
Apsaras losing their smile: Conflict and women in Cambodia

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I. Introduction

The major conflicts of Mozambique, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, East-Timor, Burundi, Cambodia, Liberia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and other countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America talked about the goal of social justice, greater freedom and right to equality, which appeals to all, and so to women, universally. However, in most of these post-conflict countries, even after the societies and states had been reconstructed on the above lines, traditional gender roles remained the same and women continue to face exclusion and stigmatization. Is it true that woman in reconstructed society faces similar security challenges as like the pre-conflict societies? Why is so that even in newly constructed societies, the security threats and security concerns of women remains the same? Why do we see the continuation of violence against women in a reconstructed state that guarantees equality, freedom and opportunity to all, irrespective of gender differentiation?

In Mozambique, FRELIMO (Frente de Libertacao de Mocambique, Mozambican Liberation Front) declared liberation of women as a fundamental necessity and to ensure it, made legal and constitutional

changes. Despite this, many studies reveal that women's issue has been largely ignored after independence (Sorensen, 1998). In Eritrea, women played major role in the struggle for independence that continued for nearly three decades. About one-third of fighters in EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front) were women, who were active as combatants and in other non-traditional roles. However, the suspension of traditional gender roles was temporary and patriarchal values reasserted themselves after independence (ADB, 2009)

In twenty seven years long war of Angola, women extended their active political and military support to the armed wings of MPLA (*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*, Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola). However, women in Angola did not achieve meaningful participation in peace-building negotiations (ADB, 2008). Further, East-Timor gained independence in 1999 after a long struggle in which women were both, victims and participants in the freedom movement. Women also played important role in the post-conflict developments. Nevertheless, they still face discrimination on gender lines and are victims of large-scale violence (UN Common Country Assessment, 2000). The "people's war" in Nepal, initiated by the Maoists in 1996, attracted women for its call of ending gender and caste based discrimination and its goal to establish a socialistic pattern of government (USAID, 2007). Women suffered as victims of violence and had also constituted a large portion of the Maoists cadre. However, they have been side-lined in post-conflict developments. These instances of conflict and post-conflict societies places a similar picture altogether that has been well narrated by Bouta and Bannon as, "the return to peace is invariably

conceptualized as a return to the gender status quo, irrespective of the non-traditional roles assumed by women during conflict." (Bouta and Bannon, 2005: 9).

The above mentioned cases indicates that despite the developments of post-conflict societies, the problem of women security continues. Violence against women rises in the transition period, and continues further even after the establishment of peace. With the case study of Cambodia, a land of "Apsaras", a place where women are treated as goddesses and are respected and worshipped in that way, the paper tries to analyse the security challenges women faces in post-conflict societies and inherent reasons for it. Although, the traditional Cambodian society had separate norms for women, compared to many Asian and African societies, women in Cambodia enjoys greater social, economic and political role. The proposed paper aims to look into the impact of conflict on the lives of "Apsaras", and how post-conflict reconstruction has influenced the security concern of Cambodian women.

The paper aims to look into the reasons for the continuation of violence in post-conflict societies and the major hurdles in the implementation and enjoyment of freedom, equality and prosperity guaranteed in almost all the post-conflict societies. The paper argues that continuation of violence against women is due to traditional notion of security which does not include women security concerns. Absence of women from decision making role is another reason for the continuity of security challenges for women. Security discussed here takes the wider notion of security that includes social, economic and political security. Violence again here denotes the physical and structural violence.

II. Gendered Aspect of Cambodian Conflict

Conflict affects men and women differently. Besides the mass killings of both men and women in Cambodia, the experiences of conflict by the women and impact of conflict on women's lives was very different from men. The Khmer Rouge (KR) claimed that they had liberated women and women enjoys greater freedom in their regime. A former Lon Nol soldier recalls the policy of gender equality, remarking, "What I observed from 1973 onwards was that for every male soldier there was a female soldier. The Red Khmer treated the men and women equally" (Frieson, 2001: 9). However, other accounts of the regime disapprove this claim to shows that the truth was otherwise. Women in Cambodia during the Pol Pot regime were used to help the revolution and women were used as a support to take care of the fighting soldiers and for propaganda dissemination. During the conflict, women suffered sexual and physical violence and were subject to rape by both the factions of conflicting parties, the Khmer Rouge and the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces.

