



**GENDER AND CONFLICT  
TRANSFORMATION**  
NAGALAND AND EGYPT

Triveni Goswami

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AND  
CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION:  
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## INTRODUCTION

Gender issues cut across all sections of society, regardless of their political, economic and social contexts. The socially constructed view of gender is deeply imbued in popular imagination, which is intricately linked to age-old traditions. Because of less development, Third World societies suffer from the problem much more than the developed world. The roots of women's subordination are embedded, internalized and institutionalized within a societal framework. Against the background of unfinished nation building processes coupled with growing ethno-religious assertions, women in the third world societies are often used as cultural symbols to the detriment of gender equality. Whenever any form of upheaval occurs within a patriarchal framework, it has a spill over effect and more often than not, women become the first targets of victimization. In an effort to protect the society, the symbols of womanhood and their space are besieged. Restrictions are clamped on them even as their bodies are used as tools of suppression. Perpetuation of male dominance thus becomes endemic. In situations of societal conflicts, this dichotomy becomes more glaring.

Control is an integral part of patriarchy that promotes as well as sustains military values. It is thus masculinity that maintains militarism. The construction of gender stereotypes that reflects the expectations of the society as to how a man and woman should behave helps in re-enforcing this patriarchal control. Whatever be the nature of conflict, it is evident that women are the most marginalized and disempowered section of the society, and are hence, the worst sufferers. This is more evident in oriental societies, which are more deeply rooted in patriarchy.

I would like to make a comparative analysis between the situations of North East India and Egypt, where two very different kinds of conflicts exist. Caught between the protracted battles of the State and the Insurgents in the former and the State and the Conservatives in the latter, the woman emerges as an easy victim. The North Eastern region of India with its mosaic of entangled ethnic discontents has been home to several ethno-political upheavals for the past five decades. The conflicts in this region have mostly been Low Intensity Silent Conflicts eating into the societal framework, systematically forcing upon the freedom and space of all individuals. The intrusion into gendered spaces are felt more intimately by the women whose body becomes an easy pawn in the protracted battle between the competing forces.

The North Eastern region of India provides us with many examples of spontaneous women's initiatives to reduce the impact of conflict and to structure peace and development in the region. The peace initiatives of the Naga Mothers Association (NMA), for example, represent the notion of motherhood for the political mobilization of women. In Manipur, the *Meira Paibies* (Torch Bearers) have been immensely successful in spearheading large-scale protest movements. Initially set up to combat social evils like narcotics and alcohol, they were soon in the forefront of struggles against human rights violations by the security forces. These and similar examples, reveal that women in Northeast India have been playing a prominent role in peace building efforts.

## I

### **NAGALAND: A BRIEF HISTORY**

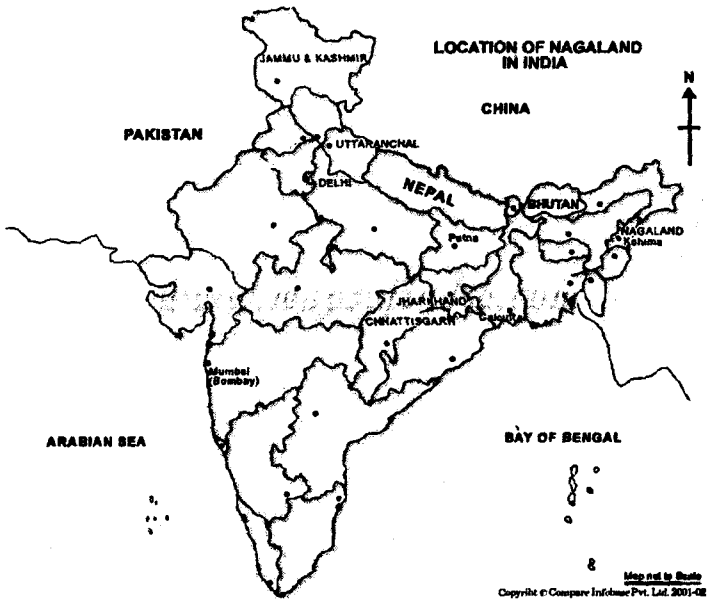
Nagaland is a narrow strip of mountainous territory in India, bounded by Assam in the west, Arunachal Pradesh in the north and Manipur in the south. It also shares its boundary with Myanmar in the east. It lies between latitudes 26 degree 6 minute and 27 degree 4 minute north of the equator and

between longitudes 93 degree 20 minutes and 95 degree 15 minutes east. The capital of Nagaland is Kohima. The state of Nagaland comprises of 11 districts namely, Kohima, Dimapur, Longleng, Zunheboto, Mon, Phek, Wokha, Mokokchung, Tuensang, Peren and Kiphire. There are at least 36 tribes and sub-tribes in Nagaland, each having its own language belonging to the Tibeto-Burmese group of languages.

