CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER DISCOURSES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract

Gender discourses in International Relations (IR) came to prominence in the 1970s as a counter-move to the dominant realist/neo-realist paradigms in IR. The realist/neo-realist theory emphasizes on power politics, security, aggression, conflict and war. It eulogizes the state as the central actor in IR and hence gave primacy to the doctrines of national security and state survival. It is essentially patriarchal in its orientation and outlook. This is in stark contrast to the gender discourses in IR, which emphasizes on liberty, equality, women's empowerment and gender justice. This article seeks to critically counter-pose the gender discoursesagainst the realist/neo-realist theory in IR. The article concludes with the argument that there is an urgent need for bringing gender discourses into the mainstream literature in IR, so that we can achieve the goal of gender justice and women's empowerment.

Introduction

Feminism first developed in the 1840s and 1850s, which can be regarded as the first wave of feminism. It sought to place women on the same pedestal as men and was articulated in terms of gender equality. This theoretical posture got identified with the ideas of liberal feminism and the most vocal advocate of liberal feminism was Mary Wollstonecraft, who quite unequivocally emphasized on women's suffrage movement and thereby expanding gender equality. Liberal feminists argue that female subordination in IR can be located through observing 'problems of refugee women, income inequalities between women and men, and the kinds of human rights violations incurred disproportionately by women, such as trafficking and rape in war' (Tickner 2011: 266). 'The second wave of feminism', argued

Andrew Heywood, 'arose during the 1960s and expressed, in addition to the established concern with equal rights, the more radical and sometimes revolutionary demands of the growing Women's Liberation Movement' (Heywood 2004: 62).

In addition to these two waves of Feminism, there had emerged in the last two decades, what had been referred to as the third wave of feminist political theory, which 'has been made possible by the establishment of feminism and its widespread social and cultural presence' (Budgeon 2011: 10). The essence of third wave of feminism 'is about coalition and 'transversity' rather than about assuming a universal identity which women share and which crosses boundaries of class, race, age, dis/ability and nation' (Charles 2015: 45-46). It assumes that there are 'multiple differences' among women and women does not constitute a homogenous category.

This article has been divided into three sections. The first section provides a typology of feminism. The second section critically analyzes the realist/neo-realist theory in IR for being patriarchal and masculine in its outlook. It also pits the gender discourses in IR as a counter-narrative to the dominant realist/neo-realist IR theory. The third and last section deals with a brief conclusion.

I

Typology of Feminism

It would be prudent to observe that Feminism and gender discourse entered the realm of IR only in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Apart from liberal feminism, there are other perspectives on feminism also. For example, socialist feminists drew their sustenance from Marxism and argued that confining women to the family and domestic household chores have resulted in women's subordination. They drew a parallel between women's subordination and the capitalist mode of production, as both are exploitative in their own way. A major advocate of socialist feminism, Juliet Mitchell had argued 'for the interplay of economic, social, political and cultural forces in society, and has warned that, since patriarchy has cultural and ideological roots, it cannot be overthrown simply by replacing

capitalism with socialism. Mitchell was also one of the first feminists to use psychoanalytical theory as a means of explaining sexual difference' (Heywood 2004: 64).

Radical feminists further expanded the Marxist perspective on feminism. Radical feminists 'portray gender divisions as the most fundamental and politically significant cleavages in society, and call for the radical restructuring of personal, domestic and family life' (Heywood 2004: 62). A major advocate of socialist feminism, Simone de Beauvoir 'highlighted the extent to which the masculine is represented as the positive or the norm, while the feminine is portrayed as 'other'. Such 'otherness' fundamentally limits women's freedom and prevents them from expressing their full humanity. Beauvoir placed her faith in rationality and critical analysis as the means of exposing this process and giving women responsible for their own lives' (Heywood 2004: 63). Kate Millett, another notable protagonist of radical feminism, had provided the essence of radical feminism through her unabashed critique of patriarchy. The institution of patriarchy operates principally through family as well as through all social, economic and political structures and must be resisted firmly (Heywood 2004: 62).

Critical feminists, like Sandra Whitworth further developed the Marxist understanding of feminism by borrowing from the works of Robert Cox, a major critical IR theorist. Whitworth argued 'that understandings about gender depend only in part on real material conditions of women and men in particular circumstances'. She suggested that 'gender is also constituted by the meaning given to that reality – *ideas* that men and women have about their relationships to one another' (Tickner and Sjoberg 2010: 209).