Some of the scholarly writings have opined that rape was not used as a weapon to create terror in case of Cambodia, whereas, the later accounts show that rape was common during Khmer Rouge regime and was used as a terror mechanism against women. Agence France-Presse (AFP) (12 November 2012) had interviewed women who had faced sexual violence during the Khmer rouge period and many victims came out to speak about the atrocities of rape against them. Rape in prison and re-education centre, rape among the KR soldiers, mutilation and forced nudity was rampant. Rape in refugee camps near the border was also prevalent as observed by R.F. Mollica

and R.R. Jalbert (1989: 39 cited in Arnvig 1994: 39), psychologists who carried out a study of the psychological problems and needs of refugee.

Other than rape, women in Cambodia faced the issues of forced marriages and marital rape after the random marriage decided by the communist leaders. Mass marriages were conducted during that period and no consent was taken from the girls. In the UN-backed Khmer Rouge tribunal, Nicholas Koumjian, the international prosecutor at the court, said in a statement that his office has reviewed evidence of forced marriages of up to 80 couples (Voice of America 24 April 2014). Many times, they were informed few hours before the ceremony about the leadership's decision of their marriage. Women were also given in gifts and as an award to the KR soldiers for their bravery. Women and girls were forcefully recruited in the KR army. Zal Karkaria (2003) has given a detailed account and interviews of some of the girls who were forcefully recruited during that period. Young women along with men were forced into hard labour on the fields and factories with little given to them as food. This many times led to prostitution as young girls fulfil the sexual needs of the Khmer soldiers for food and clothing (Kasumi, 2008).

Although, there is little account of gender based violence by the other warring factions in Cambodia, mainly along the Thai border, it cannot be denied that women must have suffered in the hands of them too. Besides the atrocities inflicted by the Khmer Rouge regime and the other warring factions, women suffered as victims of violence due to additional burden to earn livelihood, absence of health facilities and absence of any security mechanism during the conflict.

III. Women in Pre-conflict Cambodia

Gender relations in Cambodia had been described as “relatively equal” in the pre-conflict society (Ledgerwood, 1992, 1995, 1996; Ebihara, 1968; World Bank 2007). Women in Cambodia have been compared to the goddesses and were called *apsaras*, a symbol of purity and virtue. However, the idea of “equaity” in Cambodia was quite different from the western idea of equality. Women in pre-conflict Cambodia affected the social status of men and their family and the ranking of men had direct correlation with the virtues and vices of women of their family (Walsh, 2007: 9; Ledgerwood, 1994: 122). According to the Khmer proverb, the virtuous woman determines the happiness and prosperity of the family (Fisher-Nguyen 1994: 100). Women in Cambodia were prominent in the family and exercised considerable autonomy on the household economy, were able to own assets and had a say in household decision making (Ebihara, 1966: 318; Ledgerwood, 1995: 256, 1992:98).

In Cambodian society, the traditional gender roles were codified through ‘Chbap Srey’ and ‘Chbap Pros’ which describes how to behave like women. A girl was taught from the very childhood to ‘behave like a woman’ as described by Boua,; “From infancy... [she is] trained to be different from a boy...a nice girl is one who makes no sound when walking on a wooden floor (1982, p. 46 cited in Krainanski, 2007: 33). This explains that although women exercised control in the household matters and take economic activities for income generation in pre conflict Cambodia, men were the head of the household and the decision-making power goes to him. Women’s role was limited to give advice to her husband, serve his needs

and obey him. Ebihara (1973) writes that according to law, man was 'chef de famille', with almost absolute power over the household matters and over his wife and children. The Cambodian culture ranks all men higher than all the women according to their prestige system (Ledgerwood, 1990: 25).

In some matters, men and women were assigned equal rights. Women had the right to own property in Cambodia. In their bilateral kinship system, both male and female can inherit and transmit land house, trees, cattle, jewellery etc. (Ebihara, 1973; Parkin 1990). Both men and women had the right to divorce their partners and in pre-conflict Cambodian society, women exercised this power when their husbands do not fulfil their responsibilities towards the family. However, a man can divorce his wife on the charge of adultery but women were denied to get divorce on this ground. Polygamy was legal and socially acceptable. A man can legally have more than one wife but customarily, the consent of first wife was considered necessary. There was no general preference for male or female child and it was individual's choice to like a boy or a girl child (Ebihara, 1973).

In the realm of religion, women were accorded inferior status in Cambodia. Buddhism, which is the major religion of Cambodia and which played important role in deciding and codifying the societal norms segregates between man and woman. According to Ebihara, in Buddhism, women are considered to earn less in their previous incarnation and they were barred from acquiring monkhood (Ebihara, 1966: 397). Keyes (1987: 123) describes that, "While men realize their religious potential by being ordained into the Buddhist order, women realize theirs by providing alms and food to the monks"

(Ledgerwood, 1990:38).

