

Analysing Human Security: A Feminist Perspective

Vaishali Raghuvanshi

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Feminism is the school of thought that brings to the fore the gender concerns in the field of international relation. Its main focus is to analyze how gender affects world politics and is also an effect of the world politics. Five major theories of feminism which have become wide known since the 1980s are Liberal, Socialist/Marxist, Standpoint, Post modern and Post colonial. The Liberal theory considers the society in terms of individuals and proposes that individuals should possess equal rights. It asserts that irrespective of individuals being male or female they should possess equal rights. The gendering of state in providing these rights is shown by the liberals. The Marxist/Socialist theory emphasises on the role of capitalism and blames it as the main reason for the unequal status of women. The standpoint theorists, as the name suggests, focus on changing the standpoint of the international discourse. They argue that important issues should be seen from the standpoint of women. The post modern feminism criticises the basic distinction between gender and sex. They could thus show that the difference between man and woman is not biological but is highly contingent upon the meanings attached to masculinity and femininity. In other words, while sex is natural, gender is constructed. The final form of feminism, post-colonial feminism, emerged because of the fact that feminism completely focussed on the problem of the women in the western world. Post colonial feminism raises the perspective of non-white, non-western women in the post-colonial world. (Smith & Owens. 2008)

These theories are generalised and coherent models to present the concept of feminism. The practical dimensions of this concept may stretch slightly beyond the ambit of the theories. For instances Cynthia Enloe's works have addressed the role of women in economic markets, international conflicts and diplomatic relations. The works have focussed on the day to day experiences of women. Carol Cohn has shown how highly masculinised culture in the defence forces has led to lack of emotions in these establishments. This paper, in the same line, proposes to probe the status of women vis-à-vis human security. It shall deal with the pressing issue of gender security in the light of the definition of human security given by Dr. Mahbub Ul Haq in the United Nation Development Programme's 1994 Human Development Report. The perception towards security received a very unique and new dimension by the concept proposed by Dr. Mahbub Ul Haq. He made human being the epicentre of the concept of security. Dr Mahbub Ul Haq has expanded the concept of human security to seven areas. We shall emphasize the issue of gender security in the background of the expanded definition given by him. The seven areas are as follows-1) Economic security 2) food security 3) health security 4) environmental security 5) personal security 6) community security 7) political security (Human Development Report. 1994, pp.24-33).

1.) ECONOMIC SECURITY AND GENDER-

Economic security is the security regarding an individual's ability to earn and service his basic needs. A minimum level of income is required to upkeep the basic requirements of life. Access to the basic requirements of life is dependent on the earnings of the individual.

Economic security of women is a greater concern as compared to men. Most of the works performed by women in rural and backward areas are under the classification of non market activities. The household tasks, which forms a major chunk of women's works has no economic value and remains unappreciated and undermined. Even where women are paid, they are paid less for the same work. "Because of the grater task specificity of agricultural work – women perform the tasks of transplanting, weeding and harvesting – they face sharper seasonal fluctuations in employment and earnings than men" (Agrawal. 1997) another instance where threat to

women economic security manifests itself is “The Glass Ceiling effect.” Glass ceiling is a well known phenomena in the corporate world. It means that women are not promoted to higher positions of power irrespective of their abilities or qualifications. This phenomenon is prevalent in countries like US, Mexico, India, South Africa and other” (FGC Commission.1995, p.4)

2.) FOOD SECURITY AND GENDER-

Food security is the availability of healthy and nutritious food (FAO). Gender and food security have much to be looked into. Men are the primary bread winners in most of the societies. Food security has a direct relation with economic security. When women are not economically secure, they are less likely to be food secure. “In most countries in south Asia there is a persistent gender inequality within household and outside their households. The situation is bleakest for rural women in south Asia. They are often main food producers- contributing about 65% of total food production and even more” (Mukherjee. 2009). In spite of this it is difficult for rural women to get access to credit, agricultural land and employment. These facilities have direct bearing on women’s food security

3.) HEALTH SECURITY AND GENDER-

A minimum protection from prevalent diseases is what health security refers to. The modern medicine and medicinal advancement have offered a plethora of options to ensure health security. Today almost all diseases have their cures, a slew of vaccines and other preventive medicines are available to prevent the occurrence of deadly diseases. But not everyone has access to such amenities. Herein comes the importance of health security. It is the collective responsibility of the humanity to see to it that no fellow human being is dying due to curable diseases.

Health security becomes more crucial for women. Women are the marginalized sections in most of the societies. It is difficult for health benefits to percolate to the marginalized section. Women require more nutritious and healthy food during and after pregnancy. There are lots of health hazards to which women are more susceptible than men. In the societies of South Asia where birth of female child is not considered good, cases of aborting female child are common. Such operations on women’s body reduce her health. Apart from physical health, mental health of women is an often neglected area. In societies that are patriarchal, women are reduced to an inferior position which makes them mentally weak and sometimes develops a lot of insecurities and mental disorders. Such societal neglect leads to the feeling of loneliness and alienation (Unaiza and Sehar. 2006).

