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BREAKING GENDERED CONSTRUCTION OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY: SECURING THE UNSECURED

Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the discourse of international security largely defined in terms of political realism and problematise it from a feminist perspective. In this pursuit, it has explored and examined constructions of the key concepts and institutions related to the contemporary discourse of international security such as state, national, nationalism, citizenship, military, and war. A gender-sensitive reading of these concepts and institutions reveals that the constructions of these concepts and institutions have been detrimental to women's security because they are based on masculine ethos. In fine, the paper attempts to re-conceptualise the discourse from a feminist perspective based on a comprehensive notion of security. In this conceptualisation, security is viewed beyond the premises of nation-state; in global perspective. To mainstream such a conceptualisation, the paper argues that there is a strong need for feminist scholarship to engage with other non-feminist scholars of other disciplines.

INTRODUCTION

Women's voices largely remained unheard in the academic circles of social sciences until the late twentieth century. As a discipline of social sciences, the ripples of feminist movements touched the International Relations (IR) only recently - in the early 1990s - resulting in a gender-sensitive reading of its core concepts

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and theories.¹ However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, even before the emergence of the discipline itself, a visionary social reformer of Bengal, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, wrote about interstate relations to the extent of war and trade in her famous utopian fantasy – “Sultana’s Dream.”² She painted a picture of a ‘Lady-land’, a world where the presence of women is as visible as possible in all aspects of statecraft, including running of the government and waging a war. Although her work is inspirational³, it has depicted an alternative picture of how interstate relations and international security can be maintained. However, even after a century, we are yet to observe any visible presence of women as agents at various levels, be it state level, regional or international. This is not to suggest that women, who constitute half the world population, have no roles in the process of politics, nation building and security; rather the argument is that their contributions are not duly recognised and thus they remain marginalised. Cynthia Enloe’s works substantiate this argument in which she attempts to demonstrate that women are and have always been part of international relations - if one is really interested to see them there.⁴

Hence, it can be argued that IR represents a ‘fragmented and distorted version’⁵ of the world. Its core concepts viz. power, security, state, and sovereignty are gender-biased as they are neither generic nor neutral; rather they have originated from a social and political context where ‘the problem of patriarchy is repressed.’⁶ This

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- ¹ Christine Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and Gender Studies in International Relations*, available at <http://www.femisa.org/sylvesterpaper.html> accessed on 18 June 08.
- ² Begum Rokeya Sakawat Hossain, *Sultana’s Dream*, (Dhaka: Narigrantha Prabantana).
- ³ Rita Manchanda, Redefining and Feminising Security *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol-xxxvi June 2, 2001, p-1956.
- ⁴ For an excellent account of IR in feminist perspective, see Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. (London: Pandora Press, Harper/Collins, 1989).
- ⁵ Rebecca Grant And Kathleen Newland, “Introduction” in Rebecca Grant And Kathleen Newland (ed.), *Gender and international relations* (Open University Press: Buckingham, 1991) p-1.
- ⁶ Jacqui True, “Feminism” in Scott Burchill et al (ed.) *Theories of International Relations* (Palgrave: New York, 2001) p-247.

paper attempts to analyse the gender bias inherent in the discourse of international security and thereby feminising this discourse in which women's voices would be heard and Sultana's dream would come closer to reality.

With this end in view, the paper has been divided into three sections. The first section deals with the conceptualisation of international security, analysing contending approaches. The second section highlights the gender construction of various concepts and institutions related to international security, while the third focuses on the re-conceptualisation of security in feminist terms and the task ahead.

1. CONCEPTUALISING AND PROBLEMATISING INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

The thinking about IR is related with the phenomenon called war - the Peloponnesian War, the Thirty Years War, the First World War, etc. E. H. Carr, one of the renowned scholars of IR, contends that 'international relations began with Thucydides and the conflict amongst the Greek city-states two and a half thousand years ago.'⁷ This validates that the concept of 'security' is an integral part of IR. Yet the very term 'security' is a complex and contested concept of the discipline. The term 'security' is clearly linked to war, peace and power, because states enhance power and, if necessary, engage in war to protect their core values and thereby secure them vis-à-vis each other. The following discussion will shed light on the dominant approach to conceptualising international security and how the approach has been challenged in recent times.

Political realism is the most dominant approach in the study of IR. Most of the foreign policy practitioners and national security analysts see the world through the lens of political realism. Realism emerged as a strong approach in the post-World War II period in reaction to idealism that had a strong reliance on international law and was the predominant approach in inter-war period. The main focus of realism is on power-politics instead of international law as far as the conduct of international relations is concerned.

