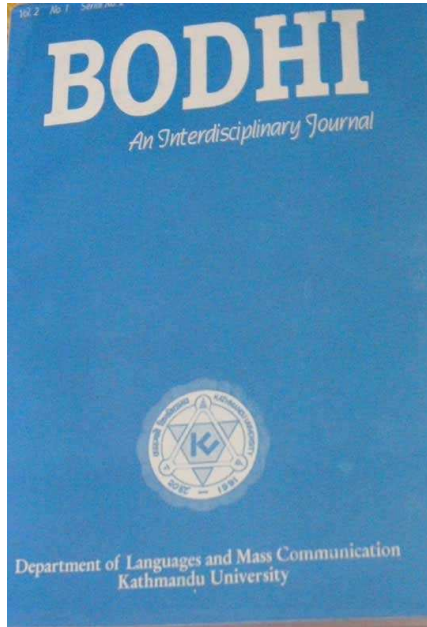


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## **Peacebuilding: From the Women's Perspective**

- Ekku Maya Pun

Peace, the most sought after, the most discussed, the most expensive yet illusive and distant as ever is looking for the change in how it is perceived and how it can be achieved. Property, wealth and lives have been recklessly spent for it in vain. It is seeking an alternative method/s for its achievement. And I believe that alternative can be found in women's perspective of peace and their ways of attaining it. This article discusses the necessity to include feminine perspective in peacebuilding and argues why they are better suited to negotiate peace.

### **Why the need for change in peacebuilding process?**

Peace, so far initiated and brokered by men, has failed.

Men in myriad of capacities: as the authority, as the decision maker, as the peacekeeper, as the human right activist have led and are leading, exclusively, for the achievement of peace. But so far the result of their effort has led to disillusionment of people across the world as more number of conflicts are spreading and engulfing larger parts without an end in sight. International Alert, an independent organization, in its brochure states that "Over 125 armed conflicts have raged worldwide since the Cold War killing more than 7 million people...mostly civilians." These facts are witness to whether the peace building effort of the world has become successful or not. Thus it is time to question whether we are using the right approach for its attainment, whether we have understood it in all inclusive manner. If not so then why there is no stoppage to conflict flaring up in one corner of the world to another which has led to continuous sufferings of people.

The peace that the world has achieved today has not stopped the sufferings of women:

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For many women of the world peace and pain go hand in hand in their lives. Whether conflict or no conflict, it makes no difference to them as they suffer violence at home or outside the home in work place or in the street at the hands of family or society.

Types of violence women experience during time of peace can be categorized from different perspective. From the perspective of the perpetrator of violence, women become victim to the following violence and suffer.

Women face various types of gendered violence in their homes at the hands of people who are related to them. It is known as domestic violence and is understood as violence committed by intimate partner like husband, cohabiting partner and by other family members such as fathers, brothers, husbands or sons against daughter, sister, wife or mothers.

“Women and children are often in great danger in the place where they should be safest: within their families. For many, ‘home’ is where they face a regime of terror and violence at the hands of somebody close to them-somebody they should be able to trust. Those victimized suffer physically and psychologically. They are unable to make their own decisions, voice their own opinions or protect themselves and their children for fear of further repercussion. Their human rights are denied and their lives are stolen from them by the ever-present of threat of violence.” Writes Mehr Khan, Director of UNICEF in the editorial of *Innocenti Digest no 6: Domestic violence Against Women and Girls* highlighting the fact that women and girl children are nowhere safe. Sometimes even the expected place of sanctuary home ‘breeds some of the most drastic forms of violence against women and girls.’ Domestic violence can be physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, or economic abuse. The table below shows the different particular examples of this violence.

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Nature of Violence	Examples of violence
physical abuse	Slapping, beating, arm twisting, stabbing, strangling, burning, choking, kicking, threats with an object or weapon,
sexual abuse	Coerced sex through threats, intimidation or physical force, forcing unwanted sexual acts, forcing sex with others, marital rape, incest
psychological abuse	Behaviours that is intended to intimidate like threat of abandonment or abuse, threat of harming children, confinement to home, surveillance, humiliation, destruction of objects, isolation, verbal aggression, emotional torture
economic abuse	Denial of funds, refusal to help financially, denial of food and basic needs, control of access to health care, over work burden, non-recognition of women's labour

Another type of violence women suffer is societal violence. It refers to that type of violence which are socially sanctioned or permitted by a group or a community through various social factors. They operate by means of institutions like family, religion, and marriage or through tradition, cultural practices, taboos etc.

Family is a very important institution in the society. It acts as an agent to familiarize an individual to the expectation and ways about society ensuring that the individual learns to behave and function in the ways that is acceptable to the society, and he/she does not disturb the equilibrium of the society nor challenge the societal norms or practices.

In the family or household of her parents' the girl child experiences the first tastes of discrimination of life and learns to expect same in the future. In the family she suffers violence like incest, beatings, negligence, force labour etc. Not only that, in

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the name of family purity and honour she learns to sacrifice her life.

The practice of killing female member of the house known as hohour killing in Muslim society is permitted by family even this day of empowerment of women and women's right. In this practice, to reclaim the honour of the family if is dishonored by the women of the family through the act of alleged adultery, premarital relationship (with or without sexual relation), rape, falling in love with a person of whom the family disapproves, the woman who has committed any of these acts is killed by the male members. The male members take the killing of the offender as the duty to be performed for the dignity and the restoration of the family honour. And cases of honour killing goes unreported and if they are reported then they take the form of accidents, suicides etc.