Feminist constructivism or 'Constructive feminism focuses on the way that ideas about gender shape and are shaped by global politics' (Tickner and Sjoberg 2010: 210). The essence of constructive feminism had been best summarized by Tickner and Sjoberg. For example, Elisabeth Prugl in her book, *The Global Construction of Gender* (1999), 'uses a linguistically based feminist constructivist perspective to analyse the treatment of home-based work in international negotiations and international law' (Tickner and Sjoberg 2010: 210).While, women do most of the house-hold work, but their work is not considered any real work, as they are not paid any wages or given some incentives for their work. Prugl essentially argued that we need to focus on the dialectical relationship between gender and global politics and how they interact with each other (Tickner and Sjoberg 2010: 210).

Post-Structuralist Feminism or Feminist poststructuralism drew their sustenance from the theory of Post-Structuralism as elucidated by IR theorists. Poststructuralism 'can be seen as constituting a radical critique of all meta-narratives of human progress and emancipation. Post-structuralists argue that so-called 'universal' features of human beings or human life are actually particular – that is, based on the Western experience…post-structuralists concentrate on the incremental changes and socially contextualised activities and strategies which women use to improve their position in specific societies' (Steans, Pettiford, Diez and El-Anis 2013: 163). Steans et al., had further argued that there is no universal category and standpoint of 'women's experience' or gender, as day to day practices reflect that feminism and gender discourses are overwhelmingly influenced by their social, historical, language and cultural relations (Steans, Pettiford, Diez and El-Anis 2013: 163-164).

J. Ann Tickner and Laura Sjoberg have pointed out that post-structuralist feminism brings out the interfaces between meaning and language, which largely are constructed by men and women are pushed to the periphery and merely 'as the subjects of knowledge' (Tickner and Sjoberg 2010: 210-211).Charlotte Hooper, a major feminist post-structuralist thinker, in her book, *Manly States* (2001) has raised a major pertinent question that 'what role does international relations theory and practice play in shaping, defining, and legitimating masculinities' (Tickner and Sjoberg 2010: 211).

At a different level, Postmodern feminists reject a singular, universal voice of women and focus on multiple different women's voices. They argue that 'identity is mediated through class, caste, gender, race, community, culture, religion, and various other factors' (Chenoy 2012: 85). Postmodern feminists emphasize on 'community level action with involvement of all stakeholders, including women and various marginalized groups' (Chenoy 2012: 85).

Thus, we can argue that gender is certainly the most essential determinant in the study of IR. The works of the different feminist scholars clearly exhibits that even though, there is diversity among various schools of thought, there is certainly a broad agreement that we need to talk and debate about 'gendered security', 'gendered IR', so that women's voices are heard and women gets the special focus in all arenas of IR. However, all of this discourse on Feminism had emanated from the West. Therefore, there is a dire need for a

Third World perspective on the gender discourses in IR. A tremendous effort in this direction had been made by Anuradha Chenoy, who had provided a typology of feminism from essentially an 'orientalist' perspective.

Feminists in the third world have raised questions whether western theories, including western feminism, are relevant to the production of knowledge in the third world (Mohanty 2003). South Asian feminists have critiqued national security doctrines of their own regimes/regions as masculinist and militarist (De Mel 2007; Chenoy 2002). They have deconstructed the gendered nature of identity as used in the relations between South Asian states (Sarkar 1998; Menon and Bhasin 1998). Women in India and South Asia are increasingly engaging in international relations as practitioners, academics and activists (Chenoy 2012: 82).

Thus, we can easily infer that third world academics and activists are trying to provide their own distinctive perspectives on the themes of gender discourses in IR. In other words, they are increasingly challenging the dominant narrative of Western feminism in IR. They have challenged the dominant theories of IR and have questioned their basic claims and assumptions. We will discuss these issues elaborately in the next section.

II

Gender Discourses and Realist/Neo-Realist International Relations Theory

The Realist International Relations theory was propounded in the 1930s as a response to the Liberal Idealist theory which was articulated in the 1920s. In the post-First World War (1914-1918) period, scholars from around the world thought of devising an IR theory which could reduce the horrors of another world war. There was a conscious attempt to reduce such mass casualties of individuals, which was brought about by wars and militarization. It was with this objective in mind that Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States at that time and an University Professor of Political Science sought to spread the message of liberal democracy and the movement for democratization all over the world. In 1919, Wilson was

awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and his vision for a liberal-democratic order influenced the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. Wilson's 14 Points laid down the core foundations of Liberal-Idealist theory in 1920. Wilson's basic emphasis was upon the themes of peace, liberal democracy, self-determination, collective security and the need for creating an international organization, which could reduce conflicts and wars in the wider arena of IR. These basic assumptions of liberal-idealism led to the formation of League of Nations, the first international organization in 1920. Wilson's basic presumption was that liberal democratic do not go to war against each other and they live in peace at all times. That will lay down the foundations of a new international order to be managed by League of Nations, the first ever international organization.