⁷ Quoted in Terry Terriff *et al.*, "Security Studies Today", (Blackwell Publishers: USA, 2001) p-10.

Applying the positivist methodology of the ‘natural sciences’ to the study of IR, Hans J. Morgenthau, one of the most prominent realists, in his six principles of political realism portrayed some objective laws derived from human nature that is unchanging. To him, men are essentially selfish, self-seeking and eager to accumulate power and so are states in the international system, characterised by anarchy, a condition where there is no higher authority to regulate their relations with one another. According to the realists, power means military power, which is a crucial factor for the protection of the state security and the national interest. The realists consider that security is a zero-sum proposition defined in terms of the stability provided by sovereign militaristic states and is examined only in the context of the presence and absence of war between and among sovereign states. States must have sufficient military power to “prevent the outside – difference, irrationality, anarchy and potential conflict – from conquering the inside of homogeneous, rational and orderly states.”⁸ It denotes that security that can only be achieved at the expense of their neighbours has been seen as the prime task of states. Hence, argues John Baylis, realism views interstate relations as a struggle for power as states constantly attempt to take advantage of one another.⁹ The quest for power (read as security) makes the states trapped into the ‘security dilemma’ defined as a ‘structural notion in which the self-help attempts of states to look after their security needs tend regardless of intention to lead to rising insecurity for others as each interprets its own measures as defensive and the measures of others as potentially threatening.’¹⁰ In explaining how states become trapped into the security dilemma, Lord Grey, a British statesman, once commented, “The distinction between preparations made with the intention of going to war and precautions against attack is a true distinction, clear and definite in the minds of those who build up armaments. But it is a distinction that is not obvious or certain to others. Each Government, therefore, while resenting any suggestion that its own

⁸ True *op. cit.*, p. 256.

⁹ John Baylis “International and global security in the post-cold war era” in John Baylis and Steve Smith (ed.) *The Globalization of World Politics* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2001) p-256.

¹⁰ Herz, J. (1950) ‘Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma’, *World Politics*, vol. 2 no. 2, p 157.

measures are anything more than for defence, regards similar measures of another government as preparation to attack.”¹¹ During the Cold War period, such formulation of security led to the emergence of theories of ‘Balance of power’ and ‘Balance of terror’. The two rival super-powers were engaged in struggle for power having been trapped into security dilemma.

The end of the Cold War ushered in a new era of cooperation, putting an end to the intense ideological confrontation between the two superpowers. Moreover, new intra-state strife, and ecological degradation have become important in global politics. In this backdrop, many scholars thought that realism based on power-politics would not be able to explain these new developments and such an understanding led security theorists to develop alternative security paradigms. In this period, ‘broad’ understanding of security studies has emerged with Barry Buzan and others playing a pioneering role. According to the broad definition, security might be ‘a state of being secure, safe, free from danger, injure, harm of any sort.’¹² Broad-school theorists suggest that it is not possible to bound security by nation-state borders and by the parameters of rational thought. For example, ecological concern is becoming the increasing concern of security. Although the work of broad-school theorists is important, at least in challenging the notion of realist security, feminist theorists hold the view that broad-school can portray only partial understanding of security and that a comprehensive understanding of security will be possible only when gender perspective of security, which is excluded from the realist school, would be recognised. To develop a comprehensive understanding of security, feminist scholarship came up with new ideas and new visions. Their main criticism is that the dominant realist theory has constructed an approach that builds on assumptions and explanations based on behaviours associated with masculinity, which is a social construction.

Human beings are socialised through the institutions of family, education and society and through this process they come to know that attributes of objectivity, reason, rationality, autonomy, control

¹¹ Quoted in John Baylis *op. cit.* p. 258.

¹² Jill Steans, *Gender and International Relations: An Introduction*, (Polity Press: Cambridge, 1998), p. 106.

and domination are associated with masculinity. Rousseau in his book *Emile* narrates that man is rational and is the perfect complement for an 'emotional woman'. Thus, man through socialisation becomes rational, choice making citizen. Because of their physical strength, they have been considered to be the protector of their nation, women and children and their activities have been concerned with the public realm of politics, which is more related to 'high politics.'¹³ On the other hand, the private or domestic realm has been considered to be of women where they have reproductive role, act as care givers to their children and husband.