Even child marriage with or without the consent of the girl is considered to be a form of violence against females. Legally or culturally the marriageable age of women is lower than that of boys. For example 16 for girls and 18 for boys is considered to be the marriageable age when the parents decide the marriage where as legally it is 18 and 21 respectively for women and men. If girls are married early, they might not be ready physiologically for demands of married life especially from the point of reproduction. Their body might not be developed for child bearing. In this case complication during pregnancy and at the time of birth may lead to the death of the women, lasting health problems or the new born will have health complication. Besides, it reduces the opportunity of education and employment in absence of which these women will have to be dependent on their husbands and family. As they are ignorant and cannot have jobs they will be treated as incapable and inferior so access to resources will be denied to them. This will further hamper their status by making a dent in their confidence and self worth which are forms of psychological torture.

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The institution of marriage on its own has become very important cause for violence against women. The husband can violate the rights of his wife by being violent on her. He can force her into sexual act, rape, batter, humiliate, threaten, deny access to resources or commit any other violence he can think of. Society's understands of marriage from women's point of view is that as soon as a woman enters the bond of marriage she forfeits her identity, her being, her dreams etc. She will be totally in service of her husband who will have unlimited access to her for sexual gratification and other needs.

Culturally condoned practices of violent nature that are kept alive in different society act as the factor responsible for the violence against women. For example the tradition of foot binding of women in China prevailed ( first recorded in 950 A. D.) as late as early twentieth century when it was outlawed in 1911 but only in 1930s it was rooted out by the campaign of "natural foot". This was done in the name of satisfying the male's desire for beauty.

Female gentile mutilation (FGM) is another example of social violence exercised on women, especially in Africa, in the name of tradition and religion. The prevalence of this horrifying practice is equally shocking. UNICEF in 2000 reported that as nearly as 130 million women worldwide have undergone FGM and approximately 2 million undergo this procedure every year.

FGM affects the health of the women and girls. Some of the immediate consequences are hemorrhage, infections, bleeding violent pain and long effects are complication at child birth, urologic and obsteric complications and sometime it may result in the death of the girl or the women.

Violence on women practiced through the culture of witch hunting to cure the person who is sick also represents the evil system that victimizes women. This is prevalent in all traditional and conservative society. Examples of atrocity on women on the pretext of hunting witch rupture their lives even

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today. There are hundreds of Marani Devi who have been victim to cruelty like sever beatings, forceful feeding of human feces, public humiliation and evictions from house and community.

*Nepal: Rastriya Saptahik* in its issue of Mangshir 12, 2062 reported the case of witch hunt at larger scale that took place in the Tharmare VDC of Salnyan district on 5<sup>th</sup> of Bhadra 2062.

In this case as many as 45 women aged between 14 to 60 had their tongue scorched with hot metal spatula to find out who was the witch among the women of the village. This was carried out by the instruction of a shaman. The report explains that what was surprising was that it was initiated by a man (Bhim Bahadur Bhandari) who was a trained health worker in community health to cure his wife Rita Bhandari who had been ill for long period of time. The shaman Kare Kami told him that his wife was being possessed by a witch and could identify that witch. So to find the witch they had called women of the village and had carried out such a terrible atrocity on them. The women had their tongue burned and they suffered. These women had agreed to this inhuman test to prove that they were not a witch.

Dowry and other bride price related violence are so common that people have become insensitive to them. The violence related to dowry again reinforces that a woman is taken as means to gain material resources and her importance lies in it. If she fail then she is no use to her husband and in laws.

Most recent form of violence on women by society is sexual cleansing. Like ethnic cleansing it targets women only. This is the result of supernatural belief that having sex with a virgin cures HIV/AIDS in patients. Driven by the despair of being infected with HIV/AIDS, male patients have forceful sex with a virgin girl. To ensure the virginity of the girl, as young as eight years old girls are victimized. This sexual cleansing is practiced within extended families in western Kenya, Zimbabwe and parts of Ghana according to WHO 2000 report on domestic

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violence on women. This has resulted in high occurrence on transmission of HIV/AIDS in girls and women.

Not just an individual and community are capable of committing acts of violence on women. Even a state can cause violence on women. The fact that women become the victim more often than the men tells us the gendered nature of violence at the highest level. This is so because the state is run by the government which operates with the ideology of the powerful. That means males who have got power through education and access to resources.

Though the specific reasons of violence against women by state may be many and varied, the nature of violence on women follows the same old traditional path of male committing violence on women for being women, thus as mentioned earlier, gendered.

In China, the state's stringent policy of "one child" for population control led to the occurrence of more violence of women and girl children. The phenomena of "missing millions" of Chinese women and girls in China resulted out of this policy. This policy pressurized the Chinese couple to have only one child. So those who already had a daughter could not have another. Son preference culture of China forced these couples into applying even inhuman discriminatory methods of getting rid of the elder child daughter so that they could try for another child the prized son. Some of the methods were sex selective abortion, infanticide of girls after birth and contracting the daughter to wealthy family in contract on bondage labour. Highlighting on this phenomena Elisabeth Croll writes that cases of missing girl is thus the result of parental discrimination and differential familial resource allocation at infancy and childhood. When children fall sick, more boys than girl receive hospital care and that parents pay more for the treatment of the son than daughter in China. ( Croll, 2000, p. 39)



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To oppress the opposition or adversary, victimizing of enemy women is one of the time honoured strategy of political survival or military campaign. It is frequently used to discourage and force opposition from creating chaos and anarchy in the state to destabilize the government.

Women human rights activists, female reporters who expose the shameful wrong deeds of governments and opposition women party workers are arrested for investigation, security etc. Sometimes they are kept in custody on fabricated charges. Mostly the type of violence would be physical, sexual and psychological. The women in custody suffer beatings, sexual harassments, threat of dire consequences, disappearance, rape and ultimately murder. We hear of custodial death of women often now-a -days at home and abroad. One such case in Nepalese context is of Maina Tamang who was arrested on suspect of being a Maoist and tortured to death. Her mother is fighting for the truth and dignity of her.

