



# Feminist Perspectives and Approaches in International Security: Indian Must Embrace Feminism

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*“Gender is not only about individual identity or what a society teaches us a man or woman, boy or girl should be like. Gender is also a way of structuring relations of power – whether that is within families where the man is often considered the head of the household, or in societies writ large, where men tend to be the ones in whose hands political, economic, religious and other forms of cultural power are concentrated. These two phenomena – individual identity and structures of power – are significantly related to each other. Hence it is the meanings and characteristics culturally associated with masculinity that make it appear ‘natural’ and just for men to have the power to govern their families and their societies”*

Cohn

## ABSTRACT

*This paper outlines a number of feminist perspectives and the kinds of questions/approaches they raise about international security. It also examines some of the empirical research conducted by feminists around questions of security, including work that focuses on the impacts of armed conflict on women, the ways in which women are actors during armed conflict, and the gendered associations of war-planning and foreign policy-making. The argument here is that, whichever feminist perspective one adopts, greater attention to gender enriches our understanding and expectations associated with international security.*

**Key Words:** International Law, Peace, Stability, Political Regimes, Genocide, Security, Safety, Armed Conflict, Territorial Conflicts, Gender Developments, Equality.

## 1. Introduction:

When feminist scholars and activists first began to engage with both the academic and policy practitioners of global politics, the idea that feminist thought might contribute to thinking about international security was sometimes met with hostility or ridicule. What could feminist theory which surely concerned only the activities of women – tell us about the workings of global politics, national militaries, nuclear deterrence, or the decision-making of Great Powers? That kind of reaction was very

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revealing, since it illustrated well part of the point that feminism sought to make. For most feminists, whatever their particular theoretical orientation within feminism, the workings of security have long been presented as though they are gender-neutral when in fact international security is infused with gendered assumptions and representations. The effects of presenting international security as though it is gender-neutral are numerous, and not least that it makes invisible the gender differentiated understandings and impacts of security on women and men and the ways in which security is constituted in part through gender.

The early ridicule that greeted feminist interventions in global politics is now far more difficult to sustain. For one, more traditional theoretical orientations within International Relations (IR) have been critiqued for a variety of exclusions, as numerous chapters in this collection have highlighted. Within this context, raising issues of gender no longer seems out of step with the rest of the literature on global politics. Explicit attention to the gendered dimensions of security is now also more widespread within some of the more mainstream sites of global politics. The UN Security Council, for example, adopted Resolution 1325 in October 2000 on 'Women, Peace and Security' a resolution which noted both that women and girls are affected by armed conflict in ways that differ from the impact on men and boys, and the importance of incorporating a 'gender perspective' into peace operations. This kind of acknowledgement underscores the feminist observation that gender permeates all aspects of international peace and security.

One question that continues to surface, however, is: How does gender permeate international security? Even sympathetic observers of feminist thought and global politics do not always find a simple or straightforward answer to this question. The reason for this is that there is no single or straightforward answer to be given, because the answer is in part dependent on the particular feminist perspective one adopts in exploring questions of security. As with the study of IR itself, feminists are not agreed on one theoretical perspective, rather feminist thinking approaches political questions using a variety of theoretical lenses. How to understand the gendered nature of questions of peace and security is thus dependent on the theoretical perspective one adopts. This chapter will outline some of those perspectives and illustrate the kinds of questions about international security that result from them. The argument here is that, whichever perspective one adopts, greater attention to gender enriches our understanding and expectations associated with international security.

## 2. Feminist Approaches In International Security:

A theoretical lens, as V. Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan have written, 'focuses our attention in particular ways', helping to 'order' or make sense of the world around us (Peterson and Runyan 1999: 1). These lenses draw our attention to specific features of our world, ways of looking at the world and usually offer prescriptions for ways of acting in the world. In focusing our attention to certain areas or concerns, our attention is simultaneously drawn away from other areas or concerns – in order to simplify the world we are observing, some elements are emphasized over others. This has been true of the study of IR and international security which traditionally focused our attention towards states and away from 'people'. But it is true also within feminist thinking. Most feminists may share an interest in focusing attention on (gender-differentiated) people, but beyond this there is no single feminist lens or perspective which directs us to the single best way in which to study international peace and security. Each feminist perspective draws our attention to different ways of thinking about gender, different ways of conceptualizing the gendered nature of international security and different ways of responding to the problems of global politics. This does not mean there will not be overlap between these perspectives; and indeed, as theoretical perspectives are adapted and modified, they may incorporate the insights of one or another perspective. Nonetheless, it is useful to map out some of the basic differences between the most important approaches to feminist theory in order to understand their different emphases and insights.

