Report on the

International Workshop on

South Asian Women in International Security:

Building Cooperative Networks

July 30-31, 1998

and the

Regional Workshop on

Women in International Security:

Exploring South Asian Initiatives

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Foreword

These meetings on women and international security were aimed at exploring regional, South Asian, initiatives and building co-operative networks within an overall framework of gender and security.

It would indeed be very useful for the world as a whole if women can play a greater role in determining our security options, our view of security as a whole and the way that women might be able to operate in a world where conflict has not yet disappeared. I think the need for such meetings arises because the number of women in our diplomatic services or even in our academic community is still very small. It is increasing but not very rapidly. So as the number of women in these services increases and the number of women looking at these problems increases, it is interesting to speculate whether new ideas, new dimensions will influence thinking on security matters.

South Asia is a very special area of the world and I think that anything we can do to reduce tensions and enhance a sense of collective security of the nations here will be a great step forward.

Prof Roddam Narasimha
Director, National Institute of Advanced Studies

Women and Security in a Regional Setting:
A Framework for Analysis

Dr Deepa M. Ollapally

A major aim of these workshops has been to explore the possibilities of regionalizing gender and security initiatives, so that we can not only come up with a regional perspective in a theoretical sense but also from a networking perspective, and a policy perspective. From these three different perspectives, what are the ways in which one can think regionally about this question? In other words, can we really talk about, first of all, a South Asian gender perspective on security? In political terms, is there a distinctive South Asian political subsystem that informs and shapes gender and international relations? Also, in social-cultural terms, can we define a South Asian identity that is unique with shared characteristics, particularly on gender matters? The agenda here is to contemplate appropriate regional activities based on a better understanding of regional dynamics. One can't talk about regional initiatives unless you really understand the regional interactions and the dynamics. One has to come up with some kind of broader, somewhat analytical, framework or at least ask some fundamental questions which I think we're going to have to be answering. We are going to be confronted with these questions for a long time to come whether we like it or not. So it's in that spirit that I want to raise some questions right at the outset.

One question, which invariably comes up, is whether a gendered perspective on international relations or international security really makes a difference or can make a difference at all. When we look at the current international system, we see states that are driven mostly by a deep sense of insecurity, vis-à-vis each other, they're in competition with each other, for power, for status, for resources. And, we have of course gone through the 19th century emergence of nationalism as a very, very serious and critical variable, of a sort that influenced policymaking. Nationalism has not proven to be something that is going to evaporate, it has been persistent and in some places it became stronger in the waning days of the 20th century despite some of the predictions made earlier.

So, can we offer a gender perspective as an alternative way of ordering the world system? Or is it just an approach which would allow us to sort of tinker on the margins of this existing reality and on the margins of the sort of dominant, realpolitik, realist approach?

A related question is whether there are fundamental differences in male/female perspectives on security, on the state, and if so, how do they differ and are they significant? Now this could be purely empirical work. I mean, it would not require a great deal of effort in one sense to simply do empirical field work to try to see in what ways this differs, if it indeed does differ. We could do this empirical work without prejudice to whether roles and predispositions are socially constructed or somehow or other essentialized. One doesn't really have to get into a sort of very nasty and complicated theoretical debate to simply to look at this kind of empirical question.

Another question that I would like to raise is how much of the gender and security agenda is in fact a western-driven agenda? What are the dominant frameworks being used and do the main issues resonate in the non-western world? Is there a kind of universal approach to gender and security, and if not, what is the role of differing social cultures in defining terms that are important to gender and security? One thing that is interesting is that both the conventional wisdom, the dominant approaches analyzing international relations and security, as well as the critiques, are coming from the west. They're both located in the west. And so, it's the western, mostly western feminists, who are at the forefront of critiquing realism and realpolitik, which has been of course the dominant discourse in international relations. Now, it's not clear at all, for a number of reasons, whether these critiques themselves don't have certain biases, which would obviously have implications for our own thinking, when we're developing enquiry in this field.

Let me just add a word on sort of this critique. In explaining the behavior of states, when we try to look at the way in which states carry out policy, realism, which is the dominant approach, uses the analogy of the Hobbesian state of nature. The Hobbesian

man is the political equivalent of the western economic man, if you will, driven by rational self-interest, highly individualistic, pursuing his economic goals without any real social obligation to the larger community. If you extrapolate this a little bit into a self-seeking system – international self-seeking system – the greatest value would be accorded to self-help, autonomy and power. Many contemporary western feminists have challenged this notion of international behavior and have pointed out that these attributes best represent masculinism.

As many scholars have pointed out, most feminists in the west are liberal feminists in their consciousness. In other words, they are essentially in many ways similar to the Hobbesian economic man in their own thinking. Now this means that their feminism is deeply rooted in an ideology of individualism and individual freedom and choice as being at the forefront. The earlier western feminists of the 1970s and 1980s had tended to argue for the view that women should have the same rights as men and those who did that would put, for example, individual women's rights above the rights of families, above the rights of the community, if you will. The liberal philosophy underlying this doesn't really have a way of tempering individual rights with responsibilities to the family, to society, and the larger community. And there's still very little attention given to this tension, given to this problematique, in terms of a serious concentration on the social responsibilities of women and men within the liberal feminist discourse in the literature - at least in the literature coming out

of the west. Now this is perfectly natural in a western, and I would say particularly American, social system that is after all embedded in liberal individualism. But I think in a South Asian environment, this would be a major concern. And I don't think we can get away from that.

These sorts of symptomatic problems of the general western thinking – feminist thinking – on the subject I'm afraid, might colour to some extent the literature on gender and international relations. If we go back to that archetypal Hobbesian man for a moment and look at the masculine attributes associated with him which are then extrapolated into the international system, it does beg the question of whether masculinity itself means the same thing across cultures and across societies? To put it rather crudely, or simplistically, in what way, for example, does the notion of machismo – the western notions of machismo – how does it have a relationship to notions of masculinity in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka? How do these notions – different sets of notions associated with masculinity – get propagated if at all in the broader regional and international context? So in a sense, the question really is: what are the constructions of masculinity across cultures? And do they share certain fundamental similarities or don't they? There are some analysts, such as Carol Cohen, who have written extensively about strategic discourse in the US and the manner in which much of the strategic discourse is really symbolic language having to do with male sexuality and sexual domination. And she

particularly notes that in the realm of nuclear weaponry. Now can we in turn see strong parallels, weak parallels or no parallels with the western strategic discourse and the dialogue that is now emerging here, given the fact that the nuclear issue is one of the central aspects of strategic discourse?

In the same way, our cultural conceptions of things like power, security, prestige, and status – all of these things, which are very crucial to the way in which international relations is conceived – are they really meaningfully similar across situations and societies? For example, how should one treat the notion of power being exercised by someone like the Ayatollah Khameni in Iran, who is really one of the most critical political leaders in Iran at the moment? As a cleric, he is exercising power – how do we look at this vis-à-vis someone like Bill Clinton exercising power? There are obviously differences. And it seems to me that somewhere along the line one has to wonder if a singular masculinist framework can really capture all of these various divergences. And it's not going to come from the west – this sort of questioning will not come from the west – they won't even perhaps see this as an issue, like we do here in South Asia.

To take a somewhat different tack but continuing along this line of thinking about the possibility of a South Asian approach, it seems to me that there has to be some way of taking into account the fact that the current international system is still hierarchical and indeed hegemonic. The role of the state, the position of the

state is also impinged by the unequal international system in terms of whether you want to call it dependence or vulnerability or what have you. But I think one has to be able to look at the mediating role of the post-colonialist international system in defining national identity, security in the developing countries. It seems it would be important to factor that into our own analysis of gender and security, which, as I've said, is really absent in western reality. Therefore, it's not surprising that it's absent in western discourse. Moreover in the South Asian context, we would have to consider forces such as communalism, ethnic conflict, in order to fully understand security discourses and practices and see how if taking a gendered perspective indeed leads us to a better understanding of these issues of South Asian politics.