In her attempt to examine the androcentrism in IR, feminist theorist J. Ann Tickner says that IR theorists attempt to show men as atomistic, competitive, aggressive, and rationally self-interested and project these attributes onto the state, which is the unitary, rational, and competitive, and the primary actor of international politics. To them, she writes, the bridge between the individual and the state is citizenship, which is constituted by (male only) military and property-owning qualifications.¹⁴ Feminist theorists argue that Hobbesian 'war of every man against every man' has played a crucial role in international politics and it produces a continuous 'security dilemma' where each actor in international politics increases its own security and that makes the other actors insecure. Hence, it is argued that women's experiences are totally excluded in conceptualising security and politics and thus Hobbesian rational male citizen and Rousseau's rational man accords men and masculinity a privileged position in society and politics. Such an exclusionary conceptualisation of security has negative consequences as far as women are concerned. The masculine nature of security discourse very often increases the insecurity of women both in public and private spheres.

¹³ Amena Mohsin, "Conceptualizing International Security: Where are the Women?" in Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.) *Women, Bangladesh and International Security: Methods, Discourses and Policies* (University Press Limited: Dhaka, 2004) p-15.

¹⁴ Tickner, summarised in Spike Peterson, "Feminism and International Relations" in Sinha et al. (ed) *Feminism and Internationalism*, (Oxford University Press: Blackwell, 1999) p-239.

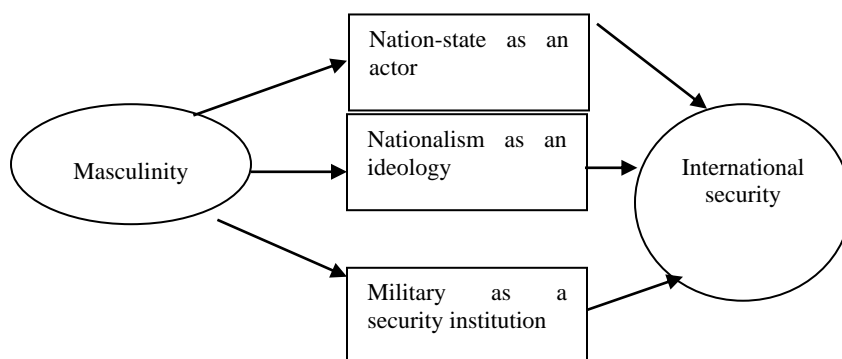


Figure1: The factors that influence international security are based on masculinity.

The very construction of nation-state, the prime actor of international system and the main reference point of international security, is also a gender construction. Its ideology of nationalism and its security institutions are detrimental to women's security, as they are also based on masculine ethos. The subsequent section will make these points clear.

2. GENDER CONSTRUCTION AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Nation, Nationalism and Women

The modern states are regarded as nation-states. Nation is a collective form of human beings who constitute a collective identity for the people who belong to it. This collective identity emerges from shared belief in common ancestry, history, culture, language and a set of boundary collectives. This nation or collective has been linked to a clan or kinship. Thus, the authenticity of the clan members has become important. In order to ensure this authenticity, women are used and they become the property and symbols of the nation. There are five major (although not exclusive) ways in which women are important to maintain this authenticity as far as state practices are concerned.¹⁵ These are:

¹⁵ Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, "Women and Nation-State" in John Hutchison and Anthony D. Smith (ed.) *Nationalism* (Oxford University Press: Great Britain, 1994) p-313.

1. as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities;
2. as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups;
3. as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture;
4. as signifiers of ethnic/national differences in focus and symbols in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories; and
5. as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.

The first two roles are relevant to our discussion and hence I will limit myself to these two. Firstly, the state has often controlled the body of women by imposing various regulations on reproduction rights and duties since they are regarded as the biological reproducers of the nation. In some cases, where the state tries to limit the number of people born within specific ethnic groups, it applies a number of policies ranging from forced sterilisation to massive mobilisation of birth control. On the other hand, the state sometimes limits women choices by encouraging them to bear more children of the 'right kind' in order to protect the nation or race from 'demographic holocaust'.¹⁶

Limiting the choice of women has been a hallmark of masculine values prevailing in the society. For example, the choice made by Western women in the early 1970s to limit the family size is now attacked by increasingly virulent 'pro-life' campaigns. Here one of the basic concerns of the campaigners is the social and economic dislocation caused by increasing autonomy of women over their bodies and reproductive capacity. In all these cases, governments and society attempt to control women's choices, increasing their dependency and insecurity.

Female bodies and their reproductive choices are also strictly controlled, as their reproductive and sexual capacities are regarded to be significant markers of male-defined ethnic identity.¹⁷ They are

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p-313.