The declaration of independence in 1953 brought many changes for women. Women's status began to have a positive change from the traditional roles during the 1950s and 1960s with many educated women in politics, government, education and the arts (UN Division on the Advancement of Women, 6 November 2003). After independence from France in 1953, Sihanouk government put the issue of education on their high priority and put special focus on girl's education. According to Judy Ledgerwood (1990), during the Sihanouk period, the budget allocation of education ministry was lower only to the defence budget.

But the cultural and traditional norms were stringent for women and very few girls attended school in that period. Girls usually quit school after one or two year of their schooling, and some of them had the opportunity to stay longer but not after puberty as according to the Cambodian tradition, it was proper for girls to stay home after that (Ledgerwood, 1990: 92). According to the Ministry of Information, the percentage of female students from 1957 to 1964 shows a marginal improvement. In 1957, 25.4 per cent of girls were enrolled in primary schools, 16.1 per cent in secondary schools, 7 per cent in superior schools and 2.4 per cent in technical and professional studies (Ledgerwood, 1990: 92). The number of girls increased in all the four categories in 1964. In the year 1964, 32.8 per cent of girls were in primary schools, 21.7 per cent in secondary schools, 10.8 per cent in superior schools and 21.1 per cent in technical and professional studies courses (Ledgerwood, 1990: 92).

During the onset of civil war in 1970, the mobilisation of young Cambodians both, male and female occurred and according to

Jacobson (2008), resulted in the highest level of gender egalitarianism the country had ever seen. Women actively participated on both sides of the conflicting parties of Sihanouk and Lon Nol and took all the roles and duties traditionally assigned to men. The role and participation of women was widely emphasised by both groups. Nonetheless, the persisting opinion that woman is mentally and physically weaker than man remained the same. Though women took combative role in both the groups, both warring factions put women in supportive role and little role was assigned to them in the decision making. Women were also absent in peace negotiations held between the warring factions and no specific attention was given to women combatants or women concerns.

In 1975, after Cambodia emerged from five years of civil war, bombardment and invasion, Khmer Rouge took the charge of the country. Khmer Rouge endeavoured to introduce communism in true sense and hence, during the Pol Pot regime, the family and social structure saw a major transformation and hence, women's role in the new social construction which took place during 1975-79 was altered. The constitution of Democratic Kampuchea executed, included the ideal principle of gender equality and referred to 'men and women fighters and cadres'. Women participated in all the economic endeavours of the government on equal terms with men. They worked in construction projects, in state enterprises and in agricultural works (Jacobson, 2008: 219). Revolutionary songs included women also as equal participant of the transformation. Title of these songs, as described by Jacobson (2008) included, 'boys and girls flourish under the light of revolution', 'men and women soldiers are stirred like boiling water to build a new country' and

'we the newly liberated young men and women resolve ourselves'
etc.

Nonetheless, the idea of gender equality in Khmer period was hollow and was aimed to include women in the labour force and in combative and other supportive role at the forefront to serve the purpose of the regime. Women and girls were forcefully recruited into the combative roles and in case they ran back home, they were killed by the Khmer soldiers. Men and women had to live separately and any attempt of intermingling with the opposite sex was punished severely. Even husbands and wives had to live separately and the child was looked by the state appointed nurses, and not by the mother. The official rationale behind the separation of husbands and wives was that there was too much to be done to reconstruct the nation that personal happiness could not be indulged with it (Jacobson, 2008: 223). Hence, women's role and status in pre-conflict Cambodia varied with regime change and saw a major change during the Khmer Rouge period. But the general underlying notion which remained throughout was that women are inferior in status to men. This common acceptance of prevalent notion of women inferiority led towards paying no attention to security concerns of women.

Role and Participation of Women in the Peace Negotiations

In the 1970's, with the start of Indochina war, women's roles began to change more as war engulfed Cambodia, and women had to play new roles in society as men were engaged in fighting. During the 1980s women in Cambodia played a major role in bringing together different sections to knit the social fabric of the country. Women's

associations and groups played important role of caretakers to the war affected population. In the 1980s, there were more than ten women's associations within the three Cambodian factions'- the Khmer Rouge, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPRLF), and the Sihanoukists- refugee camps along the Cambodian-Thai border (UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 2003: 3). They provided vocational training such as food processing and non-formal education for day-care centre. Women's associations inside Cambodia under the PRK also played a major role in rebuilding society. They mobilized women to support men who were posted at difficult duty stations along the border.