In 1879, the British came and conquered parts of Naga territory and called the area Naga Hills. When the Simon Commission visited Kohima in 1929, the Nagas pressed a demand for independence. Thereafter, according to the Indian Constitution Act of 1935, the Naga Hills was allowed to remain an "Excluded Area". On the 20 February 1947, the Nagas demanded an Interim Government for a period of 10 years, to be effective prior to the departure of the British. A day before the Indian Union gained independence from the British colonial rule, on 14 August 1947, the Naga Nationalist Council (NNC) under the leadership of A.Z.Phizo, declared Independence and cabled this information to the U.N.O. On December 30, 1949, NNC made an announcement for a Sovereign State of Nagaland. On May 16, 1951, the NNC arranged for a voluntary plebiscite to determine the unity of the Nagas. The results revealed that 99% were in favour of a sovereign state. On November 15, 1954, the Indian Armed Forces resorted to mass massacre in the "free Naga" territory. The Naga Constitution was approved on January 14, 1956 and the Naga Federal Government was inaugurated on March 22 of the same year (Lasuh & Nuh, 2, p.147 ).<sup>1</sup>

The NNC, by successfully mobilizing the people of Nagaland, enforced a complete boycott of the 1952 General Elections in India. In 1956, the NNC under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo proclaimed the establishment of a government with its own constitution and a Naga Army. In the War of Liberation between the Indian Army and the insurgents that followed subsequently, large numbers of Naga soldiers perished. In

**Map-1**  
**Location of Nagaland in India**



December 1963, Nagaland was conferred status of statehood within the Indian Union. Caught in the clashes between the Indian Government and the NNC, the common people suffered. This had serious fallouts, polarizing not only the Naga people but the NNC as well, into moderate and extremist factions. The moderate elements favoured a negotiated settlement. Taking this as an opportunity, in an effort to usher in lasting peace, the Naga Baptist Church took steps to facilitate the formation of a Peace Mission in 1964. The Peace Mission comprised of Jai Prakash Narayan, B.P. Chaliha, the then Chief Minister of Assam, and Reverend Michael Scott. The Mission's recommendations were rejected by NNC and thereafter the Mission was called off.

In 1972, the Government of India outlawed the NNC, Naga Federal Government (NFG) and the Naga Army. The Shillong

Accord between the Government of India and representatives of the underground organizations was signed in 1975, which resulted in the laying down of arms by a section of NNC. The Accord was repudiated by both A.Z. Phizo and Muivah. Soon, Muivah parted ways with the NNC and formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). In 1988, there was a further split of the NSCN into the Isak- Muivah and Khaplang factions. The Konyak tribes formed the NSCN-K (Khaplang) under the leadership of Khole Konyak and S.S. Khaplang. Isak Swu and T. Muivah led the Tangkhul faction, the NSCN-IM. The rivalry between the two factions continues till date, creating fissures in the peace process in the region.

On February 23, 1996, Prime Minister of India, Narasimha Rao, offered to hold unconditional talks with the Naga insurgent groups. In June 1996, the United Front formed a Federal Government and Deve Gowda became Prime Minister of India. On November 5, 1996, NSCN (I-M) welcomed Prime Minister Deve Gowda's offer to open peace talks. Following a dispute within the coalition government, Inder Kumar Gujral succeeded Deve Gowda as the Prime Minister and on May 19, 1997, the United Front Government at the centre negotiated a ceasefire with the NSCN-IM camp, which later was also extended to the NSCN-K faction. The five-year-old process of negotiations with the NSCN-IM reached a high point in January 2003 when the leadership of the outfit collectively came to New Delhi for a round of talks. The ceasefire agreement with the Government of India has been renewed for the last couple of years. The latest development in the recent round of negotiations has been Muivah's agreement to scale down the demand for a sovereign Nagaland to a demand for *Nagalim*, an integration of the various Naga inhabited areas of India's North Eastern region.

