A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS IN POST-CONFLICT SRI LANKA

Shruti Sonal[1], Dr. Ninghtoujam Koiremba[2]

[1]Master's in International Studies, Christ University, Bangalore
[2]Assistant Professor , Christ University , Bangalore

ABSTRACT

Feminist scholars like Cynthia Enloe, Ann Tickner and Urvashi Butalia have contributed to creating a more nuanced approach to concerns of international relations such as war and security by highlighting the gendered experiences of conflict and reconstruction. This has been translated into legal frameworks at the international level, including the much-lauded UNSC Resolution 1325 which reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. Several other attempts have been made to stress the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

However, the application of feminist ethics has not yet been given priority in the realm of reconciliation and transitional justice in post-conflict societies. While there's an unanimous understanding that women experience conflict and respond to violence and deprivation in ways different from that of men, the concerns of women are often overshadowed in post-conflict reconciliation as issues of cessation of violence, infrastructural rebuilding and economic recovery occupy centrestage. There's a growing recognition of the fact that the ways in which conflict changes men's and women's roles, needs, and capacities must be taken into account to ensure successful and sustainable reconstruction and reconciliation in post-conflict societies.It is in this context that the paper will analyse the post-conflict reconciliation process in Sri Lanka from a feminist perspective. It will analyse how the two-decade long civil war in the country affected women, both as victims of abuse, heads of families and combatants in militant groups. It will emphasise on the fact that even though the Sri Lanka military achieved a decision victory against the LTTE in 2009, issues of social reconciliation remain unresolved. Then, it will seek to analyse the post-2009 scenario in Sri Lanka, and whether the government has been successful in addressing the gender concerns.

INTRODUCTION

A feminist perspective of international relations has for a long time strived to point out that the existing dominant discourses in the discipline, such as security, power and conflict, are driven by masculine understandings of these terms and seek to transform them by including a gender perspective. Simone de Beauvoir (1953), for instance, famously said that "representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth". Indeed, with its focus on issues of high politics centred around war and power, the traditional academic discipline of international relations privileges issues that grow out of men's experiences and leaves out the roles traditionally ascribed to women, in the realm of not only politics but also in reproduction, in households, and even in the economy. Ignoring women's experiences contributes not only to their exclusion but also to a myopic view of the practice of foreign policy world and the academic field of international relations. J. Ann Tickner was one of the first scholars to introduce gender as a category of analysis into the discipline of international relations and to call for the elimination of gender hierarchies as a way of achieving global security.

A crucial contribution of feminist theory to the discipline of international relations and conflict studies has been that men and women are both affected by conflicts, but not in the same way or in the same proportions. War and conflict transforms many social norms and structures and directly impact gender roles and responsibilities in society. During a crisis, the myths and stereotypes of male and female identity are reproduced and reinforced. Masculinity radically asserts itself in the form of violence, control and domination, while women are often pushed into victimhood. Women are not only subjected to a continuum of gender-based violence (such as physical and sexual violence) but are also forced to carry the major socio-economic burdens of the crisis as displaced persons or refugees. In addition, women and girls are notably affected by the destruction of socioeconomic infrastructures like hospitals, health centers, schools, water supply systems, roads and transport. Thus, the reasons for displacement and the needs for protection, as well as the challenges related to repatriation and reintegration, are not the same for men and women. To take these differences into account within a gender perspective is a crucial prerequisite to address them in the process of reconciliation.

Moreover, since the nature of contemporary wars has changed and moved towards internal or intranational wars, the exploitation of nationalist or ethnic feeling also leads to the militarisation of public space and the recruitment of civilian women and girls and their participation in the "collective effort". In such a scenario, women's identities and bodies intertwined with honour of

the larger community and country, and both their repression and liberation becomes a part of the wider dialogue on nationalism. (Korac, 1998)

The changing nature and understanding of conflict and peace led to a widening of the understanding of the concept of security, leading to a broad concept known as "human security". This concept of security aims to move away from a state-centric notion of security and take into account the security of civilians, communities and citizens. It further points out that threats to security are not only military in nature, but also emanate from socio-political factors such as poverty, environmental chaos, oppression and gender inequality. It is in this context of that a feminist approach to reconciliation in post-conflict societies becomes crucial.

