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Internal Security Of India-A Feminist Perspective

Authored By-Manasi Ahire
University Of Mumbai

Feminist Perspectives On Security Aim To Open Discussion On Human Security Of People¹

We hope to open discussion on the construction of systems of authentic national security based on the human security of people rather than the protection and perpetuation of the interests of the states. The present patriarchal state security system is at best prejudicial to women and at worst openly oppressive of half the human family.

This conceptual core is the assertion that human security derives from the experience and expectation of wellbeing of persons, communities and the planet which sustains them. Human wellbeing, it asserts, depends upon 4 essential conditions for the maintenance and the continuation of human life, a life sustaining environment the meeting of essential physical needs, respect for the identity and dignity of persons and groups, and protection from avoidable harm and expectation of remedy for unavoidable harm.

The major assumption that influences the analyses and the arguments for change presented here is that patriarchy, the hierarchy of power and privilege which advantages men over women, rich over poor and the heavenly armed over the defenseless, is the germinal paradigm from which most major human institutions such as the state, the economy, organized religions and the social relations of the family and community have evolved. The present security systems functions to maintain this global patriarchal hierarchy, the most severe manifestation of which is constant, pervasive and often lethal violence against women. Gender violence is a daily occurrence in virtually all societies. Its severity and frequency is always heightened by regular presence of military, war and armed conflict.

A second significant assumption of the framework and analyses is that the fundamental inequalities inherent in the multiple contemporary forms of patriarchy, evident in most of the world's cultures and institutions, pose obstacles to the realization of the human security of such vast numbers of men and women as to threaten human survival. It is argued that these inequalities must be challenged for the sake of survival, equality and security, each of which we assert to be integral one to the other, and that the approach to that challenge so fundamental and essential to its success as to be imperative is gender.

A third central assumption is that the frustration of the experience and the expectation of human wellbeing is a continuing cause of armed conflict and war. War, in this time of weaponry of unprecedented destructive capacity that produces irreparable environmental damage and infrastructure destruction at enormous economic cost, poses the widest and most serious threat to wellbeing and to the very survival of all life on earth.

These assumptions lead to our central assertion that the present highly militarized global system of state security is not only incompatible with human security but

¹ Muscular nationalism by Sikata Banerjee

represents the foremost barrier to planetary security. Human security, we assert cannot be achieved within this system. The challenge raised here is a call to the transformation of the present system into one intentionally and specifically designed to achieve human security.

According to Bernadette Muthien², Security itself-even as the notion of assurance of protection against great harms to the nation, i.e., national security is a contested term. That contestation for the most part, concerns the issue of what constitutes security, rather than the clarification of the term itself.

We would also contend that the disadvantaged position of women in patriarchy puts in jeopardy the security of most of the human community-even the patriarchy. If women and those who depend upon them are not secure, to what extent can a nation, in the true sense of the word, meaning the people of a state or society, be secure? This is one of the central questions that inform this collection on gendered aspects of significant obstacles to and the possibilities for the achievement of human security.

The Family

What is a family? 'Family' is an institution with a legal identity, and the state recognizes as a family, only in a specific way. A 'family' can only be a patriarchal heterosexual family: a man, his wife, his children.

- **FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS**

In 1984, a judgment of the Delhi High Court said that the Fundamental Rights ensured to every Indian citizen by the Constitution, were not applicable in the family: these rights have to stop at the door of the home. Letting Fundamental Rights into the family, said the judge, would be like 'letting a bull into a China shop'. The judge was in fact, absolutely right. If you bring Fundamental Rights into a family, and every individual in the family is treated as a free and equal citizen that family will collapse. Because the family, as it exists, is based on clearly-established hierarchies of gender and age, with gender triumphing age, that is, an adult male is generally more powerful than an older female.