Women played important role to create a comparatively peaceful atmosphere in post-conflict period for the successful negotiation and election process. Mu Sochua, Koy Veth and Yeay Sambo were leading women figures who played an important role in organising women for peace marches. In view of increase in violence in pre-election period, women organized a peace movement in which women organisations joined Buddhists leaders to stimulate a mass peace movement and called for peaceful elections (McGrew et.al, 2004). Again in the post-election period, when the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) rejected the results, a fear of reverting of conflict arose in the country. Women played significant role to quell any such attempt of backsliding into conflict by organizing rallies and events to welcome the new Assembly and persuaded people to accept the results of elections.

Despite women's ability to implement these important duties, and their strong commitment, women in decision-making positions were either non-existent, or too few to make impact on policies (UN Division

on the Advancement of Women 2003). The major parties to conflict were all led by men and the decision making was dominated by men, despite the fact that women constituted a major chunk of all the four factions: Khmer Rouge or Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK), Prince Norodom Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC, Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party. According to a report by UN Division for the Advancement of Women (2003), although, all of the key leading Cambodian women from the four political factions participated in the process leading up to a peace agreement, they had little influence on the decisions of their respective political parties. As a result, there was very little talk about the condition of women and demand for the enhancement of security to women in the proposed government structure within the four factions.

When the problem of conflict and continuing bloodshed in Cambodia was internationally recognized, the Paris Conference on Cambodia was convened in order to restore peace. Earlier, in September 1990, the Cambodian parties agreed to form the Supreme National Council (SNC) as the unique legitimate body and source of authority in Cambodia throughout the transitional period. There were no women included in SNC which was composed of twelve representatives from the four political factions. On 23 October 1991, an agreement on the Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict was signed by Cambodia and 18 other nations in the presence of the United Nations Secretary General. It is disappointing to note that not a single woman sat as a major player at the negotiation table, and very few women had been involved in the pre-agreement negotiations (UN Division on the Advancement

of Women 2003).

The absence of women and gender related issues from the peace negotiation is disheartening. Moreover, the manner in which 'sexual discrimination' is mentioned in Paris Peace Accord indicates that women and women related issues were not a priority during the peace-negotiation in Cambodia. Even the policies that were adopted to deal with the problem of violence against women under the pressure of international donors and women organization have not been enforced strongly. As a result, the physical, psychological and structural violence against women continued unabated.

IV. Women in Post-conflict Cambodia

Following the defeat of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, women accounted for more than half of the Cambodian population. Between 1.7 and two million Cambodian died during the war years in the early 1970s and during the years of Democratic Kampuchea, from 1975 to 1979. According to the estimates, soon after the conflict ended in 1979, women constituted 60 to 65 per cent of total adult population (Wagner, 2002, 2008: 15). More women survived as men constituted majority of those executed and got killed during this period (Ledgerwood and Ebihara, 2002).

This disproportionate majority of women in post-conflict Cambodia pushed them to take new role and responsibilities beyond the traditionally reserved one. The number of female headed households increased dramatically as many women returning to their villages or towns, following the defeat of the Khmer Rouge, were the sole

providers for remaining family members. According to the National Institute of Statistics, 25.59 percent of household was headed by women in the year 1998, and in 2008, 25.7 percent of households that is more than one fourth of the households, are run by women in Cambodia, a country where men had their traditional authority as the heads of the households. However, most of the households where husbands or male partner were alive are headed by men only.

Women headed households (In Percentage)

Year	Has no Partner		Has Partner	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1998	4.38	21.80	70.02	3.80
2008	5.03	20.24	69.27	5.45

Source: *National Institute of Statistics, General Population Census, 1998, 2008.*

This change in the demography and new challenges created by the conflict, led women to take new endeavours which included tasks like new agricultural activities traditionally performed by men in the rural parts of the country and it also included work in new sectors of employment in the urban areas. During the Vietnamese protectorate of the country, women had to take up the non-traditional roles due to the necessity of the situation. Women were encouraged and trained to take up government jobs and in 1990 one third of the Khmer state employees were women (UNICEF, 1990). Though, women's presence in the higher rank was much lower. Women in Cambodia became the major force of rebuilding the social and economic structure of this devastated society. Many women participated in training courses started by the government to fill civil

servant positions, although, according to Boua (1983), few women held high ranking positions (Kraynanski, 2007).