Gender And Reconciliation

The word reconciliation comes from the Latin root *re-conciliare* meaning 'to unite again', indicating that it involves the restoration of a previously existing relationship. John Paul Lederach (2001), for instance, defines reconciliation to be "dynamic, adaptive processes aimed at building and healing" and "a process of change and redefinition of relationships". In peace and conflict studies, reconciliation has been generally understood as a process or set of practices that seeks to challenge injustices and re-build relationships in order to assist and transform societies that have experienced historic oppression through structural injustices, direct violence or the suppression of group identities. In a broader sense, Brandon Hamber and Gráinne Kelly (2004) developed five guiding principles to frame processes of reconciliation which include: advancing a "shared vision" of the future of a society, acknowledging and dealing with the past, building "positive" relationships, releasing "significant cultural and attitudinal change" and attaining substantial social, economic and political change. However, the understanding of the term and the process to achieve it remains essentially contested even today. As Johan Galtung (2001) observes "reconciliation is a theme with deep psychological, sociological, theological, philosophical and profoundly human roots - and nobody really knows how to successfully achieve it".

Feminist scholars of post-conflict societies such as Helen Scanlon have argued that the "homogenisation of understandings of reconciliation has resulted in the dominance of 'one nation,' liberal peacebuilding formula of reconciliation." (Scanlon, 2016) This dominant model does not focus on the social conditions and power relations that influence how local actors interpret and respond to reconciliation processes. According to Susan McKay (2000), national priorities regarding reconciliation often overshadow concerns of gender justice, especially when "thin" notions of reconciliation are employed. In addition, she points out that post-conflict

"transformation" often coincides with a restoration of gender relations, which existed prior to the conflict.

Since 1990s, the post-conflict period has been seen by many analysts as a window of opportunity to usher in expansive reforms aimed at promoting gender equality. This has led to both local and international demands for legal and political change. As a result, many previously perceived "private" issues such as inheritance and reproductive rights have been catapulted into the public realm in post-conflict settings. In this light, the UN Economic and Social Council proposed in 1997 that "mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality." A gender approach to reconciliation therefore has two components: redefining women's legal status by giving them the same rights as men, and transforming women's contributions during the conflict into sustainable political assets.

There have been several obstacles to the advancement of gender-sensitive reconciliation. Critics point out that a "gender perspective" is often interpreted as being limited to the concerns of women and, falsely considering the experiences of women universal. However, it is important to recognise that not all women experience conflict in the same way, and their experiences often vary according to nationality, race, ethnicity, education, class, age, faith and sexual identity. Thus, it is crucial to adopt an inter-sectional approach which challenges portrayals of women as passive victims and also acknowledges the fact that women can be autonomous actors who choose to support, oppose or survive a conflict.

International Frameworks

Addressing gender issues is a critical aspect of contemporary reconciliation processes at both the local and institutional levels. Generally, including women in decision-making positions has been seen as a tool to address the inequalities between men and women. This has led to numerous commitments at the regional and international level for quotas to promote the visibility of women in the public space.

A study done by the United Nations in 2012 of more than 300 peace agreements revealed that only 18 accords mention sexual violence or other forms of gender-based violence. The report also revealed that sexual violence was not considered by any of these peace agreements in their proposals for reparations, economic rehabilitation or development measures. This report must be

studied alongside other studies done by the United Nations which point out that between 1990 and 2010 women made up less than five percent of all signatories to peace agreements. In addition, a trend analysis conducted by the UN Women on 1,500 peace and political agreements adopted between 2000 and 2016 shows that only 25 agreements discuss the role of women's engagement in their implementation. This trend has also been criticised by several feminist scholars. Bell and O'Rourke (2010), for instance, have observed that women's inclusion in peace agreement texts is "an important starting point in achieving other political, legal and social gains for women". They suggest references to women can be significant at the stage of "ceasefire and pre-negotiation agreements; framework agreements which set out the arrangements for substantively settling the conflict; and implementation agreements that address implementation of the framework agreement". However, as Elizabeth Porter (2007) notes women's contributions to reconciliation are currently largely "informal, ad hoc and rarely part of formal peace processes."

In this light, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security was aimed at mitigating women's exclusion from the international peace and security agenda. The resolution provided the first official acknowledgement of the links between gender and conflict and proposed a legal framework for addressing women's peace and security concerns at local, regional and international levels. A 2015 UN Women study into the success of UNSC Resolution 1325 fifteen years since its passage claims that "peace processes that included women as witnesses, signatories, mediators, and/or negotiators demonstrated a 20 percent increase in the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years". This research also suggested that a demonstrable role by women's organisations in negotiation processes correlated with a greater likelihood of agreements being implemented.