¹⁷ Lori Handrahan, "Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction" *Security Dialogue* Vol. 35, no: 4, 2004 p-437.

controlled in a way that they will reproduce the boundaries of the symbolic identity of their group or that of their husbands by allowing them to have sexual relations with men of their own community. A woman may be deserted by her own community if she has 'allowed' penetration by the ethnic 'other'. This is particularly because she has become ethnically contaminated and is no more qualified as a reproducer of ethnic identity of her community.¹⁸ As the community puts emphasis on such kind of ethnic purity, women are subjected to rape by the enemy combatant during war, as the enemy nation tries to abolish national identity of the opposing nation. Here, the women have to pay double price. On the one hand, they lose their chastity that they value and, on the other, their own nations or societies based on masculine values show reluctance to recognise their sacrifices in nation-building process. A case in point is the reluctance of Bangladesh as a state, and Bangladesh society at large, to recognise the sacrifices of its war heroines. According to Susan Brownmiller, about 200,000 Bengali women had been raped by Pakistani soldiers in 1971. However, at present no proper record of the rape victims is available. It was because the rehabilitation centre set up in the aftermath of the war did not maintain any records of the affected women so that they could be rehabilitated as early as possible. The society was not ready to accept them, let alone their babies. The Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, once said, "I do not want to keep that polluted blood in this country".¹⁹

As the construction of nation or nation-state is gendered, so is its organising ideology - nationalism. Historically speaking, the creation of state boundaries in Europe was closely linked with the concept of nationalism as a strong ideology. This ideology has profound implications for international security in a sense that it is a reactionary ideology that leads states to war to preserve their national identity. Nationalism often uses the jargons such as home, blood and kin that have a familial connotation.²⁰ The nation is assumed to be female and represented as a woman under threat of violation or

¹⁸ *Ibid* p-438.

¹⁹ Quoted in Mohsin, *op cit* p-20.

²⁰ Jan Jindy Pettman, 'Gender Issues' in John Baylis and Steve Smith (ed.) *The Globalization of World Politics* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2001) p. 592.

domination to be saved by her citizen-sons.²¹ Due to such representation, regardless of what men or women do, men become the agents of nationalism while women are considered to be national possessions in need of protection. When actual fight starts, the image of *nation-as-women* changes into the image of women as *mother-of-nation* who sends their citizen-sons to the battlefield to face the enemy- the 'other' - to save the motherland, women and children.²² The Kargil war, fought between India and Pakistan, brought in its wake a series of Bollywood films containing such images. Thus, the nationalist ideology confers on women a 'place' within the broader political and social order but it is a place that takes a woman a prisoner.²³ Although gendered nationalism is detrimental to women, women sometimes being members of the nation support the belligerent movements, which may affect the security of women belonging to other ethnic or religious groups or nations. For example, many Serbian women supported the Serbian nationalist cause, which applied systematic violence against women as part of 'ethnic cleansing'.²⁴

State's practices & Women's security

The modern state, that makes the international system, enjoys sovereignty - the formal principle that institutionalises *public* authority in mutually exclusive domains and assumes boundaries between us and them, order and anarchy, domestic and international, public and private.²⁵ It inherited the public-private dichotomy from the Greek city-state. This inherent dichotomy of the modern state led to such a notion of citizenship that relegated women to the private sphere. The citizen of the modern state was expected to be objective and rational. Historically, however, rationality has been identified with masculinity. Hence, initially the citizenship was extended only to men. Women were excluded from citizenship as they were considered dependent, irrational, subjective and part of the private,

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Jill Steans, *Gender and International Relations: An Introduction*, (Polity Press: Cambridge, 1998) p. 67.

²⁴ Pettman, *op. cit.*, p. 592.

²⁵ True, *op. cit.* p. 239.

rather than independent, autonomous persons in their own right. Women were excluded from the right to vote, stand for election, and hold public office. Therefore, the construction of women as 'dependants' who are identified only in terms of their relationship to men, as wives and mothers, plays a significant role in restricting the rights of women as citizens. With time, the notion of universal franchise developed. At present, every state in theory recognises women's equal rights as citizens. However, in practice, women most of the time cannot enjoy their rights in patriarchal states. The highest duty of a citizen is, as it is considered to be, sacrifice one's life for one's country. This is also a masculine notion for in conventional wisdom war is men's domain while women are associated with peace. Culture and religion have often been used to curtail women's citizenship rights. They have been forced to remain indoors (right to movement), not to speak for their rights (right to speech), not allowed to marry the persons of their choice.²⁶ In many cases, even their right to vote has been prevented through *fatwas*. Moreover, the citizenship laws are also mostly gendered. For instance, citizenship in Bangladesh is determined through paternity; in other words it is mediated through a male. Thus, modern state has through citizenship silenced women and made them dependent and insecure.