4.) ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY AND GENDER-

There are umpteen threats that human beings face from environmental mishaps. Environmental security aims at protection from threats emerging from environmental hazards. Climate change is increasingly recognized as a major human security issue that posed serious global threats. For the world’s poor the impact will be most severe, disproportionately affecting their livelihood and security. “Women comprise 70% of those living below the poverty line. As a result, they are most likely to bear the heaviest burdens when natural disasters strike. At the same time, women are more often overlooked as potential contributors to climate change solutions, and thus to the security of all human beings”. In many societies women have the burden of household responsibilities such as collection of clean potable water, collection of fuel to make food. These things may not be easily available in many types of environment. A lot of time is spent by women in securing water and fuel, this leads to decreasing enrolment in schools and literacy rates. “Uganda NAPA describes “famine marriages” which occur in times of drought when families marry off young daughters, securing dowry for their survival, but increasing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases via older husband who tend to have had many sexual partners”. (Dankelman et al.2008)

5.) PERSONAL SECURITY AND GENDER –

Personal security is the security from physical threats and violence. Personal security of women becomes a huge issue in human security. Violence ranging from domestic violence to violence during civil wars is to be faced by women. Issue of personal security of women is pertinent in social settings. In underdeveloped countries, where patriarchal systems are in place, the personal security of women is under threat due to archaic practices such as dowry and child marriage. Domestic physical abuse is a common practice. Also, during civil wars and riots women are very vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. Women are raped and killed in such conflicts to vent out the anger of parties of conflict. For instance, during the riots that followed the division of India, sexual abuse of women was rampant; there had been cases where women were killed by their own family members to protect them from physical abuse. Practices such as foot binding and circumcision pose significant threat to personal security of women. Foot binding is a custom where the foot of girl child is bound by steel wires and weights so that the foot takes a beautiful shape and facilitates the marriage of the girl. This practice resulted in disabilities which were lifelong (Ebrey,2010; Lim,2007)“It has been estimated that, around the world, one in three women will be raped, beaten, forced into sex or otherwise assaulted in her lifetime”. (UNICEF and Innocent Research Centre,2000). In societies where women are still bound by patriarchal patterns of kinship, legalized discrimination, social subordination and ingrained male dominance, women are continuously exposed to forms of family and institutionalized violence.” Indeed, in some Arab countries, the penalties for assault against women, even lethal assaults, are reduced if it can be established that the perpetrator committed a so called “crime of honour” (Arab Human Development Report,2009. pp.79-80)

6.) COMMUNITY SECURITY AND GENDER-

It refers to insecurity regarding loss of community values and mores. Traditional communities and minority ethnic groups can come under threat. Women face a lot of hardships during such conflicts. The case of Tamil – Sinhala conflict in Sri Lanka presents the pathetic conditions that women had to face in the infamous and prolonged Srilankan ethnic conflict. Women’s economic security is always fragile and their mobility is limited. The exclusively male Sinhalese security forces raise problems for women in terms of safety, security and access to help and assistance. There were no reliable institutions which could come to their rescue. The government and security forces have done almost nothing for the safety and rehabilitation of women in this ethnic conflict. (Asia report no. 217,2011). The religiously motivated riots of Gujarat in India also demonstrate how women have to face the wrath of such conflict. The minority Muslim population had face to anger of the Hindu majority. Women were highly susceptible in the riots and were indiscriminately massacred and raped. The state machinery did not lend a helping hand and the women and human right organizations turned a deaf ear.

7.) POLITICAL SECURITY AND GENDER-

It relates to rights of the people. A place where people live in safe political conditions with guaranteed rights can be considered as politically secure. Any kind of misdeed from part of government or individuals which violate the rights of people can pose threat to political security. There should be special laws in a society to ensure the rights and security of women. Stringent laws against physical and sexual abuses are needed to ensure the political security of women. In vulnerable settings such as prison the rights of women remain unprotected. They are subjected to physical torture. They are usually coerced into providing sex for trivial helps such as certain privileges in meals. Crime against women in custody is frequent but there is hardly an efficient redressal system to provide them relief. (www.amnestyusa.org)

CONCUSION

“O Lord why have you not given women the right to conquer her destiny – why does she have to wait, head bowed by the roadside, waiting with tired patience, hoping for miracle on the morrow? Rabindranath Tagore said this at the beginning of the millennium. The millennium has drawn to a close – today we are not waiting for a miracle, the miracle is within us.” (Dr. V. Mohini giri Nicola. 2003. pp.5). It is within us where the solution lies. There have been a number of honest and genuine efforts on part of International agencies to ensure gender security. One of the first such attempts was the universal declaration of human rights which called for gender neutral language. As the international feminist movement began to gain momentum during the 1970s, the

General Assembly declared 1975 as the International Women's Year and organized the first World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City. At the urging of the Conference, it subsequently declared the years 1976-1985 as the UN Decade for Women, and established a Voluntary Fund for Decade. The millennium development goals are another step in the 21st century which has directly and indirectly addressed the issue of gender security. The concepts such as Gender equality, maternal health, child health directly address the issue of gender security while others like "end poverty and hunger", "universal education" "combat HIV/AIDS" indirectly address the issue of gender security (www.un.org.in). Despite such genuine efforts on the part of such agencies the situation is still murky. There are still countries with patriarchal societies where ensuring gender security is a big challenge. Backward and underdeveloped countries also require a lot of work. Mere formulation of policy and the surrounding grandiloquence cannot improve the ground reality without an unflinching will to realise the letter and the spirit of the policies that have been formulated. There are women in societies who have no idea about their rights. Neither such high sounding policies make any difference in their lives. They will feel the changes in their security only when the effects of these policies will trickle down to them and ensure them of a safer world. That is the day when the real aim of gender security will stand realised.

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