in shaping the debates and discussions around conflicts. Such a role played by media has even increased today due to the presence of 24X7 satellite channels and their growing emphasis on 'breaking news'. As a result, media –both electronic and print– now has become a powerful agent that shapes popular perceptions about public issues and builds public opinion on conflicts of all types. More importantly, what is communicated through the media becomes the basis for immediate reactions by the government and eventually, it influences policies and strategic plan of actions of the Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations of the world. Moreover, media has become a powerful institution in terms of its reach, coverage, and influence in defining opinions and policies on conflict resolution and restoration of peace.

It is against such a backdrop that it has become important to look at media critically in the northeastern part of India, which has been a theatre of a variety of conflicts differing in terms of their types, spread, intensity, and effect. On the one hand, media is frequently being accused of instigating conflict and violence in Northeast India. On the other, media has the potential to play a proactive role in conflict zones by creating platforms for negotiation and conflict resolution. Therefore, it is worth reflecting upon the role of media in conflict situations and try to understand as to whether media plays the troubleshooter by initiating process of conflict resolution, whether the spoken and written words used by media of northeast are sensitive enough to the reality on the ground, and whether the efforts of media leads to dialogue between warring factions in conflict situations in northeast India.

The study also explores how the media portrays and represents women during a conflict situation. As it is observed, media in the Northeast lacks sensitivity in their reporting particularly towards women who are often the victims of violence and among the first to bear the brunt of armed conflicts. Their activism as harbingers of peace and defenders of human rights find little or no space in the media. Therefore, it is imperative to understand as to why media ignores and marginalizes the plight of women and their role as peace negotiators during a conflict situation.

## **Conflict and Media in India's Northeast**

Northeast India comprises of seven states and Sikkim. They are Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Tripura. In terms of its ethnicities, the region is quite diverse. Each of the states in the Northeast is home to several endangered ethnic communities, languages, and folk traditions. As a region, it has a special place in the geopolitical map of the world, and more importantly in entire Southeast Asia. It shares its borders with countries, which are politically volatile and unstable. Moreover, a natural and ethnic affinity of the people of this region towards the countries of south-east Asia creates a sense of alienation among them from the rest of the Indian subcontinent. Years-long, this part of the country has been mired in conflicts of various sorts resulting out of clashes between the security forces and the militant outfits to conflicts occurring between various indigenous communities and illegal immigrants mostly coming from neighboring Bangladesh. Apart from that, the insurgent outfits operating in various states of this region and their ongoing struggle for attaining sovereignty has been a big challenge

for the Indian government and the Indian administration is in the process of negotiation with various insurgent outfits for restoring peace in the region. As a responsive measure, the Indian Government has declared a large part of Northeast to be disturbed area and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) is very much in force in these areas. Conflicts in this part of the region also occur as a result of clashes between the indigenous people and the people from the mainland often considered as outsiders in the northeast, and who have been residing here for a source of their livelihood. Moreover, disputes over the settlement of borders between various states that were carved out of North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) often result in conflict between people living in the border areas in the states of Northeast India. An overall observation of the situation in the Northeast gives an impression that it is prone to conflict and violence that may occur at any point of time.

Ever since India became Independent in 1947 this region has been experiencing high intensity of the conflict. There has not been a single decade of calmness in the political atmosphere. The region has witnessed numerous conflicts; some of these are widely reported in the media and sometimes, they are away from the glare of media publicity. Conflict dynamics in the region ranges from the struggle for secession to struggle for autonomy, from insurgency to ethnic clashes, to conflicts generated as a result of a continuous inflow of immigrants from across the border, as well as from other states of the country. The geographic isolation, economic underdevelopment, resource competition, alleged changes in the regional demographic pattern are seen as the causes of the conflict situations in India's Northeast.

There are now about 30 banned armed opposition groups in the region demanding independence. Some of the major groups are the *United Liberation Front of Asom* (ULFA) and the *National Democratic Front of Bodoland* (NDFB) in Assam, the *National Socialist Council of Nagalim-Issac Muivah* (NSCN-IM) which the Government of India has lifted its ban as a result of the on-going peace talk, and National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) which has been recently banned due to fallout from the peace talks with the government has its presence in Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, the *National Liberation Front of Tripura* (NLFT) in Tripura, the *Garo National Liberation Army* (GNLA) in Meghalaya. *Manipur People's Liberation Front* and *Kuki National Army* in Manipur, besides these there are not less than twenty armed opposition groups in the state.

As reported in *The Telegraph* (16<sup>th</sup> April 2016), according to a report released by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs for 2015-16, the states of Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland continue to account for the bulk of the insurgency-related incidents of violence in the region. Assam recorded 81 incidents in 2015 and in these, 645 militants were arrested while 49 were killed, nine civilians lost their lives and 27 people were kidnapped. In Manipur, there were 229 recorded incidents of violence, where 805 extremists were arrested while 41 of them killed.

Nagaland reported 102 incidents where 268 militants were arrested while 29 were killed. Nine security men and an equal number of civilians were killed and 78 people were kidnapped (Lyngdoh, 2016).

Considering the bleak situation in Northeast India the plight of women is such that mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters of armed activists who are in the struggle by choice or without choice are often targeted by the state. Similarly, women, who provide food and shelter to the combatants either as sympathizers or through coercion but either way, are also extremely vulnerable. Even women who are actively involved in peace initiatives are not always supported by the community and are vulnerable to suspicions and attacks by all factions of non-state actors as well as state actors.

Media persons in Northeast region work under tremendous pressure and threat to their life from all angles, it is a dangerous physical responsibility, as matter of fact, many scribes have lost their lives. The state and its antagonist groups both demand loyalty and both perceive the violence they perpetrate as legitimate from their own perspective and in such situation the media is trapped in. For example, on November 16, 2015, three English newspapers in Nagaland, *Eastern Mirror*, *The Morung Express*, and *Nagaland Page* carried blank editorials to protest against the notification by Assam Rifles accusing them of offering intentional or unintentional support to the banned National Socialist Council of Nagaland (K). Similarly, frequent rallies and protest by media fraternity against atrocities meted out to the press or total blackout of news are common in Manipur. It is unfortunate to say that the watchdog has often become the victims and these kinds of terrorization have a tremendous demoralizing effect on the scribes in the region. Therefore, it is a great challenge for the media to ensure its own freedom and resist any forms of oppressive pressure and intimidation. This makes the role of media even more important in this region.