*Liberal feminists* privilege notions of equality and have tended to focus on questions of women's representation within the public sphere. Feminists who work from this perspective collect empirical information about women's roles – are women present as decision-makers in areas of international security? If not, why not? Are they present in national militaries? When they are present, what is the impact of their presence, and if they are not present, what are the barriers to their participation?

Many liberal feminists focus on the ways in which within governments and international institutions, women remain highly under-represented. Where women are present, they are still largely relegated to clerical and support work, and do not figure prominently in the middle and upper management levels of institutions. As of June 2006, for example, women in the United Nations comprise some 60 per cent of General Service employees, but less than 40 per cent in the Professional categories (and only 15 per cent of the highest professional category of Under Secretary General) (Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women 2006). For liberal feminists, the barriers to women's participation need to be identified so that they can be removed, in this way permitting those women who are interested in equal opportunity to take on the challenges of political and public life.

**Radical feminists**, by contrast, focus less on notions of equality and more on notions of difference. For radical feminists, women and men are essentially quite different from one another (and essentially quite similar to one another). Whether as a result of biology or socialization, radical feminists tend to agree that men as a group are less able to express emotion, are more aggressive and more competitive while women as a group are more nurturing, more holistic and less abstract. By this view, much of the way in which society is organized supports the power of men over women and their bodies – what is called patriarchy – and the privileging of masculine norms. This impacts upon both the ways in which the world actually operates, and on the ways in which we think about the world. Radical feminists differ from liberal feminists in that they view the political as existing everywhere – it includes, but is not limited to, the public spheres of life. Indeed, many of the most pernicious ways in which patriarchy impacts upon women's lives are affected through control of the 'private' – through domestic violence, control over women's reproductive freedoms and control of women's sexuality. On questions of representation, radical feminists might agree with liberals that women ought to be represented in positions of public power, but not for the equality rights reasons the liberals give, rather because women bring a different point of view to politics, one that is more focused on cooperation and peace.

Whereas liberal and radical feminists tend to focus on 'women' and 'men', some of their insights hint at an emphasis that is seen most clearly in some other approaches to feminist thought, those that examine prevailing assumptions around 'gender'. Focusing on gender attempts to distinguish between the biological and the social – between the facts of biological differences and the prevailing ideas and meanings associated with masculinity and femininity. It is these kinds of observations that have informed a variety of what are called '*post-positivist*' approaches to feminist theory. Feminist critical theory, for example, examines prevailing assumptions about both women and men: what it is to be a man or a woman, what is appropriately feminine or masculine behavior, the appropriate roles of women and men within society, within the workforce, the family and so on. Critical feminist theorists often argue that prevailing norms associated with masculinity, as much as with femininity, must be examined, and likewise that these norms can have an enormous impact on men, particularly marginalized men. Critical feminists insist also that the assumptions that exist around women and men/masculinity and femininity take place not just at the level of discourse, but that gender depends also on the real, material, lived condition of women and men in particular times and places, which includes but is not limited to the lived conditions of race, class, sexuality, ethnicity and religion.

This draws on an insight made by feminist postmodernists who argue that any definition or standpoint will necessarily be partial and any attempt to posit a single or universal truth needs to be deconstructed. Deconstruction entails exploring, unraveling and rejecting the assumed naturalness of particular understandings and relationships, and examining the impact that otherwise 'taken-for-granted' assumptions and understandings have on our ability to act in the world. For feminist postmodernists, explains, any truth claim is an assertion of power which silences or makes invisible possibilities that do not fit easily into prevailing discursive practices.

The manifestations of these relations of power will emerge in a variety of ways, and, in the case of questions of security, can inform how we understand what security means and how it (and insecurity) is experienced by women and by men.