Constitutional Position of Cambodian Women

With the commencement of constitution in Cambodia in the year 1993 women's status was redefined and women were put equal to men in every sphere. The constitutional provisions put special emphasis on an end to all kinds of discrimination and the traditional barriers for women in political and economic spheres by taking a gender neutral approach and putting every citizen- men and women- as equal. Article 31 of the constitution reads that, "Every Khmer citizen shall be equal before the law, enjoying the same rights, freedom and fulfilling the same obligations regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religious belief, political tendency, birth origin, social status, wealth or other status" (Constitution of Cambodia, 1993). Hence, the new constitution of Cambodia opened the public arena, earlier restricted for women and dominated by menfolk. This equality was further heightened in political domain and Article 34 of constitution describes that, "Citizens of either sex shall enjoy the right to vote and to stand as a candidate for the election" (Constitution of Cambodia, 1993).

However, it was comprehended that only the legal assurance of equality was not enough to bring women in the mainstream and hence, some protective measures were adopted in the constitution to promote women and end the discriminatory practices against them. Article 36 of the constitution of Cambodia was made in conformity of Article 11 of Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination

Against Women (CEDAW), which directs States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment... planning. (Constitution of Cambodia 1993, 1999). Article 36 clearly describes equal right of women to work and to be paid equal wages. According to it, "Khmer citizens of either sex shall enjoy the right to choose any employment according their ability and to the needs of the society". It further says, "Khmer citizens of either sex shall receive equal pay for equal work".

Except these constitutional provisions, government of Cambodia set up commissions and committees to look into the implementation and execution of policies and to take up the emerging issues and challenges related to women. The government bodies like the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and the Cambodian National Council of Women (CNCW) are given the responsibility to promote gender equality in Cambodia. But, the insecurity and violence to women remained unabated. With the end of conflict, and the return of 'peace', women again went through a transformation. With the establishment of democratic process, most of the men returned back from the neighbouring countries and the border areas and assumed the 'higher responsibilities' of 'state-building' and 'policy-making', which women were assumed to be incapable of.

Violence in general declined, but the problem of violence against women continued. In their research McGrew et al. (2004: 11) has concluded that due to lack of rule of law many respondents has reported the continuation of violence against women in Cambodian society. The structural constrains of society against women, which was relaxed during the conflict, again started to tighten. The traditional and cultural norms of society, of which women have always been

important carriers, were reasserted.

All this puts the Cambodian women at a crossroad of the old norm and the new legal equality. For example, women in Cambodia legally enjoy the right to equally participate in the political field, but even after around two decades, their representation is marginal and their presence at high level of politics is nominal. In the most recent election of July 2013, in the lower house of national parliament 25 out of 123 members are women. In upper house, in the year 2012, 8 out of total 59 members are women. This is mostly because women have to face many social and cultural constrains in joining politics.

Women in Cambodian Economy

The post-conflict conditions helped women to enter in new ventures of economic activities to earn the livelihood for their family and to fill the vacuum created by the killing, disappearance and large scale migration of men during civil war and Pol Pot regime. The change in the demographic structure was supplemented by the legal provisions and Cambodian Government's ratification of the international conventions to support and promote the economic rights of women like International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) in 1983, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1992, and Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1992. Furthermore the roles of international agencies like UNTAC, UNIFEM and their programmes to help women's rights. All this strengthened the economic participation of women in post-conflict period.

Women have been a major actor in the economic reconstruction of the country since 1990s. According to the National Institute of Statistics 1997, women constituted 65.4 per cent of the country's labour force. More women were engaged in private sector, that was 49.62 per cent and as family workers, which was 31.94 per cent in the year 1997. In 1998, women comprised 54.47 per cent of total labour force and men constituted 47.53 per cent of the labour force. More women (31.94 per cent) were engaged as family workers and a marginal of 3.37 per cent were in paid employment (National Institute of Statistics, 1998).

However, after the year 2000, women labour force participation started to decline in comparison to men. In 2000, 64.4 per cent of women compared to 66.2 per cent of men were active in country's labour force. In the year 2004, 78.9 per cent of men and 70.7 per cent of women were part of total of 74.6 per cent of the labour force. This decline has primarily been the result of decline in the sex ratio of the country from almost 60 percent in the immediate post-conflict period to 51 percent in the recent years. Furthermore, women returning to their traditional gender roles in the case of men taking the role of primary breadwinner of the family cannot be denied. Women labour force participation further declined to 70 per cent compared to 81.0 per cent of working age men in the year 2007. In the year 2009, men accounted for 88.6 per cent of labour force and women constituted 80.3 per cent of the working age women labour force while in 2012, the women labour force further declined and 79.7 percent of women were economically active compared to 89.1 percent of men (National Institute of Statistics, Cambodia).