### Selected Conflict Events

The conflict events for the study were selected from three states of Northeast India. They were Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland. These states are considered to be the most affected states due to various conflicts occurring from time to time.

#### Assam

*Riot in Bodo Territorial Autonomous District:* In between April to July 2014 the country witnessed tumultuous ethnic violence between the indigenous *Bodo* community and Muslims minority in *Bodoland* area of Assam. The strife between these two communities resulted in a humanitarian crisis of a massive proportion, rendering many people uprooted from their homes. The conflict that occurred both in 2012 and 2014 has been contentiously debated upon both in media and political circles as one of the worst ethnic conflicts that India has seen in postcolonial times.

*The Beltola Violence:* The Beltola violence took place on November 24, 2007 (Time period for study-November 2007 to December 2007) in the heart of the city of Guwahati, Assam when the *Adivasi* people who are also known as the tea-tribes were on a protest march. During the incident, a young *Adivasi* girl named Laxmi Orang was stripped naked in public. This incident angered the *Adivasi* to organize a strike and create disturbances across Assam. The entire nation was shocked by this incident as media was alleged to have sensationalized the incident by repeatedly showing the images of the girl being thrashed, harassed and molested by the public.

#### Nagaland

*Border Clash in Golaghat between Assam and Nagaland:* The Assam–Nagaland border dispute has been happening for the last five decades and has killed innocent lives in both states. The border was in trouble again when two students went missing on July 26, 2014 (Time period for the study-July 2014 to September 2014). This was followed by a protest in the district of Golaghat, Assam, and torching of 16 villages in the border area. Some of the local newspapers over-dramatized the incidents and created more tension between the two states.

## Manipur

*NSCN-IM leader, Muivah's Planned Visit to Manipur:* The incident of violence took place on May 6, 2010 (Time period for the study-April 2010 to July 2010) when the state government deployed police commandos at Moa gate near the Nagaland border to prevent the entry of NSCN-IM General Secretary Thuingaleng Muivah to his native village in Ukhrul district. As violence broke out between the police forces and the Naga supporters, two young students were shot dead and many were wounded. Subsequently, this incident created further agitation and indefinite blockades in the state.

*The Alleged Murder Thangjang Monaroma:* The incident took place when Thangjang Monaroma was picked up from her home by troops of the seventeenth Assam Rifles on July 10, 2004 (Time period for the study-June 2004 to July 2004), on charges of being associated with a banned militant outfit, the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur. The next morning, her bullet-ridden body with bruise marks allegedly of sexual assault was found in a field. Following this incident, there was a widespread protest and reaction across the state, including the unprecedented nude protest by elderly women on July 15, 2004, in front of the Assam Rifle headquarters at Kangla Fort in Imphal.

### Study Objectives

The objectives envisaged for the purpose of the study are:

- (i) To evaluate the role of media in conflict situations.
- (ii) To explore possibilities for media as an effective tool in restoring peace during a conflict situation.
- (iii) To understand the extent of gender sensitivity by the media in conflict reporting.

### Methodology

Among all the northeastern states, the most affected states by conflicts are Manipur, Nagaland, and Assam. Therefore, the study was conducted by considering the target events and newspapers from these three states of the region. The study was conducted in a mixed method of content analysis supported by interviews of 10 (ten) selected journalists each from Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur.

### Research Design and Analysis

For content analysis, all the news items, editorials/opinion pieces, standalone photographs and letters in connection to the target events were identified from the selected newspapers based on the time period of the study. The content analysis of the news items was carried out based on:

- (i) Categories-news, editorials and opinion pieces, letters, standalone photographs
- (ii) Themes-violence, conflict, peace, gender in conflict, gender in peace
- (iii) Print space devoted to various categories of items.
- (iv) Print space devoted to thematic categories.
- (v) Civil society representation in the selected items in connection to the events and the newspapers from the respective states.
- (vi) Objectivity of reporting of the target events in the selected newspapers from the selected states of northeast India.

- (vii) The tone of the language used in reporting the target events in the selected newspapers from northeast India

The categories and themes were systematically defined and coded. Prior to the final process of coding, the coding sheets were prepared and an inter-coder reliability test was conducted by using Holsti's formula ( $3M/N1+ N2+ N3$ ) to establish acceptable levels of reliability/agreement.

### Coding Technique and Inter-Coder Reliability Test

*Preparation of Coding Sheets:* Coding sheets were prepared for the selected newspapers from Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland respectively and in accordance with the objectives of the study. The coding sheets were prepared to collect the required and specific information, so that, in the process of conducting the study the investigator will be able to fulfill its various objectives. The coding sheets were prepared separately for the respective newspapers selected from the selected states (total number of the newspaper is 6; two from Assam, two from Manipur and two from Nagaland).

*Training of Coders:* There were three coders to code the newspaper contents. A training programme was conducted to orient the coders with the themes and categories that have been selected for understanding the problem under study. Coders were trained to objectively code the contents of the selected newspapers and generate a pool of data. These were used for analysis in the later stage of the project. Based on such data, the investigator has drawn the conclusion and suggested recommendations.

*Inter-Coder Reliability Test:* The inter-coder reliability test was conducted to maintain uniformity among the coders in the process of coding the newspaper contents. The test was conducted using Holsti's method and the test result came out positive only in the third test. The mean rate of the agreement after conducting the test for the third time came out to be 0.695 rounded off to 0.7 that is 70%, whereas the range was 0.5-0.95.

*Interview of Working Journalists:* Interview of working journalists (ten each from the selected states i.e. Manipur, Nagaland, and Assam) was conducted through a structured questionnaire to find out their opinion and observations on conflict reporting and peace-building role of the media as well as the representation of women in such situations.

