

Quarterly Magazine of the Amana Media Initiative

AMANA

Magazine

Volume 5 Issue 2, August 2011

**Women and Peace:
from Struggle to
Strength**

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Editorial

When we talk about women's empowerment in relation to peace we need to ask ourselves, has it got anything to do with culture? The contesting meanings of culture exist not only in Asia but worldwide. In the Orient, one meaning of culture is from within, and the other meaning is given by the Occident who made us believe, in their stereotypical view as to what our culture is. Edward Said cites Flaubert, (a wealthy, French male) who paints an image of the Oriental women as, "she never spoke of herself, never represented her emotions, presence or history." Unfortunately many men from the Orient are made to believe the same. Given this context and reality, discourse on women's empowerment requires critical retrospection of both the past and the present male-dominated society and culture.

The leadership we elect or select, and those who volunteer to represent us through political and civil society organizations, claiming to safeguard our interests, behave as if they truly represent the Occident not the Orient. The challenge is how to change this deep-rooted mind-set?

Immanuel Kant said that the greatest evils which affect civilized nations are brought about by war. But before war breaks out, the never-ending and indeed continually-increasing preparations for war take place. The preparation for war starts at the mental level; it is not only the individual mind-set, but networks of minds. Towards sustaining war, military expenditure is increasing every year. In 2010, the world military expenditure was 1.62 trillion dollars (SIPRI). As James Madison stated in 1795, of all enemies of public liberty, war is perhaps the most to be dreaded because it comprises and develops the germ of every other no nation could preserve freedom in the midst of continual warfare.

The common feature of warfare, either interstate or protracted conflict within a state is that, war-mongers always claim that war is fought in order to correct wrongs and establish what is right, but the means employed in war are all wrong. Over uncounted numbers of dead bodies and destruction of livelihoods; and in the midst of broken relationships, intensified hatred and enmity; the so-called noble mission of war is declared to restore human dignity and peace!

Violence damages ability and potentiality of the human person to be creative. Women in conflict areas

continue to be brave and do their best in the community, but should they be left alone? It has to be a collective engagement for both women and men in a cooperative process of healing relationships as well as ensuring restorative justice.

Adam Curle referred to three poisons as the roots of violence. The first is the ignorance which leads to a false perception of realities, which is connected to one's own behaviour and causes suffering to oneself and to others. The second is the yearning, longing, lusting greed. It is generated from a sense of loss and insufficiency. The third poison is jealousy and hatred. We are envious of the success of others. In essence, most violence grows from selfishness, alienation, acquisitive greed and competitiveness.

This issue of AMANA is devoted to discussion and reflection on empowerment of women in general and women in conflict areas in particular. Among the articles, besides cultural aspects, religious dimensions have also been highlighted. Other articles include women's engagement in the quest for peace and their struggle to survive and save each other's life. Their experiences involve facing the daily brutal atrocities of the armed forces in the name of national security, integrity and sovereignty as well as that of the militants in the name of ending occupation, subjugation, protection of ethnic, religious identity and achieving liberation. A piece on the UN resolution on women in conflict areas, explores the possibility of its application to find remedies. Last but not least, a poem which is dedicated to Dekha, a Kenyan peace activist, who lost her life in an untimely accident. We pray that her soul may rest in peace, a peace that continues to be denied to the women in conflict areas in Asia, despite their brave sacrifices and heroic strivings for justice, as well as for peace with justice and truth.



M. Abdus Sabur is Secretary General of AMAN and the Asian Resource Foundation

Half Veiled Truths

Amidst dialogues on peace, human rights and dignity, freedom of choice and expression, it is important to remember, that all these will be rendered ineffectual until a large section of the world's population which has been subjugated for centuries under different false mantles is granted what it deserves. The veiling of Rights of women, with layers of patriarchal traditions and thought has suffocated them over the years. For a large number of Muslim women, and perhaps their counterparts in other religions, what is visible through this veil is the helpless look of dispossession and denial of rights.

Women, specially in the Asian context, have been victims to patriarchal systems whereby their subjugation has been falsely justified by religious texts, practices and societal traditions. Muslim women are no exception. The peace of any nation, any part of the world is also largely affected by adherence to principles of equality: equality of opportunities, participation, freedom of choice etc. To say that a country, a society, lives peacefully because it has not seen any violence or war, while the women in that society are subjugated and denied their rights and legitimate claims, is a false assertion.

The main issue concerning rights of a Muslim woman, directly related to her empowerment, is not that rights in her favour are nonexistent; it however is the lack, in fact in some cases the absence of awareness of their existence and the lack of willingness to realize them. If Muslim women were aware of the rights they have by law, and if these rights were practiced in their true sense, most of the problems they are having to deal with today would not have prevailed.