Society's placement of women at a lower position makes women susceptible for violence from their men. All most all the societies in today's world are patriarchal. Through this system a society establishes male dominance. In such society beliefs, values and cultural meanings give higher value and prestige to masculinity than to femininity and justify male control of socially valued resources. Not only this, the norms of patriarchy go as far as sanctioning control and subjugation of womenfolk. This male authority over women and all kinds of possession is enforced through cultural, religious, economical and legal practices. Thus it is considered natural for men to control women and for women to be compliant towards their men.

Culture and practices of gender discrimination of women inculcated in the mind and behaviour of men and women legitimize acts of violence on women by men. Because of this both sexes tend to be tolerant and even show signs of approval or encouragement for instances of abuses of women. Through out all societies, irrespective of differences in religion, culture

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violence of all types physical, psychological and sexual pervade and permeate the lives of women. Violence has become the bitter reality about their existence and also the common factor to bind and identify them in one category.

Continuation of violence against women even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when women are educated, have gained considerable economical freedom, have access to resources and have control over their reproduction stare us questioning is there peace if yes then why are the women suffering.

### **Suffering of women in conflict:**

Armed conflict once it breaks out, impacts every individual and every aspect of individual's life in the society. While experiencing the realities of conflict gender of a person plays the primary determining factor on how the situation of war will affect an individual.

The situation of armed conflict especially brings great trial and tribulation for the women though they are not directly involved in the war effort as combatant in comparison to men. The understanding of armed conflict in general public is also influenced by the dynamics of gender role and the gender specific activities. According to this understanding, in the time of armed conflict men fight and women stay behind at home taking care of the children and old people.

This gendered role of women and men in conflict has produced the commonly believed misleading conclusion that men suffer more than women. Because they have to fight and go to war men are killed in greater numbers and also they suffer inhuman condition of battlefield, which will affect them for rest of their lives in the form of physical deformity, or psychological disorder. But the reality is far from this straightforward meaning of war. Women equally suffer if not more. Because in modern day warfare the distinct demarcation line that separates home from battlefield is not observed, that line has long since

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disappeared with the development of sophisticated weapons technology. As quoted in *Gender and Armed Conflict: Overview Report* by Bridge:

Regardless of the type of conflict, the concept of men going to war at the ‘front’ and women staying safely at home with children and the elderly does not reflect the reality of war. In fact the distinction between ‘conflict’ and ‘safe’ zones, whereby the home and workplace are viewed as safe, is a long-held myth...In conflict zones, war comes to women as they work on their land. War targets their homes- abducting, displacing and/or killing them along with their children. (Bridge, 2005, p. 9)

Women’s suffering in the armed conflict is extensive. Besides sexual violence, the women suffer sever physical, economical and psychological hardships. And their hardship is intensified by the fact that they face contradictory demands from the society and the opposing forces, sometimes according to their traditional gender role expectation and sometime beyond their gender appropriate expectation. They are asked to help in the war effort. While trying to fulfill the demand they expose themselves to violence which will give them untold sufferings.

On one hand they have to maintain the strict gender role activity of women like taking care of the home, looking after the children and the old people providing food and water. Since war affects all aspects of life, the routine job of fetching water, going to the market for food supply or taking domestic animals and tilling the land become the dangerous activities. While carrying out these “normal activities” they get caught in cross firing between the warring sections and get wounded or killed like animals whose body will be left to rot.

She explains that exploiting the traditional women’s image, the militant used women to carry explosives and guns because security forces for such activities do not suspect women. The use of women’s traditional role in waging war endangers

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women to violence and increases their suffering as evidence from Manchanda's descriptions of how the use of burqa by women in Kashmir backfired:

In Kashmir, the burqa, which was expected to protect women, made them even more vulnerable to the security forces. It lent itself to subterfuge, as did the voluminous Kashmiri phiren (coat). Security forces were convinced that one in every three burqa clad person was a militant. It was believed that the disguise was used when militants wanted to shift hideouts. Women wearing burqa suffered humiliation and sexual harassment as the security forces lifted their burqa to search the weapons and ammunition. (Manchanda , 2000, p. 60)

In the period of armed conflict women are more visible in the community. As the changed situation induced by it requires them to go out into the public place and take on the traditionally male responsibility since there is absence of men to do them. This pushes the women, unarmed and disadvantaged, to face the soldiers and expose themselves to male predatory violence. There have been cases of women being tortured, raped in such circumstances. Rita Manchanda reports of rape and torture of women during investigation as a method of punishing and humiliating the entire community. She reports:

Mass rape of Kashmiri women by the security forces was first documented in the Chanpora (Srinagar) mass rape incident on 7 March 1990. In Chanpora, after a firing incident, there was a crackdown by the security forces. The men were called out and CRPF jawans went inside the homes to search for militants and guns. The women inside were reportedly molested and raped. (ibid., 2000, p. 73)

Our own context of conflict since the Maoist insurgency started in February 1996 provides such sufferings of women. Kishore

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Nepal in his book *Under the Shadow of Violence* recounts the stories of women trapped between two guns: that of government security forces and Maoist armed militants. One Belauti Khanal of Kawasoti, Nawalparasi told:

We look after our families and are responsible for managing the households. The Maoists come and tell us to cook food for them. We cannot deny them for fear of them killing our children or husbands. Next day the security people start to harass us. It is very difficult to convince them that we had no choice but to feed the Maoists. Their behaviour is often worse than the Maoists. (Nepal, 2005, p. 101)

Besides their stereotype responsibility, women are forced to take on the added responsibility of earning for the survival of the family. They have to be the bread earner in men's absence resulting out of murder, being locked up in prison, kidnapped, killed while fighting or away fighting. Traditionally women lack resources, education and skill which severely disadvantage them. They have to go out seeking job and while doing so they might face abduction, torture and sexual violence, as they are women unaccompanied by male so they become easy targets. They do not get employment easily and they can not earn as much as their men used to earn. They suffer economic hardship. This will lead them to poverty and poor health, difficulty in accessing resources and ultimately to social, sexual and economical exploitation.