The above data shows a declining trend of overall employment

in Cambodia but most importantly, a sharp and sudden decline in women employment. There are few explanations to this fact and the most important of it is recent global economic crisis and its impact on Cambodia. The main sectors which were hardly hit by the financial crisis were textile and clothing, construction and tourism, especially the informal sector. In 2003, 73.5% of women participated in the national labour force. They constituted 75% of the non-agricultural sector, 40% of the private sector and 87% of all factory workers (primarily in the textile industry) (LICHADO 2004). As more women in Cambodia are employed in the informal sector of the economy and in the garment industries, women were main victim of this crisis. As a result, women employment declined from 99.1 percent in the year 2004 to 70.0 percent in 2007.

Another dichotomy related to women and employment in Cambodia is that although a significant number of women in Cambodia are employed, majority of these employed women are active in the agriculture and service sector of economy as unskilled labourers. In 2009, 47.8 percent of women compared to 79.0 percent in 1996 were engaged in agriculture and related activities. Women's presence in service sector has increased from 11.6 percent in 1996 to 19.6 percent in 2009. Women accounted for 13.8 percent of total labour force in craft and related trades and 15.9 percent of other elementary employment compared to 3.5 and 3.3 percent in 1996 respectively (National Institute of Statistics, 1998). However, most of the women remain self-employed or were engaged in unpaid family work. In 2009, 52.4 per cent of women were self-employed and 24.5 per cent were working as unpaid family workers. Only 22.8 per cent of women were in paid employment (National Institute of Statistics,

Cambodia).

Women in Cambodia not only face discrimination in occupation but in wages also. Constitutionally, there is the provision of equal wages, yet it was estimated that on average women are paid 30% less than men for commensurate work. (Situation of women report 2004). Though, in some sectors, like apparel industry, wage difference between men and women has declined; in 1996, female wages were 26.6 per cent lower than men, but in year 2009 this has dropped and women were paid 11.9 per cent less than men (Savchenko and Acevedo 2012).

All this has its implication on women's economic strength and security as it left women with minimal wages and hence less savings and limited property. The economic condition of women in Cambodia is result of not only educational status but also absence of women in higher and vocational/professional studies, which resulted into lower skills and not as much of earnings.

Land and Property Rights of Women

Land is one of the most important assets for the people and especially for women. According to USAID, land is a particularly critical resource for women as it provides support to her when the household breaks down in case of male migration, war, abandonment, divorce, polygamous relationships, illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, or death. Furthermore, land ownership enhances women's social status and decision-making role within the household. Yet, in many societies, women do not have the right to inherit and own land (RDI Report 2009; FAO 2010; OECD 2012).

In Cambodia, women historically enjoyed right to own land, right to inheritance equal to men, and right to divorce. The 'legal absence' of men had no effect on this right as mentioned by Kusakabe (2005) that, "in case of spouse's death, the land will belong to the widow(er). Even if she/he gets remarried, the new wife/husband is not entitled to land". According to the Cambodian Constitution, all Cambodians, women and men equally, have the right to own property, and ownership of land must be protected by law. The most relevant laws and regulations relating to land tenure and land use are land law of 2001 and 1999. Cambodia, as a signatory of CEDAW observes to follow the land rights of women.

With the commencement of new system of governance, the customary practice of land ownership has changed, and at present, according to the legal provisions of Land Law of 2001, the land is registered in both husband's and wife's name. Legally, the land should be divided equally between the couple. Furthermore, it is being claimed that the Land Law of 2001 and the provision of joint ownership have enlarged the number of women who own land in present day Cambodia. Women have the right to ownership of land and if we follow the statistics, 60 per cent of women in 2005 have their own land or own them jointly. In 2005, 14 per cent of women inherited agricultural land (Ministry of Women Affairs 2008). Compared to 86.6 per cent of men, 13.2 per cent of women inherit agricultural land in 2009 (National Institute of Statistics 2009). Further, 69 per cent of women had their house jointly or alone and 21 per cent of women own jewellery on their own in 2005 (Ministry of Women Affairs 2008). According to statistics, 1 million land titles have been issued through systematic registration until 2009 to women

and men of which 20 % of these titles are done in the wife's name and 70 % consist of joint titles.

However, the new land law has created more troubles than help women. Lack of data and a missing “registration culture”, unregistered marriage, and non-transparent subsequent land transactions prevent the monitoring and evaluation of gender equality in land administration (Thiel 2010). Land law, family law, the Civil Code or the Constitutional provisions may simply be unknown to the majority of women's population due to their lack of education and the complexities related to these laws, or the legal system can be de facto out of reach for many (Thiel 2010). The problem with the joint ownership of land arises in particularly in the event of separation, divorce, abandonment, multiple marriage relationships (polygamy), or death of the husband.