- **DECISION- MAKING**

In the process of decision-making too, the female opinion is always considered secondary or not at all. Women have no rights to decide, once a decision is made by the family, any challenge to that decision is taken as the challenge to culture, family and their values. Many experts believe that there are about 1000 honor killings a year in India. The basic cause of this social menace is the tradition of caste and control over a women's body and the patriarchal mindset. In the second decade of the 21st century, the term honor killings has come to be routinely used in the context of the Jat community in Haryana, the khap panchayats which have ordered or carried out murders of couples who choose "inappropriate" marriage partners.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had seen the potential of inter-caste marriage for what he called 'the annihilation of castes'. He had stated in 1936, "The real remedy for breaking caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of caste". Evidently, Ambedkar's recognition of inter-caste marriage is being potentially disruptive of caste identities is one that

² Muscular Nationalism by Sikata Banerjee

continues to be shared and feared by Khap Panchayats seventy-five years later. These distinguish themselves from the sarkari panchayats instituted under the State umbrella, and claim greater legitimacy with the community, which may well be true.

- THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR³

One of the key features of this institution is the sexual division of labour. Women are responsible for housework, that is for the reproduction of labor power. The labor that goes into making people capable of working day after day {food, clean homes, clean clothes, rest} is provided by women. There is nothing 'natural' about sexual division of labour. Certain kinds of work are considered to be 'women's work' and other kinds-men's, but more important is the fact that whatever work women do, gets lower wages and is less valued.

This division of labor is interpreted to affect the economic security of women. On one hand, women are supposed to be physically weak and unfit for heavy manual labor but both in the home and outside, they do the heaviest work-carrying heavy loads of water and firewood, grinding corn, transplanting paddy, carrying head loads in mining and construction work. The unpaid work that women perform includes collection of fuel, fodder and water, animal husbandry, pot harvest processing, livestock maintenance, kitchen gardening and raising poultry that augment family resources. However, so naturalized are assumptions about gender roles that the Indian census did not recognize this as work for a long time, since it is not performed for a wage, but is unpaid labor around the family. If women did not do this work these goods would have to be purchased from the market, services hired for a wage, else the family would have to do without.

- THE PLIGHT OF THE DOMESTIC SERVANTS

One estimate of the number of domestic workers {servants} in India is made on the basis of the fact that the white-collared middle class in India is around three crores. Assuming most of these would have a maid, and that some would be in the same family, the number of domestic workers is likely to be more than 1.5 crores.

There's nothing inherently demeaning about cleaning up other people's homes or cooking for them for a wage, it could be just another job. But not in India, there the work has the worst aspects of both feudalism and capitalism.

The callousness of the Indian middle classes towards their servants outdoes the worst excesses of feudalism. They are treated as less than human, less than pet animals. Apart from facing physical and sexual abuse-which is common-domestic workers perform heavy unrelenting toil, for they have no specific work hours if live-in, no days off or yearly vacations if part-time.

Formerly, the feudal family servant could at least expect to be broadly looked after in times of need, but the modern servant can at best expect small loans for personal emergencies, to be deducted from the pittance they are paid. On the other hand, a capitalist work contract could be more dignified than a feudal situation-two parties mutually deciding terms and conditions. It can also be more alienating than the generations-old feudal bond, with no human relationship beyond the lines of the contract but, atleast in principle, it is more equal. The Indian servant knows neither the safety net of the feudal servitor nor the formal equality of the capitalist contract, at the same time he or she bears both the humiliation of the feudal hierarchy and the cold exploitation of the capitalism.

³ Seeing Like a Feminist By Nivedita Menon

The family is the basic unit of socialization and the smallest replica of the state. The state constitutes societies and societies constitute families. Looking at the security of this fundamental unit thus becomes imperative. Without recognizing the security concerns at his level, it would be unfair to talk about the security issues at the national level.

The Society

'I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved'-Dr.B.R.Ambedkar

Quite true! In this respect, the security of a community should also be judged by the degree of security felt by women of the community. And this security should be whole some involving psychological, financial, social and physical. The human security, emphasizing sustainable development, social justice, human rights, gender equality and democracy.