Sri Lanka: War and Women

The Sri Lankan civil war was a brutal conflict between the Sinhala-dominated Sri Lankan state and the Tamil secessionists led by the militant organisation LTTE. The war was an identity-based driven by ethnonationalism but women- both their repression and liberation- soon became an important political tool for both sides. As Hellsten (2012) points out, "nationalistic and ethnic conflicts, which are often based on presumptions regarding 'natural' hierarchies, tend to view women as the 'weaker sex' in addition to the producers and guardians of ethnic or national heritage." This interplay of gender and ethnic dynamics in Sri Lanka led to a complex web of intersectionalities which had widespread consequences for women as victims, combatants and agents for change. Thus, the overall conflict both exacerbated the socio-economic and physical vulnerabilities of women, and simultaneously created opportunities for their empowerment.

Report of the OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka (2015) pointed out that during the war, women in detention camps were subjected to the same patterns of ill treatment as their male counterparts on the basis of their ethnicity, such as torture, extrajudicial killings, and sexual violence. However, outside in heavily militarized zones, women were targeted for sexual and gender-based violence more than their male peers. In particular, women were being forced to provide sexual favours in exchange for government services or information. Their safety or the safety of their loved ones was also under threat. Further, women in the North and East not only faced vulnerabilities associated with being present during the armed conflict and being from a specific ethnic group, they also faced vulnerabilities on account of their gender. A 2012 report by Human Rights Watch indicates that rapes by Sri Lankan security forces, together with other violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, sharply increased with the implementation of expanded Emergency Regulations, and the resumption of armed hostilities between the government and the LTTE following the breakdown of the 2002 ceasefire in 2006.

However, discrimination and victimization is not the only aspect of women's experience of conflict. A significant aspect of the Sri Lankan civil war was Tamil women's participation as militants and combatants. As the North and East became increasingly militarized, women joined the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in large numbers. It is estimated that women combatants accounted for 30 percent of the total militants in the LTTE. In addition to the LTTE, they joined the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS), Eelam National Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE). As a result, women found spaces of empowerment in women's collectives and grassroots organizations, which advocated on behalf of the rights of women as well as on behalf of the good of the community. Allison (2003) points out several speeches of Prabhakaran where he himself said that '[t]he ideology of women liberation [sic] is a child born out of the womb of our liberation struggle'. In sync with his views, the Women's Front took up many causes like opposing dowry, elimination of discrimination against Tamil women, securing socio-political and economic equality, ensure that Tamil women control their own lives, to secure legal protection for them against sexual violence.

However, there have been several feminist critiques of the LTTE model of women's liberation fused with Tamil nationalism. For instance, Kumudini Samuel (2001) views female armed Tamil militants as one group of women who have rejected traditional notions of femininity, but maintains that "women's subordination within the national struggle is not a question they have addressed". Sitralega Maunaguru (2001), on the other hand, asserts that the major Tamil nationalist groups have addressed women's equality largely from the lens of a conventional ideology that does not recognise the specific oppression or problems of women within the nationalist movement. Ultimately, what suits best is perhaps Rajasingham Senanayake's (2001)

phrase 'ambivalent empowerment' to analyse the position of LTTE women. Senanayake argues that the organisation allowed women to break out of the confines of their allotted domesticity and taken on new roles as fighters, but on the whole, they "remained captive both to the patriarchal nationalist project of Prabhakaran and the history and experience of oppression by the Sri Lankan military."

The civil war came to an end after the Sri Lankan government declared victory over the LTTE on May 18, 2009. Virtually all of the LTTE's military leaders and many of its political leaders were killed in the final days of the fighting, under circumstances that remain unclear. The government's refusal to allow any independent observers into the conflict zone hampered an impartial assessment of the number of casualties. The Panel of Experts appointed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon later reported that up to 40,000 civilians died in the final months of the war. The report also indicated towards the large-scale sexual violence committed by the army against women. However, the Sri Lankan government has neither investigated nor prosecuted alleged human rights abuses and war crimes committed by government forces and the LTTE during the conflict. In other words, the military victory brought an end to the violence but did not lay a steady ground for peace.