I once interviewed more than fifty Muslim women in India for a project, a mix of those who had completed their higher studies, and those who had not had an opportunity to, and what came out from these discussions was a common belief in 'letting go' of their rights for the sake of the family. Nearly all of the women interviewed believed it was not 'correct' to demand for the 'rights' that are in reality 'gifted' to them by Islam. No religion in its essence can or does propagate inequality and disempowerment of a group, in this case women. It is a shame that those who interpret religion,

mostly men, lay emphasis on a certain phrase or paragraph in the texts and completely forget and disregard the essence of the teachings. An instance here is the much debated practice of polygamy, Tunisia was the first Arab state to abolish polygamy in the year 1956. It needs to be stressed here that in accordance with the Quran, which is the source of all laws that flow from the Shariah, polygamy is permissible but conditional upon the man being fair in all ways to his wives. Since humanly it is not possible to treat all with equality, it is said that a man should not marry more than one woman. This also makes it clear that justice is the central aspect and polygamy cannot be treated as a right or privilege as has unfortunately happened in a male dominated society, where in practice, Muslim men have practiced polygamy, and proclaimed it as their right with little regard for the attached condition most of the time, without any fear of conscience.

Empowerment also has to come from within. To ask for what is one's own is not wrong and this internalization in women is extremely important. Why let go of something which is by right yours? Another instance here is Meher or dower, which most Muslim bride's forgo, even though they are entitled to get it as a 'free gift' at the time of marriage. Many Indian Muslim families consider it a small issue not worthy of being raised during marriage while some others, in flaunting off their status, fix an amount so high that it is not possible for the groom to part with, both resulting in the bride-to-be being denied her right.

It is appalling to see sometimes that this transfer of 'values', as they are called, come from the elders in the family, specially mothers and elderly women who, having given up all their rights believe, the generation to come should also succumb to the 'right ethos' and do as they did. In most Muslim families, elders play a very important role in disseminating information about religion to the younger generations, and more often than not this dissemination takes a duties based approach and rights are relegated to the background. I am in no way implying here that the peace of the house should be disrupted by continued demand for rights, but yes, such a situation can certainly be avoided if members in the family duly receive what they deserve and at the correct time.

Legal equality is one among the fundamental rights of women, but this alone is inadequate and cannot ensure them a fair stake in economic and social development, nor can it lead to a major improvement in the lives of the majority unless the structures that generate disadvantage and discrimination are dismantled.

A hindrance in the betterment of the situation of Muslim women and working towards their empowerment is the taboo associated with the term 'progressive interpretations', as if almost to imply that they mean 'western interpretations'. The term progress is not synonymous to being western at all, in fact, to reinterpret texts and revisit historic instances which were interpreted by men at a time when women were considered inferior, forget equal, to men, keeping in mind the essence of the religion, is essential if one has to even begin to talk of women's empowerment.

It remains no secret that over the years Muslim women have lost out on social and political opportunities due to patriarchal family structures as well religious dogmas. These dogmas and biases have flourished over the years, few of them even assuming the status of informal codes of conduct for a large section of the population. The presence of these dogmas and mis-

conceptions about roles and rights of women under Islam exists largely due to the socio-political estrangement of the Muslim woman from decision-making in family and political structures. The acute lack of representation owes itself to deeply patriarchal family structures as well as lack of education amongst the women in the community. This provides a fertile ground for perpetuating unexamined beliefs and images about Islam, imputing wrong meaning to provisions in Shariah law, thereby implicating women in a vicious cycle of under-representation and marginalization.

Like Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism and other religions of the world do not propagate disempowerment of women. The entire problem here lies with the patriarchal interpretations and the emphasis on the practices of some followers of the religion instead of the essence of the religion itself, hence veiling the truth. Thus, the Hanafi belief of the simply given triple Talaq needs to be re-thought as the Prophet Muhammad, (PBUH) clearly stated that the law-ful thing Allah hates most is divorce.



Mariya Salim is the Editor of AMANA. She is also the Regional coordinator of AMAN's Refugee and Women's programs.

Eminent activist and author of Prisoner No. 100 Anjum Zamrooda Habib in conversation with Mushtaq Ul Haq Ahmad Sikander



You have been active in social work since 1980s. What is your experience with regard to the participation of women in Social activism, has it declined or progressed further?

Women's activism has been on decline since the inception of militancy, as militancy dominated the hearts and minds of the society and social evils like dowry receded into oblivion, but new and more serious social problems like widowhood and increase in the number of orphans emerged and nothing substantial was undertaken to address these challenges. In the name of rehabilitation the widows were exploited by the government agencies and others, reinforcing the fear and vulnerabilities of women even more, also life of women is hard hit by the raging conflict and the repercussions of militancy are still felt, and these factors together are responsible for the decline of women's activism.

So you would say that female activism and participation declined with the inception and prolonging of the armed struggle?

No, only the spheres of activism and participation changed. When the armed struggle started, the whole nation was on the streets, prominent among them be-

ing women, who along with men protested and even saved their men from the brutal hands of occupational forces and police. When the State opted for an Iron fist policy to suppress the resistance, women occupied the backseat. Women still play an active role at the grassroot level of the society. Women are still the ocean of sacrifice and without their participation no resistance can survive. They are still quite active within the confines of their home but unfortunately their sacrifices aren't taken into account, which they always offer readily, continuously without any desire for recognition.

Why this transition from social to political activism?

I was one of the founding members of the Women's Welfare Association, of which women from the Pundit community were also members, but after their exodus and the daily killings of innocent civilians, politics came to dominate all spheres of life, I also felt compelled to do something for my nation, though I didn't give up social activism but yes I became active on political front too.