Displacement, AI fact sheets reports, is the most common consequence of armed conflict and women the most affected civilian population. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that women and children comprise 70-80% of the world's refugee and internally displaced population. In flight as well as upon arrival in an urban shanty towns or refugee camps women suffer violence and abuse at the hands of warring parties, opportunistic civilians or those who are supposed to be peacekeepers.

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Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf report that in fact displacement is so pervasive and common that instead of being indirect effect of war it is a careful calculation by combatants echoing UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's sentiments that "the forced displacement of civilian population is now often a direct objective, rather than a by-product, of war." For example the "ethnic cleansing" that took place in Yugoslav war by Serbian soldiers. They purposefully targeted the Bosnian muslim women for rape, forced pregnancy and other sexual violence so that it would force them to leave the community and neighborhood. Then those areas can be free of Bosnian for Serbian to occupy.

The sufferings of women in the times of armed conflict are manifold embedded in the process of surviving which leave them traumatized for life, but unaccounted and invisible from the frontline of battlefield and ignored from the war narratives and history. The women themselves become silent of their misery because they know even when they speak about it there is no one to listen and do something about it. As those who have violated them and made them to suffer are in authority and are condoned by family, society, government etc. Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf stressing this fact say:

During conflict, women and girls experience violence at the hand of many others besides armed groups. Women are physically and economically forced or left with little choice but to become sex workers or to exchange sex for food, shelter, safe passage or other needs: their bodies become part of barter system, a form of exchange that buys the necessities of life. Government official, aid workers, civilian authorities and their own families have all been complicit in using women in this way. (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2000, p. 13)

Those men who are humiliated by being forced to witness their women folk being tortured and raped in front of them feel frustrated and emasculated. Their aggression related to these

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frustration targets their own women in the form of beating and abusing. By dominating their women they recover the some semblances of their manhood and masculine pride. Men whether as soldiers or civilians too suffer PTS disorder and they display this through violent act on their women. Maria Holt highlighting the increase in domestic violence to Palestinian women due to Palestinian uprising against the perceived occupation of Israel says:

... ‘new Palestinian masculinity’ also had a number of negative implication for Palestinian women...Palestinian men have truned their anger and frustration on female members of their own family...some men who where subjected to beatings and torture return home to inflict violence upon women. (Holt, 2004, p. 120-121)

In explanation of rise in domestic violence she offers the idea of ‘crisis of masculinity in Palestinian’ man due to their experience of bitterness, disillusionment and also of extreme violence of forced removal from the land, humiliation of occupation, negation of the identity. Also their traditional gender role of defender of the family and the community was jeopardized by the superior military power of Israel because of which they were unable to defend the community and overwhelming feeling of powerlessness engulfed them. (ibid. 118)

In the time of peace women are valued for their bodies for pleasure of beauty, comfort and sex, during war too their bodies are prized for the same and more because they can be special tool to wage the battle. Through rape and sexual abuse, women’s body and their reproductive capacity are literally turned to battlefield where men, whether civilian or members of opposing armed forces, fight their anger, humiliation, defeat and even celebrate their victory. Examples of captured women of enemy paraded as ‘booty of war’ sometimes naked and used as sexual slave are found in history of war. War in former Yugoslavia provides us with the recent case of woman’s body

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used specifically to wage war during armed conflict. Francine Pickup with Suzanne Williams and Caroline Sweetman narrates:

In the campaign of violence against women during the war...Serb soldiers and paramilitary troops who raped Croat and Muslim women told them that they would give birth to “little chetniks” (Serb soldiers) who would grow up to kill their mothers... Croat and Muslim women were told by soldiers that when a woman was impregnated by a Serb, then she and the fetus became Serbian. Some women were held in “rape camps” in Bosnia until their pregnancies were so advanced that they would not be able to obtain an abortion. (Pickup & et. al. 2001, p. 134)

This is in accordance to the patriarchal belief that family lineage is maintained through male. This practice of maintaining ethnic and community purity led to the double victimization of the women as in their family and community they were attacked for carrying enemy in the womb.

Rape and different forms of sexual abuses used in armed conflict as weapons of war is the out come of this understanding on the part of war planners. As such when rape takes place they are not accidental but thoroughly worked out plan to defeat the enemy. As the saying goes “Everything is fair in love and war.”

Though rape and sexual abuse are denounced and are considered crimes liable for punishment, it is legitimized in the armed conflict. The proof of which is the widespread use of it wherever the armed conflict takes place through time and place.

As the most reliable weapons of war, rape helps the perpetrator to fulfill many objectives. At the immediate level it fulfills the sexual needs of soldiers who had been deprived of social life through separation from their wives or girlfriends. And also it



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helps bonding in groups of men soldiers, especially gang rape. By taking part in the violence of criminal act of raping they express solidarity and become a cohesive unit sharing everything. Gang rapes also relieves from individual responsibility.

Also patriarchal ideology of purity of women's body for the preservation of unpolluted family line and ethnicity gives paramount significance to the keeping of women's body pure. So playing with this sentiments armed soldiers purposefully rape the enemy women to inflict the enemy force and community the harshest defeat. The rape of women represents total conquest and shame of the enemy men who failed to protect their women as protecting of women is one of the most fundamental duties of being a man. Also the soldiers perform rape on enemy women as a punishment for giving birth to their enemy and to stop future enemy from being born as the rape will injure the women reproductive system and render her incapable of conceiving babies.

As violence women suffer in armed conflict is of sexual nature, their suffering follows them even after war comes to an end. It will be the legacy of war experience, which does not stop to wound them in every step of their lives. It leaves them to live a life of destitute abandoned by family and friends.