Another prominent liberal-idealist of that period was Norman Angell. In her landmark book, 'The Great Illusion' (1909), Angell had argued that there was an illusion in the minds of the policy makers and the ruling elite that winning wars will be of advantage to them. But, Angell had challenged this theory and counter-argued that 'territorial conquest is extremely expensive and politically divisive because it severely disrupts international commerce' (Jackson and Sorensen 2003: 39). Instead of the prevailing view, Angell had emphasized on the two themes – 'modernization and interdependence', which he argued will initiate 'a process of change and progress which renders war and the use of force increasingly obsolete' (Jackson and Sorensen 2003: 39). Feminists defend the liberal-idealist theory for its emphasis on human security, including women's human rights and security.

However, critics of the idealist theory had argued that increasing resort to war and militarization in the 1920s vindicates the success of the idealist theory and instead counter-posed the realist theory in IR in the 1930s. The Realist theory was advocated by theorists like Thomas Hobbes, E.H. Carr, George Kennan, Reinhold Niebuhr, Arnold Wolfers, etc. But, the most ardent advocate of Realism or 'Political Realism' was Hans J. Morgenthau, who underlined the basic assumptions of the Realist theory in his widely popular book, 'Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace' in 1948.

What then are the central assumptions of the Realist theory in IR? Realists of all persuasions believe in a pessimistic view of human nature. Human beings are self-interested and always strive to achieve power. They argue that power politics is the key to understanding IR. The Realists assume that states are the ultimate units in world politics.

Consequently, they give primacy to the doctrines of national security and state survival. Further, the Realists believe that all international conflicts are ultimately resolved by war. They also believe that there is no scope for values in the Realist theory. Therefore, the Realist theory is not at all normative and is very clearly empirical.

The constant struggle for power politics meant that no harmony exists between countries and people. Instead, both people and countries have profound conflict of interest among them. Therefore, 'International relations is in a basic sense about the struggle between such conflicting interests and desires. That is why IR is far more about conflict than about cooperation' (Jackson and Sorensen 2003: 41-42).

In other words, power politics, aggression, wars, militarization and the questions of state security are the prime referral points in Realism. While, the liberal-idealist theory dominated the IR discourse in the decade of 1920s,the realist discourse dominated in the 1930s and also in the post-Second World War period. The rise of the two superpowers – the US and the former USSR and the ensuing Cold War between them, conflict between the two competing ideologies of capitalism and communism, the formation of military blocs (NATO, SEATO and CENTO by the US and Warsaw Pact by the former USSR), the formation of economic blocs (Brettenwood institutions – International Monetary Fund, World Bank or International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs by the US, and Council of Mutual Economic Assistance by the former USSR) – all bears testimony to the dominance of the realist discourse in the 1950s to 1970s. Similarly, neo-realism contends that the themes of 'anarchy' and 'balance of power' are central to analyzing IR. The most ardent advocate of neo-realist theory was Kenneth Waltz, who elaborated the theory of neo-realism in his pioneering work, 'Theory of International Politics' (1979). Waltz outlined the central theme of IR as anarchy. States differ from one another in only 'their relative power'. Since every state's power is different from one another and every state wants to usurp their superiority, there will be anarchy in IR.

However, it was in the decade of mid-1970s and 1980s that feminism and gender discourses appeared on the fringes of world politics. Feminists argued that the Realist theory appeared to be excessively patriarchal and male-dominated, as it relied primarily on wars and militarization. The realist theory by emphasizing on power relationships is based on extreme inequality and injustice and is essentially a masculinist discourse (Preiswerk

1981; Grant and Newland 1991; Tickner 1992; Chenoy 2012). As renowned feminiss-activist and academic Anuradha Chenoy had rightly pointed out:

> Feminists fault the realists for endorsing a 'masculinist' understanding of the world that favours the power and status of men. In this system, 'sovereign man' can make a rational choice to legitimize violence. Women are controlled either through direct physical violence or indirectly by conceptions and ideology like – 'women's work'; the 'cult of motherhood'; inadequate health care; sexual harassment at work; gender-based wage differentiation and unequal access to resources. The complicity of the state is apparent when the state follows a policy of non-intervention in domestic violence or may directly support laws that allow gender discrimination.
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> ….Feminist writers argue that realist theory endorses patriarchy because for realists, patriarchy is necessary for maintaining social order and the state. It is for this reason that women are excluded from many prevailing definitions of political actorhood (Grant 1991; Sylvester 1994; Steans 1998). IR theory privileges man and excludes women because it is man who is identified with the state and the state is the basis of patriarchal relations in realist discourse. Feminists critique the realist argument that the citizen is identified with the male and the women are the 'other' – the outsider (Chenoy 2012:84-85).