You were also one of the founding woman members of Hurriyat Conference. How many more like you were there?

There was one more women's organization which was a part of this amalgam when it was formed in 1993, but it faded away with time, though my organization Muslim Khawateen Markaz (MKM) is still prominent among the Hurriyat Conference.

Does the Hurriyat Conference have a certain quota of women representation in decision making and as members?

No, there is nothing written about women's quota as members or decision makers in the constitution of the Hurriyat Conference. The condition there is quite abysmal and pathetic, women's voices are ignored and their political participation and representation in the decision making body is minimal.

Is it difficult as a women's organization (MKM) to survive in a male dominated political culture?

Yes it is, but exceptions are always there. Men do politics but women by their nature are tender and loving who wish to end any conflict amicably and offer reconciliation wherever it is applicable readily. It is also difficult to survive as an organization, and when you are solitary, frequently your opinions get sidelined as a minority, despite being vocal and progressive in outlook.

Why have the sacrifices of women been undermined and in most cases die unsung in oblivion?

When resistance is amalgamated with politics only power seems to be the concern, plus in the war zone memories are short lived, add to this the fact that the world follows patriarchy with most men who do not want to acknowledge the sacrifices of women and all these factors add together for this apathy.

What steps have you taken to rectify this apathy?

Women should come forward ignoring the vulnerabilities, fear and patriarchal norms and join hands with me, as MKM is the best platform to raise a collective voice about women issues and concerns.

After your release from Tihar jail, you formed Association of Families of Kashmiri Prisoners (AFKP), why?

In Tihar jail, I was the only lady from Kashmir, and I have witnessed the horrors of jail life where you feel unwanted, forgotten and dismayed with life. The same is the case with others too, and witnessing the pathetic conditions of the families of the prisoners I decided that once I would be free I would certainly try to help my fellow prisoners, which became a moving spirit behind the formation of AFKP.

What does AFKP do?

We provide moral support to the families of victims besides documenting their cases and following their trails. As society and Indian legal system is hostile towards Kashmiri Prisoners, when they get released after long detentions they are a misfit in the society hence need for counseling is necessary which AFKP has in mind, but it could not establish a counseling cell due to dearth of funds. Nothing has been done for the prisoner's rights and we are making people aware about the same.

Any message for women?

Women are the part and parcel of the resistance movement. The new generation of women have been individually carrying the mantle of resistance but they should come forward and join hands with MKM for a collective endeavor.

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YOUTH SPEAK

Nepal: Sreyasa Mainali

Nepal is a multicultural and multiethnic country with over one hundred different ethnic and caste groups with distinct languages and culture. Discrimination based on sex and gender is still widespread in the country. The literacy rate and life expectancy of women in Nepal is much lower than that of men. Children are still unable to get citizenship under their mother's name. A few legal instruments have been put in place to overcome these inequalities. The women of Nepal like women around the world have lived under the shadows of a patriarchal society for very long.

The shadow started lifting in 1975 with the declaration of International Women's Day on March 8 by the Government of Nepal which is celebrated every year now. That very year, the Civil Code of Nepal was amended to include property rights and inheritance for women. In 1990, with the restoration of multiparty democracy in Nepal, the new constitution declared that discrimination based on sex was punishable by law. The Women's Movement of Nepal continued to focus on the elimination of the inequalities in the Nepali legal system. Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was ratified by Nepal on April 22, 1991. These efforts have resulted in significant changes. Women are now able to inherit property and no longer have to return it to their father upon marriage. Recent developments now allow a woman to divorce her husband under certain circumstances. Abortion has been legalized under some conditions like rape or danger to the life of the mother. Unfortunately, the few legal instruments that are in place for the protection of the rights of women are unknown to the majority of the population in rural Nepal.

The Maoist insurgency, despite its many faults, was an instrumental force in bringing about positive changes with regard to gender equality in Nepal. Women now have a 33% representation in the Constituent Assembly and other political and decision making bodies which is a big achievement for Nepalese women and an inspiration for South Asian and other developing countries. The current Interim Constitution contains many provisions for women but it is not legally im-

plemented. With the deadline of the second extension for the Constitution approaching in September 2011, there is much hope among the women of Nepal for development, equality and empowerment.



Sreyasa Mainali is currently pursuing a Masters' degree in Conflict, Peace and Development Studies in Nepal.

Afghanistan: Waheed Siddiqui

The condition of women in Afghanistan has improved over time, specially, after the end of the Taliban regime in 2001. Many rights which were denied to the women during the dark regime of the Taliban were either improved or restored with the new constitution of Afghanistan guaranteeing several rights and promising gender equality. According to Article 44 of the constitution: "The state shall devise and implement effective programs to create and foster balanced education for women, improve education of nomads as well as eliminate illiteracy in the country." According to the Constitution 25% of seats are reserved for women in the parliament and according to Article 84, in the House of Elders of parliament or Mishrano Jirga 50% of seats are given to women. A recent parliamentary election (2009) had 28% seats in the lower house won by women.

Three ministries are occupied by women out of 17

ministries, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled. Besides these laws, Afghanistan is signatory to many of the international conventions and treaties e.g Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women to promote welfare of women in the country. Article 58 of the constitution further strengthens condition for women and men equally by establishing a Human Rights Commission.