Sexual violence like rape is taken as the taboo culturally, religiously by societies all over the world. So those women raped or abused sexually are considered as the damaged good whose body has been soiled by men outside the religion, race or ethnic group. So she is impure. Under such strong cultural and religious influence women find themselves disowned by their husband, family and community. One such example is of Cherifa Bouteiba, a married Algerian woman aged around 20, who was abducted by the seven armed men on 2 June 2001 while she was visiting relatives. She was taken to the mountains and repeatedly raped for two days before she escaped. She suffered miscarriage as the result of the assault. Her husband

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divorced her saying she had soiled his honour. Her relatives also showed reluctance to accommodate her. So she became homeless. And the authorities gave no financial support. Her perpetrator went unpunished despite the fact that she had recognized some of them in the process of investigation.

Thus the violence women suffered during conflict become the beginning of cycle of sufferings that fill their lives. Another side to the painful experience of women during war is the secrecy, unaccountability that is associated with their suffering and impunity to those perpetrators. Citing various reasons women are forced to keep silent about their ordeal of war. They have to suffer alone in hiding. Even if the women speak of the violence committed against them, they do so on condition of anonymity. The fact that they want to talk but could not exacerbates their pain even more.

Women's wartime experiences are made invisible because of the nature of the violence they suffer. Rape and sexual abuses are taken as private violence and private matter of the individual soldier so it is not proper to address it in public by governments or states' authorities

At the time of giving justice to women of sexual violence, it becomes personalized and depoliticized and the state or the community escapes accountability and discredits the crime altogether. On top of this, their pain is tainted with humiliation as their perpetrator enjoy impunity as if they did not commit any crime due to various barriers that the authorities face to bring war criminals to trials.

Patriotism runs high during armed conflict in the populace. For the nation every one; men and women, young and old all must contribute and sacrifice. Anything that creates barriers and endangers the benefits of the nation must be put aside. This sentiment of nationalism leads the authority in power to put aside the grievances of women and their war related sufferings at the time of negotiating for peace with the other warring party.

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Maxim of “Nation first, women after” coined by J. Massad rules the brokers of peace so violence on women are pushed to background. It is sacrificed for the safety of the nation. Thus the violence women suffer at the hands of the enemy is dismissed and their indictment is not pursued, which leads to justice being denied to these wrong women.

So cessation of violence does not necessarily mean cessation of pain for these women. There ordeal of war follows them through out their lives even long after ‘peace’ has been achieved. Addressing this painful reality of women, Rita Manchanda asks “In desperate desire for peace is justice being side stepped?” and to emphasize the importance of justice for true peace she quotes Khwailie Chisi the president of Naga Mothers’ Association “ ...the objective (of achieving peace) is to try and forgive and then move on if we are to have a future together. Can there be forgiveness and healing without justice?” (Manchanda, 2004, p. XI)

Thus so far the architectures of peace have failed to incorporate women’s understanding of peace that has led violence and pain stalking women continuously in their life peace or not. To make a complete turn around for women’s life filled with happiness we must start acknowledging the presence of women, become sensitive to their feelings and pain, include them in all aspects of life, only then we can attain true and lasting peace.

### **What must be done to achieve peace that truly is peace for women of this world?**

Redefinition of peace that includes women’s perspective is crucial.

Explaining and understanding of peace from the perspective of women, majority of whom suffer gender based discrimination and violence at home and outside home even when there is absence of armed conflict, demands new approach. We really have to think what constitutes peace from the battered and

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suffering women's point of view. If absence of violence is peace then why so many of our women in the family and society suffer long after guns have gone silent. Guns and bullets, soldiers and militant in uniforms alone do not cause sufferings to women in the jungles and conflict zones. Their sad face and abused body express what they can not tell in words that violence is continuing in their lives. It is being committed to them by men and women, friends and foe without uniforms, at home and at work, on the street and on the parks, day and night. Rape by soldiers and militant is replaced by husbands, fathers and strangers, beatings by mother-in-laws, trafficked by agents and pimps, sexually exploited by employer and condoned by society instead of military. Then how can people say there is peace if they are suffering?

Justice as mentioned above is imperative to peace and goes hand in hand with it. But the women do not feel they have been treated justly.

Like everything else interpretation of peace purported by male system also reflects the dynamics of gender perception. When peace is understood as the absence of war and violent activities associated with it then it is being explained from male's point of view. As they don't need to go and kill enemy, or get killed by the enemy, or get engaged in destruction and suffer trauma from brutality of spilling blood and other insanity. The state and the community are not in the state of war. The men are back home with family and attending office work. They are free to pursue their leisurely activities. Everything is normal. This gendered peace brokered by men failed women as Michael Henderson, a journalist working for peace, remarks:

I often felt that peace got a bad rap. During the cold war, the very peace was discredited; it became politicized. Peace often became an excuse for blame, for an absence of thought, for an abundance of rhetoric. It was associated more with conflict than with harmony. (Herderson, 1994, p. 1-2)

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The famous maxim of John Galtung, a conflict and peace scholar, “the absence of war does not mean peace” is used by feminist to argue that what people generally understand by peace does not apply to women. The discussion and the debate that is taking place on what constitutes a real peace for women has led to the theory of ‘just peace’ that will, in the actual sense of the word, be *just*, that provides justice to those marginalized and oppressed groups of human being and not be the situation where there is *just* the cessation of violence.

There might not consensus on what ‘just peace’ denotes to all the peace researchers and feminist but we can develop our understanding of it by finding how some noted women scholars have explained it. Enloe defines it as “women’s achievement of control over their lives...not just absence of armed and gender conflict...but also the absence of poverty and the conditions which recreates it” (cited in Haleh Afshar & Deborah Eade, 2004, p. 12)

Galtung’s concept of positive peace presents the progressive view of peace which tries to accommodate women’s interests too. Explaining Galtung’s concept of positive peace Donna Pankhurst writes:

Positive peace, requires not only that all types of violence be minimal or non-existent, but also that the major potential causes of future conflict be removed... positive peace encompasses an ideal of how society should be, some characteristic of society experiencing positive peace would include: an active and egalitarian civil society; inclusive democratic political structures and processes; and open and accountable government. An egalitarian vision of positive peace also embodies equality between ethnic groups and among sexes. (Pankhurst, 2004, p. 11-12)

For a society to truly encompass positive peace, she identifies following four must characteristics for it:

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1. an active, plural and egalitarian civil society
  2. Inclusive social and political institution
  3. Inclusive democratic political process
  4. Transparent and accountable government.