Naga women for long have been associated with the peacemaking process. The grassroots initiatives for peace began with the ancient traditional institution of the *Pukhreila*

(Khashim, 1993, pp.193-194).<sup>2</sup>. Ever since then, women in Nagaland have actively participated in the efforts for peace both as individuals and as a collective force.

## II

### EGYPT: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The Arab Republic of Egypt is located between 22 degree and 32 degree latitudes, north of the equator and between 24 degree and 37 degree longitudes, east of the Greenwich Median. Egypt lies to the North-Eastern part of the continent of Africa and is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to its north; the Red Sea to its east; Palestine and Israel to its north-east; Libya to its west and Sudan to its south. A different form of conflict is seen in Egypt. Since Gamal Abdel Nasser became President, Egypt has witnessed a successive change of political heads with differing political affiliations, which have in turn shaped the dynamics between the State and the Islamic Conservatives. The reason I have used the term Conservatives instead of Fundamentalists is because the latter serves to homogenize and constrict our view of some Islamic thoughts and practices. The late 1980s and the 1990s witnessed resurgence in movements guided by the Islamic identity. Their efforts, incorporated among other activities, the use of the *Koran* as a tool for suppressing women and imposing restrictions on the cultural manifestations of womanhood, such as their dress and their mobility. The role of women in religious observances and education were also similarly restricted. In order to sustain the myth of masochism of man, the woman became the embodiment of suffering, whose very survival was dependent wholly on the support from the man.

Prior to undertaking this research project, my knowledge about Islamic Conservatives and the role of women's groups in Egypt were drawn from library research alone. There are several women's organizations such as Alliance for Arab Women, the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights (ECWR),

**Map-2**  
**Political Map of Egypt**



Egyptian Medical Women Association etc. that have been working for women's rights. These organizations have adopted several need-based approaches to ensure active participation of young women in decision-making and policy making processes. As an author has remarked, "*Women's movements in the Middle East are potential agents for democratization, yet they are highly constrained by the prevalent socio-political structures, lack of clear institutional targets and ambiguous state policies*" (Al-Ali, 2002).<sup>3</sup> In most countries in the Middle East, a shared understanding of Gender as a social category is intimately intertwined with the overwhelming reality of Islam.

The *Sharia* refers to the body of Islamic Law. The term means “way” or “path”; it is the legal framework within which public and some private aspects of life are regulated for those living in a legal system. It is based on Islamic principles of Jurisprudence. *Sharia* deals with many aspects of day-to-day life, including politics, economics, banking, business law, contract law, sexuality and social issues.

Two Muslim women considered leaders of the struggle for women’s rights in Egypt are Huda Shar’awi and Zainab Al-Ghazali. Huda Shar’awi, founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923 is considered the Mother of the Egyptian Feminist Movement. A member of the upper class, she campaigned for women’s voting rights, equal access to education and reform of Egyptian marriage laws. Zainab Al-Ghazali took a different view of Islam and the meaning of veil. She founded the Muslim Women’s Association in 1936 and believed that Islam and not western style feminism, gave Muslim women the rights and freedoms they sought ([http://mediaguidetoislam.sfsu.edu/03a\\_feminism.htm](http://mediaguidetoislam.sfsu.edu/03a_feminism.htm)).<sup>4</sup>

My experience of working in the North Eastern region of India has revealed that although women are actively involved at the grassroots level, they are kept away from decision-making processes. This raises the issue of their access to power and the extent to which they are politically empowered. Hence, it needs to be examined whether women are relegated to being mere props in any movement of change or whether their voices are actually heard. An attempt has been made here to explore the possibilities of parallels, if any, in the situations in the North Eastern region and Egypt.