However, as we know that on paper many rights and legislations may paint a rosy picture of the condition of women compared to the past, the controversial law allowing Shia men to reign over their wives, quite literally, attracted great dissatisfaction of Afghan women. This law, according to UN, signed by Hamid Karzai, legalizes rape in marriage and prevents women from leaving their house without the husband's permission. It says that women can only seek work, education or doctor's appointment with their husband's permission.

Again, a UN survey shows that civilian casualties increased 25 percent in the war against terror due to bombings of NATO and American aircrafts this year and a majority of those injured were women and children. Instances of domestic violence are many in the country and a woman is used as a means settlement of disputes between families especially in tribal and rural areas for blood feuds and vendetta. Child marriage is still not abolished fully, with over half the population of women facing forced marriages and polygamy also still being wide spread in the rural areas.

Many NGO's and international institutions are working hard in Afghanistan to represent women in the society adequately. During the Taliban's dogmatic era 86% women were illiterate, today the figure has fallen drastically now.



Waheed Siddiqui is an LLB(hons) graduate from Goa university, currently working with UNHCR Kabul as legal advisor and teaching political history of Afghanistan in Bakhtar University, Kabul.

Indonesia:Nur Imroatus S.

Empowering Women by Strengthening the Value of Women Domestic Workers

The statistics of the quality of Indonesian people's life creates a deep concern. In 11 years (1996-2008), the government was only able to raise its people's purchasing power to Rp 40.000,00 (about US\$ 5) and it was only able to elevate the level of education by a year. The number of people unemployed reached 30 million. Meanwhile, the number of poor in the country reached 32 million.

Adding to the equation were extremely weak development policies whether in the agriculture or industrial sector. Government's policies failed to motivate the agricultural sector. As a result, the rural society was unable to create any job fields and many of their youth were forced to seek employment in the cities. Again, inflation and the increase of interest rates hampered the growth of micro-businesses.

In other words, looking at the statistics, Indonesia should have already been in a systemic poverty and hunger crisis, but it is surprising that while this threat has been heard for long, how are many Indonesians surviving? What have the impoverished citizens done to make ends meet? To name one, there are many working as domestic workers, with the majority being women.

Domestic workers in Indonesia have extremely low bargaining position. Their working hours are longer than the standard (more than 12 hours – overnight) with awfully low wages (around Rp 400.000 or US\$ 50 per month), and they often become targets of abuse and sexual harassment threats from their employer. They also don't have employment contracts and social security and the profession, like in many other countries in Asia is not included in the category of labor, so they are sans any labor law protecting them.

This problem, of course, is not only a problem of government's failure in fulfilling the needs of its society but also a problem of a cultural condescension towards women's work value. Domestic workers directly become the reflection in how Indonesian society appreciates domestic work performed by a woman, usually considered unskilled work.

In the public dialogue, "Manifesting Acknowledgement, Respect, and the Fulfillment of Domestic Work-

ers' Rights", July 7, 2011 in Jakarta, Poppy Ismalina (Director, Magister of Development Economics, Faculty of Economics and Business, Gadjah Mada University) suggested a strategy to increase the value of domestic workers by calculating their real economic value with indirect valuation techniques. This technique will calculate the cost of homeowner's missing productivity, the health cost from the accumulated tiredness and stress from doing the domestic works and other expense factors which homeowners would have to spend were they not employing any domestic worker. This technique later would be used as the basis of determining certain domestic worker's wage. The question that often appears when this technique is put to use is, if domestic worker's wage follows the Regional Minimum Wage (RMW) standard, wouldn't it be dilemmatic for Indonesian society, which is also underpaid that they can't pay proper salary to domestic workers? It would render many homeowners incapable of hiring any domestic worker. Regarding this, it is important to emphasize that this effort to calculate the real economic value is an effort to strengthen the work value of domestic worker, and not merely an effort of raising domestic worker's earnings.

This effort would also accelerate the movement of gender equality in domestic space. If only a certain work was done by domestic worker, the rest of the domestic works could be negotiated for work allotment between a husband and wife at home.

It is important that the education of domestic workers must not stop at technical skill trainings like domestic worker agents usually give. Domestic workers must be given knowledge to foster better understanding of their rights, and a capability of self-advocacy whenever unfairness occurs. This critical awareness movement through education has already been started by Rumpun Tjut Nyak Dien and Sapu Lidi School of Domestic Workers.

The government should start revising the Bill of Labor and they should include domestic work as skilled work, so that the social security and law protection for domestic workers can be secured. Strengthening the value of domestic work is a concrete effort that we can make for the empowerment of women in Indonesia.



Nur Imroatus S. is a Community Empowerment worker of AMAN Indonesia and also a Researcher at CSRC (Center for Study of Religious and Culture) Islamic State University "Syarif Hidayatullah" Jakarta.

India: Swapnil Tembe

In the context of India even though a lot has been debated and brought into practice to empower women, much more needs to be done. We today exemplify the progress made by us in women's empowerment by taking names of Kiran Bedi, Bachendri Pal, Pratibha Patil and their likes but the list is not long given the colossal population India has. Many schemes such as Ujjawala, Priyadarshini and National commission for women have surfaced and proved effective. Though this is just the beginning of a long journey.