Overall I think there are two or three things we should keep in mind. One is that the trend in international relations clearly has been to formulate increasingly sophisticated and detailed critiques of the western masculinist biases – that I think is what we've seen more and more of. They're getting more detailed, more sophisticated but really they are essentially nuanced versions of the same sort of arguments. For a gendered international relations to make sense for South Asia, I think we have to go beyond this narrow preoccupation to one that goes beyond gender and takes into account social and cultural factors. How one does this really is dependent on the scholarship and thinking that comes out of this region. At least that much is very clear to me – it will not

come from the west or any other place. So if this is going to come out, it will have to come from South Asian scholars. And one of the particular points is to have a sufficient mass of people doing it so that at any point in time, there should be a critical mass from which one can engage with the broader dialogue.

Secondly, even if we were to look at some of the conventional international relations approaches, we do find some changes taking place. There is an increasing recognition of the importance of understanding gender, even to explain so-called big politics and big history. Let me just for example take one case here – Paul Kennedy. In Paul Kennedy's book on the rise and decline of great powers and their interactions, there is no reference really to gender or women's issues and so on. However, when Kennedy went back and began to forecast international politics into the next 50 years, into the 21st century, it turned out that one key variable for his analysis was the social consequences of demographic transitions.

This in turn forced Kennedy to see changes in the role of women as a critical variable in determining 21st century realities. Normally the role of women in such large-scale historical and political changes is rarely investigated but the fact is that research has shown over time – thanks in large part to the women's movement over the last many years – it has been increasingly demonstrating a strong causal link between increasing gender equality and the rapid and non-disruptive completion of the

demographic transition. And therefore, he was forced to actually take into account that this is in fact a very, very important factor to explain large-scale changes in the world system. So in a sense, an assumption rising out of this would be is that rapid population increases in societies where women don't enjoy basic equalities could lead to crises in other social institutions, which of course then has implications for the overall global political economy and the prospects for different societies within it. So the link is clearly there and I'm glad Kennedy finally saw that and wrote about it.

Finally, leaving aside the conceptual terrain and whatever framework one wants to put one's own work into or however you may define oneself – as a feminist or otherwise – I think there is one immediate compulsion that probably all of us could agree on. And that is how to increase access for women to political power and increase access to political decision-making. How do you bring women's experiences and skills out of the so-called private sphere and into the more public domain? How can decision-makers be encouraged to listen to women's experiences and women's notions of various things without having to see whether or not in fact there is a difference of approach or in viewpoints?

Armed Conflict and Political Participation of Women

Dr. N Shantha Mohan

Background

The information for this paper is drawn from two baseline studies, i.e. "Women in Armed Conflict Situations" and "Political Participation of Women in India", supported by the International Women's Rights Action Watch-Asia Pacific. The former study was coordinated by the North-East Network and the latter by the Gender studies Unit of the National Institute of Advanced Studies. Apart from establishing the incidence and forms of violence women face in such situations, it aims at evincing the need for women to participate in politics to effectively articulate and negotiate their demand for a life free from violence.

The Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), also known as the Women's Convention and the Women's Bill of Rights, was adopted by the UN General assembly in 1979 and ratified by India in 1993. It is the most popular international treaty that deals with women's human rights. Though the spirit and context of the Convention in effect addresses the structural causes of violence and discrimination women face in different spheres of their lives, the text of CEDAW does not have a specific article with relation to women in armed conflict. However several articles of the Convention and General Recommendations

12 and 19 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women apply to the situation.

Women and Armed Conflict

In situations of armed conflict, while the entire community gets affected, the effect on women is intense and complex. The term security should transcend its narrow definition to include all rights and freedoms of women, both in the personal and public domains. It should be reiterated that as the focus is on women and their concerns, it is necessary that the whole question of violence that is perpetrated from the personal to the public to the conflict situation be addressed. Women perceive and experience violence differently from that defined by men and the state. Further, it varies among the women themselves according to the roles they play in the situation. The study has identified six such different groups of women and has been able to capture what security means to them in a conflict situation. They are: a) women relatives of armed activists, b) women relatives of state armed forces, c) women militants, d) women as shelter providers, e) women as victims of sexual and physical abuse and f) women as peace negotiators. However, all of them, irrespective of their roles, have to a greater extent been victims of sexual and physical abuse. This victimisation cuts across ethnic, communal and all other identities of women, except that of gender.

Conflict is also location-specific and therefore understood differently by those residing in the hills as against those in the

plains. The primary question is whether women, in a conflict situation, need to be seen in the context of their ethnicity or that of their gender. However, even the women under pressures of intense conflict tend to give more importance to ethnic rather than their gender identity, resulting in the latter getting subsumed in the dominant ethnic struggle. It is not only the state that views women in a neutral and non-gendered manner – this view is also perpetrated by the community, family and other vested groups due to which women lose their identity as women.

While women are victims of state perpetrated violence, there is even the prevalence of violence between and within ethnic groups. Inter and intra ethnic violence between and among marginalised and tribal communities living in armed conflict situations also increases insecurity for the women. This is mainly due to the limited access and control over the already depleted and scarce resources available to them. The struggles are therefore on the one hand as an ethnic group and on the other as independent communities. Because of which, there is evidence of much inter-tribal conflict, and conflict even between militant groups. Each of these forms of conflict impact women differently and thereby their understanding of security too. But, in all, it marginalises the rights of women and fails to recognise the differential impact that mainstream human rights approach has on women. Women, irrespective of the category they belong to, have a common reaction to the kinds of violence and sufferings they face and therefore able to transcend their differences on this issue. But

these women loose their gender identity when it is the question of their ethnic and community identity.

The other questions are whether there is large-scale migration of women in search of livelihood systems and different safe places and an increase in the incidence of women in the sex trade because of the conflict. The phenomena of forced migration and vulnerability to physical, mental and sexual abuse and even killings is on the increase. The women are especially susceptible to violence due to ethnic clashes and that perpetrated by the state, which is supposed to guard and protect them. Such violence has restricted the mobility of women and confined them to their homes and has also affected their livelihoods, food security and properties. Often, they are responsible for running households single handedly. As a group, primarily addressing issues regarding women's rights, the violations of freedoms and victimisation women face is the focus.

Though several legislations have been enacted, they lack special provisions to address concerns of women in conflict. In particular, the intermittent operation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act since 1958 has contributed to the high incidence of violence in the region. Some of the salient features of the Act are that it gives unbridled powers to the armed forces to shoot to kill in order to maintain order; enter, search and arrest without warrant or use any amount of force to effect the arrest. It gives almost total immunity to the armed forces as no prosecution, suit or legal

proceedings can be brought against them without the permission of the Central Government. Where men are either in hiding or killed, the women are vulnerable to victimisation under the Act.

The tribal communities are governed by customary laws, which are gender insensitive. They are deeply entrenched within patriarchal values of control and domination of women. Because of this, the participation of women in politics and decision-making bodies is extremely low, whether they are the traditional bodies or the democratic institutions. Further, the absence of a facilitating and enabling environment prevents women from entering politics. As such the space for articulating and making the voices heard on the basis of their gender identity is entirely lacking. In this context, it needs to be pointed out that women have been socialized to believe and internalize the notion that they are the transmitters of their culture and therefore they have to carry on what has been handed over to them as an ethnic group, rather than as a woman.

It needs to be remembered that those very women who have lost their men in conflict, are the ones who provide, nurture, care and work towards maintaining their families. However, in the framework of human rights, they are not given the same importance as the men who have lost their lives. The burden women shoulder under such harsh conditions has not been considered as a matter of security, though it is their security that is at stake. It includes their economic and physical security, to be

mobile, and to have access to resources. It is evinced that the major item of expenditure incurred is on providing for the armed forces and not for the betterment of the communities and the civil society.