### **Review of Literature**

The chapter *Theorizing Gender and Nation* in the book *Gender and Nation* by Nira Yuval-Davis speaks about how the notion of Manhood and Womanhood shapes the construction of our concept of the nation. The author states that although

women are often regarded as the cultural symbols of the nation, they are excluded from the theoretical considerations of Nationhood and also denied their space from the public political sphere. In this chapter, the author has dealt with the various theories of gender relations, focusing mainly on three questions namely: First, why and how women are oppressed; secondly, the ontological basis of differences between men and women and thirdly, the differences among women and among men and their effects upon generalized notions of gender relations. According to her, the notion of the 'nation' has to be analyzed and related to nationalist ideologies and movements on the one hand and the institutions of the state on the other. Quoting various theorists, the author has also extensively dealt with the origin of the concept of the nation and the state.

The paper *Women, Islam and the State: Subordination and Resistance* by Tazeen Mahnaz Murshid deals with the emergence of the religious right wing in the political scenario of Bangladesh, and the impact it has had on the policies of the State as well as the women within Bangladesh. She traces the political history of Bangladesh and tries to show how successive regimes have dealt with gender policies. The author states how the *Purdah* reduces the mobility of the women and restricts the scope for full participation in national life. She then speaks about how the history of the resistance to subordination in Bangladesh has focused largely on three main issues, first, the manipulation of religion to ensure male domination; secondly, advocacy of economic emancipation for women and thirdly, revision of family laws. The author states that when the legitimacy of the State was linked with the Islamists, the latter's powers increased and with the taste of political power, the religious right (Jamaat -I-Islami) emerged as a contending force in the socio-political scenario of Bangladesh. In her conclusion, she stated that the state is unable to play an effective role as a mediator between these forces and the women who are often victims, because it effectively becomes a party to the perpetration of injustices against them.

The book *Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt* by Azza M. Karam deals with the impact of politicized Islamic discourse on women in Egypt. The author has analyzed the dynamics between the State, women and Islamists using Foucault's analysis of power. Thus, according to the author, the reactions and counter-reactions between these three forces are natural forms of power dynamics. The author has defined Feminists as those *women who are actively involved in articulating discourses on and of women, on a broad socio-political level*. She has spoken about three types of Feminist thoughts in contemporary Egypt. They are: Secular feminism, Muslim feminism and Islamist feminism. Both Islamist and Muslim feminists take recourse to the Qur'an in their efforts to champion women's rights. As the author states, *both sets of feminists argue against existing patriarchal religious formations/hierarchies, and the implications of their interpretations on gender*. While the Islamist feminists are more conservative in their approach, the Muslim feminists are more moderate in their outlook. For example, with regards to the veil, while the Islamist feminists believe that the veil is a signifier of religious obligation and conviction, the Muslim feminists consider the veil to be a matter of choice exercised upon by a woman. The third set of feminists spoken about by the author is the Secular feminist. According to the author, Secular feminists consider *religion a private matter for each individual but completely reject it as a basis from which to formulate any agenda on women's emancipation*. In her book, the author also speaks about the emergence of various women's organizations to work for the upliftment of women and strive for women's rights: socially, politically and economically. The author speaks about how the Egyptian State is interventionist, by formulating policies and laws that seek to control the popular, everyday discourse on gender. The author then goes on to speak about the dynamic relations between the State, the Islamic Revivalists and the Feminists. According to the

author, the agenda of the prevalent political Islamist discourse is the Islamization of the people and the government. In achieving their stated purpose, they often find themselves at loggerheads with both the women's organizations as well as the state machinery. According to Foucault, resistance in itself is a form of power. Wherever there is power, there is a possibility of resistance. Islamists as well as the state are both regimes, although their sources of power are different. The women become sites of struggle and resistance in the interplay of power dynamics with the State as well as the Islamists. In conclusion, the author states that the need of the hour in Egypt is for a joint platform to fight for women's issues and their rights. A dialogue on common goals by the feminists is of utmost necessity for women in Egypt.

