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Borderless Issues: The Role of Mothers in Conflict

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Women's issues are not contained by borders. Regardless of development indicators, we see similar patterns across South Asia – patriarchal systems and values, women treated as domestic property and attacked for revenge, unchecked urbanization with its myriad problems exacerbating women's vulnerabilities particularly with the concurrent breakdown of community and joint family systems.

Women's empowerment and education leads to a better society – something that came across forcefully to me while speaking on the phone with Nusrat Ara, a district councilor in Mardan, Pakistan. This is the city in northern Pakistan where a horrific case of lynching took place on a private university campus on April 13, 2017, when a mob of charged students lynched and killed a fellow student on false charges of blasphemy. Nusrat and I spoke quite by chance a few days later. She is a dynamic woman, one of the thousand women nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. We spoke about the lynching and what Mashal's family are going through. The attackers were human but showed no humanity. And it is not just one mother who has lost her son. All those mothers whose sons attacked Mashal, have also lost their children, she added. "*Wo bhi kisi maan ke bache hain*" (they too were the sons of their mothers).

It is a powerful thought. There is a reason that militants acting in the name of Islam are particularly conditioned to cut off ties with their families, particularly the women. There is a reason that extremists, regardless of which religion they belong to, invariably suppress women.