There are many limitations to women's right to land. Women in Cambodia have limited right to sell their land as the customary practices and the subordinate status of women in family does not allow this despite the legal provisions. Only 65 per cent of the 14 per cent women who own land on their own can decide to sell their land without permission of family members. Women enjoyed greater freedom on jewellery as 82 per cent of those who own jewellery on their own can decide to sell it (Ministry of Women Affairs 2008). All these problems related to land rights of women put them in a throbbing and contemptuous condition. They remain dependent on the decisions and understandings of the other family members mainly men.

Political Representation of Women in Post-conflict Cambodia

Historically, the political decision making and other political activities had remained strongly associated with men in Cambodia and women had been politically marginalised (Ebihara, 1968; Friesoon 2001; Ojendal and Kim 2006, 2011). This scenario has been changing gradually now and women have come out to participate in the Cambodia's political reconstruction also. Although, few women at there at the higher level of decision making in Cambodian politics, women are bringing change at local and sub-national levels of politics in their capacity.

Women in Cambodia have been an important part of country's transformation from a land of mass killings to a politically and economically stable state of Cambodia. With 52 per cent of population, women constitute a major portion of electorate. However, women's representation in Cambodia has remained poor. In post-conflict period, the representation of women in lower house has increased marginally from 4.16 percent in the year 1993 to 16.8 percent in the year 2008. The representation of women in the year 1976 was highest as 18.4 percent with 46 women representatives in the 204 member house (Inter-Parliamentary Union). Women's representation at senate level also remained low and in the recent elections of January 2012, women captured 13.56 per cent of Senate seats. In 1999, 8 out of 61 Senate members were women and in 2006, 9 out of 61 women were elected to Senate. Women's representation did not see any increase in all these years in the upper house of Cambodia.

On the other hand, the representation of women at local levels

of politics is more encouraging in Cambodia. Cambodia's process of democratic decentralisation framed by the Law on Administration and Management of Communes/Sangkats (LAMC) and the Law on Commune Elections declared in 2001 established the communes as a new medium of political participation, especially for women. In the 2002 election of commune council, women constituted 8 per cent of total commune councillors and were elected to 954 councillor positions out of 11,261 in 1,621 councils across the country. The number of women candidates in 2007 commune council election further increased and 15 per cent of commune councillors elected were women. In June 2012 elections of Commune Councils, there were total 28,481 out of 111,056 women candidate. 17.79 per cent of total candidate elected were women in the year (Cambodian Council of Human Rights, 2012). However, women were elected at junior positions at commune levels. In 2012, only 4.66 per cent of women were elected as commune chiefs, 9.27 per cent were elected as first Deputy and 8.05 were elected as second Deputy. 78.02 per cent of women at in commune level elections were elected to junior positions (Cambodian Council of Human Rights, 2012).

Thus, we see that women's political representation in Cambodia is very low and women are present at lower levels of representation. There are various factors which contribute to this state of affairs of women in Cambodia. These include social and cultural barrier to women for their participation in politics and in public life, low level of education, domestic responsibilities of women to take care and rear the family and lack of family support to women to join the public domain.

What has been Re-constructed for Women in Cambodia?

Although, women played major role during the conflict and are important actor of pos-conflict reconstruction, a comparative study of the status and role of women in Cambodian family, society and politics do not indicate a very encouraging situation. Even after the constitutional guarantee of “equality” to women in every sphere, women in Cambodia are put lower to the men in the family and social hierarchy. In economic sector, most of the women labour force is engaged in the productive activities, but few women are employed in highly skilled jobs and in the government sectors. Like the pre-conflict period, it is still believed and argued that women belong to “domestic” and their primary duty is to take care of the home. In politics, the presence of women has increased, especially at the sub-national and local levels of decision-making. Nevertheless, this increase in the numbers is very slowly converting into change in the attitudes of people towards women capabilities to understand and tackle the ‘important issues’.

Now the question is what has reconstruction of Cambodia for the past two decades done for the issue of women and women security? How successfully it has addressed the issue of women’s security while tackling the problem of state security? Further, why the violence (both, structural and physical) against women is continuing in Cambodia if the country’s social, economic and political system has been reconstructed on the line of equality and freedom for all? Despite the various constitutional and legal provisions on women right to equality and the establishment of institutions to address the problem of violence against women, why the attitude towards

gender is unchanging and justifiable? Answer to these question lies in the reconstruction policies, programmes and the attitude of the important actors towards women security, involved in the process.