(cited in Gopinath & Sewak, 2003, p. 15)

Meenakshi Gopinath and Manjrika Sewak opine that at the heart of any definition of peace, there must be foregrounding of the equally valued experience of women along with that of men that contributes to the process of active coexistence and multiculturalism. (Gopinath & Sewak, 2003, p. 15)

Further adding to the discussion on what constitutes peace and how it can be achieved from women's perspective, Betty Reardon, a noted feminist peace researcher, writes that the peace that proves to be real peace for women should include:

...The four visions. "The birth right vision" images a world in which basic human needs of the Earth's people are met, "the vision of women as equal partners" centers on full equality of women and men in the public and the private sphere", "the transcendence of violence vision" projects a world free of war and the physical abuse of women; and "the vision of an ecological community" perceives a world built on common interests and sharing, and respect and care for planet Earth... Each vision reflects possibilities for meeting a fundamental human need of expectation of well-being, and offers a goal against which to measure progress toward overcoming the various forms of violence and peacelessness. (Reardon, 1993, p. 149)

Maria Stern, another feminist researcher makes a distinction between negative peace and positive peace with a analogy of negative security and positive security. She explains:

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By assigning negative and positive values to the concept of securities, one develops a useful tool for analyzing different interpretation of what it means to be secure. In the same sense, one gains insight about the different subjective nature of peace. Negative peace and negative security rely on a desire to inhibit the existence of a destructive entity, while positive peace and positive security rest on a desire to create a constructive entity. (cited in Reardon, 1993, p. 20)

By negative security and peace she explains as the security/peace attained through canceling a threat with equally or more threatening device like development of nuclear weapon to counter terrorism. But on the hand positive security/peace is achieved through eliminating the threat by addressing its cause.

This cursory survey of the concept of just peace indicates peace is interconnected with and interdependent on other issues such as basic human rights, gender equality, environment, form of governance etc. For peace to be successful it must not be handled exclusively, in isolation as it is linked with development in reciprocal manner for the achievement of positive social and cultural goals.

Thus it is important to redefine the peace from women's point of view because it helps to set goals and identify methods of achieving those goals focusing on the need of women.

### **Why feminine approach in achieving Peace?**

Women make up the half of the humanity. Whether accepted or not they also have the role to play in making the society and the world a better place to live. In spite of being equal partner to men in every thing they are suppressed and denied the rights in development, opportunity, equality etc. This has fuelled them to be more determined and eager to change the people, society, and the whole world into a place where they can enjoy equality, respect, freedom from any form of cruelty in the name of

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gender difference. Their best interest lies in transforming society into an Utopia where stereotypes that shackles the progress and pushes to life of pain and drudgery is broken.

So far men have been manipulating the control of resource, policy/decision making and implementation process of every aspect at organization, community, society and national/international level. But their effort has failed to deliver the desired goal. The world is still divided over varied issues like, gender, poverty, energy, terrorism and peace etc. Distrust among people, nations, regions is growing creating the gulf that seems to be unlikely ever to be bridged. People's life across the world has worsened as they are facing more challenges of survival in the world where humanity, respect and understanding have lost their meaning.

Amid this chaotic and disheartening situation, the search for alternative way of governance and pursuit of happiness has become desperate. As established by the examples of the collapse of earlier civilization that litter the history of human civilization, peace is at the heart of well being society and nation. Nation achieves its highest aspiration when there is peace as it is the essence and the impetus of progress.

Till date the mankind has sought peace from male's perspective and guidance steeped with ideologue of patriarchy. But the result so far achieved is intangible. Change in the pursuit of peace is being felt. And for this change we should not look far and wide. If we are observant we only need to look in the reasoning and the ingenuity of our women which have been hovering in the background lying doormat (not because of lack of will or strength) looking for opportunity to burst and change the whole set up of things. Donna Pankhurst writes that recently there has been a surge of international interest in 'peaceful women' and this seems to have occurred partly as revulsion against the violence of war, and in the hope that a focus on women might reveal the way towards a more peaceful, less



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violent world and that women hold the key to peace building. (Pankhurst , 2004, p 20, 21).

Judith L Hand in her book *Women, Power, and the Biology of Peace* questions: Is there any reason to think women would do anything (in this case seek peace) differently from what men have? The answer is ‘yes’ and that is why I advocate that women can provide the alternative approach to achieving peace on the following grounds.

**First, they are biologically potent for peace:**

What makes women to do things differently and make a difference and lead to the different state of things? Are they different from men so they will react differently to conflict and violence? Once again the answer is ‘yes’. Women by nature are endowed with nurturing and caring instinct. Women’s biological capacity as the only organism to procreate enables them to value life and hate all those that pose a threat and seek to destroy it. As they experience the pain of giving of life they are more determined to protecting life. Their body naturally responds to supporting of life by producing milk after giving birth to a baby for whom mother’s milk is the critical life resource. The act of mothering conditions women toward being natural peace makers. One of the earliest women to link this biological aspect to women being more inclined to peace and start the feminist peace theory was Ellen Key in *War, Peace and the Future in*. She writes:

To be a woman implies the giving and protecting of life, and the whole future significance of women’s increased rights is dependent on her reverence for this mission and her abhorrence of all destruction of life, especially of the mass destruction of war.(cited in Pierson, 1987, p. 7-8)

*Three Guineas* (1938) by Virginia Woolf is also credited for making significant contribution to feminist peace theory. In this

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long essay she proposes to spend three guineas, first to support women's college; second to educate the daughters of the educated men to help them earn a living and also to endow them with an independent and disinterested influence with which to prevent war; and the third one to protect culture and intellectual liberty. Woolf is of the opinion that men by nature are not the peace loving creature and she very skillfully expresses violent nature of men that cannot be eliminated even by education, thus:

Men have been educated at universities for 600; women for 60 year. ..Yet, that sex which has had the least money spent for its education, has been the most peaceful: "scarcely a human being in the course of history fallen to woman's rifle...while the majority of men today again favour war, in spite of being educated. This lead to the question "what sort of education will teach the young to hate war...Unfortunately, education of the young has focused on teaching them how to use rather than how to abhor the use of force. (cited in Bechtold, 2000)

The theoretical grounding of conceptualizing feminine as inherently peaceful is based on motherhood as the antithesis of violence according to Inger Skjelsbek.