In the paper, *State versus Islam: Malay families, Women's Bodies, and the Body Politic in Malaysia* by Aihwa Ong, the author deals with the impact of Islamic Revivalism and State politics on Malay womanhood and kinship. She explains how the domestic unit of the family becomes an object of social policy through health, educational and welfare programs. In her paper, the author shows how the concepts of kinship, gender and reproduction have been transformed by State policies and Islamic Revivalism. With the emergence of the Islamic Revivalists, the control of female sexuality to reinforce and strengthen male authority, increased manifold. The state policy of family planning began to be looked upon as a threat to national survival. The masses felt that if contraception was widely adopted, Malays would lose their voting power vis-à-vis the other races. The change to a capitalist agenda ushered in various changes. According to the author, women began to seek work outside and a large number of women had the money and social freedom to experiment with a newly awakened sense of self. This induced a sense of fear in men of female competition. They felt that their experience and knowledge was being challenged. Tracing the history of Islamic resurgence

in Malaysia, the author states that successive Islamic groups have had a significant impact upon the social construction of gender relations and morality in the society. In her paper she focuses on the ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia or Islam Youth Movement of Malaysia), which rose to national prominence during the 1970s. In trying to define a new *umma*, the AIBM and *dakwa* groups sought to borrow ideas from foreign Islamic cultures rejecting the Malay-Muslim culture. According to the author, women in the Malay society became the most potent symbols of Islamic Revivalism. The mini-telekung (a cloth that tightly frames the face and covers the head, hair and chest) and the hijab made inroads into the Malay culture. Although, the women were being portrayed as someone with the moral capacity to construct and preserve the imagined Malay community, the female body emerged as a space of contesting struggles in the troubled socio-political landscape of Malaysia.

The paper "*The Women's Movement in Egypt with Selected References to Turkey*" by Nadje S. Al-Ali, deals with the emergence and evolution of the women's movement in Egypt and Turkey. She begins her paper by citing a few references on the women's participation in the 1919 revolution and subsequent rise of feminist activism associated with the renowned feminist activist, Huda Sha'rawi and the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU). According to the author, the early feminist movement can be associated with the rise of nationalism. In her paper, she has cited several scholars who have argued that the women's movement came of age during the period between 1945 and 1959. In 1948, Doria Shafik created the Bint El-Nil (Daughter of the Nile) association to work for the political emancipation of the women and also campaigned for the upliftment of women. The author also traces the growth of the feminist movement with the successive changes in the political regimes of Egypt. According to her, the Egyptian feminist activism receded under the rule of Gamal

Abdel Nasser (1952-1970) when the State became strict, monitored all political activity and banned autonomous organizations. Certain women friendly laws were passed by the State although the conservative Personal Status Laws were retained. During Anwar Sadat's regime, women underwent a mixed bag of experiences. The Personal Status Law was reformed in favour of women's rights, although women experienced high rates of unemployment and inequality in the workplace. Speaking about the present context, under Hosni Mubarak's regime, the author states that the women's movement has re-emerged. In 1985, the Personal Status Law was amended due to strong opposition from the Islamists who perceived it to be anti-Islamic. Confrontations between the Islamists and the women's activists increased, especially with matters related to the Sharia. The author states that many activists in the Egyptian women's movement view the preparations of the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, September 1994, as a turning point in their efforts to create a feminist platform. The Conference created space for the discussion on variously held taboo topics like abortion, violence and reproductive rights. Although the ICPD raised hopes on several issues pertaining to women's rights, attacks by the Islamists pressured the government to compromise on several matters thus frustrating the expectations raised. The author feels that there is no single issue that propels a woman's movement. There are different goals and priorities in the women's movement, which get translated into various projects and activities. In this paper, the author has critically evaluated the role of the State. She feels that in order to encourage the growth of the women's movement, the State has to play a more proactive role, be less restrictive in its policies and not bow down to the pressures of the Islamic Conservatives.

In the book *Autonomy Movements and Federal India* by Bhupinder Singh, Chapter 3 'The Naga Insurgency' deals with

emergence of the insurgency in Nagaland. The author clearly outlines the progression of the movement and the form it currently takes in the political consciousness of the people in the region. The roots of this movement have been traced to the late 1940's with the birth of the Naga National Council (NNC), which was originally set up with an agenda for social welfare and later took on political hues. The Naga Baptist Church played a significant role in initiating a dialogue for peace by forming the Peace Mission in 1964. The Shillong Accord was signed in 1975 between the Government of India and the moderate faction of the NNC, which was later repudiated by both Phizo and Muivah. Muivah's faction formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). Inter-tribal rivalry led to the further division of NSCN in 1988. According to the author, the desire for peace has acted as a powerful incentive for renunciation of violence. In 1997 as well as in 2001, concerted efforts on both sides led to the declaration of ceasefire. The author concludes on an optimistic note stating that there is a latent aspect of a possible Naga settlement.