## Literature Review

### Media and Conflict

It is a generally believed idea that media plays a very important role in conflict situations. Media either creates an environment of hate and violence by an unethical and violent coverage of the conflict-related issues or creates an atmosphere of peace by positive coverage of such issues resulting in the process conflict resolution and transformation. However, such an idea and argument of media interventions and its relationship with peace building in conflict situations is clearly problematic and a complex process to understand. The mainstream line of thought behind media and peace building is that journalists are not supposed to take sides on the conflict in question, other than the side of peace (Terzis & Vassiliadou, 2008). At the same time, a few others disagree with such an argument, as Bertil Lintner (2015), a journalist and writer mention that the idea of peace

journalism is a dangerous approach. If this is set as an objective to promote peace, it is easy to become biased and to filter information and write only about what you think may serve the purpose of establishing peace in conflict. It may rather lead to a distorted view of reality and it would also be counterproductive to the efforts of those interested in solving the ethnic and social conflict.

From the above argument, it is clear that the assumed role of media as an agent for the promotion and realization of peace during conflict situations is a contested one. But the fact remains that media continues to hold a crucial position as the main source of information and communication for the people, and helps in the formation of public opinion. In this context, Brian McNair (2000) notes that media represents an independent source of knowledge, by not only informing the public about politics but also protecting them from the abuses of power.

Early research on the impact of media was developed during World War I ranked by many as one of the deadliest conflicts in human history in which media was being used for widespread propaganda. Governments, including that of the United States, supported mass communication efforts to mobilize their citizens in support of the war and to demonize and discourage the enemy countries. Reflecting on these activities, Harold Lasswell published *Propaganda Techniques in the World War in 1972* (Folkerts & Lacy, 2004). He regarded Hitler as a mad genius who benefited from psychoses induced to the German people by economic depression and political conflict. When it came to using the media, Hitler was an evil artist. The conclusions of Lasswell and others that media propaganda had been successful in generating support for the war led to the concept of universal, powerful media effects, which became to be known as Magic Bullet Theory. Scholars argued that the media worked like a bullet in their powerful persuasive impact on the audience. However, communication scholars like Carl Hovland and Paul E. Lazarsfeld later found evidence in their studies that media have only limited effects on the audiences, defying the Magic Bullet Theory. But during the early 1970s researchers began to label media effects as 'moderate' rather than 'limited'. Moderate effects research found that media content had a greater impact on people than limited effects studies suggested. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw's Agenda Setting theory also contends that the media influences the importance of individuals' place on a public issue (Folkerts & Lacy, 2004).

Whether one agrees or disagrees, media in today's world is influencing every sphere of our life. In this context, Wolfsfeld (1997) explains how the news media has become the central arena for political conflicts today. The competition over the 'News Media' is a major element in modern political conflicts. The Pro-Choice and Pro-Life movements in America, the Serbians and the Muslims in Bosnia, Amnesty International, Russia, Chechnya, and the American government; all compete for media attention to achieve political influence. Each antagonist group attempts to promote its own frames of the conflict to the news media in an attempt to mobilize political support for its cause. The Gulf War stands out as one of the best examples of a war in which the history of the more powerful over the news media was as complete as its domination on the battlefield. It was considered the most media-covered war in recent times as Lieutenant Colonel Pat Proctor (war veteran in Iraq and Afghanistan) pointed out that the Iraq war did not happen so much in Baghdad as the world believes, instead it happened every day in television, in the newspaper, and on the internet. The BBC called it 'War on Iraq'; CNN 'War in Iraq'; ITN 'War on Saddam'; Fox News 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' and an Arab language transnational daily *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* referred to it as 'recolonization of Iraq' (Tumber & Palmer, 2004) and each of these terminologies connote different attributions about the Gulf war. The Allied forces enjoyed a multitude of advantages in the structural and cultural field that allowed them to control

a good deal of the media discourse about the war. Saddam Hussein was portrayed earlier by the news media as the aggressor and the international consensus around the law and order frame made it extremely difficult for Iraq to promote its particular version of the injustice and defiance frame.

## Media and Peace Activism

Chomsky (2003) in his analysis on the progress of peace activism and the role of media pointed out that the *New York Times* had never been critical of the war. He described how Anthony Lewis, *The New York Times*'s Bureau Chief in London was not even willing to speak to people including him in the American Peace Movement. When Noam was in Oxford in 1969 talking about war, it was all over British media, some of the anti-war groups tried to get Lewis Anthony to have a discussion with him, but Lewis refused to talk to anyone connected with the peace movement. But by late 1969, he began to write mildly critical stuff about the war. Then he went to North Vietnam and discovered that bombs actually hurt: 'you walk through Haiphong; you see a lot of building knocked down and people are torn apart'. At that point in time, Lewis started to write critically about the war.

The concept of media's role in promoting peace during conflict situation should not be viewed from a narrow lens as 'peace activism' only, but it should also be contextualized from a broader perspective and understanding of peace, which includes reporting the truth, hope and justice for the innocent victims such as women and children who are often the most vulnerable ones in conflict. Peace is also about equality of space and time in the media that is inclusive and participatory in its approach. In other words, the media must be free from being too power-centric and become more people-centric. As observed in the media reportage on armed struggle movements and peace initiative in the northeast, with insurgency groups such as the NSCN (IM), The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFD) and the Kuki armed groups and others, one can critically state that it lacked in-depth analysis of coverage on these issues for people to develop their opinion.

## Reporting Conflict from the Periphery: Dilemma and Discourses

Sengupta (2007) writes about the national media being biased towards issues of the Northeast region and focus only on the negative aspects of violence, conflicts, and insurgency. The news portrayed is all about ULFA, NSCN factions, ambushes, and bandhs. Most of the mainstream dailies and the news channels have just one reporter to cover the entire northeastern region, implying the shortage of media personnel to be placed in the field and cover the ground realities.

On conflict reporting and the absence of the reporter's voice in Nagaland, a survey was conducted among the noted dailies where it was observed that there was a dominance of conflict coverage. However, certain issues relating to this dominance is to be examined. Lack of journalistic skills and only capturing the powerful voices were issues of concern. Moreover, the reporters also did not want to take any risks for the story they had covered as they had no protection if there were any repercussions. Most of the news sources were paper releases with no corroboration from the field. Ultimately, it boils down to the suppression of the freedom of the press on reporting about the Naga conflict as reporters just go only by the facts given by the factions and do not investigate further (Chattarji, 2010).