For any kind of empowerment, political empowerment is a prerequisite. India is a democratic system where the powers are vested into the elected representatives of the people and unless we have an equal share for women in parliament, the overall empowerment can not be achieved. One such bill is long pending to be introduced. However, some states have taken mature decisions in this regard by providing 50% reservation in the local governance systems which is a huge stride towards eliminating the gender bias.

Education is another important aspect. As per the 2011 Census preliminary reports, though the overall literacy rate climbed to 74.04% which is a welcome sign for India, the literacy rates for females and males were 65.46% and 82.14%. The gender gap of 16.68% speaks for itself. A lot needs to be done for ensuring participation of women in education with special focus in the rural areas where the situation is worse. While framing the education policies and schemes the makers should keep in mind that-"If you educate a man, you educate an individual but if you educate a woman, you educate a whole family".

Peace comes out of the cordial existence of the two sexes. Conflicts arise only when one dominates. Domination cannot in any way be fair. And the way to bring peace is to bring the women at par with men via their empowerment. And those who claim that special treatment to women is against the equality of law should revisit the pages of history where she has been confined between the four walls and enslaved for generations. Women's empowerment brings them to the centre stage where they can actually realize the wide spectrum of opportunities waiting for them. Women should endeavour and men should encourage, so that the road to liberation becomes a reality.

Jawaharlal Nehru once famously remarked-” You can tell the condition of the nation by looking at the status of the women.” And I believe a day will come when that statement would lose its grandeur as on that day, women would outshine men in every sphere.



Swapnil Tembe, originally an Engineer from IIT Kharagpur is currently pursuing a masters degree in Sociology .

Pakistan: Samra Sylvia Francis

Pakistan is a country with great promise but extreme fragility. Economic development and democratization have been hindered by internal and cross border conflicts that have resulted in a great number of refugees as well as internally displaced, increased migration and urgent needs of economic development challenges.

There is a situation of no-war-no-peace, and while there have been a number of bilateral and multilat-

eral peace-building processes launched, women and women's issues have not been incorporated into these discussions. Women and girls are among those most affected by the violence and economic instability associated with conflict and post-conflict situations. Yet, when it comes to negotiating peace and facilitating the reconstruction of societies after war, women are grossly underrepresented.

Another unfortunate reality in Pakistan is that women are culturally perceived to be confined to homes in the society though it is true that the trends are changing. If we talk about the urban and rural women we can clearly see the difference between their patterns of life. Most women in cities get basic to masters level education however in rural areas they are still struggling to reach up to secondary level of education and trying to get out of their narrow shells defined by traditions. Similarly their contributions towards economic development vary, the social and economic problems they face are also different but in reality they are an integral part of the economic process of the country and of shaping the role of society, within and outside their homes, in the formal and informal sectors yet they are not treated equally. So we can say that women are in continuous conflict situation whether in a “conflict” or a “non-conflict” situation.

Women should also be seen as drivers of peace and agents of change and not just as victims. They also have a pivotal role to play as ‘healers’ in society. They can play a critical role at the state/society level in policy shaping and making. They constitute more than half of the country's population and since the creation of our country we have seen female icons continually playing a decisive role on all fronts.

There are many names to be honoured - Fatima Jinnah, the Founder of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah's sister who stood by her brother when he was struggling for an independent Muslim state from the British India, Razia Bhatti, the courageous journalist who braved the man dominated media in Pakistan and won many accolades. Raheela Gul, a young woman who was a trekker, expeditionist died in the 2008 earthquake. Mehreen Jabbar, another promising woman is making headlines in filmmaking these days. Nafis Sadiq, physician by profession, has spent a lifetime working on the politically charged and non-glamorous issues of global population control and women's health, issues which at first glance some may consider irrelevant in their daily lives. The role of these women from different fields is a proof of wom-

en's ability towards bringing change and improvement in the society.

The need of today is to encourage and uplift the status of women in Pakistan by empowering them to bring change and peace especially, women of the rural areas who have fewer opportunities to recognize their importance in the society. They can become the promoters of Peace by dialogue, understanding and engagement, both at home and in whichever field they are in.



Samra Sylvia has done her Masters in Business Administration and has been working with a Non Governmental organization in Pakistan for the promotion of Peace and Social Harmony.



Young Muslim woman in the thar desert near Jaisalmer India -- wikimedia commons

WOMEN AND PEACE

Many feminists think women are much better suited for peace than men. If so, why? What are those factors which make women play a better role for peace. Does she not have the same weaknesses as men? Has she proved to be a better ruler than man?

We all know how women are dominated in a patriarchal society. In most cases she internalizes this oppression and accepts it as her fate. She reconciles to playing the role of a house maker and looks after her husband and children after marriage. And in modern society she is even content playing a dual role i.e. as an earner as well as house maker. Some men who are against women working outside home never tire of pointing out that women have to bear a double burden.

These are problems of a patriarchal society and women all over the world suffer from patriarchal cultural values, even in advanced democratic societies of western countries despite gender parity there. Thus women are oppressed and the oppressed know the value of peace better than the oppressors. This is one important reason why women can prove to be better peace-makers.