The phenomenon of women being forced to service men in the armed forces is justified on the grounds that they are the men who have sacrificed their personal wellbeing to provide security in the region and therefore need satiation of their desires. Thus, the state which is supposed to be the guardian of protecting the rights of its citizens is often the cause for the violation of the same rights. The women also face similar problems with the militant groups. Therefore women are victimised and exploited, both by the security forces and the militants. The State is unable to provide the basic necessities of life as the major share of the financial allocations and the resources are used for maintaining the armed forces. In addition to the scarce resources, the presence of the armed forces inhibits women's free mobility to work and therefore to the incomes that are absolutely essential for their very survival. The most vulnerable under these conditions are the children, the elderly and the disabled.

The conflict situation has adversely affected all dimensions of everyday life. Girl children, in particular, are unable to attend schools because of the fear of being abused. Further, the schools are located away from their homes and they are afraid of being caught in crossfire. Primary health care is weak because of break

down of services and the reluctance of health personnel to work in such conflict-ridden areas. Women are not even able to go and get fuel for their everyday consumption. In all, the women do not enjoy their rights and their rights remain subsumed in mainstream conflict considerations.

Women and Governance

Women face the same kind of exclusion in their participation in politics as in the armed conflict situation. Over the last few decades, their numbers in formal political bodies have shown only a marginal increase, with their number never having exceeded 15 percent of all seats in the parliament and 7 percent in the legislatures. Among all the states in India, as of 1998, Delhi records the highest proportion of nearly 13 percent.

Noting the low participation of women in politics, the government of India, in the year 1993, adopted an affirmative action for providing reservation for women in Local Self-Governing institutions through Constitutional Amendments. Prior to the Amendments, only the state of Karnataka had 25 per cent reservation for women in local bodies. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act introduced 33 per cent reservation for women in the Panchayat Raj institutions in the rural areas. Similarly, the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act provides for 33 per cent reservation for women in Nagara Palika and Municipalities in towns and urban areas. In spite of such action, some States like Bihar and North-East have had no elections to these bodies. It is

only through the intervention of the court that elections have been held in Bihar.

With these amendments, at least at the local levels, over a million women are now actively participating in shaping the policies and programmes of the country. However, such affirmative action has not been extended to the higher echelons of governance. The 81st, 84th and 85th Amendment Bills providing for reservation for women at the Parliament and Legislature levels have been stalled for not having reservations within reservation for women on the basis of caste. This has become a highly debated issue and it is worth noting that none of the arguments that have been brought up against them came up during the passage of the far more historic 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments providing for reservation at the local levels of governance. The resistance to such a reservation is because the presence of one-third numbers of women to the total number of seats would displace that many numbers of men from holding positions of power. They would in due course be in a position to progressively empower themselves and therefore become a power that male representatives would have to contend with. They would also be able to harness the support of strong and vibrant constituencies of both women and men. These inherent fears have been manifested through the absence of enabling structures for women to contest and win elections; the lack of financial and human support for them by political parties and family members; increasing violence and criminalisation of politics; character assassination of those women

who assert themselves and the general impediments they pose for women to occupy positions of power.

While political space has been created for women at the local and district levels by the affirmative action of the state, they have not been able to guarantee a non-discriminative and enabling environment for women to participate. Mechanisms to protect women in politics from character assassination, criminalisation and extensive use of money and muscle power by males in politics are also inadequate. Another major impediment to women's effective participation is the lack of awareness among them of their rights and responsibilities as elected members. This increases their vulnerability to negative experiences.

Therefore, there is little or no participation of women in decision-making processes. The women's agenda gets subsumed in mainstream political processes, where the agenda set by the dominant, and by men, takes priority. Women lack an enabling environment, which provides the space for them to articulate their demands and/or create the pressure on the state to be responsive to their own needs and that of their constituencies. Even if there are women, they are there only figuratively and do not have any voice to negotiate their demands or represent the interests of other women. Further, women do not have and/or are unable to nurture a supportive and vibrant constituency, particularly that of women, to back them in their negotiations. In the presence of such impediments, it becomes extremely difficult for women to centre-

stage women's concerns, increase their visibility and bring about the desired change in the existing political dialogue.

At the higher levels of political institutions; i.e. the legislatures and the parliament, the number of women elected is abysmally low. This despite the fact that the number of women contesting elections has been consistently increasing. Political parties seem uniformly reluctant to field women candidates. The latest data reveals that in the parliament their representation does not exceed 8 percent. For the states, Delhi has the highest number of women members (12.9 per cent) followed by Andhra Pradesh and Kerala (9.5 and 9.5 per cent) respectively. Not having a critical mass within the political institutions makes it difficult for women to push their agenda forward. The lack of an active and articulate critical number of elected women representatives impairs them from accessing decision-making positions, negotiating for important portfolios and mainstreaming gender issues in policy and programmes. Even where there are articulate and assertive women representatives, they are deliberately marginalised through a process of exclusion by the dominant and the powerful. The few women who are in decision-making positions are invariably given 'soft portfolios' which are generally the extension of the women's stereotypical image. In the absence of political allies in key positions to support them and little or no access and control over resources and decision-making powers, they are relegated to the background.

There exists a lot of resistance to elected women representatives because of the belief that women occupy these positions due to

tokenism and male-dominated support extended to them through families or political parties. However, it must be realised that even this token visibility due to their physical presence in political institutions in itself can be considered the first step to their active participation. However, to facilitate women's participation, there is a need to work closely with the state and the civil society.

Elected women representatives remain silent and voiceless and accept what is given to them. They rarely oppose dominant structures, in order to retain their own positions and power. This is possible because women often get naturalised to the ways of the dominant masculine culture. In order to free them from the process of internalising the dominant view-points in governance, women need to be empowered so that they are able to represent their own agenda and/ or get the dominant sections to voice the concerns of women. Thus, to facilitate women's effective political participation, governance should be engendered. In a longitudinal study undertaken by the Gender Studies Unit of the National Institute of Advanced Studies involving research, action and advocacy on 'Engendering Decentralised Governance', it was revealed that both women and men defined 'effective governance' somewhat similarly. Accordingly, all activities and outcomes that were visible were identified as the parameters for measuring effectiveness. But, the study also revealed a subtle difference in the priorities of women and men in the activities envisaged by them. Women, generally prioritised activities that were considered invisible, as they had no immediate measures for evaluating effectiveness. Thus, their

contribution has been measured against parameters and norms defined by the dominant and as such been deemed 'ineffective'. Therefore, the parameters of measuring governance should be developed to not only incorporate consciously the male and female perspectives but also involve both men and women in this process of engendering governance. It is imperative for both women and men to be partners in struggling for the rights of women and therefore for a just society. Without this direction, women will be segregated and excluded in the mainstream dialogue and discussions of identity, power and decision-making.

Governance in the tribal areas

According to the 1991 census, the scheduled tribes (ST) constitute 8.08 per cent of the total population in India. They are spread unevenly over different regions of the country. The Constitution of India in its Articles 244(1) and (2) in part X has listed the "Scheduled Areas" and "Scheduled Tribes" under the Fifth and Sixth Schedules respectively. The Fifth Schedule refers to the tribal dominated areas in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Maharashtra, Orrisa and Rajasthan. While the Sixth Schedule refers to the administration of the tribal areas in the Northeastern region including the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura.