The post-2009 scenario has shown that shifting gender roles and women's empowerment stemming from the armed conflict has not completely erased traditional views regarding the appropriate roles of men and women in post conflict society. Furthermore, the violence and socio-economic distress faced by the Sri Lankan women during the war led to extreme difficulties post-war. This is particularly highlighted by the situation confronting 40,000-60,000 women headed households in the former conflict zones which are reported to face a range of specific economic, physical, and psychosocial vulnerabilities. In her study of female headed households in Northern Sri Lanka, Raksha Vasudevan (2013) argued that their economic vulnerabilities are primarily due to the loss of assets during the conflict and the inability to regain those assets due to discriminatory administrative laws; the lack of steady, decently paid employment opportunities in a male-dominated formal economy; the lack of direct compensation or assistance from the government; increased physical vulnerabilities, and the risk of sexual harassment and abuse.

Similarly, in a report studying the experiences of Tamil women in the post-war period, Nimmi Gowrinathan and Kate Cronin-Furman (2015) discovered that inexistent or ineffective means of legal redress for violence against women or for various forms of socio-economic harms endured by women during the armed conflict further leads to insecurity in the North and the East. This has led to the extreme reluctance of survivors of sexual and gender based violence to report crimes committed against them by either security forces or members of their own communities.

Martina Klimesova & Bimsara Premaratne (2015) further point out that it is the Tamil women formerly associated with the LTTE who are facing double marginalization in post-conflict Sri Lanka. They are firstly disadvantaged in access to employment and social justice due to the continuing prevalence of unequal gender roles. Secondly, it is the Tamil women out of the larger group of women who face further marginalisation both due to their identity and former affiliations with the LTTE network. They point out that in an attempt to deal with the troublesome LTTE past, Tamil communities ostracize LTTE widows. Former female combatants in these regions also fear retribution and ostracism from their communities and therefore maintain silence about their experiences in the conflict. Reintegration programmes focusing on these gender and identity aspects of former combatants have not been designed. Whereas many former LTTE female cadres have opted to build new lives through programs for reintegration outside of their original communities and villages, the same opportunities have not been afforded to non-combatant women affiliated to the Tamil Tigers.

Analysing Sri Lanka's Policy on Reconciliation

These examples show that despite the end of civil war in 2009, the road to peace and reconciliation of women into the fabric of post-conflict society remains unachieved. Thus, in order to achieve sustainable peace in Sri Lanka, it is important to address the above concerns and adopt a gendered path to reconciliation.

Saavedra and Saroor (2017) point out that such an approach will require three crucial components. First, to effectively address the issues that led to women's victimization during the armed conflict and the perpetuation of victimization in the post-conflict period, transitional justice processes must not seek to merely go back to the status quo pre-conflict. Second, tackling gender discrimination must begin with an analysis of deeply embedded cultural norms regarding masculinity and femininity. It must be kept in mind that women during conflict are exposed to overlapping vulnerabilities (such as gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status), and experience periods of victimization, empowerment, and re-victimization both from the State, as well as within their own communities. Finally, they argue that it must be remembered that women in Sri Lanka do not speak with one universal voice. Not only do their experiences differ across time and place, but their responses towards their experiences and their ideas of justice are equally varied.

Since the 2002 peace process, several attempts have been made to address gender issues in the framework for peace. During the third round of the Norwegian facilitated peace talks in Oslo in December 2002, for instance, Sri Lanka established a joint SubCommittee on Gender Issues (SGI), consisting of representatives of the government and the LTTE . The SGI, drawing upon

UNSC Resolution 1325 as its reference point, acknowledged the need for women's issues to be fully incorporated into "all aspects of peacemaking, peace-building and reconstruction".

The most ambitious attempt at reconciliation in Sri Lanka was the establishment of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) which was tasked with investigating the facts and circumstances that caused the collapse of the ceasefire agreement of 27 February 2002 and led to the events between then and the conflict's end on 18 May 2009. Following an 18-month inquiry, the Commission's report was published on 16 December 2011. However, the LLRC was criticized for failing to conduct an unbiased investigation into credible allegations of systematic violations by government forces in the final phases of the war, which many claimed amounted to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international law. The LLRC failed to incorporate a gender perspective consistent with international law and standards. In particular, although the report makes specific mention of the effect of the armed conflict on women, it only briefly treats sexual and gender-based violence in spite of credible claims that abuses of this nature were committed systematically. In addition, the LLRC also failed to adopt policies and processes geared towards facilitating women's participation. For example, only one out of eight appointed Commissioners was a woman. Many reported that the LLRC failed to create a safe space for victims to testify. Hearings were held in public and typically filmed and no protection was given to victims or witnesses. This compromised any possibility of confidentiality for those who testified and discouraged women, particularly victims of sexual violence, from coming forward with their stories.