Chakraborty et al (2015) have conducted a study in Assam to compare the coverage of the 2012 Bodo-Muslim violence in Kokrajhar by both the English and the vernacular dailies on the aspects of the standards of conflict sensitive journalism using framing analysis. A total number of 202 newspaper items from *The Assam Tribune* and 408 from *Asomiya Pratidin* were analyzed and 610 news items on the Bodo-Muslim conflict in the two newspapers were included as part of the content analysis. The study revealed that *Asomiya Pratidin* has extensive coverage almost twice that of *Assam Tribune* in the form of straight news. The front page of that newspaper was devoted to coverage of the conflict in the first month. Even in the editorials, *Asomiya Pratidin* had 24 articles and *The Assam Tribune* had only 13 pertaining to the conflict. When it came to conflict sensitive journalism, only a few articles addressed the issue of conflict resolution (Chakraborty, Borah & Hazarika, 2015). It was apparent that the vernacular press extensively covered the conflict with more number of articles and editorials compared to the English daily in the state and with regard to sensitivity both the newspapers did not pay much attention to it.

Exploring the Indian media's engagement with the northeast, Sen (2011) states that it is very selective and most of the reports are misinformed. Extreme bias and neglect by the mainstream media have made the region invisible to the world. The regional media is subject to a lot of pressure from armed groups and they do not have the power to influence policy at the Centre. Reporting on the northeast region has become insignificant compared to the seriousness of the conflict in the region. This leads to a vicious cycle where reporting is based on handouts and most of the violence goes unreported. He suggests conducting workshops to train reporters on improving the quality of reporting on conflicts of the region as an essential step. He also calls for journalists to create a platform that provides support to them and also addresses their grievances. Media to play the role of an accelerator and bring the issues relating to conflicts of the region to the attention of the world is also suggested as a remedial measure.

Baruah (1994) states that the majority of the mainstream Assamese press did not condemn the open style of operation of ULFA or its violent methods. In fact, some of them published statements made by their leaders and carried articles in their editorials. Incidents of human rights abuses by the armed personnel and members of ULFA have been rampant in the state of Assam as published in a report by Asia Watch. The police harassed one of their investigators and she was followed all through while she went about interviewing families of victims of abuse. Many of the victims are civilians and villagers who were threatened, harassed, raped and killed by soldiers. The report further stated that in Assam, dissent was curtailed and human rights activists and journalists were arrested for reporting on abuses.

A study in Nagaland to explore the theoretical perspectives of how conflict is provoked and the role of media in the peace process found that the media focused more on the fatalities and violence rather than on the peace process. Even when it came to reporting on peace, it restricted to only the negotiations or talks between the insurgent groups and the government and did not emphasize on the efforts taken by the public through their peace rallies and cultural events to bring about peace in the state (Roy & Das, 2015).

A study of three leading newspapers in Assam relating to the ethnic conflict in Kokrajhar revealed that media sensationalized the violence and downplayed the efforts of reconciliation. Public opined that the media did not emphasize their suffering by reporting such incidents. There were contradictions in their statements that depict the irresponsible nature of media, which also played a biased role and showed allegiance to certain communities. The positive aspects of dialogues or initiatives taken by the community and

the government were not reported. The failure of the media as an agent of conflict transformation and peace building was highlighted through this study (Joseph, 2016).

## Media, Gender and Conflict

During any conflict situation, human beings experience a violation of their rights differently. Among the populace, the plight of women and girls is more severe than that of their male counterparts due to gender-specific violence and inequalities addressed towards them. Women are the worst sufferers of any conflict. During the conflict situation, they are positioned in a cycle of violence, which is the most critical element of disadvantage to them. Irrespective of caste, class, creed, and age, women face various forms of violence. The common forms of violence against women in times of conflict situation include rape, sexual humiliation, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy and trafficking and other physical assaults which result in deep physical and emotional or psychological trauma.

The atrocities rendered against women can be termed as Gender Based Violence (GBV). According to the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is an overarching term to include any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will on the basis of gender that is ascribed between male and female. These acts violate many of the universal human rights instruments and conventions. GBV is also used interchangeably with the term 'violence against women' (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012).

The concept 'gender normative violence' was proposed by Margaret Urban Walker to refer to the continuous coercion, violence, and silencing of women and girls. It denotes the different ways by which men try to dominate women and control their lives, most importantly their reproductive, sexual activity, and their way of dressing and also curtail their freedom to express themselves. When women go through such subjugation, conflict situations further exasperate their vulnerability to all kinds of harm and violence. Further, they don't have access to the resources and basic services for their living, and they are also not provided adequate protective mechanisms, which have a negative influence in the survival and recovery of women and girls during armed conflicts (Mazurana & Proctor, 2013).

## Women as Peace Activists

In conflict situations, women take on roles as combatants, community leaders, social organizers, welfare workers, and others, but they are not considered important players in peacekeeping. It is to be noted that they have remarkable strength and courage and resilience in conflict situations which are hardly captured and highlighted by the media (Turley, 2001). Hence, a situation rarely arises for these women to be involved in the decision making process and peace building. It calls for a lot of discretion by the media to ascertain this balance of women as victims as well as agents of peace (UNIFEM, 2002).

The significant and crucial role of women as peace activists is noteworthy to be highlighted. As they have a deep understanding of the conflict and its impact, they are efficient in devising ways of rebuilding the community. Women are able to address issues that are generally ignored and neglected by the key players in peace building discourses, such as schooling, health care, livelihoods and they bring to the fore the voices of the voiceless, the vulnerable and marginalized sections of society, like the elderly, the children, the mentally ill and the victims of all forms of violence (Mazurana & Proctor, 2013).

It is imperative that women who are affected during armed conflicts play a role in peace building. This calls for a complete change in the perception of women as mere

passive victims and undermines their potential and contribution towards ensuring peace. It is unfortunate if they are not included in many of the official peace processes despite of the fact that they are completely aware of their community, their needs, and are efficient in initiating peace (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2002).