In this context it is essential to note that the experiences of women of developing countries are far different from those of developed countries. Women of developing countries have much bitter experience than that of developed countries. They could hardly struggle for equality with men as the latter themselves are 'oppressed' in class terms, given the high level of poverty in these countries. They are rarely involved in the public sphere; in fact very few who are able to involve themselves in the public sphere are invisible. Hence, they remain underrepresented at the highest decision-making level of the state. Ahmed argues that in South Asia about 50% of the population are women, but only 6.6 percent of them have representation in the parliament. According to him, even this 6.6 percent are illusive because it is based on reservation or nomination. The reserved seats are 30 in Bangladesh and 20 in Pakistan. Without the reserved seats, female participation in

²⁶ Mohsin, *op. cit.* p. 22.

Bangladesh and Pakistan comes down to barely 1.3.²⁷ In developed countries women's presence in the decision making process is not remarkable either. Even in the USA, where men and women have equality in terms of access to power, no female president has ever been elected.

Women constitute only one percent of the heads of state or government, seven percent of the government ministers and eleven percent of the parliamentarians in the world, with many of them happening to be in South Asian.²⁸ Politics, be it national or international, is highly dominated by men. In the context of national politics, Cynthia Enloe argues, women are allowed selectively. This observation holds more in the South Asian context where "these selected women are widows, wives and daughters of male politicians."²⁹ This discrimination restricts women's ability to acquire skill for wider participation in public life and thus they remain weak and dependent on their men folk and make them vulnerable to various forms of male violence: *fatwa*, rape and acid violation, to cite a few. Although states are sometimes forthcoming in ensuring women's empowerment, it is the vested quarters of the society in question that attempt to thwart such initiatives. A glaring example of this is the recently-staged nationwide demonstrations by some Islamist outfits against the proposed National Women Development Policy in Bangladesh. The new policy aims at, amongst other issues, ensuring women's equal rights to property. However, the Islamist groups branded the policy as anti-Shariah and demanded its withdrawal.³⁰ This epitomizes the gendered attitude of society that negates women's empowerment and attempts to silence them in the name of religion.

²⁷ Imtiaz Ahmed, 'On securing Women's Security: Perspective from South Asia', in Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.) *Women, Bangladesh and International Security: Methods, Discourses and Policies* (University Press Limited: Dhaka, 2004) p-35.

²⁸ See Ingeborg Breines, Dorota Gierycz and Betty Reardon (ed.) *Towards a Women's Agenda for a Culture of Peace* (Paris, UNESCO publishing, 1999).

²⁹ Rita Manchanda, *op. cit.* pp. 1956-1960.

³⁰ *The New Age*, Islamic groups brand women dev policy anti-Shariah. <http://www.newagebd.com/2008/mar/15/front.html#6>.

Military, War and Women

The notion of national security is directly linked to the security of nation-state. Ensuring national security is the prime duty of the state and thus of its citizens. To ensure national security, states systematically have developed the institution of the military. The purpose of this institution is to protect the state from the attack of the enemy i.e. other states or to fight other nations for conquering the latter. Hence, war and military are inter-linked. To realists, the security dilemma that the modern-state faces in the anarchical international system most often essentialises strengthening of the military, an institution based on masculine ethos such as violence. Such an understanding has its roots in the cultural construction of masculinity that has passed down. Statesmen use the language of masculinity in order to express the vigour of their military strength. For example, in October 2001, when relations between India and Pakistan became strained, President Musharraf sent a message to the Indian leadership: “We in Pakistan have not worn bangles and we can fight India on our own.” Prime Minister Vajpayee replied saying, “In Punjab where bangles are popular, people also wear ‘khada’ [steel bracelet]”. The two leaders, argues Chenoy, berated each other for being feminine to the extent of wearing bangles and thus by implication being incapable of protecting their country or honour.³¹ It shows that women are considered passive and too weak to protect themselves. It is the male members or the sons of the nation who play the role of protector when the security of the ‘motherland’ is threatened. Thus, it is discernible that men are to play the central role in the entire gambit of war machinery while women are denied access to the decision-making regarding war, although it has an adverse effect on them. To illustrate this point, a recent example³² can be cited. In India, a high level Group of Ministers (GOM) has been formed to examine national security in its entirety. Its composition is obvious - the ministers of home, external affairs, defence and finance (all men) - given that the tasks are border management, defence, intelligence and internal security. This

³¹ Anuradha M. Chenoy, “Gender and International politics: The Intersection of Patriarchy and Militarisation” *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 11:1 (2004) p-32.