Attempts by NGOs and citizen networks have been made to bring out the issues ignored by the government. The Colombo-based Initiative for Political and Conflict Transformation (Inpact) carried out a project between August 2013 and July 2014, aimed at empowering widows and other marginalized women in rural and impoverished regions in the Jaffna district. Through theater-based workshops the project identified specific problems that the marginalized women faced and were otherwise reluctant to share in an open forum. The initiative highlighted that a lack of security for women is a persisting issue and many of the women participating in the project reported disadvantaged in their opportunities to sustain their livelihoods. Moreover, most of the participants have experienced some form of hardship or sexual abuse within their families, from their employers, or from law enforcement authorities. Interestingly, the workshops showed that the affected women benefited greatly from creating a sense of community spirit among themselves and welcomed joint small-scale business initiatives.

Another such initiative was the, the Women's Action Network (WAN) which in collaboration with other women's groups and collectives, conducted trainings, interviews and discussions with survivors and women's rights activists in the North and the East to hear their views on the four

proposed transitional justice mechanisms: the Office on Missing Persons, the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reconciliation and Non-Recurrence, the Judicial Mechanism with Special Counsel, and the Office on Reparations. These consultations looked at each of the proposed transitional justice mechanisms and identified ways in which women's ideas, concerns, and recommendations could be incorporated into the planning process of these Mechanisms.

The political transition in 2015 gave moderate sections among both the Sinhala and Tamil communities with a popular mandate for reforms to advance peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. The national unity government formed with a cross-party political alliance of the two largest political parties - the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP), and the cooperation with the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), provided an opportunity to create a unifying framework to advance reconciliation, and facilitate peacebuilding. A number of the recommendations that emerged via NGOs, citizen groups and transnational organisations were incorporated into the National Policy of Reconciliation and Coexistence 2017. This policy filled the gap for the existence of an official declared policy by the Government of Sri Lanka on the subject; hence this National Policy on Reconciliation and Coexistence aims to fill this gap. The objectives of the policy, as stated in the document, are "to function as a state policy on reconciliation and coexistence; to provide direction to national reconciliation and coexistence by addressing past violence and conflict, and through envisioning of a shared future that fosters national unity and peaceful coexistence among all peoples and communities in the country and to provide a guiding framework to all stakeholders working on reconciliation and coexistence in order to achieve coherence in peace and national unity initiatives."

The policy is focused on the two principles of transitional justice and gender responsiveness. It recognizes that reconciliation and coexistence involves addressing several components such as truth-seeking and healing, justice, protecting the rights and interests of missing persons and their families, reparation and institutional reform as parts of transitional justice. Crucially, it states the need to proactively adopt gender responsive measures at every step of policy implementation and also while designing reconciliation and coexistence initiatives in order to ensure that women's human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. It also emphasises the need to build a culture of respect between women and men through all reconciliation initiatives; and also recognizes that while large numbers of women have been victims of conflict and violence and require redress and reparation, they must also be actively engaged as equal partners in the reconciliation and coexistence process.

The policy aims to "ensure the principle of gender equality in all national initiatives by developing protection mechanisms for vulnerable women around the country; providing reparations and redressal mechanisms to women who have endured violations; and promoting

agency of women as partners in decision-making and as agents of change in reconciliation processes and activities." Further, it emphasises on the need "to empower and engage with vulnerable groups affected by the conflict, such as female heads of households, war widows, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, children & youth, internally and externally displaced communities, families of the missing and disappeared, families ex combatants and soldiers and differently-abled and resettled communities." Importantly, the policy addresses the need to "take steps to institutionalize women & youth engagement at all levels of the national reconciliation process; and promote agency of women and youth through participation in decision-making structures, as necessary partners to reconciliation and coexistence process."