### 3. Women, Gender and Security – The Impacts of Armed Conflict:

What have gendered analyses of security focused on and revealed? This too requires a multifaceted response. One common set of questions within security is to focus on war and armed conflict, what Peterson and Runyan (1998: 115) describe as 'direct violence'. Some of the work examining gender and armed conflict takes a largely liberal feminist position and documents the differential impact of armed conflict on women and girls as compared to men and boys. By itself this is a very large undertaking, as the impact of armed conflict on all people is enormously complex, and highlighting the ways in which its impact differs for women requires nuanced and detailed analyses. 'Gender-neutral' analyses of armed conflict regularly do not focus on people at all – conflict is conducted between states or armed groups, the specific impact on people's lives is a marginal concern and instead the focus of analysis is on territory and resources gained (or lost) and the outcome (in terms of winners and losers) of battles and wars

Where some analysts do focus on people affected by war, the tendency has been to focus on the experiences of men – the central players in most war stories, whether it is as combatants, prisoners of war, generals, war planners, fighter pilots, infantrymen, war criminals and so on. Women are assumed to more rarely be combatants in armed conflict, and so they are assumed to be impacted only indirectly by war. Their lives may be disrupted during war, and they are sometimes injured or killed as a result of 'collateral' or indirect damage, but women's particular experiences were generally not thought to be worthy of specific or sustained study, or in any way important in determining how we might understand both 'security' and 'insecurity'.

Early feminist work in IR disrupted these assumptions. Cynthia Enloe (1983, 2000a), for example, has documented the varieties of ways that militaries require women's work, whether or not that work was ever formally acknowledged. As *Enloe* writes:

*"Thousands of women were soldiers' wives, cooks, provisioners, laundresses, and nurses. Sometimes they served in all of these roles simultaneously. When they weren't being reduced verbally or physically to the status of prostitutes, camp followers were performing tasks that any large military force needs but wants to keep ideologically peripheral to its combat function and often tries to avoid paying for directly."*

But women do not merely take up the invisible jobs associated with supporting fighting forces; they are regularly and directly affected by the violence of armed conflict itself. This has always been true, but during the post-Cold War era it became increasingly apparent that in the new forms of conflict that began to emerge, women were targeted specifically, and in specifically gendered ways.

Studies by scholars, human rights organizations and international institutions began to focus on the impact of armed conflict on women. Much of this work focuses on the ways in which, most commonly, women and girls are subjected to heightened levels of sexual violence during wartime, including sexual torture, enforced prostitution, sexual slavery and mutilations and sexual trafficking. In some conflicts acts of sexual violence have been so widespread, and so widely and clearly documented, that international protective measures have been developed which acknowledge the systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. In both the International Criminal Tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda, as well as in the Rome Statute which formed the basis for the newly established International Criminal Court, there has been an acknowledgement that sexual violence in wartime constitutes a violation of the laws of war (UN Secretary General Study 2002: ch.3).

Although in very important ways the widespread use of sexual violence during armed conflict demands our collective attention, and a focus on sexual violence against women has received the most sustained empirical analysis from feminist researchers, exclusive focus on sexual violence during war obscures a number of important issues. One is that, as Judith Gardam and Michelle Jarvis (2001: 94) note, most formal acknowledgements of women's experiences during wartime, especially in the form of legal redress, tend to reproduce very stereotypical assumptions about women: they are visible, valued and deemed worthy of protection primarily in terms of the sexual and reproductive aspects of their lives. This means that other ways in which armed conflict impacts upon women may be ignored or not receive equally necessary legal recognition and protections.



These other impacts may include being targeted for acts of violence women are not only sexually assaulted during wartime; they are also regularly killed and maimed. They may also be sexually and physically assaulted and exploited by those ostensibly sent to 'protect' them – peacekeepers, refugee and aid workers, guards and police. Women are also affected by the economic impact of armed conflict – they struggle with the loss of economic livelihoods and the inflation that normally accompanies conflict, making the cost of basic items or foodstuffs prohibitively high. In some cases local sources of food have been destroyed altogether, with the destruction of agricultural lands, marketplaces and the poisoning of water sources. The same is true of sources of shelter when home communities become part of the battleground or combatants force civilians to flee, women and their families become internally displaced persons (IDPs) or, when they cross borders, part of the burgeoning number of global refugees. During conflict, women also struggle for continued access to health care or other social services such as educational facilities, after these have been destroyed or are simply unavailable to internally displaced people and refugees.