The rationale behind the notification of the scheduled areas has been to assist the tribal population in enjoying their existing rights and to develop and promote the economic, educational, and social

progress of the tribal inhabitants. The Fifth Schedule envisages a special system of administration for the areas directly under the Governors of the state under the direction of the Central Government. It is based on the premise that that it should be in consonance with the customary laws, social practices and traditional management of community resources. As per this schedule the State government is responsible for implementing the provisions pertaining to the welfare and general development of scheduled tribes in the region. It also provides for Tribal Advisory Council, which is an advisory body that prevents the exploitation and discrimination of the tribal population. One of its most important functions is to facilitate governance of the scheduled areas in the larger interest of the tribals.

The Sixth Schedule provides for a separate mechanism of administration in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. Entry 2 of the Schedule provides for the setting of District and Regional Councils in each autonomous district and region. It confers powers of legislation and administration of justice on the district councils apart from endowing them with executive, developmental and financial responsibilities. They have a traditional jury-based legal system evolved indigenously by the tribal societies. This body has the right to own and dispose of property and the right to sue and be sued.

In conclusion the Fifth and Sixth Schedules facilitate the tribals to retain their customary practices and the traditional laws framed

by them to enable governance of the scheduled areas in the larger interest of the tribals. The Acts of Parliament and the legislature of the State will not be applicable to these states unless it is specifically made applicable through separate notifications.

India has adopted a bold, affirmative action approach through Constitutional amendments by way of providing for one-third reservation for women in all local self-governance institutions. It also provides for reservation of the posts of Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons in these bodies. However, the provisions of the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution of India were not made applicable to the Scheduled and tribal areas. Subsequently it was made applicable to the Fifth Scheduled areas as per the provisions of the Panchayats (Extension of Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996.

In the above Schedules, in the scheduled areas, which are predominantly tribal, the village councils are the institutions in the field of administration, religion, politics, economics, justice and so on. Generally, it is found that these councils do not have women members, and in cases where there are women, they hold peripheral positions. Their absence in local institutions has led the women to take a divided stand on the issue of reservation at the higher levels of governance. For example, in Nagaland, during an interaction with the National Commission of Women in 1998, the Naga women were of the opinion that it was crucial for women to be represented on the village councils first, where decisions affecting their lives were taken. They stressed on the power yielded by the village

councils and were apprehensive of the fact that even if reservation is to be introduced at the state and parliament levels, the results of such elections would continue to be determined by these councils with minimal support to the concerns of women.

The number of women in the state assemblies as per the latest statistics reveals the complete absence of women in the states of Mizoram and Nagaland (1998). In the remaining states of Meghalaya (1998), Tripura (1998) and Assam (1996) they do not exceed 5 per cent.

Their low numbers may be the reason for their inability to negotiate for reservation in the lower tiers of governance i.e. the village councils or to push for specific notifications. This gives a clear indication that an affirmative action state initiative is necessary and in the context the 85th Amendment Bill seeking one-third reservation for women in the parliamentary and legislative seats becomes an extremely important alternative.

Conclusion

The lack of a critical mass of women in decision-making institutions impedes them in participating in mainstream and male dominated dialogue on what constitutes security. The accumulation and consolidation of power through violence is what is absorbing the male discourse on security. But, such a discourse does not include the violence experienced by women, both from the state and within their homes. Thus, the meaning attached to security is

entirely different from the one given by men, who center-stage ethnic identity rather than gender, thereby subsuming the importance of the rights of women to even a minimum means of livelihood and their basic needs. There is a need for a comprehensive definition of security which includes all dimensions of the lives of women – economic, social, educational, political, legal and so on. This definition and the elements of it need to be in a common and accepted vocabulary that emphasizes the identity and perspective of women transcending their ethnic, communal, racial and regional identities. By so doing, there is the possibility of evolving an international perspective and orientation to security as defined by women. This would provide the opportunity for women to be the main players in developing networks and strengthening regional co-operation and participating effectively in international politics.

The presence of women in large numbers at all levels of governance and decision-making bodies can also have a tremendous impact on the State and other international agencies, in that they can pressurise and facilitate them to fulfill their obligation for ensuring women's equality and their rights.

Executive Summary of the proceedings
of the International Workshop

Dr Deepa M. Ollapally

Introduction

On July 30-31, 1998 the International Strategic Studies Unit at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) Bangalore held an international workshop on "South Asian Women in International Security: Building Cooperative Networks." The Workshop was chaired by Dr. Deepa Ollapally. Participants from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Uganda and Australia attended the Workshop. The Workshop was designed to approach the question of security and gender in South Asia by broadening the concept of security to "comprehensive security," and taking up issues which are transnational in nature, with a strong gender component. The aim of the Workshop was three fold:

1. To bring together women experts working in more conventional international relations/security with those involved in non-traditional security, especially with gender implications.

2. To launch a regional network for shared access to information and experience; for building sustained collective efforts in areas of common concern; and serving as a vital link in non-formal diplomacy.

3. To provide a forum for professional development with the objective of increasing participation and access of women in the region in decision making in government agencies, international institutions, nongovernmental organisations, and opinion making and expert bodies.

The participants were drawn from academia, media, policy community and NGOs. The spanned a considerable spectrum in terms of seniority, age and political persuasion. This particular mix was an important element in the crafting of the Workshop.

In South Asia, this initiative is the first of its kind and as such, in some ways, the Workshop was an experiment or pilot project. As circumstances would have it, it also turned out to be one of the very first (if not the first) nongovernmental/expert interactions between Indians and Pakistanis in either of the two countries after the May 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan. Despite this backdrop, it deserves to be emphasised that the atmosphere at the Workshop itself was entirely cordial and not at all vitiated by the heightened state to state tensions. For this, the participants are to be individually applauded.

Emergent Themes from Discussions and Working Groups

A number of basic themes emanated from the discussions, which may be characterised in the following manner. These are essentially issues which formed the parameters, assumptions for

building blocks in thinking about gender and security, broadly speaking.

I. Situating Selves

A number of the participants had not viewed their work in terms of the notion of security of transnationalism, nor indeed considered the possible link between gender and comprehensive security until the Workshop presented these issues along those lines. One basic question which ran through the discussions (implicitly and explicitly) was whether a "feminist" perspective on security was necessary to underpin discussions or not.

Working Group A: Revisioning Gender and International Relations, addressed this issue to an extent, with some divergence of opinion. This difference was reflected in the larger plenary body as well, with strong differences particularly between those in NGOs versus those in government, bureaucracy and policy arenas. Two main tendencies were apparent. One suggested a wholescale reconceptualization of security, particularly through a feminist critique of Neorealist theory focusing on militarism, gender and violence, ideology, and the reification of the nation state. An alternative viewpoint preferred to take the nation state as a given constituent element of the contemporary international system, with accompanying structures and constraints. However, this view suggested that women and the induction of gender/comprehensive security issues could play a mediating role to mitigate some of the serious drawbacks of the current South Asian international system.

In more concrete terms, the first group for example would argue for considering state violence by looking at presumed linkages between the personal (including domestic violence), internal, and international safety/security. In contrast, the second group would argue for promoting such mechanisms as confidence building measures and greater involvement of nongovernmental organisations in traditional statecraft. While the latter can fit into the former framework, clearly the point of departure for the two is different. Moreover, the latter approach does not easily or necessarily accommodate the former's priorities.

The question of whether increases in the number of women in higher echelons of power and policymaking alone was sufficient or whether an altogether *qualitatively* different framework was needed was debated a number of times. In other words, the issue was whether changing the gender balance would accomplish anything significant. The fact that presentations were made both by analysts who promoted the importance of greater numbers of women in security and foreign policy, as well as by experts who challenged these very foreign policy and security structures, allowed and indeed forced, participants to hear important opposing opinions.

II. Defining and Redefining Security

A consensus on making the notion of security more "people oriented," rather than "territory oriented" was evident from the outset. This preference was generally held across the spectrum of

NGO to government experts. Beyond that, partly as a result of the mix of participants, partly due to divergence in thinking, and partly because of differences in priorities, the so-called traditional versus nontraditional security concerns tended to "compete" for salience at the Workshop.