On a cold December night in 2012, a 23-yr old woman, a paramedical student was brutally gang raped and grievously assaulted and her male friend injured in a private transport bus in India's capital city, Delhi. While the young woman was battling for life in hospital and following her death, two weeks later, there was an outpouring of outrage and grief not only in Delhi but across the cities and smaller towns of India, a phenomenon perhaps unparalleled in recent history of public agitation in the country. The nation-wide outcry was primarily directed against the apathy and insensitivity of the criminal justice system of the state, as seen in the abysmally low conviction rate in rape cases {24% in 2011, National Crime Records Bureau}.

In July 2004, the army picked up Manorma Devi from her home in Manipur, took her away to an unknown destination, raped her and shot her dead. Her body was found in the fields the next day. Under the workings of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act {AFSPA} in operation in the northeast since 1958, the army has complete immunity from civil courts and has over the last 50 yrs. functioned outside the ambit of law. The discontent over army violations in the region exploded in Manipur after the rape and killing of Manorma Devi. There were demonstrations and bandhs, yet most of characteristically took little note of what was happening in Manipur. Then one day a group of Manipuri women stripped them naked and demonstrated in front of the headquarters of the army in Imphal during the army to come and rape them, they held banners that screamed, 'Indian Army rape us, Indian Army come take our flesh. Suddenly and predictably the media in India picked up the pictures and the account of the demonstration from the local media, finally, the rest of India sat up and took notice. All over Manipur and other states of the Northeast, as well as in many cities across India, civil rights groups demanded the unconditional withdrawal of the AFSPA. Given the violence of the events triggered off by the incident, including the self-immolation by a protester, some response by the state beamed imperative.; first the state in Manipur, and then at the Centre announced measures to placate the outraged response from the people. Among the measures was a committee to review the AFSPA and the Act was withdrawn in 7 constituencies in Imphal, despite opposition from the Centre. It remains in force in Manipur as in many other states and the findings of the Commission set up to review the Act are yet to be made public.

And even as all this was hitting the media, how many of us have become aware that there is by now an over six-yr.-long fast unto death happening at this very moment by a courageous woman, Irom Sharmila, who has been demanding the lifting of the AFSPA since 2000 and that she was till recently being force fed in a hospital, and that the state controls and decides who can have access to her?

Miranda Alison explains that the male urge to rape in a conflict zone is related to their aggression physical strength and natural role as protectors of females, who are submissive nurturers and givers of life. Alison talks about 'our women', in contrast to 'their women' and 'our men' to 'their men' during conflict. Masculinity defines men during conflict and gives them the "duty" to protect 'their women'.

Susan Brownmiller {1975} makes the case that rape is about the exercise of power over women. Her study of rape scrutinizes war-time rape that has existed throughout history in all locations. It calls attention to the crime of rape as intrinsic to the military in and out of combat as a constant threatening reality for women in the areas of military presence, and indeed within the military.

Rape is seen not only as a form of sexual violence but also as a method to show power and domination. In the famous legend, Mahabharata, which saw the public humiliation of Queen Draupadi being disrobed by the wicked Dussasana, it was notably believed that Dussasana, a weak and fable man who could never win even a small fight against others, used his opportunity to show his might and ability by humiliating a woman.

In the Dalit massacres, like the Bhotmange's incident, wherein the women of the house were publicly raped by members of the village, rape was used as a way of humiliating and bringing to notice the fact that the victims were Dalits who did not deserve education, agricultural prosperity or a well-dignified life. When on one hand men are brutally killed, women are gang raped and then killed as rape is considered as worse than death for a woman and in turns her family, her community.

It is axiomatic to say that the war system impoverishes human security. When the object of armed conflict is genocide and it implements include rape, sexual mutilation, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy, the battleground is women's bodies and the stakes can be survival of a whole people.

Many women are raped in the presence of the family members both to increase the woman's sense of humiliation and to underline the powerlessness of victim's husbands and fathers. In other words, sexual violation of women is a means of communicating defeat to men of the subordinate ground. When, out of their own feelings of shame, men abandon their families and communities, the subordinate groups, social structures is further weakened.