Thus, focusing strictly on the sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls during armed conflict directs our attention away from the many other effects of armed conflict on their lives. Importantly however, it also draws our attention away from the sexual violence perpetrated against men and boys during armed conflict. Whereas women are presumed to be targets of sexual violence during wartime, the same assumption is not made of men. Yet, sexual violence – including rape, torture and sexual mutilation – is also used against men and boys during war and conflict, usually in an effort to attack their sense of manhood (UN Secretary General Study 2002: 16). Female prisoners of war often find they are disbelieved if they report they were not sexually abused or assaulted while held prisoner – this was true of US prisoners of war Melissa Rathbun-Nealy who was taken prisoner during the 1991 Gulf War and Jessica Lynch who was taken prisoner a little more than a decade later during the US invasion of Iraq. By contrast, male prisoners are rarely even asked whether they were sexually assaulted, their captivity is assumed to be asexual where a woman's captivity is highly sexualized, in both cases irrespective of whether sexual violence actually takes place.

The United States' own sexual torture techniques against Iraqi prisoners of war illustrate well the ways in which men can be targets of sexual violence, with an explicit intention to injure and humiliate. The interrogations involved smearing fake menstrual blood on prisoner's faces, forcing them to masturbate or simulate and/or perform oral and anal sex on one another, to disrobe in one another's presence, to touch one another, to touch women, and to be photographed in these and other positions (Highman and Stephens 2004). Prisoners were also made to walk on all fours with a leash around their necks, or to stand balanced precariously on boxes, or to pile on top of one another to form a pyramid of naked bodies. Most often, it was female soldiers who were photographed perpetrating these and other acts. Zillah Eisenstein (2004) has written of the ways in which the male targets of this violence were depicted as 'humiliated' precisely because they were treated like women. Male Iraqi prisoners were the targets of a violence aimed in one instance directly at themselves, but as Eisenstein and other feminist commentators have noted, in another instance they were also the subjects of a violence that sent a larger message about empire and imperialist masculinity. Manipulating radicalized and gendered assumptions of appropriately masculine (and feminine) behavior, the sexual torture at Abu Ghraib also illustrates the gendered dimensions of contemporary imperialism and empire building.

#### **4. Women, Gender and Security : Action and Activism**

Feminist accounts of armed conflict do not focus only on the 'impacts' of war on women (and men); they also explore the ways in which women are actors in armed conflict. We have seen above that women and men can both be 'victims' of conflict and political violence. They can also both be active 'agents' in armed conflict. It is normally men who are depicted as the primary actors in war, most often serving as combatants in armed conflicts. But women also regularly take up arms and commit acts of violence in war. In some cases it is because they are forced to do so, but in others it is because they are committed to the goals of the conflict, and they choose to become combatants themselves. Women have also been documented as serving as messengers for combatants, as spies, and as providing assistance through smuggling weapons and providing intelligence.

The positioning of women and men as either combatants (men) or victims (women) has implications for both women and men. Because women are seldom viewed as having served as combatants, they may experience greater freedom in organizing informal peace campaigns. Much feminist analysis focuses on the varieties of peace campaigns that women are involved in, from peace marches to silent vigils, to working across combatant groups to establish communications. Some authors note the ways in which some women peace activists have used prevailing assumptions about their roles as 'mothers' to protect themselves against state and non-state authorities who would otherwise prohibit public criticisms of local and foreign policies concerning a conflict. However, at the same time that women have been documented as being actively involved in informal campaigns, they are usually ignored when formal peace processes begin, they are rarely invited to formal 'peace tables' and are normally excluded from disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes which give former combatants access to educational, training and employment opportunities (UN Secretary General Study 2002: ch.4).

Men, on the other hand, are presumed to have held power and decision making authority prior to the emergence of conflict and to have been combatants and instigators throughout the conflict itself. This assumption can make all men (and boys) targets of violence within a conflict, whether or not they are actually combatants or directly involved in the conflict. Some critics point out that the assumption of men as combatants – or at the very least 'able to take care of themselves' – has resulted in their exposure to greater dangers and levels of violence during armed conflict. In the former Yugoslavia, the protection of women and children was prioritized as the goal of UN peacekeeping forces, resulting in a massacre of unarmed Bosnian Muslim men and boys who were left largely unprotected (Carpenter 2005).