³² Rita Manchanda, *op cit* p-1956.

example is enough to depict that in security discourse women are absent as they are traditionally identified with ‘soft’ politics not with ‘high politics’ of security.

Although women are denied access to decision-making about war, an ‘impact-on’ analysis reveals that they are the worst victims of male-initiated war and weaponry. Nuclear and small arms impact women more negatively than men. In Hiroshima and Nagasaki women are still giving birth to deformed babies because of the fall out of radioactivity. Besides, exposure to radiation may damage the foetus of the pregnant women. This may also damage the eggs within the ovaries of women of child bearing age. With men, the sperm continually reproduce and healthy sperm rapidly replaces sperm damaged by radiation.³³ “Of 49 conflicts during the 1990s, 46 were fought primarily with small arms resulting in four million deaths—90 percent of which were civilians and of 80% women and children.”³⁴ A gender sensitive analysis of recent global war on terror also reveals that this war is gendered and thus detrimental to women. The intensification of the military with the establishment of US military bases in many countries has led to spiral militarisation and prostitution in these countries. Therefore, Cynthia Enloe observes that “when the US promotes military institution as the solution for stability, security and development, the result is deeply gendered. With such a policy, the politics of masculinity is made to seem ‘natural’ and the male grasp on political influence is tightened, while most women’s voices are silenced and join those of the marginalised”.³⁵

A gender sensitive analysis of armed conflicts shows that women have to undergo sufferings at various stages of war and conflict. At the pre-conflict stage, women suffer from an intensification of structural violence.³⁶ This is what was the case with most of the

³³ Dilara Choudhury, Women and Weapons: Nuclear, Conventional, And Small Arms in Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.) *Women, Bangladesh and International Security: Methods, Discourses and Policies* (University Press Limited: Dhaka, 2004) p. 97.

³⁴ Quoted in Dilara Choudhury, *op. cit.* p. 101.

³⁵ Quoted in Chenoy, *op. cit.* pp. 30.

³⁶ Cynthia Cockburn ‘*Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*’, Background paper, The World Bank, Washington DC, June 1999

societies that experienced armed conflicts or political violence during in the 1980s, a period marked by debt-crisis of the developing countries. Before the actual violence breaks out, there is, Cockburn pointed out, an increase in militarisation and the stockpiles of arms. Analysis shows that there is a negative correlation between arms spending and social spending. The USA increased its military spending between 1980 and 1985 and for this spending the government cut its social spending, which cast an adverse impact on low-income families. In the 1980s in the US, the feminisation of poverty became a significant phenomenon with 34.6 per cent of all women-headed households falling into the official category of 'poor'.³⁷ Hence, women start bearing the brunt of the war or armed conflict long before it actually takes place.

During conflicts, women are considered the "last vestiges of civil society".³⁸ When men go to war, it is the women who defend the homes and carry on with the day-to-day activities of feeding a family and caring for elders and children often in adverse circumstances. In such a situation, they become more vulnerable to be raped by the enemy combatants. One of the ways to intimidate a whole population is to perpetuate the fear of rape among them. Major General Patrick Cammaert, a former UN peacekeeper, is of the view that it is a very effective weapon, because the communities are totally destroyed.³⁹ In exploring the causes of rape in war, Ruth Seifert suggests three possible explanations⁴⁰: firstly, rape is considered to be a booty principle which has always been an unwritten rule of war 'that violence against women in the conquered territory is conceded to the victor during the immediate post-war period'. Secondly, through rape, it is communicated 'from man to man, so to speak, that the men around the women in question are not able to protect "their" women. They are thus wounded in their masculinity and marked as

³⁷ Steans, *op. cit.* 110.

³⁸ Meghna Guhathakurta, "Women in Peace-building" in Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.) *Women, Bangladesh and International Security: Methods, Discourses and Policies* (University Press Limited: Dhaka, 2004) p-133.

³⁹ BBC, UN classifies rape a 'war tactic'
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7464462.stm>

⁴⁰ Seifert, Ruth. 1995. War and rape: a preliminary analysis' in Alexandra Stiglmeier (ed) *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.