Similarly, the neo-realist argument of an anarchical IR varies from time to time and 'is impervious to historical change and transition' (Chenoy 2012: 86). Further, we can argue that inter-state conflict is only one aspect in analyzing IR and that local issues can impinge on international politics and vice-versa. In other words, international conflicts can also be a major factor which impinges on domestic and local issues (Vanaik 1995).

Feminists and especially radical feminists argue that the realist theory glorifies war and conflict and the excessive use of militarization is primarily a reflection of masculinist way of thinking about IR (Sylvester 1994). It is the women who are primarily victims of sexual exploitation and rape in a conflictual IR. The women are primarily given a secondary

position in issues of war and conflict, which is essentially considered a male domain. Even though women are side by side with men as wives of diplomats, 'as workers for defense contractors', and women are the primary victims of war as well as are the refugees in issues related with migration (Enloe 1990). This aspect can be clearly reflected in the Rohinga refugee crisis in Myanmar as well as in different countries of South Asia and Middle East crisis in the contemporary world.

Feminists argue that the realist over-emphasis on military and national security justifies the notion that men are the protectors and women are the protected (Buzan 1991: 33). This clearly is a violation of the gender security which needs to exist in a civilized world. Women may be physically weak, but they are intellectually and mentally much stronger than men. Other scholars have also similarly elucidated about it in a similar manner. It is widely believed that men wield power in accordance with the realist perspective. This perspective is strongly contested by feminists, who have pointed for the need to overcome such misogynistic perspectives (Claude 1962; Hirshmann 1992).

Violence can be done to a person by depriving her/ him of their basic rights essential for leading a dignified life. Women's socially subordinate role places them at the risk of gender based violence, at the same time it is invisible. Violence against women is a universal reality but the extreme violence that women suffer is directly related to the violence that exists in women's everyday life in "peace times" be it physical, structural or cultural. The violence against women in conditions of conflict stands in a continuum alongside the violence experienced by women in 'normal' conditions (Manchanda).

The realist hypothesis focuses on the concept of national interest and national security, which are essentially male bastions. It completely ignores other markers of identity politics, be it class, gender, race, etc. This perspective is strongly contested by feminists, who have questioned the notion of a homogenous national identity. Identity cannot be identified with only self-identification but are actually a part of the wider social identity, to which women are an invisible part (Enloe 1990). 'Feminists from South Asia', argued Anuradha M. Chenoy (2012: 88), 'have shown how women became victim to a masculine notion of identity, that on the one hand used motherhood to identify the nation, but controlled the autonomy of women and denied them equality'.

Similarly, on the question of war and peace, feminists denounce the notion that these issues are to be decided by men and also question the secondary and subservient position accorded to women. 'Feminists', argues Anuradha M. Chenoy (2012: 91), 'see war not just as the impact on women approach, but as a system where the gender stereotypes are re-enforced and gender relations restructured...womenand children are victims of policies that they did not plan or execute'. Moreover, women and children have been victims of war. Sexual exploitation of women takes place in all forms of war, whether it be conventional wars, 'inter-community conflict as well as during ethnic and sectarian conflicts' (Chenoy 2012: 91). Sometimes, the death of male family member cause enormous emotional stress on women.

III

Conclusion

In contrast to the dominant realist/neo-realist notion of state security, feminists support the alternative notion of human security, as suggested by Mahbub-ul-Haq in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Human Development Report in 1994. The notion of human security gives primacy to individual human being, their security, welfare and dignity. And, human security does not have a gender-bias and emphasizes on security of both men and women. Women's human rights and their right to live with dignity form the bedrock of the human security paradigm. 'The centrality of human rights in human security', argued Anuradha M. Chenoy, 're-enforces the claims of the women's movements and is acknowledged by feminist theory and practice' (Chenoy 2012: 92). To conclude, we can argue that absence of physical and emotional violence against women will lay down the basis of comprehensive peace and security for the entire humanity.

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