A bridging of sorts between these two groups did occur at times, best exemplified by the response to the Emmy award winning film, "Selling of Innocents" which chronicled the trafficking of girls and women from Nepal to India. The presence of the filmmaker, Ruchira Gupta, who described the off camera making of the film added an important dimension. A traditional or even "comprehensive security" based meeting is most unlikely to have included this type of film presentation on its program. Yet this film which interested an intricate web of state boundaries, transnational economics, religion, patriarchy and muscle power dramatically illustrated the need for combining traditional security with nontraditional security concerns made a great impact on members of the Workshop.

III. Uniqueness and Commonality

With 35 noted women from eight countries represented at the Workshop, it was not surprising that country-specific and situation-specific reports pointed to the numerous variations in context and experience. Some commonality did stand out, particularly as the presentations for the Roundtable on the status of Women in International Affairs and Panel I: Gender Issues and Comprehensive Security in South Asia, revealed.

There was great interest in learning more about the various situations and drawing lesions from other cases. For example, the presentation on conflict resolution in Uganda and the manner in which methods were tailored to fit African circumstances and culture created enormous interest across the board. What was particularly striking for many South Asian participants was the terribly low level of information and understanding about each other's conditions, as well as the acute dearth of opportunities for professional interaction. Many commented that without this kind of Workshop, they would never have been able to interact so freely and easily with counterparts from the neighbouring countries.

Review of Working Groups

Three Working Groups were convened twice to focus specifically on the sub-themes of "Revisioning Gender and International Relations," "Confidence Building," and "Transnational Problems in the Region." Given the wide range of "Comprehensive Security," this was to facilitate more focused discussion and thinking. The Working Groups were charged with developing strategies and options for enhancing women's participation and decision making in official and nonofficial ways for problem solving in common areas of concern, and assessing the potential utility of professional networking. The Working Groups provided a brief report of the plenary of their findings on the final day and an overview is provided below. Recommendations which we made are given later in this Executive Summary.

I. Working Group A: Revisioning Gender and International Relations

A major issue was the need to change ideas and modes of thinking along with increasing the participation of women at decisionmaking levels and in areas of security where women have traditionally been underrepresented. There was concern regarding the manner in which state borders are privileged above trans-state issues like "refugee movements" which were compared to a "river." The call was for "softening" of borders in the region to accommodate common problems. In this connection, the need to redefine security was emphasised.

The Group referred to the "invisibility" of women in security affairs despite direct impingement on women, for example in laws regarding citizenship; and military violence. The need to increase gender sensitivity in each of our own situations was also highlighted. The group also pointed to the utility of empirical work and the need for such additional work to locate and build new theoretical approaches.

II. Working Group B: Confidence Building

Confidence building was seen as being relevant both across hostile states and within states where internal conflict is occurring such as in Sri Lanka. For some, building confidence among the members of the Working Group itself was seen as an important task. There was strong sentiment that Tracks II, and III must influence Track I diplomacy. Confidence building needs to be

proactive and consider short term, medium term and long term issues simultaneously, and somehow avoid turf battles for these by the different Tracks. A fairly successful example of this was noted with reference to the ASEAN Regional Forum where each Track's input is actively sought. More specifically, the utility of a "Comprehensive Group of Eminent Persons" to give public support to government institutions in confidence building which could potentially run up against domestic opposition was discussed. There was some sentiment that NGOs as such are not as influential in South Asian as they are in the west. The role of South Asian Non Residents in acting as catalysts was also touched upon.

The Group attached great importance in focusing on win-win situations in nonformal efforts across borders, which ensure that there is no *loss* of confidence for any of the parties in the end. Conventional confidence building measures were viewed as insufficient in the South Asian context; other steps need to be taken geared toward changing "mind sets." Noncontroversial areas should be tackled first, which hold the greatest promise of some degree of success. It was suggested that the small and large success stories in South Asian confidence building need to be publicized in the media to the wider domestic audience, along with successes of each other, in an attempt to counter the cycle of generally negative publicity South Asian countries tend to accord each other. It was believed that economic imperatives of individual countries may influence confidence building positively.

The role of women in confidence building and particularities therein was debated without reaching any strong consensus. The Group underlined that women could and should play an important part at Track I, II and III. To make the decision processes in security more gender aware, it was suggested that women speakers specifically from conflict situations or conflicted areas need to heard (at all Track levels). It was also suggested that women who are working in various capacities in internal security need to be included in networks such as this, along with women in other political arenas including regional or state assemblies.

III. Working Group C: Transnational Problems in the Region

This Group identified a number of issues which either requires cross border efforts or is desirable to approach in cross border terms. These issues included poverty which cuts across the region in significant ways; shared environmental concerns; religion and social impact; the nature of patriarchal institutions and socio-cultural aspects; and the position of women in conflict situations.

Several strategies were considered by the Group to enhance the role of women. One basic need focused on advocacy to deconstruct stereotypes. The need to build consensus was pointed out, especially through multi-level networking at the local, regional and international level. Methods to enhance skills of women in leadership was viewed as critical.

It was suggested that a level mechanism such as a Regional

Tribunal at the SAARC level be set up to specifically address the following: women in armed conflict situations; refugee women; women being trafficked; and migrant women labour. For transnational victims, a mechanism for "compensation" was seen as necessary since they can easily "fall through the cracks" of the system as it stands. It was noted that a Fund to finance some of these ideas would be important for actual implementation.

Follow on Recommendations

These recommendations and suggestions are derived from the Workshop and post-Workshop communication with some participants.

1. Each participant submit a *Note* of no more than two to three pages on what "security" means in their view. This would be an important exercise in gaining greater collective understanding of a basic but terribly complex term.

2. Set up a Web site for South Asian Women in International Security.

3. Create a Directory of women experts in security in the region. To accomplish this, each participant should supply names, address and brief bio-data of 3-5 others in the field.

4. Compile international laws/instruments relating to women and security which have been accepted in the region.

5. Send Research Note to peace journals.

6. Initiate study to reconceptualise gender and security in South Asia, keeping in mind particularly a South Asia wide viewpoint. One subtheme identified is the link between

violence in peacetime and violence in war. An overall objective could be to contribute to the security/gender discourse which is currently dominated by western scholars.

7. Develop roster of NGOs and groups in South Asia (and elsewhere as relevant) involved in similar issues, for networking, collaboration and mutual learning.

8. Relay Workshop recommendations to the Chair of the SAARC Secretariat.

9. Establish subnetworks or separate networks along the lines of the three Working Group subject areas. Specific suggestions include:

    a. Transnational – On issues of societal security, especially affecting women and children, mount a special effort to involve MPs, MLAs (national and state) and officials, male and female, in further networking.

    b. Revisioning Gender and Security – Identify and conduct theoretical and empirical studies. Work which is occurring in South Asian countries (which appears to be largely empirical) needs to be coordinated and disseminated effectively.

    c. Confidence Building – Utilize the network for promoting more positive images of each other. Institute cross country study groups which mirror ongoing official talks or take up issues in anticipation.

10. Constitute a small core group to evolve modalities for planning continuing traveling Workshops to widen networking.

11. Hold a workshop with women in government and bureaucracy dealing with security concerns, and NGOs for a brainstorming

to bridge the existing perceptual and experiential gap. Common ground needs to be evolved.

12. Conduct one meeting to seriously and substantively identify what the security concerns of the individual South Asian countries are and hone in on common regional security concerns. Examples – environment, economic restructuring and women's work force, along with drugs, trafficking and terrorism.

13. Undertake a myth vs. reality exercise to consider how religion, culture and education feed into threat perceptions and how to counteract it.