‘incompetent’. Finally, it helps to promote soldierly solidarity through male bonding, especially in case of gang rape and systemic rape. In a historical move, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution (no: 1820) in June 2008 classifying rape as a ‘war tactic’, which is used to humiliate, dominate, instil fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or ethnic group. In the resolution, there was a clear reference to the fact that this type of violence against women in war “can significantly exacerbate situations of armed conflict and may impede the restoration of international peace and security.”⁴¹

All this shows that women have a very different story of war to share. Arguing on this premise, Grant commented that a woman might have had written the accounts of the Peloponnesian War from a perspective other than that of Thucydides highlighting economic hardships of war and the loss of her sons in battle.⁴² Similarly, in her gender sensitive analysis of twenty-year long civil conflict in Mozambique, Ruth Jacobson pointed out the collapse of primary health services affected women differently, leading to a high increase in maternal and child mortality and morbidity.⁴³ Moreover, war and conflict make the women and children, along with men, refugees and displaced. Nearly half (47%) of the refugees and asylum-seekers are females.⁴⁴ In refugee camps, these women face a variety of problems, ranging from physical insecurities to mental agonies. The “durable solutions” – voluntary return home, integration in the country of asylum, and resettlement in a third country – pose unique challenges for women.⁴⁵

During post-war reconstruction, the women who have by compulsion played the role of a male-house head during conflicts are

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- ⁴¹ UN Security Council Resolution available at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/391/44/PDF/N0839144.pdf?OpenElement>.
- ⁴² Rebecca Grant, Rebecca Grant and Kathleen Newland (eds.), *Gender and International Relations* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991) p. 15.
- ⁴³ Quoted in Cockburn, *op. cit.*
- ⁴⁴ UNHCR, *2007 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons*.
- ⁴⁵ See Martin, Susan Forbes. *Refugee Women*. London: Zed Books. 1991.

often denied access to the public sphere. The women whose male family members survived the conflict are likely to experience increased domestic violence when male combatants return home.⁴⁶ On the other hand, many of those women who have lost their men in the conflicts and who have very limited access to livelihood options often opt for sex for survival. Unlike the returning war heroes who receive treatment for their war wounds, women who survived physical harassment including rape cannot disclose their stories as they are mostly sexual. Even during reconstruction period, many women are also violated by UN peacekeepers. In 2007, 127 incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers were reported to the UN.⁴⁷

Although the war may witness the breakdown of patriarchal structure, this appears to be a short-lived phase in the whole cycle of war and peace. This is due to the re-emergence of national male leadership after the war and the male international development community, who take part in post-war phase. “This may be evident in the aggressive refusal by the international development community, as a whole, to seriously consider gender issues in post-conflict reconstruction. The lack of ‘gender mainstreaming’ seems *not* to result from an inability on the part of the international community to know better, but rather suggests its *inability* to consider *its own* patriarchy and the damage this does within international development paradigms.”⁴⁸ Therefore, women are not called for consultation at the peace table though they act as the last vestige of civil society during conflicts.⁴⁹ In a melancholy voice, a Palestinian woman activist once repented, “I am the soldier, the supporter and the nurse in times of wars. And with my wounds, with my dreams, with my vision, with my strengths, I am the silenced one when the cause is no more.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Handrahan, *op. cit.*, p. 434.

⁴⁷ The Economist, *Who will watch the watchmen? May 29th 2008*
http://www.economist.com/world/international/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11458241.

⁴⁸ Handrahan, *op. cit.*, p. 436.

⁴⁹ Chenoy, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Azza Karam, “Women in War and Peace-Building” *Journal of International Feminist Politics* vol. 3, no. 1, 2001, p. 2.

3. FEMINISING SECURITY: SECURING THE UNSECURED

The foregoing discussion has made the point clear that (international) security discourse is gendered—women have hardly any scope to raise their voice in this discourse - although it has a significant bearing on their lives across the world. Security studies is a new field for feminist analysis and may be termed as ‘applied feminism.’⁵¹ Therefore, in recent times, there have emerged several approaches to re-conceptualise the security discourse.

The first step towards the re-conceptualisation of security may be to make an ontological and epistemological intervention in the study of IR. Cynthia Enloe has contributed significantly in subverting the conventional ways of knowing and doing IR.⁵² Through her work, she attempts to show how the activities of ordinary women from below contribute to the functioning of the international relations but are less represented in the discipline of IR. For example, she notes that one of the very important factors in bringing about the end of the Cold War was the withdrawal of Russian mothers’ support for the Soviet army due to the gross and unaccountable sacrifice of their sons in the USSR-Afghanistan war. It is what Christine Sylvester termed as ‘*Everyday forms of feminist theorising and issues of security*’.⁵³ Such a method encourages us to treat women as the *subjects of knowledge* elevating them ‘from the margin to the centre.’⁵⁴ Thus, feminist analysis, through its various approaches, has challenged the androcentrism of IR that demeans any ‘other’ entity.

Feminist scholars have nullified the concept of the objectivity of human nature, from which realists derive objective laws regulating interstate relations. They argue that human nature is both objective and subjective and both man and woman possess these attributes and hence objectivity cannot be attributed to man only, or more

⁵¹ Terriff *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁵² True, *op. cit.* p., 260.