Another dimension to the discussion of nature/or biology causing women to be peaceful then man is added by Judith L Hand. She presents in detail rationality behind this biological theory of motherhood. She explains that females desire for peace because their basic biological priorities are different from those of males. What is most important for females are that their off spring survive and in turn reproduce which will keep their gene alive through out the process of evolution. So to achieve this, their priority is for social stability for a long period of time. This social stability allows them to care, support and protect their off springs, whereas social turmoil such as conflict threatens the life of the off springs. If the offspring die before

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reaching the reproductive age then whole their effort of protecting their child would go in vain. Peace provides the social stability. This knowledge will push the women as far as required to achieve peace.

**Second, they are the educator of love and Peace.**

A child receives its first informal lesson of life in the lap of its mother. Through the gentle caressing and feeding the mother communicates to the new infant about love, care and trust. These lessons of love and care become the crucial learning of the child as it has implication for the whole life. A child born and raised in a family which has a loving mother who teaches it about love, peace, trust, relationship has better chance of navigating the treacherous path of the world and the mystery of life. Children coming from broken homes and ill treatment tend to follow the more destructive path to life. They tend to be aggressive, violent, ill-tempered etc. Emphasizing on this and on the role of women in peace making, His Holiness, Dalai Lama has written in Forward of Henderson's *All Her Paths Are Peace: Women Pioneers in Peace Making*:

Women naturally have important roles to play in peacemaking. Nearly all of us receive our first lesson in peaceful living from our mothers because our need for love is the very foundation of human existence. From the earliest stages of our growth, we are completely dependent upon our mothers' care and it is very important for us that she expresses her love...If children do not receive proper care, in later life they will find it hard to love other. This is how a mother's love has bearing on peace. Peaceful living is about trusting those on whom we depend and caring those who depend on us. We receive our first experience of both of these qualities in our relationship with our mother. (Henderson, 1994, p. Forward)

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In the early stages of formal education of children, women teacher are most of the time preferred for teaching them. Out of many, one of the basic rational behind this preference is that women can create a more conducive environment to learn for the children who are very young and have just left their mother side for a considerable length of time. The woman teacher in the class substitutes the mother at home. Because of this, it becomes easier for them to get adjusted. I believe this is another reason behind a single female teacher taking charge of the class, taking the children through different subjects.

Another important requirement for peace to prevail is stability. The sense of stability is also instilled and nurtured in the young children by mother. She is always around with them encouraging when they attempt taking the first step, eagerly waiting to listen to the first sensible sound they make, hold them when they fall down, reward them with kiss and smile when they succeed in their endeavours. That is why a child follows the mother's every gesture and every word. Even in the later life of children no success is complete without the mother to share it.

This capacity of women as an educator of love and peace can be utilized for the pursuit of lasting and just peace. Reardon justifies women as better peace maker by stressing this aspect in them as mothers. She says that the mothers of the world, who provide the care for most young children, are fundamental and formative peace educators and that peace education is an activity where the mother feels a responsibility for creating positive human relation in the family, the community and the world.(quoted in Skjelsbek, 2001, p. 62)

Thus women can take part in the process of peace building as educators to the major stakeholder of peace process: the warring factions, community leaders, peace activists etc.

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**Third, their holistic approach makes them better peace maker:**

Men and women differ considerably in their approach to viewing things. This can be very critical to achieving peace. Helen Fisher provides the list of differences between men and women in different skills which have bearing in how they perceive the situation:

- Women are better able to decipher facial expressions.
- Women are more capable at multi-tasking.
- Women are more inclined to long-term planning.
- Men are more inclined to focus tightly on a problem.
- Men exhibit more emotional control.
- Women have better intuitional judgment.
- Men are more likely to take risks.

(cited in Hand, 2003, p. 38)

Being better at multi-tasking simultaneously allows them to pay attention to different tasks so they can co-ordinate them better as the out put of all the tasks come together. This will lead to the better dealing with multiple parties involved in the peace process. No doubt men are able to focus tightly on one task as their approach is one task at a time, but it handicaps them from paying attention to other issues which are important to address side by side for the fulfillment of the objective. They may miss out one crucial link here and there, narrowing their scope of understanding leading to incomplete picture or truth of the whole situation. Also as men are single task oriented, it forces them to see a thing in isolation as an event not a process. Taking thing as event has its own draw back. It propels toward quick solution, impatience, and cessation of continuity.

Since women are more inclined to long-term planning, they incorporate wider issues and time frame allowing them to be better at anticipating future. This in turn leads them to be cautious and better prepared to handle pressure of demand made on them.

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Women's ability to decipher facial expressions and better intuitional judgement also gives them advantage over man to perceive the situation and act accordingly.