14. For future meetings, include some male participants linked with the security establishment.

15. To raise the visibility of women security experts, establish contact with national T.V. and press agencies and provide expert lists for interview and other purposes.

'What does Security Mean?'
Viewpoints from the discussion

A decade after the end of the Cold War, we are now at the beginning of a new millennium and our understanding of the context of security is undergoing fairly major change. Until now we had essentially two schools of thought – the realist school which stated that the states are the main building blocks of the international system and their sovereignty is not limited. In this approach, security is a matter of competition between states – it is state-centered. But there is another approach which emerged and came into its own during the later part of the Cold War and that was a holistic perspective where scholars talked about people-oriented security, and put people first.

Rather than looking at this purely as a male vs. female issue, we can look at it as hegemony of the patriarchal discourse where both men and women have been co-opted. There are of course some men and perhaps a larger sum of women who have managed to steer away from this discourse.

There is the whole notion about hegemonic masculinity and the whole notion of realism where power is central – are women able to look at power from a different perspective at all and if so, what are those dimensions of power? And how much of the gender and security agenda is a western agenda? Treating third

world women as one undifferentiated mass doesn't really sensitize one to the problem of security because even within the third world victim-woman myth, there are several gradations. A middle class woman from a third world country probably buys into the power discourse much more easily than does a menial factory worker. So there are both shared and non-shared perspectives even within the third world.

Implicit in the current security notion is the view that states are in competition with one another and that issues such as balance of power and deterrence are the key parameters of the security debate. That proceeds on the premise of the Hobbesian view of nature that war is inevitable and therefore self-help and realism determines that you somehow work out accommodation in a situation where war is inevitable. Even in the west, where people are pointing to the fact that women are not getting involved in the security discourse and that women should participate more effectively in the security discourse, people think what should happen is that women should be more informed about the range of the missiles, and the nuts and bolts of the nuclear system. That is purportedly being informed about international affairs and security affairs. That reinforces an area of diffidence for women. We feel that unless we are well-versed in the nuts and bolts of the nuclear establishment, we are somehow outside – we are marginalized. I think the first thing to do is to decide that we are not inconsequential to the debate. That we are, in fact, not required to know the range of the Pershing missile, that that does not

really construe the be-all and the end-all of the security argument. The other thing is starting from the western axiom that the personal is the political – one can carry that one step further and say that the international is the personal for women. Because whether we like it or not, we are enmeshed in it all and we are actors and actresses in this international system of security vs. insecurity. Whether we are part of the tourism trade, whether we are women who serve as soldiers on bases, whether we are in factories in what is called the trade-free zones of Latin America, whether we are on the plantations of Latin America, whether we are in the Philippines or Vietnam or in Sri Lanka, we are all servicing an international system where masculine hegemony is established.

And we all are ambivalent about both our locations in and our relations to that system. Our identity in that system is not fixed – it varies – our identities are in flux depending on whether we assume the role of consumer at one given location or victim at another given location. But we are already part of that international system and by virtue of being part of that international system, we have to realize that we are no longer just victims. We have to realize that we are no longer – even though we are marginalized in terms of the discourse, we are actually what makes the international system run. And recognition of that would move our involvement with issues of security much further.

On the issue of male/female difference, it appears that suddenly, liberation in women and the coming to terms with security issues

has become a gradual, actual, masculinization act in itself. The initial effort of the women's movement was an attempt at feminizing security, trying to feminize a look at power through a feminine perspective, but in fact the reverse is happening. When it comes to issues of power, there's actually a masculinisation of women because those women who accept the agenda traditionally set by patriarchal or male roles, get absorbed into it and become role models and they are the ones who set agendas and therefore they become very critical actors in the whole process of actually voicing that kind of discourse and making it more acceptable.

It's also the whole business of shifting the conceptual vocabulary – creating an alternative vocabulary. The current discourse concentrates on formal legal structures and tends to be institution and state-centric. Civil society is not a major concern or even included in these discussions. We're discussing threat perceptions purely from the governmental – from the state point of view. The other things it that the contemporary discourse on security does not look at the fact that there are sizable sections of the population within the country that does not necessarily reflect the government's point of view. And those are sections that the women's discourse needs to give a voice to – not just women but the sections that do not necessarily agree with the existing security debate or discourse. They somehow do not even enter the columns of the newspaper. So there has been a kind of marginalization of public opinion. And it is not that these voices are not there – they are very much there – but somehow they are not allowed to enter

into the mainstream. And when we talk about ideology, we're not talking about crude propaganda. Ideology works most subtly and most effectively by excluding things from discourse – exclusion is the most subtle form of the ideological state apparatus functioning.

In the debate it has been continuously reinforced that states are rational actors. Going back to the Hobbesian individualistic state of nature – Hobbes' men are basically unmothered individuals who come from this state of nature – they are unmothered. Subaltern groups and voices do not fit into the discourse, there is little access to information because it's always shrouded in mystery. The presumption is that you cannot understand security issues – they're far too complex, far too technical. And therefore there is a vested interest in keeping the level of discourse at the purely technical and non-human level. Because the moment it translates into vocabulary that people can empathize with or at least share or begin to understand, then it no longer remains the preserve of the authority of the security establishment.

Then of course there is the changing nature of the nation-state itself. The security debate continues as though the nation-state hasn't changed one bit. It's still the preferred model. It's amazing how many of our security experts still talk about deterrence as a viable way of determining international relations. People whom we respect very highly for their intellectual acumen are still talking about deterrence. There is a tension between political

independence and economic inter-dependence, and sovereignty vs. economic inter-dependence. This has not been substantially understood – or at least cognized – in the security debate. Issues of poverty, dispossession, and displacement never enter into the security debate and so when you don't look at poverty and you don't look at displacement, you don't look at women. You leave out a large section of the population.

And part of this mythology is that security acknowledges violence and war and women, by nature – you know, again a very essentialist argument is imported – women, by nature, are not supposed to be inclined toward conflict and war, although we know that that is not the case. So that's another great lacuna. Many analysts have pointed out that the South Asian countries are quite comfortable living in a world of greater ambiguity about what is deterrence. There is a certain existential feeling that yes, there have been tests and we have therefore shown a level of credibility and that's enough – one doesn't have to go down the road of rapid escalation. And when you're sitting in the U.S., one also hears the opposite – why is there not a transparent doctrine about nuclear weaponry? Why is there not a command and control being set up very clearly? Whereas the Indian perspective seems to be – we don't want to go down that road of the nuts and bolts of bean counting – how many weapons, where is it being targeted, who is targeting, do we have all that and so on? That is actually a dangerous kind of spiraling. You can't turn the clock back but the question is and how do you approach that?

There are certain cultural, historical predilections that allow a woman to be less masculinist, less aggressive – not that they want to be, I'm not saying that we are inherently less aggressive – but there is a certain cultural condition that allows you to live in this world of ambiguity that the western world cannot accept. It's very difficult for them to accept this ambiguity – they want everything laid out, they want a cost-benefit analysis, they want a problem-solving method. So these methodologies don't necessarily mesh together.

On the point about the rationality of the regime – if we take the example of the tests, it's not just rationality of the regime, it's narrowed down to rationality of who is in power. Because the regime was actually divided – those in the opposition questioned that rationality. Those who are in power decide and they are correct. The rest of the decision makers are then wrong and cannot question it. Just like in the military where you cannot question in a situation of military tension. So there was a transferring from the military into the civil sphere – you were not allowed to question what the government was doing even if you were part of the opposition.

There is a large part of the population whose opinion is never sought, when it comes to foreign policy issues. Take elections for the last decades – how many times have foreign policy issues occupied a key place in electoral manifestos. Rarely. People are rarely ever consulted. There is the view that people in Pakistan will not accept a peace with India if the Kashmir problem is not resolved according to what they expect. Have the people ever been actually consulted? Does it matter to them? What we really need to do is to take different segments of civil society and get them involved in the security process. In India, the intelligentsia is told to tow the line or they are isolated or they are debunked as anti-nationals. It is easy to discredit a person.