In the paper "*Nationalism and Gender: The Construction of Identity*" by Nicole Negowetti, the author has dealt with the notion of how Gender and Nation are interlinked. According to the author, the notions of nationalism, gender and sexuality are socially constructed and they play a significant role in constructing and shaping one another. The author states that women are often signified as bearers of ethnic collectivity and transmitters of its culture. In the nation building process, the nation is often symbolized as a Mother, the entire burden of the cultural collectivity being placed on women. According to the author, power struggles by guardians of the nation are played out over the female body—both physically and metaphorically. In this paper, Negowetti cites the reference of Mayer (2000) who states that "in addition to biological reproduction, the nation is also reproduced culturally, socially and symbolically through its members." Negowetti goes on to

state that the construction of the feminine identity is closely interlinked with the prevalent religious discourse in the society. Women are often represented as symbols of purity and traditions of the nation. According to Martin (2000), disciplining the woman's body through the application of state laws can be defined as violence if it violates the civil rights of female citizens. The common construction of the identity of men is as nation-builders and hence protectors, whereas, women are seen as biological producers and collective bearers of nationhood.

The hypotheses adopted for the present study is that caught amidst the emerging trends of Revivalism, women in both Nagaland and Egypt, have adopted strategies to initiate change and usher in transformation within their respective communities.

The objectives of this study are the following:

- To explore how Revivalism (Islamic Revivalism in the context of Egypt and Ethno-centric Revivalism in the context of Nagaland) as an emerging trend, has impacted upon women's space and mobility.
- To study the historical evolution of women's struggles in both Nagaland and Egypt.
- Explore the strategies of resistance adopted by women's organizations in both the contexts.
- To explore the extent to which women in Nagaland and in Egypt are empowered politically, socially and economically.
- To explore the linkages between the policy makers and grassroots organizations (through policies and formulation of laws) in Nagaland and in Egypt.

## **Methodology**

In trying to achieve the above stated objectives, the author

was adopted a qualitative approach and collate adopted educated data from both primary as well as secondary sources. It was felt that taking a few *Case Studies* of the various Women's Organizations in Egypt as well as some Islamic Conservatives could help shed light on the dynamics of the relations between the State, Women's Organizations and the Islamic Conservatives in Egypt. To this end, the author has conducted *interviews* with the concerned individuals of organizations, using a questionnaire focusing on basic issues like historical evolution of the women's movement in Egypt; power dynamics between the State, Women's Organizations and Islamic Conservatives; Strategies adopted by the women's organizations towards the culture of peace; the extent to which policies of the State and the Islamic Conservatives have had an impact on the space and mobility of the women and the extent to which women are empowered in the society.

The essential idea of the proposed research is to capture the experiences of women's organizations in two diametrically opposite contexts. The aims are to understand whether women victimizations are in equal measure in both situations. Are they passively tolerating whatever they have been subjected to? Are they making useful societal interventions not only to aim for gender justice but also to restore peace and harmony? These are some of the research questions that the present study would address. This essential contrast makes the comparison most challenging and can throw up several pertinent questions when completed.