In light of the above mentioned principles and objectives, the Sri Lankan government has taken several steps. A significant measure was the establishment of Ministry of National Integration and Reconciliation which was set up to effectively resettle the Internally Displaced Persons and Refugee Returnees and facilitate the social integration of rehabilitated ex-combatants. It also aimed to uplift the quality of life of the war affected women headed families, support economic opportunities for the families of missing persons, disabled and provide catch-up education for conflict affected children. In addition, the Office of Missing Persons (OMP) Act was passed in the parliament which laid down that "the OMP shall provide or facilitate psychosocial support to families of missing persons." A crucial aspect of fulfilling the OMP's mandate of identifying avenues of redress for victims is providing psychosocial support specifically to female victims and witnesses before, during and after their engagement with the OMP. Along with the OMP Act, the government has recently passed a Victim and Witness Protection Act (VAWP Act), whose stated objective is to "set out, uphold and enforce the rights and entitlements of victims of crime and witnesses and to provide for a mechanism to promote, protect, enforce and exercise such rights and entitlements." It also aims to provide assistance and protection to victims of crime and witnesses and enable victims of crime to obtain compensation from persons convicted of having committed offences against them. As women have shown a reluctance to participate in government truth-seeking mechanisms due to harassment, reprisals, stigma, and intimidation, such robust victim and witness protection measures are needed to ensure that women participate before the OMP.

Thus, through its varied transitional justice mechanisms, the Sri Lankan government has attempted to provide a comprehensive and multi-faceted redress for victims of the armed conflict. These mechanisms include several measures, as discussed above, which especially apply to women, who face socio-economic harms that are difficult to redress through other mechanisms. In this way, the measures outlined in the National Policy of Reconciliation and Coexistence have the potential to practically and effectively address underlying gender inequalities that women face in recovering from the armed conflict.

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Additionally, ONUR, along with the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, has launched a program to provide relief to war-affected women in North Sri Lanka. ONUR has stated that it has identified serious gaps in services and opportunities available to women affected by the war, particularly war widows and women-headed households. As an initial step, ONUR and the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs are working with various other government agencies to provide assistance to women who have been unable to obtain vital documents necessary for accessing government benefits and services.

However, there are many obstacles to realising the ambitious objectives that the Policy and other government programmes seek to achieve. Any form of reparations to women in the North and East will be ineffective if they simply seek to repair harms that stem from the armed conflict. In order to completely address the harms suffered during the armed conflict, attempts must be made to also transform the underlying inequalities that women face in Sri Lankan society. In doing so, the Office will need to take a creative approach in recommending government programs that seek to address societal gender discrimination, such as education campaigns, outreach programs, or media campaigns that influence the way society views women. Further, the policy lacks special provisions for the integration of women who were ex-combatants within the LTTE and other militant organisations. As discussed before, social ostracisation of former female combatants hampers their reintegration and leads to a reluctance on their part to voice their concerns. The most alarming roadblock to the implementation of a gender-approach to reconciliation seems to be the political crisis in Sri Lanka. In October 2018, a constitutional crisis developed in the country as President Mathripala Sirisena dismissed the incumbent Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and installed in his place former controversial Prime Minister Mahindra Rajapaksha. While Wikremesinghe has now been reinstated, it shows that differences in the country's political arena remain. Moreover, the search for a new constitution for the post-civil war Sri Lanka still remains awaited. The manner in which the process of constitution making addresses questions of reconciliation, war crimes and gender rights over the next few years will be crucial in deciding whether the women in Sri Lanka will be heard or not.

CONCLUSION

Thus, through the works of feminist IR literature and expanding international legal frameworks, it has been argued that men and women experience conflict differently and in different dimensions and proportions. In this light, the process of reconciliation in post-conflict societies must address concerns of women in order to move towards comprehensive frameworks for sustainable peace and transform existing socio-economic relations in society. This has drawn from two crucial understandings: that women are not only victims of violence during war, but also sometimes take part as combatants or agents of peace. Secondly, a conflict exacerbate not

only physical threats to their life but also increases their social, economic, political and psychological vulnerabilities. A gendered approach to reconciliation therefore must not only redress the issues faced by women during war, but also redefine their status by giving them legal rights as men and transforming their contributions into sustainable political assets. The case of post-conflict Sri Lanka is vital in studying the different roles that women play during and after war. The military victory in 2009 against LTTE in the country brought an end to the violence, but issues of reconciliation still remain. The National Policy of Reconciliation and Coexistence adopted but the government in 2017 has recognised the need for a gender-sensitive and gender-responsive path to reconciliation and transitional justice. Steps such as the creation of Office of Missing Persons and passage of Witness Protection Act have set up crucial legal measures in striving towards the same. However, political crises and the long wait for a post-war constitution to be formed have slowed down the process. It remains to be seen how successfully the steps included in the 2017 policy will be implemented and represented in the Constitution.

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