The assumption of men as combatants also sometimes makes their motivations suspect when they become involved in efforts to bring conflict to an end – they are often assumed to have alternative agendas. At the same time, however, it is men who are normally invited to the formal 'peace table' once it has been established, and they are the ones who primarily receive the benefits of DDR and other post-conflict activities (UN Secretary General Study 2002: ch.4). The assumption of men's 'activity' in conflict is what may impact upon their insecurity when conflict is ongoing, but it is also what ensures a 'place at the table' when the formal efforts to bring a conflict to an end are underway.

Women and men can thus both be 'active' in wars and armed conflicts in a variety of ways, either as perpetrators of violence or as participants in peace processes. However, the prevailing understandings and assumptions about women and men in conflict – whatever their actual experience – can significantly shape and limit those experiences in both profoundly positive and negative ways.

## 5. Women, Gender and Security: Talking and Making Weapons and War

Although many feminist analyses of security focus on the impact on and involvement of women and men in war and armed conflict, as discussed in previous sections, these are not the only forms of scholarly intervention taken by feminists who explore questions of international security. Instead, many feminists focus on the ways in which gender is constructed through security (and insecurity) and on the ways in which security is constructed through gender. The previous sections have already pointed to some of these types of arguments – it is prevailing assumptions about women and men/masculinity and femininity that position men and women differently in conflict: as targets of violence, as targets of sexual violence, as actors and as victims. Other feminist scholars have examined the practices of national security think-tanks, of nuclear strategy, of foreign policy decisions and even of weapons of mass destruction, to uncover the way in which assumptions around gender impact upon, and are impacted by, these processes.

One of the most important early interventions in this area was the work of Carol Cohn (1987), who argued that the apparently gender-neutral and objective (or by contrast highly sexualized) language of defence strategists and planners was used as an 'ideological curtain' to obfuscate and naturalize the deployment and possible use of nuclear weapons. She showed how the language used by defence planners either drew attention away from the real implications of their plans and analyses (for example, by describing hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties in a nuclear confrontation with highly sanitized terms such as 'collateral damage'), or how sexualizing weapons and weapons systems made them appear more controllable by

symbolically equating them with women's bodies (for example, through such terms as 'pat the bomb')

Cohn has also examined the ways in which the 'symbolic dimensions' of weapons or foreign policy decisions can impact upon decision-makers in ways clearly tied to their own sense of masculinity. As Cohn, Hill and Ruddick write:

*"When India exploded five nuclear devices in May 1998, Hindu nationalist leader Balasaheb Thackeray explained 'we had to prove that we are not eunuchs.' An Indian newspaper cartoon depicted Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee propping up his coalition government with a nuclear bomb. 'Made with Viagra' the caption read. Images such as these rely on the widespread metaphoric equation of political and military power with sexual potency and masculinity".*

When linked to notions of manliness in this way, the decision to choose nuclear weapons is characterized as 'natural'. A symbolic association with strength and potency, in other words, becomes a substitute for careful and rational analysis that would explore all costs and benefits associated with acquiring nuclear weapons.

For feminists, this kind of masculinist frame can lead decision-makers down paths that could be avoided, and predisposes decision-makers to naturalize highly militarized and violent responses. In turn, it likely forecloses other policy options precisely because they are not deemed to be 'manly' enough. Some observers suggested that the US government could make an enormously profound statement after 11 September by 'bombarding Afghanistan with massive supplies of food instead of warheads. Such an approach would surely earn America's commander-in-chief the media label of wimp – and much worse. Obviously, it's the sort of risk that the president wouldn't dare to take' (Solomon 2001).