While men, women, boys, and girls experience similar phenomena during and after the conflict, their experiences and levels of vulnerability are influenced by their gender. The manner by which society views men and women is rooted in its perception of gender. The cultural factors also play a role in the differences between males and females along with one's sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, social class and so on (Zahidi, 2014). Women in conflict situations are portrayed as passive victims and their stories are sensationalized. However, their courage and resilience are hardly captured. They play varied roles during conflicts and even after the violence has ended, participate in conflict resolution processes that are not portrayed by the media (Lloyd & Howard, 2005).

Women have a psychological map of the war enabling them to see the world in its entirety, the past, the present and the future at one stretch. This generally does not emerge clearly in interviews held with them. A journalist needs to listen and meet them regularly along with other women in the community to come up with a story that has similar themes (Hardjono, 2001). Post-conflict situation has different meanings when it comes to women as evidence suggests that all forms of violence intensify during this time. A lot of factors play a role in determining women's experience in a conflict and post-conflict situation, whether they are civilians or combatants, being displaced, their race, socio-economic condition, age, family situation, and their location. According to the Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria in 2013, incidents of sexual violence are underreported or delayed and the threat of rape is used to instill terror and punish women. Such incidents occur during raids, or in detention centers (Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2016).

It was unfair in Bosnia when women were portrayed as victims to draw the attention of international interventions during the war but they were not included or considered significant entities in the peace negotiations. None of their interests or needs was taken into consideration in the Dayton Framework (Haynes, 2010).

## Gender Sensitivity and Journalism

The relationship between journalism, gender and conflict is a complex interplay of professional standards and moral issues. According to Angana Parekh, 'conflict is not restricted to only wars between countries, but it also depicts clashes that take place due to ethnic, caste, communal strife, gender violence, and poverty' (Lloyd & Howard, 2005). Women journalists are forced to see themselves as journalists first and then as women due to the cultural socialization and the high level of competition in the media profession. This has an impact where they cannot automatically become sensitive or respond to gender issues. It calls for gender sensitivity among both male and female journalists alike so it could impact the content of the article written and strongly reflects the focus, the perspective and the intent for which it is written.

Media insensitivity towards gender can result in stereotyping of women by ignoring or relegating issues of women in conflict reporting. According to Turley (2001), 'the perspectives on women are hardly touched upon during conflict situations and they are portrayed as passive victims by their stories being sensationalized'. This is referred to as the mainstream media being 'gender blind'. Instead of projecting and promoting the positive images about women, media ends up with stereotypes of women as victims, defenseless objects as seen in beauty pageants and also in advertising.

Women are also excluded from decision making processes and negotiations leading to peace in spite of their contribution in varied ways towards conflict reconciliation. In this regard, media can play a role in building the bridges by enabling people to understand the crucial role of women in peace building efforts.

It is time to question the portrayal of women as passive victims and accept the gender ideologies where male and female are considered different. Media must make an attempt to portray the role of women in peace building and highlight their resilience; it should not shy away from reporting the fact that most women are really victims of all kinds of violence and discrimination that prevents them from having control of their own lives.

It is also a well known fact that gender-sensitive journalism depends on gender-sensitive journalists. But the real issue is that journalists many times do not have control of what comes out as news, owing to the newsroom hegemony that prevails. Who takes the call in what is published as news is a vital aspect to ponder over because this shapes the perception of news.

Research has shown that less than ten percent of the political or government news coverage includes women and their experiences in spite of journalism schools producing more women graduates than men. The attitude at the top is what matters as expressed by a Bangladeshi journalist, Farida Yasmin. Majority of the media companies across the world are managed by men. Though women have managed to progress, it is mostly what men decide upon those features as news. It can also be observed that only a small fraction of women in the media profession advance to high levels (UNIFEM, 2002). Another important issue is the silencing of women's voices by the male-controlled media where the gathering and distribution of information are predominantly from a male perspective. The women's perspective is missed out on many occasions where only men are telecast reporting and analyzing conflict situation.

Women continue to be marginalized in the media, a profession that prides itself in gender equality. Their contribution has gone unrecognized for long which is due to the prevailing dominant political and industrial culture. Due to the lack of representation of women in key positions in the media profession, it reflects the less emphasis given to women issues and less scope for women's voices to be heard. Not only that, women journalists are not considered to work in conflict situations citing their physical strength and fragility to bear the rigor of war and report from the field. Such disparities prevail between male and female journalists in fulfilling their professional role. For instance, women reporters are very few in Myanmar and issues relating to women do not get highlighted in the country thereby the reality goes unreported as women are not treated equally on par with men (International Media Support, 2014).

## Findings

The Table 1 reflects that there were a total of 183 issues of publication of the selected newspapers where the target events were given coverage. Out of them, the total number of news items published was 631. There were 113 editorials and opinion pieces and 41 letters published in connection to the target events. The numbers of standalone photographs published in the selected newspapers were 58. This makes the total number of items published in connection to the target events 843. Comparatively, the target events from Manipur were given much more coverage than the other two states such as Assam and Nagaland. Such a variation could be because of the intensity of the conflict events, which were selected from the three states of Northeast India.

Table 1. Number of issues and items published in various newspapers in connection to the target events for the study

Media, Gender and Peace Initiatives in Northeast India							
States	Nagaland		Manipur		Assam		Total
Newspaper	Nagaland Post	Morung Express	Poknapham	Sangai Express	The Assam Tribune	Ahomia Pratidin	
Issues	38	28	39	39	22	17	183
News Items	54	34	139	136	110	158	631
Editorials and opinions	8	5	8	60	13	19	113
Letters	5	0	6	6	19	5	41
Photographs (Stand alone)	0	0	11	12	18	17	58
Total Items	67	39	164	214	160	199	843
	106 Nagaland		378 Manipur		359 Assam		

Table 2 shows that there were a total number of 183 issues of newspapers where the selected events have been published. In total there were 843 items published in the selected newspapers from three selected states from Northeast India. Out of the total items, 631 (75%) were published as news items with an average of 3.45 per issue or publication of the newspaper. Editorials and opinion pieces constituted 13% (113) of all the items published in connection to the selected events from the three selected states of Northeast India with an average of 0.62 per issue of the newspaper. 5% of the total items were letters with the number 41 and average 0.22 per issue of the newspaper whereas 7% (58) were standalone photographs with an average of 0.32 per publication.

