Women and Armed Conflict: Resurging Violence

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Abstract

The modern nation-states witnessed armed conflict as an inevitable phenomenon. Women are most vulnerable section that bear the violence of armed conflict. The dominance of armed rebels and state's repression reinforces patriarchal space. As the conflict become more armed, it also became more masculinised. Women become the direct victim of all sufferings. Armed conflict smashes the social sectors of main requirement for women and their families. As the armed expenditures raises, there is less concern on health, education and other welfare services. Apart fromexperiencing the extreme form of violence, women are subjected to extra roles that emerges out of conflict. The paper attempts to understand the resurgence of violence experienced by women that erupt during armed conflict.

Keywords

secessionism, state response, armed conflict, women, violence

The twentieth century has witnessed 250 wars and over 100 million causalities. Civilians remain the main targets of contemporary conflicts and account for over 90 per cent of war causalities. Over 23 million people have died in more than 160 wars and, after 1945, overwhelmingly in the Third World. Yet there is a phenomenon of militarism larger than war that affects civil society- the human cost of which is even higher than that of war (Chenoy, 2002). While population suffered the exigencies of errant rulers or demanding dictators, war itself remained an activity that was outside the society at large. This suffered a complete reverse during two world wars which made the targeting of whole population in Germany a strategic activity, and whose whole scale killing was supposed to yield certain benefits. This it did not do, but that did not stop the use of nuclear weapons against Japan, nor did it stop the march of doctrine which continued to see the prosecution of terror a part of intelligent strategy. This global blackmail by each superpower led to the pushing of power downwards, emerging in the 1960's as terrorism in Europe and as interstate war in the developing world. Along with depredations of BaaderMeinhof gang and the German Red Brigade, came the shock of Vietnam and realization that intervention in others conflicts was an expensive and horrifying business.(Shiva, 2001)

On the other hand, post-colonial countries have all along been afflicted of grave crises. Communal tensions, ethnic conflict, secessionism, sub-nationalism are phenomenon widespread in these societies. Secessionism bloomed in both Asian and African nation-states. These newly independent states were intended at transforming secessionism to sub- national movements, but it generally ended up in converting secessionism into insurgency. The present era is witnessing this form ferocity in every post-colonial state. Although secessionism and insurgency are terms that are invariably a state coinage and are used interchangeably, they do reflect a rebelliousness and struggle for autonomy.

The consequence of conflict phenomenon results in extreme form of radical violence. This rebellious social reality exists in all most all realms, either in covert or in apparent form. There is emergence of state which experiences the use of aggression, violence and inclination to fight. Any individual or group can take to violence. There is increased emphasis on weapons, armed power by rebels to further their interests. The masses are inspired to vie through armed and protest for pictured glories of their objectives. This need not only include insurgents, but also armed religious groups,which take to violence to further their beliefs, political groups in the name of self-determination etc. authority of the state is challenged with a severe attack on political and social institutions. A sense of alienation develops to rebellion character.

What followed further was a degeneration downwards into a proxy war where a patron state supplied the favouredregime with the weapons that must require to deal with the opposition force which were provided with guns, assault rifles, and land mines that were the most appropriate to fight an irregular war. This was often not a war at all but a series of conflagrations and bush fires that swept across Africa, South Asia, or East Asia, or where-ever the great powers found their interest clashing. Thus billions of dollars of weapons flowed into the hands of various non-state actors who variously espoused a dubious and poorly understood left or right wing ideology. Tons of weapon soon begun to spread outwards or inwards especially where a state was involved as a conduit for the supply of weapons. This led to a culture of violence within these societies, as well as the arming of states within these societies, as well as arming of states in the region with tons of weapons ideal for the fighting of low level war with neighbours stronger then themselves. The option of proxy war thus became the favoured option for those countries who had already tried and failed at achieving their objectives through conventional war. Thus proxy war was launched as an extension of war by other means. Though clearly, a part of state activity, it did mean that the state had to adopt a certain standoff position, without seeming to be too involved in what was essentially an illegal act. Ideally also this trans-border operation required the crafting of new ideology that would provide some legitimacy to what was outright interference and sabotage. (Shiva, 2001)

This result in increasing use of military power both by state and rebels to further their national interests. Equally, the society gets militarised as the use of armed weapons is legitimised by both state and non-state actors. The civilian institutions acquire dominated militarist values. The armed conflict is given a legitimate space. Secessionism along with acting state responses often co-exist to produce forms of violence against women. There is fortification of patriarchal practices as a result of fundamentalism and national chauvinism. Such situation very often demote women to periphery. Caught in the imbroglio between the two – secessionism and state response, women face repercussion of large and intense magnitude.