The expectation that the terrorist attack on the USA demanded a swift and manly response was simultaneously linked to a sudden concern for the 'plight' of Afghan women. Part of the justification for the intervention focused on the Taliban's treatment of women in Afghanistan. As Krista Hunt (2002: 117) argues, representation of Afghan women as passive is part and parcel of the way in which 'we' will dehumanize 'them', depicting the women of Afghanistan as uncivilized and in need of saving. As Hunt points out, the United States and the West's sudden interest in the plight of Afghan women was, at best, suspicious. There had long been information available about the systematic abuse of women in Afghanistan – much of it raised by the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) – which until 11 September went largely ignored by Western governments and the international media. For Hunt, this means not only that women's bodies are being 'written' in a way which justifies particular forms of military response, but moreover, that the enormous impact upon women which will result from that military response will be rendered if not invisible, at least 'justified'.

This is not to suggest, however, that the situation of women in Afghanistan was not horrifying, and indeed a final set of questions which feminists raise about 11 September concerns the relationship between the deep misogyny inherent in fundamentalisms (all fundamentalisms) and the kinds of violence which erupt from them. The group Women Against Fundamentalisms (2007) write: 'Fundamentalism appears in different and changing forms in religions throughout the world, sometimes as a state project, sometimes in opposition to the state. But at the heart of all fundamentalist agendas is the control of women's minds and bodies.' How much does the violence which we saw on 11 September emerge from a complex of factors, one part of which is the offer to 'desperate, futureless men the psychological and practical satisfaction of instant superiority to half the human race'.

## 6. Historical Roots and Evolution of the Feminist Movement and Ideas:

Historically, Indian women's role in the family, community and society at large was determined by an interplay of several forces such as caste and gender based division of work, class background, geographic location and ethnic origin of particular community/tribe. For example, women dominated by Aryan culture had a far more rigid control over sexuality, fertility and labour. Women in Dravidian culture had to face relatively less ferocious patriarchy. Over the last 5,000 years, Indian women's status has also been influenced by various religions– Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism. Religious reform movements between 12th century and 16th century, which also gave rise to liberation

theology, namely Bhakti Movement and Sufism, brought women's concerns to the fore. Saint poetesses such as Mirabai, Lal Ded, Akka Mahadevi, and Bahinabai articulated women's aspirations of personal freedom and creative urge (Krishnaswamy, 1993).

### **The Genesis of Feminist Movement and Women's Organizations in India:**

In the 19th century, the male social reformers with the blessing of the British administrators, influenced by western liberal democratic values initiated the process of fight against female infanticide, widow burning, segregation of women from the public life, prostitution and begging by destitute women. They also organised public functions for widow remarriages. As a result, their relatives, neighbours, community leaders and organised religion boycotted them. In a way, it was a blessing in disguise because their isolation from petty politics gave them ample time and resources to interact with the power structures to bring about legal reforms and establish educational institutions, shelter homes, training centres for women from where the first generation of teachers, nurses and other skilled workers came out. (Desai, 1977)

Classified as the first-wave feminism, the phase was marked by the first generation of English educated women's struggles against child marriage, widow burning, female infanticide and efforts for education for women and their voting rights. It impacted only women from the upper caste and upper class. Enormous amount of literature of that time, produced by the Indian social reformers in Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, Malayalam, Tamil, and Bengali bears witness to their path-breaking efforts. The first generation of English educated empowered women became foremothers of the women's movement in the pre-independence period. Most of them channelised their energies in building pioneer women's organisations such as All India Women's Conference (AIWC), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and Anjuman-I-Islam. The political agenda of AIWC was to fight against child marriage, mobilise public opinion in favour of voting rights for women, and impart basic skills (such as tailoring, embroidery, cookery, hairstyling, childcare, folk and classical music and dance, letter-writing, etc.) so that they become efficient homemakers. The cultural ambiance of the AIWC suited the needs and aspirations of the high-caste Hindu women. For all practical purposes, the YWCA was multi-religious in terms of its areas of activities and beneficiaries, though its decision-makers happened to be the Christian wives of politicians, bureaucrats, professionals and the managerial cadre, who were in close proximity to the British rulers. The YWCA provided vocational training courses to groom nurses, typists, secretaries and teachers, classes in bakery products, flower arrangement, as well as Western and Indian classical dance and music. Anjuman Trust was committed to the cause of women's education and skill formation with an idea to enable them to become home-based workers. They had to work within the matrix of the purdah (veil). Women office bearers of the YWCA had to face the outside world with nominal male protection. Many AIWC leaders had their male family members as facilitators. Women leaders from the Anjuman Trust interacted only with the Muslim community. Differences in eating habits, dress-code and language barriers prevented them from collaborative ventures though their leadership was from the economically better-off sections.

