



GENDER AND DISARMAMENT

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ABSTRACT

In the history of international relations, it has always been the plight of women to bear the brunt of pain and hardship caused by wars and conflicts. Regardless of nation, community or class, the burden of deprivation and hardship often falls on women. While all civilians suffer when war breaks out, it is women and girls that face most risk and bore disproportionately large share of the burden of conflict, but they had a marginal say in matters of peace. The author believes women's rights and empowerment fundamentally predicate on maintenance of peace and security. However, women do not have a hand at the official political level of negotiations and in determining terms of agreements concerning peace and security. Women will have to claim their political space, will have to gain official political power so that gender perspectives will be integrated into State and intra-State decisions on peace and security.

KEYWORDS : Gender, Disarmament, Peace, Security, Women's Peace Initiatives

INTRODUCTION

Gender perspectives affect the way people and societies view weapons, war and militarism. Carrying guns, possessing and brandishing an extraordinarily destructive capacity is associated with notions of masculinity. Likewise, nuclear weapons provide a sense of masculine strength. Nuclear weapons possessors are sometimes referred to as the "big boys" (Acheson, 2015). After India's 1998 nuclear weapon tests Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray stated, "We had to prove that we are not eunuchs (Cohn & Ruddick, 2004)". In the nuclear age, many governments have come to believe in the security paradigm that weapons are necessary because security can only be achieved through the ability to command and control.

Identifying 'women with peace and men with war' and 'women as protected and men as protectors' reinforces gender stereotypes. Protagonists of women's peace movements say that non-violent action against war is self-assertion rather than submission (Bulbeck, 1988). Some women feel typecasting as 'peace-loving' denies them access to some forms of power and political leverage. Women seem to be under-represented in international multilateral forums related to war, conflict, arms control and disarmament.

Gender analysis can bring to light the correlation between constructed masculinities and 'gun cultures' that promote the acquisition and use of nuclear weapons. It enables us to see the false sense of security that nuclear weapons produce. Gender perspective can also help determine appropriate policy or budgetary responses to particular challenges.

How is gender relevant for disarmament and arms control? This paper focuses on gender perspectives in peace and disarmament based on women's movements against war and militarism, gleaned from recent history. Indeed, it is time that a gender dimension in peace-making and peace-keeping decision-making got incorporated at all levels.

Governments, the world over, need to pay specific attention to all facets of women's experiences of conflict -- as victims, combatants, and as agents of change. Women's participation in matters of disarmament and arms control, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peace building need to be incorporated.

Gender and Disarmament nexus

The relationship between gender and disarmament is not always obvious. However, for more than a century women, women's organisations and movements have mobilised in support of peace and disarmament. While often participating in organisations with men, many women have found it more effective to organize separately with other women against war and weaponisation.

In 2006, Chair of Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission Hans Blix stated, "Women have rightly observed that armament policies and use of armed force have often been influenced by misguided ideas about masculinity and strength. An understanding of and emancipation from this traditional perspective might help to remove some of the hurdles on the road to disarmament and non-proliferation (Cook & Hill, 2008)."

Women's organizations have often played a vital role from the Hague Peace Conferences of the 19th century to the present time. The role of women in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security was recognized by the Security Council in Resolution 1325 (2000). There are many women's organisations and movements at the national, regional and international level that focus mainly on peace or disarmament. Although women's peace organizations in Europe and North America have received most of the publicity, there are organizations in all parts of the world.

In a United Nations (UN) seminar launching the publication of "Gender Perspectives on Disarmament" Jayanta Dhanapala (2001), then Under Secretary General, Department of Disarmament Affairs (DDA) exhorted that disarmament simply cannot, and must not, turn a blind eye to the interests and ideals of half of humanity. Despite the short shrift meted out to womenfolk in many developing societies, they have achieved a pride of place in the peace firmament, as evident from the fact that as many as eighteen Nobel Peace Prize winners till date have been women.

Women and women's organizations can be effective social agents in mitigating the causes of strife and conflict, and their aftermath of hardship and deprivation. However, their potential in this regard remains under utilised.

Women's Peace Initiatives - A Historical Overview

The origin of women's peace and disarmament movements can be traced to various roots. In 1854 Frederika Bremer, a Swedish feminist formed the European Women's Peace League which was the first trans-national women's peace group (Lyn Reese, 2021).