When the peace negotiations were going on in Cambodia, conflict and resolution of conflict was considered as an issue to be settled between men. All the parties who sat on the negotiation table ignored the fact that women have been an important part of the conflict and that the years of conflict has brought many changes in the lives of women. There was no talk of women's role, women's concerns and women's security, as the focus of the reconstruction process was state security which in a way took a monolith and universalised view of security from a statist point of view. There was no demand from either the national or the international agencies to involve women in the process and to address the emerging issues that challenges women security concerns. The absence of strong women organisations was another barrier to the involvement of women in the formal and informal peace process and the demand for the inclusion of women concern in the reconstruction process.

This has resulted in the absence of a larger section of women from the public arena and in the decision making. As a consequence, through the reconstruction process the traditional gender roles has been re-imposed in Cambodia and women has been pushed back from the freedom they had got to be active in public sphere and apply their skills in the new ventures of the economic activities. This has resulted into the loss of an opportunity to bring significant changes in the women's life and ensure wider and greater security of women in Cambodian society and state structures. Hence, we can argue that looking at the gender aspect of reconstruction process

in Cambodia, almost similar social, political and economic structures has been 're-constructed' which promoted the discrimination and exploitation of women, with little effort, that too, due to the wider emphasis on the gender based violence in present day politics, to tackle the issues of women security.

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Abstract

Apsaras losing their smile: Conflict and women in Cambodia

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With the end of 'war', societies are assumed to go back to 'the normal' and 'to restore the cultural and traditional values' that was destroyed by war and bloody conflict. This 'going back to normal' and 'restoration of culture and traditions' is an indication that women should 'go back to the houses' and take their primary duties assigned in almost every society 'to take care of the home and family'. This at the same time also indicates that the discriminatory practices against women will continue despite the reconstruction of a new social, political and economic structure. This paper examines the problem of continuation of violence against women in post-conflict societies and argues that the traditional notion of security, on which most of the post-conflict societies are reconstructed, is partial. The overemphasis on power politics excludes women as actors in 'war' and 'peace' and ignores women security challenges and shuts the door of opportunity that any conflict opens, that is to reconstruct the new structures of state and society that promotes gender equality. This paper has taken the cases of Cambodia to argue that greater involvement of women in the reconstruction process makes a difference to women security and greater political representation of women put restraints on the problem of gender based violence

by taking women issues as an agenda of importance. My research makes a comparative study of women in pre-conflict and post-conflict societies of Cambodia to look at the changes that reconstruction has brought out for women and influence of reconstruction programmes on women's security challenges.

Keywords: Security, Women, Post-conflict, Reconstruction, Violence against women.

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국문초록

미소를 잃은 압사라: 캄보디아의 분쟁과 여성

전쟁이 끝나면 사회들은 '정상'으로 돌아가 전쟁과 유혈 분쟁으로 파괴되었던 '문화적, 전통적 가치들을 회복'하리라 예상된다. 이 '정상'으로의 회귀와 '문화와 전통의 복원'은 여성들이 '집으로 돌아가서' '가정과 가족을 돌보는', 대부분의 사회에서 할당된 여성의 본래 의무를 다해야 한다는 말이다. 동시에 이는 또한 새로운 사회적, 정치적, 경제적 구조의 재건에도 불구하고 여성들에 대한 차별적 관습은 계속 이어짐을 뜻한다. 이 논문은 분쟁 이후의 사회에서도 여성에 대한 폭력이 계속되는 문제를 조사하고, 대부분의 분쟁 이후 사회들이 재건의 바탕으로 삼는 사회의 전통적 관념이 편파적이라는 점을 주장한다. 권력 정치에 대한 과도한 강조는 '전쟁'과 '평화'에서 행위자로서의 여성을 배제하게 되며, 안보 위협에서 여성을 무시하고, 분쟁으로 열린 젠더 평등을 촉진할 새로운 국가와 사회 구조를 재건할 기회를 문을 닫아버린다. 이 논문은 캄보디아의 예를 들어 재건 과정에서 여성의 더 많은 참여가 여성의 안전에 변화를 가져오고, 여성의 더 많은 정치적 대의권이 여성문제를 중요한 의제로 삼음으로써 폭력에 기초한 젠더 문제를 규제한다고 주장한다. 나의 연구는 캄보디아의 분쟁 이전과 이후 사회에서 여성의 비교 연구를 통해 재건이 여성들에게 가져온 변화와, 여성의 안전 문제에 대한 재건 프로그램들의 영향을 살펴본다.

핵심어: 안전, 여성, 분쟁 이후, 재건, 여성에 대한 폭력.

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