Non-violent means of protest actions under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi ensured massive participation of women in the national liberation movement. Women family members of the Congress leaders gave up purdah and participated in public functions, rallies, demonstrations and experienced prison life. Many families allowed women to take political risks, which enabled them to eventually emerge as powerful leaders. Some of the highly educated women joined educational institutions, the diplomatic corps, public service boards, and public and private sector industries. The rest became enlightened homemakers with a strong commitment to educating their daughters. The journey that began with the 19th century social reform movement and culminated with the 20th century freedom movement, resulted in securing the constitutional guarantees of equality, freedom and equal opportunity for women, irrespective of their class, caste, creed, race and religion (Kasturi & Mazumdar, 1994).



## Why is Feminism So Crucial for a Country like India? Why Should India Embrace Feminism?

India needs feminism because a woman deserves the same amount of money and respect as a man does for performing the same tasks.

- a) **To Rid of Male Dominance:** India needs feminism because a woman should not be considered a responsibility of a male throughout her life, whether it be her father, brother, husband or son. Practices like '[kanyadaan](#)', '[Raksha Bandhan](#)' and the '[purdah system](#)' where a woman is veiled behind a '[ghoonghat](#)', highlight the extent of male dominance. These practices emphasise that strong, capable men have to protect the weak, fragile women and that women aren't designed to protect, but to be protected.
- b) **To Promote Equality of the Sexes:** India needs feminism because a woman is not a burden and marriage should not be the only reason for her existence. Every year [over 2 lakh girls](#) are killed even before they can step into this world and thousands of women die due to [dowry harassment](#). In many Indian households, males and females are treated differently; education, as well as nutrition for boys, is prioritised, while that of the girl is neglected. Women in many Indian families eat last and the least after serving all their other family members. This discrimination is reflected in the statistics released by the government, which states that almost 50 per cent of teenage Indian girls are underweight and [52 percent are anaemic](#).
- c) **To Ensure Women are Respected Regardless of Their Career Choices:** India needs feminism because a woman is treated with disdain whether she is employed or not. A certain section of our society believes that it is an offence if a woman is well-educated and working, to support herself, or her family financially. Another [sophomaniac section](#) of our society believes that becoming a housewife would contribute little to women's empowerment. Women who choose to raise their children full time over continuing their career are criticised. But what is vital is to realise that just because a woman isn't earning doesn't mean her work is less important. Some research also points out how being a homemaker is equivalent to [working 2.5 jobs](#). So, a profession shouldn't be deemed important based on the amount of money it offers but on the amount of value it holds. India needs feminism because a woman deserves the same amount of money and respect as a man does for performing the same tasks. Working women in India [earn only 66%](#) of what their male counterparts earn for the same amount of work. This gender pay gap and disparity in opportunities discourage women from performing well in the professional domain. A report suggests that India would be 27% richer if there were higher employment rates of women. The glass ceiling effect is present in India, which means that there is an invisible barrier that prevents women from rising to higher ranks in a corporation. In India, females make up only 11.2% of board members in firms which is less than the global average. We can see the same trend in the newly elected 17th Lok Sabha where only 14% of the members are women. The [Women's Reservation Bill, 2008](#) is a pending bill in the Parliament, which proposes to reserve 33% of all seats in the Lok Sabha, and in all state legislative assemblies for women. The bill is still pending as it never went to the Lok Sabha. Women are considered ill-suited for holding power in a democracy, but what we don't realise, is that any person who understands the problems of running a home, will be well suited to understanding the problems of running a country.
- d) **To Break Menstruation Taboos:** India needs feminism because we have maligned the purity of something as natural as [menstruation](#) and turned it into something unmentionable. Some Indian women on their periods are treated as untouchables. They aren't allowed to enter the kitchen, forced to sleep on the floor; they cannot be touched, spoken to, neither can they share the same table with others. Because of the stigma attached to it, there is a [lack of awareness](#) about the methods of menstrual protection. Data suggests that about 46 percent of women do not use hygienic methods of menstrual protection and 36 percent feel uncomfortable in buying them with other customers around. India suffers from something called "[period poverty](#)" because we lack enough sanitary products to cater to our menstruating population. Another thing that comes to light is the hypocrisy, where on one hand we worship [Kamakhyia Devi](#), also known as the bleeding goddess, and on the other hand, we restrict women on their periods from entering her temple.
- e) **To End Unfounded Stereotypes About Gender Roles:** A still from the movie Lunchbox. Stereotyping in family roles includes how men are expected to be the sole breadwinners of a family and females are presumed to single-handedly take up