Women academicians throughout the twentieth century had vociferously questioned militarism and State involvement in war. Polish economist and activist Rosa Luxemburg, the first Marxist thinker has theorised militarism as a new "province of accumulation" (Luxemburg, 1913). She, along with other leading women of the German proletarian women's movement, mobilised women against militarism in the years before and during the First World War. During this time nearly 1200 women from warring and neutral countries came together to protest the conflicts and formed the Women's

International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), which advocates internationally for a range of issues from nuclear disarmament to human rights.

In the 1980s, women's peace movement spread across Europe, the US, Canada, Australia and to eleven countries. On 12 December 1982 an estimated 30,000 women in the UK began a movement against deployment of US cruise and Pershing nuclear missiles at Greenham Common. The movement persisted till after the last missile had been returned to the USA in 1991. In 1985, a group of pacifist feminists from across Europe united to protest the buildup of arms and nuclear weapons. Together, they established 24 May as International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament (WILPF Advocacy Documents, 2021).

Women's Movements against Nuclear Weapons

During the Cold War, women lobbied against stockpiling and possible use of nuclear weapons in 1959. The group named, European Women against Nuclear Disarmament organised a conference on the responsibility of women in the atomic age in Brunate, Italy, bringing together women from both east and west (Roseneil, 2000). A strong regional movement was led for a nuclear-free and independent pacific for three decades.

In the US, women's anti-nuclear movements were carried out by a trio, Mary Sinclair, Bretton and Shyamli Khastgir. An Indian immigrant in the US, Shyamli Khastgir was arrested in 1977 in Washington DC for protesting against Trident Nuclear Submarines (Khastgir, 1994). She suffered imprisonment several times in North America for championing various causes for peace. Women figured centrally in struggles for nuclear-free security in the Pacific during the 1960s to 1980s.

Beijing Platform for Action (1995)

Over the last few decades, the international community has increasingly acknowledged the importance of women's participation in peace and security issues. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), recognised women's gender-specific experiences in conflict. It devoted a full chapter to women and conflict, including a comprehensive action plan for their protection and empowerment in conflict settings. The 'Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on the Critical Areas of Concern of the Beijing Platform for Action 1996-2009' mentions the actions to be taken by governments such as: encourage appropriate role of women in peace movement, work towards general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control including disarmament of all types of weapons of mass destruction (Human Rights Library, n.d).

UN Resolutions

In the first UN (Mexico) Conference on Women held in 1975, the three inter-linked goals of equality, development and peace were established. Disarmament was part of the focus on peace.

The third UN (Nairobi) Conference on Women held in 1985 reaffirmed the commitment to disarmament issues by highlighting the key role women can play, including in nuclear disarmament, and calling for greater support of women's efforts. The 23rd special session of UN General Assembly on follow-up to the PFA (June 2000) reaffirmed the links between peace, disarmament and gender equality.

In 2001 the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA) and the Office of the Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women produced a set of six short yet comprehensive briefing notes on how gender perspectives are relevant to disarmament issues. These illustrate the links between gender and landmines, small arms and light weapons, weapons of mass destruction, and post-conflict process of disarming, demobilizing and

reintegrating former combatants.

On 31 October 2000, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security' (UN Press, 2000), following a series of international workshops, conferences and campaigns led by civil society for protecting women's rights in conflict. This resolution was monumental in recognising women's direct contribution to disarmament. Paragraph 13 of Security Council Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security' specifically mentions the need to incorporate gender perspectives in all areas of peace support operations, including in disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation initiatives (Security Council Press Release, 2000). It also encourages to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependents.

In 2010, Resolution A/65/410 on Women, Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-proliferation was adopted by the First Committee in UN General Assembly which deals with disarmament and security issues. The resolution urges States to emphasise the importance of involving both women and men in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

CONCLUSION

There is a need for participation of womenfolk in decision-making processes critical to war and peace. Denial of mainstream societal roles to women has deserted whole populations of humanistic values such as religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence. India has donned the mantle of G20 Presidency in 2022 and it is propagating peace forcefully in its foreign policy. Women have both, a key interest and role to play, in the maintenance of peace and security. It is hoped that opposition to nuclear weapons, international border wars and ethnic conflicts will soon become a common concern and point of action of women in India and the world over.

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