Table 2. Category-wise distribution of items published in the selected newspapers from Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland.

Media, Gender and Peace Initiatives in Northeast India			
Total		Average items per issue	Percentage to total number of Items
Issues	<b>183</b>		
Items	843	4.606557377	100%
News	631	3.448087432	75%
Edits and opinion	113	0.617486339	13%
Letters	41	0.224043716	5%
Photographs (stand alone)	58	0.316939891	7%

Table 3. Categorical and thematic distribution of items published in the selected newspapers from three selected states of Northeast India

Categories	Media, Gender and Peace Initiatives in Northeast India						
	Violence	Conflict	Peace	Gender in Conflict	Gender in Peace	Total	Percentage
News	48	247	250	49	37	631	74%
Edits & Opinions	2	16	85	6	4	113	13%
Letters	9	8	16	2	6	41	6%
Photographs (standalone)	14	5	19	3	17	58	7%
Total	73	276	370	60	64	843	100%
Percentage	9%	33%	44%	7%	8%	100%	

Table 3 shows that there were a total number of 843 items published in the selected newspapers from the Northeast. Out of the total number of items, 74% were news items followed by editorials and opinion pieces that constituted 13% of the total items. The number of letters published in the selected newspapers was 41(6%) in connection to the selected target events from Northeast. 7% of the total items were standalone photographs. Thematically, 44% (370) of all the items were focused on the aspect of peace followed by conflict as another aspect that constituted 33% (276) of the items. 9% (73) of all the items were focused on violence. On the gender front, 60 (7%) items were focused on the aspect 'gender in conflict' whereas 64 (8%) were focused on 'gender in peace'.

Table 4. Category wise and thematic distribution of print space of the items published in the selected newspapers from Northeast in relation to the target events

Categorical distribution of print space (cm <sup>2</sup> )	Media, Gender and Peace Initiatives in Northeast India						
	Violence	Conflict	Peace in conflict	Gender in peace	Gender	Total	Percent
News	10741.39	49766.14	45035.05	6646.44	5389.6	117578.62	83%
Edits & Opinions	1149.44	2074.89	5489.61	1453.38	1077.4	11244.72	8%
Letters	621.7	419.6	3756.14	37.2	152	4986.64	4%
Photographs (stand Alone)	1871.02	725.25	2878.64	304.7	2294.26	8073.87	6%
Total	14383.55	52985.88	57159.44	8441.72	8913.26	141883.85	100%
Percentage	10%	37%	40%	6%	6%	100%	

The total print space devoted to the selected target events from the three states were 141883.85 cm<sup>2</sup>. Table No 4 further shows that news items occupied 83% (117578.62 cm<sup>2</sup>) of print space of all the items published in the selected newspapers from Northeast in connection to the target events. This was followed by editorials and opinion pieces that constituted 8% (11244.72 cm<sup>2</sup>) of the print space. Letter occupied 4% (4986.64 cm<sup>2</sup>) of the print space of the total items whereas standalone photographs constituted 6% (8073.87 cm<sup>2</sup>) of the print space. Thematically, peace was the focus amongst 40% (57159.44 cm<sup>2</sup>) of the print space of all the items published from three states. This was followed by the theme conflict that constituted 37% (52985.88 cm<sup>2</sup>) of the print space. Violence as another theme was the focus amongst 10% (14383.55 cm<sup>2</sup>) of the print space. On the gender front, 'gender in conflict' was the focus amongst 6% (8441.72 cm<sup>2</sup>) of the print space whereas 'gender in peace' was the focus amongst 6% (8913.26 cm<sup>2</sup>) of the print space of the items published in the selected newspapers from the three states of Northeast with reference to the selected target events.

## Journalists' Take: Media, Gender and Peace Initiatives in Northeast India

### Nature of Conflict Reporting

Out of all the journalists surveyed in Northeast India, 60% of them do write about conflict in their respective newspapers. Only 40% do not write on conflict and peace situation in the Northeast. Journalists who write about conflict in their newspapers have shared various conflict-related stories that they have written in their newspapers. They range from the conflict between militant groups and security forces to conflicts occurring between communities residing in Northeast India. The nature of conflict-related stories is more or less similar across different states of Northeast India.

In Manipur, the journalists who write about conflict, many have reported about the *Kakching* district headquarters conflict between the locals and outsiders. Most often they write about the conflict between communities formed on the basis of their region and ethnicities. Similarly in Assam, an observation of the journalists who write on conflicts that they write on issues ranging from ethnic conflicts to communal violence. Incidents such as the clash between security forces and insurgent groups most often get space as one of the items on conflict reporting. Apart from that, stories related to cross border migration and the resultant conflicts also occupy space in media. As per Dilip Kumar Sharma, he writes on conflict situations in Assam regularly mentioning the incidents of *Bodoland* violence and the violent incidents in *Karbi Anglong*. Sometimes journalists who report on conflict situation also write human-interest stories. Arup Saikia cites his story on a Hindu temple being maintained by Muslims in a village in the Lakhipur Block of Goalpara district. This story was published when the Bodo-Muslim conflict in the neighboring Kokrajhar district was at its peak. The conflict between insurgent groups and their encounter with security forces is another item that features regularly in conflict reporting from Northeast India. Enaxi Saikia Barua says that she has been reporting such conflicts since the 1990s. Susmita Goswami recalls that the last news in connection to the conflict that she has done was on December 25, 2017, regarding the release of an abducted youth by a militant outfit in eastern Assam. Subir Bhoumik recalled a story that he wrote on the issue of Rakhine conflict in Myanmar.

Similarly, Pankaj Borthakur remembers a story that he wrote on Naga ultras on August 17, 2017. Journalists in Nagaland who write about conflicts mostly cover Indo-Naga issues along with clashes between Naga political groups and security forces even though small and petty conflicts between various parties do get space in the conflict reporting by media in Nagaland. Therefore, it is clearly evident that in Assam and also in the entire Northeast region, conflict stories related to insurgent groups and their encounters with security forces feature regularly in the media.