Feminists such as Cynthia Enole, indicates the interconnection between the patriarchal and militarists view, point out that "this relationship can be more effectively understood if militarism is viewed as a process rather than a series of events". A state and the visible dimension of the interface of gender issues with militarism emanates from the fact that in times of rising militarism, sexual violence is used against women and is perpetrated by various agencies.- the military, state agencies, armed perpetrators of intercommunity, sectarian or ethnic conflicts. This violence is

often specific to women, with rape and other gender specific assaults being cases in point.(Banerjee, 2008)

Essentially, women are visible as the overwhelming victims of war. In the modern form of political violence, women are worst sufferers. Women experience the economic violence of conflict even before its physical outbreak. Militarization entails a diversion of scarce resources from social sectors of greatest concern to women. The disruption of armed conflict makes the socially assigned responsibility of women to feed and care for the children and the aged, all more difficult. While men go underground and joined the militias, it is the women who remain in the home, unless forced to flee. Conflict produces women headed households in a patriarchal society where women are structurally and socially disadvantaged. (Manchanda, 2001)

Women are the majority of civilian casualties of war, before, during, and after the conflict. They are the primary targets of those who use rape and forced pregnancy as weapons of war. They make up the majority of refugees displaced from homes, farms, and sources of livelihood. Women also experience hardship and discrimination as members of state militaries and insurgent groups, which often replicate and exaggerate social inequalities. (Sojoberg, 2010)

Violent conflict increases patriarchal and men, controls on women on masculinities and femininities. Most of the actors involved in a conflict are male, whether they belong to liberation or anti-state groups or to state or government security or intelligence forces. Even when women form a significant form of structure of insurgent/militant group, their military roles tend not to be as significant as those of men. Civilian in general, and women in particular, suffer the most in these conflicts, since most often they are caught between the warring factions and face the consequences of social fragmentation and disruptions of homes, social networks and livelihoods. Year of conflict, violence, lack economic opportunities, breakdown of the rule of law and military presence has militarised society and led to much alienation and despair. In militarised societies, all institutions get gendered and male privilege dominates as women get confined to their homes because of the atmosphere of insecurity. Women take up new roles in the absence of men. It has been analysed that these new roles are not empowering and only add responsibilities. (Ed. Ava darsha,2007)

Women become indispensable to armed groups, being capable of sustaining and nourishing a violent movement by simultaneously playing the socially ascribed role of women and the newly assigned role of men. They fight like men, and hence become the protectors and killers. At the same time they continue to be caretakers, nurturers and facilitators. Concurrently, female combatants experience both accidental

empowerment as well as victimization during conflict. Once violence recedes, female combatants are relieved of the burden of playing roles of men and women. They are relegated to the private domain within the four walls of domesticity to play one socially attributed role – that of women. In the post-conflict situation, these women become pariah for all: the community, the group they fought for and the group they fought against. (Shekhawat, 2015)

In a low intensity conflict they generally are exposed to different kinds of human rights abuses than men, including rape and sexual torture. Pregnancy can also be a factor in the gendered treatment of female prisoners, either with forced pregnancy resulting from rape, or forced miscarriage resulting from torture. Women and young girls are often targeted as the quintessential innocents and as socializing agents and conveyors of culture, in order to create a culture of terror which will subdue and demoralize the population. In armed conflict, it is not only "enemy" women who are targets of violence, often in the form of rape. In all wars, women have been assaulted by invading armies and rape's role in wars has been essentially the same throughout history. One reason for rape in war is simply the opportunity and the situation of impunity which exists during armed conflict. Rape is not only a side effect of war, however, and Ruth Seifert argues it is a deliberate policy and has strategic functions. Sexual trespass on the enemy's women has long been considered a right of the victors and Seifert argues that rape in war is actually intended as communication between men. It is viewed as a male defeat (because "his" woman was unprotected) and the pain and emotional suffering of the woman is considered to be incidental. (Burke, 1998)

The report on "Women and Armed conflict" highlights the global commitment of 52nd session in 2008, in which the Commission on the Status of Women reviewed implementation of its agreed conclusions on "Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building" adopted in 2004. The review revealed a number of gaps and challenges, including in terms of representation and participation of women in peace-processes and decisionmaking; prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence, monitoring and accountability, and funding.

The protection of women living in situations of armed conflict need a great attention.The global states should reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments. There is a need to promote non-violent forms of conflict resolutions. Even in the inevitable conflict zones, policies of state should focus on women and their needs. There is a need to increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels as they are the worst sufferers. The

major check on the part of state should focus toreduce the incidence of women abuse in conflict situations. As women play a transformative role in peace, their contribution should be promoted. The NGO's and other volunteers active in conflict zones should provide protection, aid and training to refugee women, other displaced women.Serious laws need to be framed to end the culture of exemption for crimes committed against women. Effective mobilization and advocacy on part of civil society should ensure safeguarding of the women rights.

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