As a mother her role of bringing life into existence is most fundamental. She conceives the baby, nurtures it in her womb for nine months and then bears it at the risk of her own life and after giving birth she has again to nurture it for several months, even years. Thus who knows value of life more than a mother? Man, always arrogant about power often behaves as an ego-centric agent and does not hesitate to take life to fulfil his power-centric ambitions. A life which comes into existence after months of labour and pain can be wiped out in less than a second with disastrous weapons made through modern technology. A woman who bears, nurtures and sustains life would hesitate to promote conflict which may result in such mass murder in far off places just by pressing of a button. Moreover, in a patriarchal society woman does not share power too and her behaviour is much less power centric than that of man. Also, a man lacks compassion for life which a woman is gifted with.

Love and compassion are needed in abundance for life to flourish. It is hatred which destroys life and love that makes life richer and worth living for. And hatred is borne more often as a result of struggle for power.

Power becomes a burning ambition and human life can be sacrificed at its altar. Man kills ruthlessly, women very hesitantly. Her orientation to life is very different and this difference is a gendered one.

Even if a woman is involved in power struggle, except for very few exceptions, she would not kill as man does. She, by nature is more compassionate. It is only in extremes of persecution that she becomes revengeful. It is her psyche. Also she is more patient than man. Her patience, in fact, is far more enduring and so is her tolerance. These are sterling qualities nature has gifted her for her motherhood.

She does not have much presence in armed forces. It is true in these days of gender parity many women are seeking entry into armed forces, not only in non-combative but combative services. But it is more for gender parity than her feminine qualities. In fact it goes against her primordial nature. Here it must be borne in mind that gender parity too has its limits. Gender, as we all know, is a social construct whereas natural qualities are with ones birth.

I don't say that women should not take part in combat situations; she should but only for defence situations as by nature she has been programmed for love and compassion. Man should learn from her, in order to pursue gender parity should trudge his path of aggression and ruthlessness. This is a very delicate matter. Some feminists may argue why a woman should not be as combative as a man? Yes logically this argument is quite sound. But there is difference in logical arguments and natural gifts or the way she has been gifted with her motherhood which requires life affirmative and life promoting gifts. I am also aware of the fact that upholders of patriarchal values are likely to misuse this argument in favour of denying equality to women. But we have to face dilemma of one kind or the other. Ultimately what we need is life affirmative values. Patriarchy has not only deprived us of life affirmative values but has brought great disasters for humanity. In hundreds and thousands of battles and wars fought millions of lives have been lost and all that for patriarchal assertion, power struggles, domination of one patriarchal group over the other. Had matriarchal values prevailed world would have been very different.

It is also important to note that matriarchy changes



Demonstration of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) in Peshawar, Pakistan -- RAWA

the entire perspective on life. Everywhere and in all fields it is life promoting perspective which matters and peace is one among them. When war or any kind of conflict is going on it is not only human lives which are at stake but also destruction of life facilitating factors. As now it is not only gross product which matters in capitalism but the very quality of life which prioritizes health services and all other facilities which are needed to make life worth living which matter. Similarly it is feminine concerns for making life richer in every possible manner which make life worth its price. A feminine perspective should not be equated merely with domestic chores. A feminine perspective on life is basically concerned with richer and fuller life and that is possible only when peace prevails and for peace to prevail we need not patriarchal but matriarchal perspective on life.

The peace pacts drawn up by men are more often of temporary nature as both sides want a breathing period to prepare for 'winning wars'. However, for women the next war would not be a priority but a permanent peace which is life enriching. Generally peace treaties drawn up by UN have predominant role by men as most of the top officers are men have very restrictive clauses and slight violation leads to fresh breakout of wars.

In these treaties consideration is not life enriching possibilities but vaguely defined 'patriotism' which is all about possession of land rather than potentialities of peace. A lasting peace is not possible if one has obsession with land and no concern with human lives at

all. Land-oriented patriotism is part of our emotionally charged language too. In this orientation even mothers are honoured only for producing sons to defend land.

Women for permanent peace, for example, would insert clauses which would make a treaty more inclusive of other ethnic and identity groups, especially belonging to minorities and weaker sections transcending political ideologies and religious persuasions to save peace. Peace cannot prevail unless divisive clauses are minimized and inclusive clauses are given greater space in these treaties.

For peace we need patience, tolerance, democratic and inclusive perspective so that people of all ethnic, linguistic and racial groups are included. Only women are capable of bringing such perspective for peace as women care more for life. Life is the beginning and end of their perspective.



Dr Asghar Ali Engineer is the Chairman of the Asian Muslim Action Network and also leads the Indian based institute of Islamic Studies and Centre for Study of Society and Secularism in Mumbai

Security-Council Resolution 1325 and its relevance to Peace and Conflict Resolution in Asia

Background:

Women and children account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including refugees and internally displaced persons. They are often targeted by combatants and armed elements and such targeting has serious consequent impacts on durable peace and reconciliation. The role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building is very important, indeed crucial. Hence, the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security is vital. So is the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.