### Conflict and its Coverage

*Coverage:* 33% of the newspaper journalists from Northeast as surveyed have said that they give *extensive* coverage to conflict and peace situations in Northeast whereas 63% of the newspaper journalists have said that the coverage given to conflict and peace situations in Northeast is only *moderate*. Only 4% of the newspaper journalists give *minimum* coverage to conflict and peace situations from Northeast India.

*Role of the Newspapers:* Out of the journalists surveyed for this study, 4% think that newspapers in Northeast are not playing an important role in reporting conflict and peace situation. 53% of the journalists in Northeast believe that the newspapers are actually playing an important role in reporting conflict and peace situation in the Northeast. 33% of the journalists believe that newspapers are playing to some extent an important role in reporting conflict and peace situation in the Northeast. Only 10% of the journalists believe that newspapers are playing a very important role in reporting conflict and peace situation in the Northeast. 57% of the journalists have opined that the newspapers play a constructive role in reporting conflict and peace situation in Northeast India whereas only 40% believe that the newspapers play limited roles in such situations in Northeast. Only 3% opine that newspapers play a destructive role in reporting the conflict situation in Northeast India.

*Pressures:* 53% of the journalists accepted that they do face some sort of pressures while reporting conflict situation in northeast whereas only 47 say that they do not face any pressure while reporting conflict situation in Northeast. 43% of the journalists say that the pressure is political whereas according to 33%, the pressure also comes from militants. According to 7% of the journalists, the pressure comes from management. 23% of the journalists say that the pressure come from community whereas 20% say the pressure comes from security forces. 3% say that the pressure comes from religious heads while reporting conflict situations. Similarly, 3% also say that the pressure is from women's groups. 7% say that the pressure in reporting conflict situation comes from policy issues.

*Effectiveness of Media in Conflict Resolution:* 87% of the journalists think that media can actually help resolve the conflict by promoting peace initiatives whereas only 3% believe that media cannot resolve conflicts by promoting peace initiatives. Only 10% of the journalists do not have an opinion on this. Journalists from Northeast have specified various ways to resolve conflict and promote peace among the conflicting parties. The journalists who consider that media can actually help resolve the conflict by promoting peace initiatives opine that it can do so by unbiased reporting of the conflict and peace events along with disseminating information and educating the readers. Media can also resolve conflicts by presenting the viewpoints of all the stakeholders. Media can resolve conflicts by balanced reporting of news events and creating space for positive public opinion building. A few of the journalists think that along with educating the mass the media can actually resolve conflicts by advocating truth. If not directly media can indirectly address the conflict by creating platforms for discussions, debates and deliberations on such issues thus creating a condition for the resolution of conflicts.

Media, as some journalists claim, can also resolve conflicts by showing both sides of the story or by being unbiased. Apart from that, the media can actually create a commonality that describes and reinstates the earlier bonds between conflicting groups. Kshetrimayum Annushree Devi avers that media can actually resolve conflict and promote peace by focusing more on news or activities, programmes, and events, which promote unification than division. If required, the media can also collaborate with organizations and associations that are willing to promote the idea of unity in diversity. They can reflect such values in their journalistic practices while reporting on various communities of the state. Further, Yambem Hakkar Singh thinks that media can resolve conflicts by acting as an unbiased moderator between the parties involved in conflict situations. Further, the journalists from Assam have more or less a similar take on the issue of the role of media in conflict resolution. Journalists who believe that media can help resolve conflicts by promoting peace initiatives have pointed out various ways. Dilip Kumar Sharma says that conflicts occur due to various reasons and mostly because of differences between



communities and tribes. In these situations, media plays its role in preventing and reducing such conflicts in various ways. One such role is liaising and coordinating between groups involved in conflict and violence. Arup Saikia feels that media can actually help resolve the conflict by writing more number of stories that focus on peace and highlighting interfaith and inter-community relations. Similarly, Enaxi Saikia Barua agrees “media can help to resolve conflict and restoring peace by highlighting the peace initiatives undertaken by the administration so that people are not influenced by the negative mindset attempted to be created by militant groups.

Media can play a constructive role by pointing out the ill effects of extremism and the dangers involved there. Also, the press release from militant outfits [which are] against the country’s interest should not be published as it unnecessarily gives publicity to the groups and keeps them alive in the public domain. Media can also bring to light the psychological trauma faced by the women and children of both militants’ families and their victims’ families, besides views of civil rights organizations”. Sushmita Goswami thinks that media can help in resolving conflict and restoring peace as she asserts “Media can bring to the fore the devastation and sufferings left behind by conflicts and violence and expose the hollowness of such situations. The need for peace and how it can bring lasting prosperity and stability must be highlighted by media to encourage more people to get involved in such initiatives”. Amarjyoti Borah believes that media cannot really help resolve the conflict by promoting peace initiatives. With a skeptical note, Borah opines, “Most media houses are becoming market-oriented and mainly seek to maximize profits with minimum expenditure. Leading peace initiatives may be seen by many owners to be an unnecessary waste of time and resources of the organization”. At the same time, Subir Bhoumik is quite positive that media can actually resolve the conflict. He elaborates, “Media can always create dialogue channels between antagonists with their links on all sides and help kickstart the dialogue through which antagonists can break the ice. As a journalist I have done that in my home state Tripura helping the state government and the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) start secret negotiations in 1987 that led to the 1988 accord. I have also helped Bangladesh Government and PCJSS-Shanti Bahini start a dialogue that led to CHT accord.” According to Pankaj Borthakur “News based on proper investigation and unbiased attitude must be placed as a top priority to make public understand the actual causes of the conflicts and bitter consequences of it. It can be done so by respective media houses for the greater interest of the communities. Through analytical reporting and conversation on the historical background of the facts and the future consequences of the conflicts, the hostile groups [which are] involved in conflicts can be brought to a mutual understanding and this can ultimately help resolve their conflicts.