the responsibilities of managing the home. India needs feminism because even professions and family roles have been stereotyped based on gender. For example, professions like engineering, aviation, and military are considered masculine and professions like teaching, fashion designing, and homemaking are considered feminine. Stereotyping in family roles includes how men are expected to be the sole breadwinners of a family and females are presumed to single-handedly take up the responsibilities of managing the home. India prides itself on producing great female warriors such as Rani Padmavati, Razia Sultana, and Rani Ahilyabai Holkar, yet the participation of women in the Indian defence forces is disheartening. Equal involvement of men and women in the army is still a far-fetched dream. This only supports the stereotype that masculinity implies physical strength and femininity, sentimentalism.

- f) **To Stop Telling Women How To Dress:** India needs feminism because girls are shunned for their choice of clothing. There have been several unreasonable instances where *fatwas* have been issued against female celebrities for wearing western clothes, one of them for also wearing a saree. Another such appalling incident occurred when a prominent politician compared immodest clothes with an [invitation to rape](#). Mindless WhatsApp forwards and misogynistic serials and movies that normalise stalking and eve-teasing worsen the situation. It's time we recognize that feminism isn't about making women strong. Women are already strong. It's about changing the way the world perceives this strength. Nobody should be afraid of being referred to as a feminist because it frees both men and women from the imposed gender stereotypes. Feminism shouldn't be perceived as hostility against men because Me asking fr my rights will not deprive you of yours!

## 7. Conclusions

The author has tried to outline some of the kinds of interventions feminists make into questions of international security: those that focus on the differential impact of armed conflict on women and men, the impact upon women and men of naturalized assumptions about their behaviour and actions, and the ways in which assumptions around masculinity and femininity figure into conflict and decision-making. The argument here has been that the ways in which gender is implicated in questions of international security are multifaceted, but in all of its variations, feminist analyses of security direct our attention to a much broader set of practices and concerns than more traditional perspectives which insist international security is a gender-neutral set of practices.

India ranks very poorly in all sorts and parameters of gender indices. Talk about gender inequality, sex ratio, the gap on the pay scales, percentage of the workforce and we've painted a very grim picture out of these. How do you come to terms with the fact that we have countries like Bangladesh, in our very own neighborhood, with higher percentages of working women? Aren't they supposed to be *more* conservative? Well, not in the statistics, at least. For all the reason stated herein above author is of firm belief that it is high time to a diverse country like India to embrace a noble concept of Feminism in its pure form.

### Further reading:

1. Sanam Anderlini, *Women Building Peace; What They Do, Why it Matters* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2007). This book examines through a series of case studies the ways in which women contribute to peace and security processes and the ways in which women's experiences need to figure into peace-building efforts.
2. Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman (eds), *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004). This edited collection focuses on the gendered and racialized dimensions of contemporary armed conflict by exploring both comparatively and conceptually over half a dozen specific examples (including the former Yugoslavia, Sudan, Ghana, Guatemala, Sri Lanka, Iraqi Kurdistan and Afghanistan).
3. Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan, *Global Gender Issues* (2nd edn) (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999). This book provides a general introduction to both theoretical approaches and empirical examples of issues in gender and International Relations, focusing explicitly on questions of security, economics, power and ecology.

4. Jill Steans, *Gender and International Relations: Issues, Debates and Future Directions* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006). This book provides an introduction to feminist contributions in International Relations, including overviews of feminist theories and specific chapters that examine feminist perspectives on war and peace and on feminist approaches to security.
5. Sandra Whitworth, *Men, Militarism and UN Peacekeeping: A Gendered Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2004). This book explores from a feminist perspective some of the issues that arise in UN peacekeeping missions, including charges of sexual harassment and assault, and also examines UN responses to these concerns through the strategy of gender mainstreaming.