Sum total of these skills is that women see the interconnection and interdependency of issues at the background or periphery which need to be addressed or eliminated for the goal to be achieved. This is what enables them to have a holistic approach to viewing situation. Equipped with this very important skill they can make more realistic assessment of the problem and come up with better solution. Carol Gilligan makes a case for women's holistic approach when she writes:

Women tend to see reality as a set of interconnected experiences and interrelationships. They measure the desirability of an action in terms of its human consequences, a characteristic often sorely lacking in policy making. Because of their concern with relationships, women tend toward holistic views of the world that focus on problems in their general context over longer time period, including past as well a future. (cited in Reardon, 1993, p. 143)

Holistic approach provides better prospects for solution as it allows looking at things from multiple angles of cause and effect. Further things are seen as a process which requires continuity of determination, effort, and patience over long period of time.

They also think for the future not just the immediate present like in the story of *The Princess and the Admiral* by Charlotte Pomerantz. In the story the princess who is the ruler of an island which has been peaceful for 100 year is attacked by the admiral on a battleships when the islander are preparing for celebration of peace. She uses the non-violent means to dispel the attack and captures the admiral with his men. As the practice of war, the admiral concludes that he along with his men, would be beheaded. But on being presented in front of the

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princess, he was surprised by what she offered. She offers two guides and two-week supply of food and water and five buffaloes to carry the food to return to his country.

She does so to secure the peace in future too. For her future is as important as solving the present problem. Her logic was that by peaceful settlement of the present, threat of the future could be eliminated. She believed no one would attack the country which had shown mercy and respect to its own people. She secures the peace of her country through peaceful means. Instead of executing the admiral she forgave him and sent him home safely with the deal of no future attack.

This quality of women can be very fruitfully used in the peacemaking process for the cause of just peace. If and when women are included in the initiative of peace they will enrich and strengthen the process with their gender practicality, instinct of love and care.

**Fourth, they can be the best mediator for peace:**

This draws upon the proposition put forward by anthropologist William Ury in his book *Must We Fight? From the Battlefield to the Schoolyard-A new Perspective on Violent Conflict & Its Prevention*. As explained by Naomi Malone in her thesis *From Just War To Just Peace: Re-Visioning Just War Theory From A Feminist Perspective* he developed the concept of third party mediating the peace process on his field work among tribes like the Bushmen of Kalahari, observing the way in which family, friends and the extended community intervened to resolve issues between contending parties. He realized that conflicts never take place in a vacuum but strictly between two adversaries. Ury explains:

the third side is composed of people from the community using a certain kind of power, the power of peers, from a certain perspective, which is a perspective of common ground; supporting a certain process, which

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is the process of dialogue and nonviolence; and aiming for a certain product, which is a triple win--a solution that's good for the community and good for both of the parties." (cited in Malone, 2004, p. 42)

Ury recognizes that conflict is natural and advocates positive interaction rather than mere opposition from outside, providing concrete practices for “third siders” to play in bringing resolution to conflicts. Ury’s ten roles that “third siders” can play are:

1. Provider: helping people meet their frustrated needs
2. Teacher: instilling skills or attitudes to defuse tensions
3. Bridge Builder: fostering good relationships across potential lines of conflict
4. Mediator: helping people reconcile their opposite interests
5. Arbiter: delineating the disputed rights
6. Equalizer: balancing the power between clashing parties
7. Healer: repairing injured relationships and defusing wounded emotions
8. Witness: taking heed and note of early warning signs of dispute
9. Referee: establishing objective rules for conflict
10. Peace Keeper: stepping in to separate the fighting parties, even physically. (ibid., 2004, p. 42)



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Joshua S Goldstein reports the role of women in ending the war and starting the peace process in some simple societies. He writes that women tend to restrain the men from war or play special roles as mediators in bringing wars to an end. For Instance Andamanese Island women tried to settle quarrels and bring fighting to conclusion. Among the Kiwai-Papua, after both sides signal a desire for peace, “a number of men accompanied by their wives make their way to the enemy village. The women walk a few paces ahead. It is taken for granted that bringing their wives is demonstration of peaceful intention. (Goldstein, 2001, p. 322)

Women have been playing out most of the roles listed above in their life. They are the provider of care and love that heals the injured wounds and relations. They are the first teacher of children of the world who teach peaceful existence and importance of human relationship. They are seen stepping physically between disputing parties. They are better at forgiving and moving ahead than men which makes easier to bury the hatchet and extend the hand of reconciliation with enemy. They have been practicing these skills at personal and informal level. So if they are given the opportunity, with few modification and adjustment they can bring in these experiences for the just peace.

### **Conclusion**

Change is the order of day to make difference in our life and prescriptions for it are breaking of the stereotypes, status quo and search for alternatives, opportunity for new idea/new players. If Nepalese can give chance to rebels to join the mainstream politics for better new Nepal and American can rise up to the challenge to elect the first colour president being colour blind then why not women be given the chance to lead the peace process. Who knows under their lead mankind is destined to achieve perfection of ‘just peace’.

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This is not just a wishful thinking of an overtly confident promoter of women. The discussion above provides compelling reasoning to why women have the potentiality to be better at achieving peace. The world writhing in the pain of gender discrimination, racial injustice, unequal distribution of resources, heightened threat of terrorism and conflict is seeking for the way out. That way out can be shown by the women of the world through their meaningful participation of creating stability through peace in peaceful manner. Because as Gandhi had once said “There is no *way* to peace. Peace is the *way*.” Their love for life drives them to do more to achieve peace as peace sustains life. Realizing the importance of women participation in peace building effort Resolution 1325 was passed by UN Security Council in 2000 which recognizes the necessity of women in global peace building process thus, “...an understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security”

Skeptics would criticize and doubt (well that is their job) questioning the women about their knowledge, ingenuity, experience or lack of it. But we must weather them all-the doubting Thomases-by giving the chance to women to bid for peace. It is a lot saner to take chance with them instead of playing the same old tune over a broken violin and following the same old path that leads to same conclusion.

But a cautionary note to the women: that they must not forget the past experience, rights of the other, respect and justice to all in their pursuit of peace. They must understand the gravity of the situation because giving women a chance is giving peace a chance.

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