Through unbiased reporting and futuristic approach newspapers can play a vital role in maintaining peace and harmony among such groups since the aftermath of the conflicts”. Nitali Sharma Dutta says that media can resolve conflict and observes that “By focusing on peace and development, media can ensure that the public is not swayed by the negative impact of violent activities that occur from time to time”. Moa Longkumar affirms that media can help resolve conflicts and promote peace “by highlighting the futility of violence and stressing on dialogue”. Similarly, Temshi believes that media can resolve conflict and restore peace “by writing reports with constructive criticism”. Similarly, the journalists in Nagaland have also specified various ways to resolve conflict and restore peace with the help of media. According to P. Tiamongba Aier, media can help resolve conflict “by playing the role as a constructive mediator and reporting conflict situations/news without any bias”. Apart from these, a few other journalists have asserted that media can help resolve the conflict by disseminating authentic information and also building public opinion to act positively in normalizing conflicts and restoring peace in the region.

*Gender, Media and Conflict:* Three per cent (3%) of the journalists have stated that gender as an aspect in media reporting during conflict situation in Northeast is totally neglected. 7% of the journalists confirm that gender representation is discriminatory in the media reporting of the conflict in the Northeast. 50% of the journalists say that the gender representation is balanced during conflict situation in the Northeast. 40% of the journalists have stated that gender representation in media reporting during a conflict situation in Northeast is very limited. 53% of the journalists surveyed have adduced that media do acknowledge the role of women in peace initiatives whereas only 3% of the journalists from Northeast have stated that media do not acknowledge the role of women in peace initiatives. 44% of the journalists think that media to some extent acknowledge the role of women in peace initiatives.

*Media and Civil Society in Peace and Conflict Situations:* Thirty-seven percent (37%) of the journalists believe that media to some extent is giving space to the civil rights organizations of different communities to offer their opinion during conflict situations. 63 % of the journalists in Northeast think that the news media is giving enough space for the civil rights organizations of different communities to offer their opinion during a conflict situation.

*Media, Conflict Resolution and Restoration of Peace:* In order to resolve conflicts and restore peace in the region the journalists whose opinions were sought have suggested various measures. Out of them, 83% have agreed to the fact that media can actually resolve conflict and restore peace by creating strong public opinion for peace through journalistic crusades and gender-sensitive reporting. 57% have agreed that media can resolve the conflict by involving women's groups in peace initiatives. Similarly, 57% of the journalists from Northeast have also agreed to the fact that media can resolve conflicts by highlighting the futility of violence and the need for peace. 67% of the journalists surveyed have agreed that media can resolve conflicts through proper interpretation of the conflict events.

## Conclusion

Northeast region of India has constantly been in the news and politics related to conflicts and peace processes since very long. Most often, the conflicting events emerge out of clashes between security forces and the insurgent groups that are operating in this region. Apart from that, interstate conflicts and conflicts between the ethnic and religious communities break out often in Northeast. Even though, media in this part of the country may not have any direct role in influencing policy frameworks for resolution of conflicts and restoration of peace, it is certainly playing a very important role in reporting conflicts and peace processes by providing a platform for various stakeholders to raise their grievances and concerns.

In context of the present study, it is found that newspapers are playing a significant role in providing space for mediating conflicts between various stakeholders, such as insurgent groups, government, civil society organizations, and women's groups. In most of cases, events connected to conflict and peace situations are published in the newspapers as news items. As observed from the findings, it is quite evident that the news items give equal emphasis to conflict and peace angles of the events even though they do exaggerate violence occasionally. Gender representation as one of the aspects in addressing conflict and peace situation has been very minimal unless the conflict event is directly connected to the issues of women. It has also been found out from the study, that very often there is just a mere mention of gender as one of the aspects in conflict situation. Only on rare

occasions, there is detailed coverage of gender-related issues during conflict and peace situation. Though media persons working in various newspapers from Northeast believe that the women folk play a very crucial role in the peace initiatives and the newspapers from Northeast do prioritize the issue of women in conflict and peace situations in Northeast, that does not get reflected much in the contents of the newspapers as has been found out with reference to the select conflict events in the study. The editorials and opinion pieces published in the newspapers from Northeast with regards to the selected events are quite sensitive towards conflict, as in majority of the cases the orientation of such editorials and opinion pieces is more towards peace rather than conflict or violence. But unfortunately, only a few editorials and opinion pieces focus on gender as an aspect in their coverage.

There were 41 letters written by readers and published in various newspapers in connection to the selected events. This is a clear indication that the newspapers in the region have been quite effective in addressing conflict situations with an impact on the readers. Thematically, the majority of the items are addressing the issue of peace in their reporting. The portrayal of violence in the coverage by newspapers in connection to the selected events is very minimal, though it is significant. Efforts are therefore necessary on the part of the media of Northeast to even bring down the element of violence further in its coverage so that it can play a more sensible and responsible role in conflict situations. Similarly, the gender dimension in the coverage of conflict and peace initiatives can be given more emphasis.

In most of the cases, media have taken a balanced approach in reporting conflicts. Media has been objective in its reporting and coverage of conflict situations except in a few cases, where it was found to be biased. However, media has been quite "proactive" in most of the situations on its part to help address the issue of conflict for resolving them and restoring peace in the region. Its only occasionally, that the media has been "reactive" in its reporting of conflict situations. It has relatively overplayed violence in its coverage of the selected events. Therefore, there is a need on the part of newspapers in the Northeast not to unnecessarily exaggerate violence in such situations. Overall, gender representation was absent in almost 80% of the cases in its reporting of the conflict. As such, there is a need for media to be more sensitive and accommodative towards the concerns and issues pertaining to woman during the conflict situation. The study has further revealed that media did provide space to civil society and its initiatives during conflict situations. In most of the time media reflect the government's position during conflict situation, which helps in reducing confusion among the various parties involved in the conflict about the government's stand. This also helps the civil society organizations to act in a direction so that they can actually pressurize the government and participate in dialogue and mediate in between the affected parties.

Overall, media's role has been found to be effective and responsible in conflict situations even though on the gender front media of northeast still needs to adopt a more sensitive and inclusive approach. More and more women journalists should be involved in conflict coverage by newspapers. On one side, gender focus reporting should be encouraged, and on the other, the voice of the affected women should be presented and represented by media. Media literacy and peace journalism should be encouraged to sensitize not only the media persons but also media consumers as well. Apart from that, media should embark upon peace campaigns and advocate dialogue based solutions partnering affected women in conflict and peace initiatives. Now is the time for a peace mission to ensure holistic development of the much-neglected region of the country.

**Funding:** This research was funded by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi.

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