The unanimous adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 in 2000 was indeed an important milestone remedying the neglect, for many years, of the specific situations, roles, needs and rights of women during and after armed conflict. Resolution 1325 (2000) finally recognizes women's rights to protection from violence and to participation in all peace and security processes to prevent, manage, and resolve conflict. "It has opened doors for women all over the world – it has shone limelight on the capabilities of women, their resilience and creativity in the face of disruption, chaos and tragedy" (Alphbach: 2010).

Within the Security Council itself, resolution 1325 (2000) has led to the adoption of other key resolutions on women, peace and security, including resolutions 1820 (2008) and 1888 (2009) on sexual violence during conflict and 1889 (2009) which urges UN Member States and other relevant actors to take further measures to improve women's participation in all stages of peace processes.

Actions called for by Security Council Resolution 1325:

Security Council Resolution 1325 (hereafter referred to simply as SCR 1325) calls for many actions on the part of many actors.

UN Member States:

- Member States should ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict.
- Member States should incorporate into their national training programs for military and civilian police personnel, the protection, rights and the particular needs of women.
- Member States should increase their voluntary financial, technical and logistical support for gender-sensitive training efforts, including those undertaken by relevant funds and programs of the UN.
- All States must put an end to impunity and prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls.

The UN Secretary-General:

- The Secretary-General should implement his strategic plan of action (A/49/587) calling for an increase in the participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes.
- The Secretary-General should appoint more women as special representatives and envoys to pursue good offices on his behalf; as well expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations.
- The Secretary-General should provide to Member States training guidelines and materials on the protection, rights and the particular needs of women, as well as on the importance of involving women in all peacekeeping and peace-building measures.
- The Secretary-General, where appropriate, should include in his reporting to the Security Council progress on gender mainstreaming throughout peacekeeping missions and all other aspects relating to women and girls.

All actors involved, when negotiating and implementing peace agreements shall adopt a gender perspec-

tive, including, inter alia:

- The special needs of women and girls during repatriation and Resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction.
- Measures that support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution.
- Measures that ensure the protection of and respect for human rights of women and girls, particularly as they relate to the constitution, the electoral system, the police and the judiciary;

All parties to armed conflict are required:

- To take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse.
- To respect the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and settlements, and take into account the particular needs of women and girls.

All those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration are required to:

- To consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and
- To take into account the needs of their dependants.

Stock-taking on the Tenth Anniversary of Resolution 1325 in 2010:

October 2010 marked the 10th anniversary of SCR 1325. It is pertinent to ask the question therefore, has any real progress been made, or is it mere rhetoric? (Christine Binder, Karin Lukas, and Romana Schweiger, Empty Words or Real Achievement? The Impact of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women in Armed Conflicts. 101 Radical History Review, 2008)

Simply put, the answer is yes, some progress had been made but much more remains to be done.

At the international level, initiatives on women and peace and security have increased, addressing in a more targeted way different aspects of the resolution such as violence against women and the need to end impunity for perpetrators, enhancing women's participation in decision-making, especially in efforts related to peace and security. The Council has introduced a gender perspective into country reporting.

At the United Nations, a number of countries formed the "Friends of 1325" a group that globally advocates the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and encourages other states to raise awareness of the resolution and to promote its implementation. In response to

the Security Council, the UN adopted a system-wide Action Plan for 2005-2007 which was further refined following an evaluation, leading to a results-based new plan for 2008-2009. Moreover, entities, individually and in partnerships, have undertaken over 1000 activities in support of Member States' implementation efforts. They have devoted resources and time on training, capacity development and awareness-raising. Publications, tools and materials have been produced to guide and support the implementation of the resolution.

Through advocacy and targeting of police and military, the number of women peacekeepers in those units has increased. A dedicated unit of women police officers provided by India for the UN Mission in Liberia has served as a role model. Other police contributing countries are considering its emulation. The United Nations Mine Action service has been relentless in ensuring that mine action programmes have an equal impact on women, men, boys and girls. Perhaps more importantly they have aided in the transformation of women's views about their roles. Afghanistan is a case in point.

At the regional level, a number of initiatives have been undertaken to support implementation. The European Union (EU) 1325 partnership, for example, brings together regional and national institutions, including the military, academia and NGOs, to enhance awareness and coordinate implementation efforts regionally. The African Union has partnered with the European Union to support African countries in their implementation efforts.

At the national level, there is increased attention to women's participation in decision-making and peace processes which has created more opportunities for women and women's organizations to contribute to the prevention of conflict and to participate in conflict resolution, peace-building and peace negotiations. Governments are increasingly supporting initiatives to enhance participation by women in efforts to maintain and consolidate peace, including at all decision-making levels.

An increasing number of countries are developing national action plans on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) to guide implementation through the prioritization and coordination of strategies and activities. As of 1 August 2010, 18 countries had adopted national action plans and several countries were in the

process of formulating such plans. Not one of them is from Asia, however.

Some countries have integrated strategies and actions on women, peace and security into existing national policies and strategies on gender equality. In a number of countries dedicated mechanisms, such as inter-agency working groups, observatories and networks, have been established to support and monitor the implementation of national strategies and actions on women, peace and security. An example is Argentina where the Ministry of Defence created a working group for the diagnosis and analysis of measures and actions for the effective implementation of the gender perspective in the field of defence and in the context of International Peacekeeping Operations.