⁵³ Christine Sylvester, The Contribution of feminist theory, in Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (eds.) *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996) p. 263.

⁵⁴ Steans, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

specifically masculinity. Similarly, they challenged national interest as understood by realists. To them, it is multidimensional and contextual. When security is viewed beyond the premises of the nation-state, a global perspective in security becomes important. The issues like environment, poverty have become a common security challenge for all. These global issues require cooperative behaviour among various stakeholders. Moreover, feminists point out that empathy is built into the primary definition of the self of women and later through socialisation process a more complex relational world is implanted in them. Such construction of identity negates 'autonomy' and separation rather emphasises interdependence and connectivity. Thus in feminist understanding the separation between 'domestic' and 'foreign' becomes blurred and this leads us to see inter-national relations in terms of a series of complex relations and interdependence.⁵⁵ Hence, they attempt to replace 'power over' with the notion of 'power in concert'.

Feminists have challenged the traditional notion of citizenship based on war and patriotism as the concept is equated with masculinity. Liberal feminists argue that women should demand the right to fight in order to break the myths of militarism as a masculine institution. Other feminists, however, maintain that such incorporation of women into the 'military have the effect of increasing the militarisation of society as a whole and so undermine the work of peace movements and women's movements'. They also argue that 'instead of a notion of citizenship that glorifies dying for one's country as the noblest and highest form of duty, one should make a case for a notion of citizenship that has the courage to sustain life.'⁵⁶

Feminists also question the assumption of 'autonomy' of politics because of its being a masculine construction and creating the dichotomous relations between the public and the private. "Claiming that militarism, sexism and racism are interconnected, most feminists contend that the behaviour of individuals and the domestic policies of states cannot be separated from state's behaviour in the international realm. For feminists violence is not a discrete or distinct

⁵⁵ *Ibid* p. 170.

⁵⁶ Mohsin, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

event rather it is a continuum and ought to be analysed at all levels viz. individual, national and international.”⁵⁷ Feminists, thus, developed an alternative conception of security defining it in positive terms. To them, ‘security is not just the absence of threats or acts of violence, but the enjoyment of economic and social justice’. Their understanding of security also incorporates the elimination of all types of violence, including violence in gender relations. Reardon contends that there are two key feminist principles of security: inclusivity (only fully global security is meaningful) and holism (a multi-dimensioned approach to address the various different, interconnected constituent elements of security).⁵⁸ Women’s notion of security is indeed based on life sustaining premises.

For realists, such an approach renders the discipline so broad as to be meaningless; they prefer to stick to nation-states as referent objects. The basic difference between the two lies in the depth and complexity. ‘Realism relies on a sparse construction with which to explain and predict security concerns; and the feminist model is far more complex as it recognises the meshing of the inter-relational and the international and entails a sense of empathy, seeking to understand other perspectives rather than dominate with just one view. Unlike realists, they argue that security of one entity cannot be built upon the insecurity of others.’⁵⁹ They emphasise the human security where the basic needs of individuals are secured.’ To them, re-conceptualisation of security does not mean broadening of security to include a range of new issues and concerns. It is about the capacity of human beings to express their vulnerabilities and insecurities and thus present new ‘visions’. ‘In this context feminist perspectives do not simply make a contribution to our understanding of security, but are rather central to the ‘reconstructive’ project. The time has come to mainstream the feminism in IR including its sub-field of security. In this respect, feminist scholar Jacqui True asserts that the IR feminist scholarship has ‘to engage in more self-conscious dialogue with a variety of other perspectives on global politics.’⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 25.

⁵⁸ Terry Terriff *et al. op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 97.

⁶⁰ See, True, *op. cit.*

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The notion of present-day international security is based on the realist notion of security that emphasises the conflictual aspect of state behaviour rather than cooperation. Such conceptualisation is not fruitful for the human being, especially for women. This conceptualisation of international security has been established on the masculine attitudes and values. So, feminist scholarship has challenged the exclusion and marginalization of women's experiences and perspectives on security. It has been argued that women's experience represents an alternative approach to security, which puts emphasis on non-violent ways of negotiating conflict and agency in reconciliation and peace. The feminist calls for a human approach to security that weaves into its fabric the voices of both man and woman as equal partners. Such perspectives are important not only from a human point of view but also because it questions the state-centric military security approach in addressing problems and kind of insecurities that the world faces today. Through the continuous engagement of feminist IR theorists, the re-conceptualisation project of international security would come closer to the vision held by Begum Rokeya.

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