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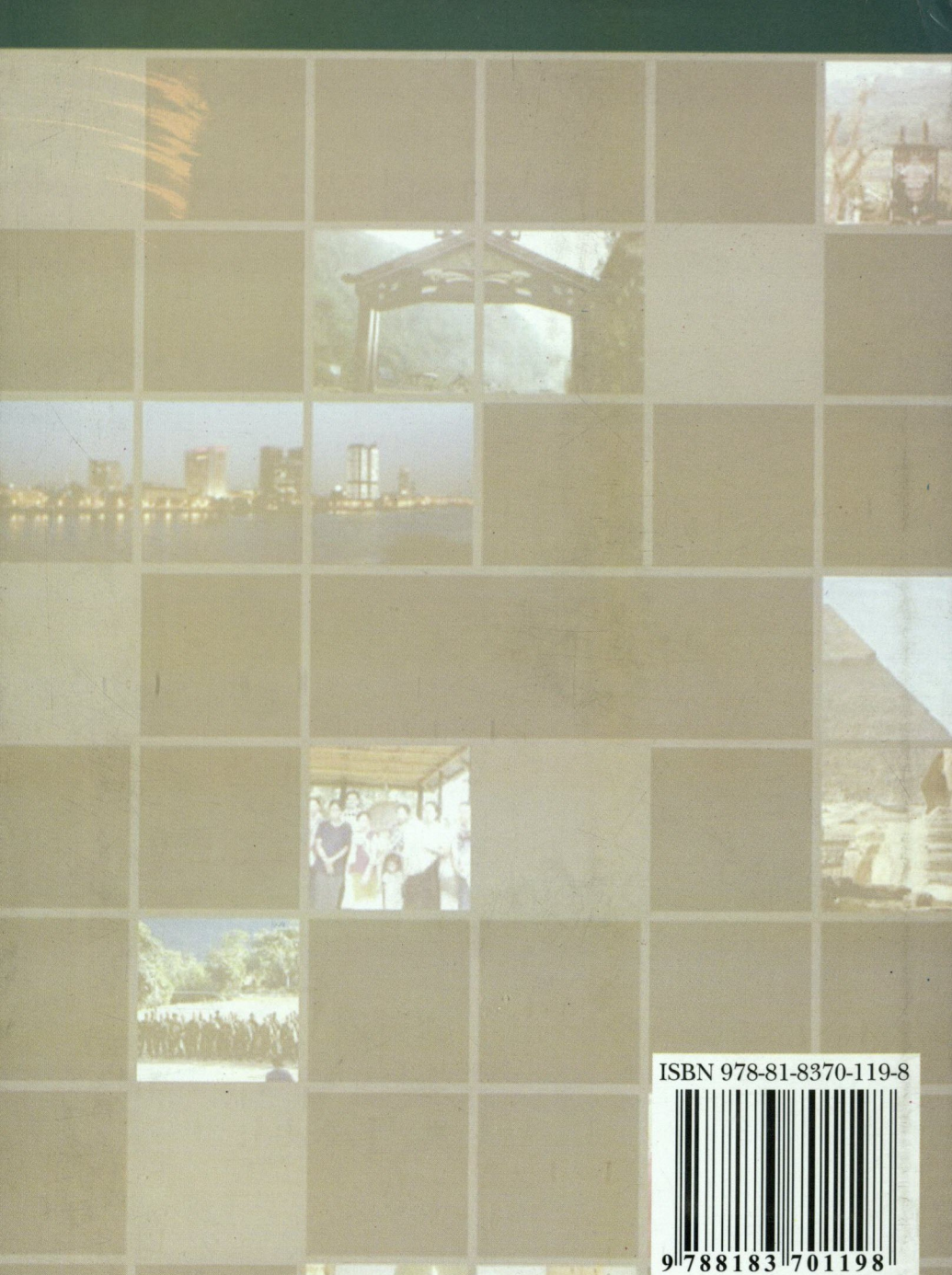
The Book '**Gender and Conflict Transformation: Nagaland and Egypt**' looks at the dynamics between the state authorities and revivalists in two contrasting contexts—Egypt and Nagaland and the efforts made by the women in the respective locations. The dynamics shared between the state authorities and the revivalists in the two contexts, have created a milieu within which women have had to bear the brunt of the widespread repercussions. Despite all odds, women in both the contexts have risen above diverse obstacles to campaign for women's rights and fight for the cause of women. They have initiated steps towards fostering an environment of understanding, security and support for the women in their respective communities, in spite of being caught in the complex vortex of the social imbroglio.

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**Triveni Goswami**, a young scholar completed her post-graduation in Psychology from the University of Delhi. As a Junior Research Fellow at the Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development (OKDISCD), Assam, she worked on a study on "Role of Women as Peace Builders with special reference to Nagaland" which has since been published. In 2006, she was awarded the prestigious *UNESCO/Suzanne Mubarak/Japan-Egypt Friendship Fellowship for the Empowerment of Women in Peace and Gender Studies (2006 Cycle)* at Bibliothéca Alexandrina, Egypt. She is currently a Research Associate of OKDISCD. Her areas of interest are Peace and Conflict, Gender Studies and Mental Health.

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