Progress has been made, but it has been modest and slow for several reasons. So, what is needed to address the situation? Assistant Secretary-General Mayanja offers the following recommendations:

First, the Council should adopt a holistic rather than a piece-meal, selective approach to avoid fragmentation, duplication and ensure maximization of resources.

Second, a clear framework containing a set of achievable goals within specific timeframe, and with measurable indicators, should be established to ensure a coordinated and concerted implementation.

Third, provision of resources to Member States' implementation is critical especially in an environment of financial and economic melt down coupled with other crises and emergencies.

Fourth, an accountability framework must be established to provide for regular monitoring and reporting.

(Statement by Ms. Rachel Mayanja, Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women; at Alpbach, Austria (3-5 September 2010) to the Retreat on The 10th Anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) – Identifying Progress and Closing Gaps).

Worthy as the above recommendations are, they run the risk of focusing too much on the UN system and not sufficiently at the country-level.

Most of all, it is important that an accountability

framework be established to provide for regular monitoring and reporting on not only the implementation of Resolution 1325, but on its violation as well. This is perhaps the ultimate challenge for peacemaking and peace-building in Asia.



Dr. Clarence J. Dias, is President of the International Center for Law in Development and resource person for AMAN's Peace Studies Program and facilitator/resource person for the AMAN Muslim Lawyers Network.

Remembering Dekha Ibrahim Abdi

(Dekha was a peace practitioner based in Mombasa, Kenya. She left for heavenly abode in July, 2011.)

You prayed five times a day your whole life.
You pilgrimed to your beloved Mecca more than most.
You observed Ramadhan in its purest way
To strengthen your soul.
You were ready for Paradise.
Paradise was ready for you.

But we were unprepared.
You had warned us many times.
“Take your ego out of it”,
let the vision motivate you,
Generously give the credit away.
Feel proud when others are praised for something
you know inside it was you.

And when you were gone
Horrifically, violently swept away,
You were not taken from us,
It was your time to go,
But we were unprepared,
And could not and would not believe.

But as we pulled ourselves together,
Grappling with this cruel reality,
We began to comprehend the massive legacy you had left us.
It weighs heavily on your children,
Universities to build,
Somalians beyond number to feed,
Fragile peace to hold.

This should not be the burden of your children alone, if at all.
All of us who loved you, all inspired by you,
all who grieve your shining face,
and your gentle challenge to build peace everywhere,
must take up the mantle.

You did not leave us alone, you left us an eternal quest to end violence and realize peace in our time.

We commit to honour you, by carrying forward your mission,
a hundred fold, a thousand fold,
to all the corners of the earth.
We will not allow your children to bear this mantle alone.
For it is surely heavy as you well knew.
With the wisdom you left us,
with the spirit of generosity you shared,
and energized by your laughter ringing in our ears,
we pledge our lives to work for a just peace,
Just as you spent all your days.

Thank you Dekha for entrusting us with this most sacred of tasks.
We hardly feel worthy but we will not shy away from the challenge,
for to do so would be to dishonor your life's work.

Emma Leslie

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Having been a part of the Aman Assembly, this issue reminded me of all the great moments spent in Thailand. Although i enjoyed reading all the articles, i could see colours of hope reflecting from the AMAN Assembly Statement and I can see the motivation to go on and a sense of concern and connectivity building stronger!

Anila Noor
Pakistan

Readers are welcome to send comments. Letters to the Editor will be published in the next issue. You may write to the Editor at amana@arf-asia.org

Dear Editor,

Our world is built with different beautiful things, having within its fold numerous religions and people with different identities. Today the world is seeing a lot of tension, a lot specially, in the name of religion, and it is us who are responsible. Every person thus has the responsibility of eliminating such discrimination, specially youth as seen in the last issue. Unity in diversity is what makes the world beautiful, almost like putting together flowers of different colours, together into a beautiful bunch, as one.

Nie Mar Bo
Myanmar

DONATE A MEAL APPEAL

Asylum seekers in Thailand are in abundance, there are families here, with little children surviving with nearly nothing, who flee to Thailand and some other countries to escape death in their own land. We, in AMAN, want to help these families, and others similarly situated, but cannot do it on our own. We need your help. All we ask of you is to donate two meals a month, (one meal=4USD), for either six months or a year. This money will be used to help feed an entire family. For more information please write to mariya@arf-asia.org

EVENTS AT AMAN

Applications are invited for a 3 day Workshop on Youth, Conflict and peace to be held in Kolkata, West bengal in September 2011. For more information Kindly contact mariya@arf-asia.org

The Amana Media Initiative (Amana) is a broad-based media project committed to promoting greater understanding and peace within Muslim communities, between faiths and among various cultural communities in Asia. Amana means trust, stemming from 'aman', the Arabic word for peace. Amana was founded in April 2005 by the Asian Resource Foundation (ARF) and the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN). The ARF supports holistic development by building awareness to mobilise and share resources in order to help marginalised groups in Asia. AMAN aims to build understanding and solidarity among Muslims and other faith communities in Asia towards people's empowerment, human rights, justice and peace. With over 1500 members, Amana's network spans Asia and is coordinated from Bangkok, Thailand.

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