There is no space for dissent in this kind of discourse and that is what you need to create – you need to create space where different opinions can find a voice. It doesn't exist at this moment. Somewhere along the lines, you need to bring a home-grown solution to what your foreign policy problems are. In India and Pakistan, the debate on Confidence Building Measures has gone forever, focused only on the military issues, without looking at deeper factors. Look at the history books of the two countries – they are coloring the minds of generations to come, poisoning their minds. The media does the same thing.

Unless there is a diversification at the grassroots level and you start questioning and involving different sections of society in the discourse, a handful of people are not going to make a difference – because they will be co-opted eventually. Even if there was a woman on the National Security Advisory Board, could she take a different stand and stay put?

It's not just a woman's participation, which is important. We have woman prime ministers, we have woman opposition leaders,

but what about the position of women in the larger sense? And it's not the women alone who can participate in women's issues. Male and female should both be involved.

The security discourse must be conceptualized in a way that goes beyond the concept of force. In realist thinking, it is only the state that is a referent but we can have multiple referents. The state remains naturally the primary referent but the scope should be broadened, especially in the South Asian case. For many South Asian people, there is endemic political violence and instability, the threat of surprise terrorist attacks, acute water shortages, the ill effects of deforestation, refugee cross-border movements – these are more real, more threatening than the high politics of States.

However, as someone has written, anything bad will come under the scope of security. We should create certain criteria so that the concept does not get diluted.

Women and Perceptions of State and Security in Sri Lanka

Kishali Pinto-Jayawardene

The following is based on data which is still tentative because we still haven't finalized many of the statistics, but I hope to highlight certain trends in our research in Sri Lanka.

Specifically, it focused on issues of state security and governance. The study examines governance and the role of women in the governance process in Sri Lanka. For vast numbers of women in my country and for vast numbers of men as well, the many political and social forces that have shaken the life of Sri Lanka in the last few years – the violent forces – have really transformed perceptions of state and security.

Women's response to the violence has been constrained by a particular social, economic, and legal framework, which is essentially patriarchal. And that continues to limit their responses. This has been very unfortunate in a country that had a very strong woman prime minister in the 1970s and which has a very charismatic woman president at the moment, and always this contrast is pointed to by analysts – asking why when we have very strong women at the head of our political institutions, why it has not percolated down to the women in general.

And the point that we have made in our study is we have looked at women in the formal and informal political process and we have said that while women in the formal process are confined by many factors that are common in the South Asian region, women beyond that – in the informal process – are at a greater disadvantage because there is very little challenge to the construction of the public sphere and the State as masculine and male-dominated. And though there has been some acknowledgment of women's concerns – for example, setting up of the Women's Commission – that has remained very artificial, it has not been substantial in changing the degree of incorporation of women's perceptions into political processes. For example, the notion of citizenship is applied differently to men and women. Citizenship is not central to women – women can't pass citizenship on to their children, only the men can do it. In terms of immigration laws, women are again differentiated. People use these discriminatory laws to their own advantage to carry on a particular political vision. We have said that this has remained so even though there is a significant number of women in politics. We don't have women's issues being articulated in those institutions.

Our study also makes the point that women's traditional roles have undergone drastic change because of civil unrest in the 1980s and the ongoing ethnic conflict. This has catapulted women into the uncharacteristic role of soldier and head-of-household. Despite these changes, deep patriarchal roots still undermine women's full and equal participation in the public sphere.

Through these themes, we've looked at how women define the state, women's interactions with the state and the state's current limitations in its obligations to its women citizens. We have made the point that alternative ways of governance has taken on greater significance to women in terms of the political processes currently being shut out from women because of the very deep level of violence that is prevalent in those structures. So, for those women involved in both formal and informal politics, there is a need to redefine the state – to look at it as a gender-neutral force – to make the point that it's very important for women to look at the state as a force from which they can draw on their rights as women and not merely as people who don't have any rights of their own apart from those shared with the men. They tend to identify the state as with the men and not something they can draw on.

The study has been divided into two parts. The first part has 500 women drawn from across the country randomly. We interviewed them with specific questions on the state, security, governance, political process, violence, etc. The second part dealt with interviews with women activists, professionals, politicians – we asked them how they defined politics, what was lacking in the political processes and how they thought this process could be improved so that their participation could be much more viable and impacting.

What we found was that in the formal political processes few women politicians generally asserted female characteristics and

interests. The popular belief among them is that cannot and will not change the status quo. While many are paying lip service to the cause of women, the tendency unabashedly affirmed by them is to carry on the agendas of their husbands, fathers, sons or political parties. We found many women who come into politics in that manner – their action in politics was limited by their manner of entry. If not through their husbands, or fathers being assassinated it is by knowing a politician who sponsored their entrance – they feel they are beholden to this particular person. They have to go back to consult them if they have a problem and they thought this was something positive. They feel like they can't act independently because they are obligated to these men – they can't oppose them.

There was this whole issue of women in minority parties in the context of the ethnic conflict. Numerically, the numbers of Tamil and Muslim women in parliament are low and with the breakdown of the political life in north and east of the country, the concerns of women in that area have departed from any question of political participation – there are only questions of survival. They do respond – women's groups in the north and the east – when you talk to them about security and the state but the response is one of complete disassociation from this process. They would say – don't talk to us about this, we are completely fed up, we don't want to get involved, the entire process is corrupted, we just want to look after ourselves day to day.

One woman whom we spoke to who came from an ordinary family. She expressed the view that women would participate in violence as much as men – they didn't have any problem being aggressive. It was a very definitive indication of how they are a part of the same violent trends.

Look at what happened in the 70s and 80s in the south of country. You have mothers of disappeared sons – captured and killed by the security forces – protesting against the violence. But that protest was as mothers. When the politicians responded to them as mothers, the women agreed to be used as agents of the political parties. Once one of the political parties came to power, then the women completely moved to the background – their concerns were no longer taken into account. But the women never asserted themselves as citizens, only as mothers.

I'd like to highlight some of the data. Women described security, and the state and politics, as something which men are basically engaged with. 81% exercised the right to vote; the reason given by those who had not voted was that it was because they were not registered, not because they didn't think it was important. Those who did vote – 33% said they would vote like how their family voted, 23% said they would vote the way their husbands voted. Many of them openly say that they vote how their men vote.

There were questions on how they understood state and government. 66% of women and 72% of males could not articulate

their understanding of government. They could not go beyond yes or no questions. The majority who responded said that the difference between state and government was completely irrelevant to their lives and didn't know why they would need to be asked that question.

From minority respondents – their response to the questions was not from a textbook. They said that they got the information from the media, for example. They said the government was a political party while the state was some entity backed up by which they could assert their right to their needs being addressed, irrespective of whether they were male or female. This is something that should be explored in later surveys.

Women expressed widespread disillusionment with the state, but there was also a going-back to the state; they couldn't name other groups – like activist groups – to go to. Activist groups had a certain role in civil society and that did not extend to the political sphere.

The majority of the respondents didn't belong to any community groups or social organizations. They said that they had no time or interest – the male members in their families engaged in those activities. There was a very large number that said they did not represent the state and government and they felt that the state and government represented them. It was very interesting because I wouldn't have expected it. They said – we can lay claim to certain rights but the articulation will not go beyond that.

Many are illiterate – 43% were at the basic level stage, 60% had grade O-level stage, 20 participants had passed the A-level stage. Both men and women said that politics is not exclusively male – that women could participate in it – theoretically it was asserted but practically it wasn't accepted. We perceived that the respondents felt the need to be favorable in their responses to us, but when we got specific, their responses were not very encouraging.

On violence in the country – the last elections in early 1999 was the most violent in the country. We saw the phenomenon of gender violence – women brutalized in the streets, women being stripped. Sri Lanka did not have this level of violence before and it's something we thought we should address in subsequent studies. Most women who have entered into politics in the last two decades have been daughters, mothers and wives of political figures, and they have inherited from the men certain structures of politics and violence. Eventually they become willing or unwilling perpetrators of violence and corruption. They see themselves as having no choice but to follow traditional political loyalties.

We have also looked at what should be done. For example, creating consciousness and creating a space for women in the margins to be heard and a face to be seen – for women to transcend barriers that the patriarchy has enforced. We have examined certain structures of NGOs and civic organizations in Sri Lanka. A very interesting phenomenon is a political movement mostly

of Singhalese and Tamil women, transcending minority barriers that have been very obvious and difficult in Sri Lanka in the last few years. We made an interesting study of this organization. It was chartered in 1998 as an attempt to provide relief to women displaced by conflict and to protect and promote harmony in the country where there is a large Indian population. This organization later got into community development and social mobilization activities around issues of poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, micro credit help, nutrition, education, reproductive rights and health, environment and peace. The current membership of the organization, including men and women, is about 28,000.

 Because of the failure of the government to respond to their demands and a real sense of disenchantment with the governance mechanism, they themselves contested the provincial elections in April 1999. It was interesting because we saw men contesting on a gender platform. These men addressed meetings on that platform. For me, it was a startling experience that they could identify themselves so openly with gender concerns. The problem was that the impact of the extreme violence meant that on Election Day, the polling was miniscule, they couldn't get even the members to go to the polls. As a result, monitors couldn't go to the elections, voters couldn't vote. But they are still fighting. We see the development of such organizations being very significant in Sri Lanka. The other problem is that if they did win, how could they remain a distinctive identity once elected? We talked to them about this and they said they could maintain this gender platform once elected.

We also focused on the efforts of women in the north and the east to cope with the violence. We talked to survivors and asked them how they dealt with the daily life situations in those areas. There is extreme violence in their lives. What we found was that in the north, there was a very distinctive pattern of women politicians asserting themselves as mothers. The Tamil woman MP who was assassinated – she had declared herself beyond assassination because she was a mother. We asked the women in the north what would have happened if she had been a strong male – they said she would have been taken more seriously.

Regional Approaches:
Understanding the Differences and the Commonalities

DISCUSSIONS

Dr Ollapally:

One can approach the South Asian region in different ways. One way to see it is as a regional cohesive subsystem - pointing to things like SAARC - especially as a regional economic entity on the lines of ASEAN and NAFTA. According to many analysts, that is really the wave of the future – regional integration, regional economic blocks.

Another way is looking at it as a social, cultural entity. The region does have a shared political, colonial and post-colonial history. For example, if you look at Islam as practiced in South Asia, it would be very different from the Islam practiced in the Middle East, and one could see that as a set of shared characteristics.

Another way is to look at the region as centred around a single major country, – India – with a certain amount of influence in the region. One could see the exercise of this influence as a benign one, or a not-so-benign one. Perhaps the benign view could be epitomized by the Gujral doctrine, good-neighbor policy, not

demanding reciprocity at some levels – one is not expecting Bangladesh or whatever to reciprocate its concessions. Of course, the Gujral doctrine may present itself in one way, but Bangladesh may have a totally different perspective on it, say on the river-sharing agreements. The not-so-benign could be epitomized by the Indira Gandhi period. In this case, I think perceptions matter a lot – big country, small country perceptions of the same thing. These are things that one would have to examine closely.

There is a school of thought that talks about the provision of so-called public goods by a big country or a big actor in the system. For example, the Indian market is obviously the largest one in the region. In a period where there is economic distress in many markets, suppose India could say – okay, we will keep the markets open for your goods. It would be acting in a way that would not necessarily be in its own interests – at least not immediate interests – but it would be providing a so-called public good. One could see a possible Indian role that way down the line if the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement actually gets going. Perceptions matter because provision of public goods by one party may seem like complete self-interest to another.

Another way to look at it is to see South Asia as a fractured subsystem. In other words, you could even see different countries, literally trying to "escape" South Asia. For example, Pakistan has been trying to reorient itself toward the Middle East and West Asia. India, in similar fashion, has tried to be a world

player – not just being confined to South Asia. India sees itself as a world player – which of course Nehru tried to do in the 50s and it played out in a different way. If you look at Nepal – Nepal is, of course, connected to India but it still has certain orientations toward China. In a way, it's trying to escape and circumvent the Indian influence. Even though the Hindu identity is there, on the other hand, there's political distance that is being cultivated. Same thing with Myanmar. Both China and India are trying to make sure that there is a certain amount of distance between India and Myanmar. Bangladesh, in a similar fashion, has tried to reassert the Islamic identity, again, trying to not just be grouped with South Asia. Sri Lanka, I think has always thought of itself as apart from South Asia because of its human welfare standards. It's always characterized itself as global in a sense – much more outside of South Asia – of course the Buddhist/Hindu issues are there as well.

Dr Chenoy:

There are many issues that can be seen as showing commonalities – the common threats to the environment, for example. What we do filters on to the rest of South Asia. While the bomb issue was basically between India and Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal could have protested that tests and the like could affect their environment severely. The fact of our common poverty and our ways of approaching it is another commonality. It could be argued that we are all spending more and more on defense instead of spending money to address poverty related issues. And there is our whole

situation vis-à-vis globalization. We're all going to be facing similar problems with globalization – there are the same multinationals in Bangladesh and India with the same regulations. And if we have to fight things like GATT or WTO, the only people who will understand your kind of approach will be in this South Asian subsystem.

Then there are the contradictions and divisions – questions of national identity, communal divisions, and borders. These are the central problems and if you examine them, you can see that what is dividing us is all "constructed." They do not have a material base. They are constructions of regimes and actors. Threat perceptions are not necessarily linked to what people think. So in order to negate what divides us, you have to have a people-to-people connection. Because what will and should bring us together are the natural issues – which are not constructed – they are the issues of the common people. There has to be voices and movements to challenge these false constructions built by people interested in capturing power.

Shaheen Afroze:

Most of the people in Bangladesh would feel there are certainly elements of both commonalities and differences. But mainly things are played out in terms of India and Pakistan – there are many things different between them in their relationship. Like when you say India and Pakistan have bombs, there were repercussions in Bangladesh, there was concern. Bangladesh was concerned

because if there is a nuclear war, nobody will be spared. But then again, on Kargil, people are not that bothered even on the government level. They think it is India and Pakistan's 'internal' problem. They are a little concerned but not to the extent that it will matter. Again, all the other states, they have borders with India but they don't have borders with each other. They see India as always hegemonic and imposing. And even now in Bangladesh, even today, there is a mixed feeling about India's imposing nature. But again, they do talk about – in the academia – they do try to talk about the commonalities that you have just now mentioned and about how to solve these common problems together.

Think tanks like ours have taken up projects and are working towards it. In my institute, we have instituted a dialogue series with the northeastern states of India with the view that there will be more cooperation. Why are there mixed feelings, however? Why is there an anti-Indian feeling even today in Bangladesh when the government-level relation is quite good? The Bangladeshi market is flooded with Indian goods, but we can't get into your markets, though we have many things to offer you. There is no border – actually there is no border. I know a person who came to Calcutta with no passport and no Indian money and stayed for a couple of days and then went back to Bangladesh.

One speaker raised a point here that in Pakistan, "they will take Indian money, but they won't take Pakistani money in India.''

The overall conclusion expressed was that while there were many things that created hostility in people's minds and blocked cooperation, this was now the age of cooperation, and it was time it was talked about in real terms. And that it must be made to happen.

International Workshop on

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