Women are also raped in front of the whole villages, again increasing their violation while also intimidating the onlookers thereby all villagers to flee. In as much as the object of genocide is not so much the physical death of a people, as it's social and territorial death, rape in public is a powerful tactic. For most people. National identity encompasses not just intangibles such as language and religion, but also physical connection with a particular place. When that place becomes a site of torture, it ceases to be a home and instead becomes a place of horror, to be fled both in fact and in memory. Compared to rapes by an individual, gangrape can be more violent, more injurious and more humiliating for the victim. It can also serve to forge bonds among the gang members, heightening their sense of themselves as both sexually and ethically dominant.

Dalit Feminism⁴

There is a major difference between the Dalit women and the Hindu Dominant castes hierarchical women. Since these very women are unable to understand segregation {Apartheid}, Untouchability, Slavery, Massacres and regular atrocities. The same is reflecting on the Feminists particularly on those who are hailing from the Dominant castes. But Dalit women and the women of the productive and food security relations with natural resources. These women are skilled, productive and knowledgeable in livelihood productions.

When we look at Dalit woman, she has the knowledge of crafts, food grains, land for agriculture, whereas the Hindu Dominant castes women are not skilled enough to produce such things but they have skills only in managing the lands as property and ownership including bossism on the untouchable agricultural labourers, including women. Feminists hailing from dominant castes in India are not considering all these factors even to this day.

The question of reproductive rights and democratic space within the family system rather than subjugation of women is the central issue in the Feminist Movement in India. Women should be able to enjoy democratic rights within the family. Discussion on these particular issues was started by dominant –caste Feminists, yet the very reproductive rights, social, productive rights always remained part of Dalit and also artisan community women's life. The position taken by Dalit Feminism is that these particular rights of Dalit women and families in particular are controlled by the Hindu Dominant caste system. And this is going on in all the villages in India as the Dalit families, work under them as labourers since it is the Dalits who only have all the productive agricultural knowledge. So, it is mostly Dalit women for whom the reproductive rights are necessary for their family, community, and for social production for entire society rather than for mere Dalit family.

Fight Against Brahmanical Patriarchy

For a Dalit woman, apart from herself, her husband is also a slave and both of them including the children and the entire family and entire Dalit community are untouchables and become victims in the hands of dominant castes all the time according to the Varna Ashrama Dharma system, whereas Hindu Dominant caste women fight against their Head of the family {that is her husband, her father- in- law, etc}. And those who benefit from Brahmanism in spite of opposing patriarchy do not fight the Hindu Brahmanical patriarchy. In the Varna Caste system, no individual is allowed to live individually. The Hindu Brahmanical patriarchy within the Varna caste system not only deprives all the Dalit and Artisan castes including its women but also denies them basic livelihoods and sustenance only to push them into slavery, untouchability and segregation. Thus, the oppressed castes fight against the Brahmanical patriarchy and Varna dharma.

HEALTH⁵

“What for example is the cause’ of death of a starving person caught in a civil war, who ends up in a refugee camp and then dies of measles?”-W.P.Falcon and R.L.Naylor

Health is fundamental to the human experience. It is also the outcome of human experience; humans work to create and use resources that result in health and wellbeing, such

⁴ In Conversation with Shyamala Gogu. Rajkumar Eligedi.

Writers in Conversation Vol 1. No.1, February 2014

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/writers> in conversations/

⁵ Muscular Nationalism By Sikata Banerjee

as food education or leisure. Positive endeavor lead to greater social, capital, success and even positions of social dominance thus increasing the overall wellbeing and life expectancy for both individuals and communities. In situations where freedoms are denied, education not provided, work not done or environments in which violence, inequity and exclusion are common, there are often negative effects on health. Thus, health becomes a lot more than just a product of medicine-it becomes an outcome of the effects of these social and environmental 'determinants' of health. For health and development workers, this represents a paradigm shift in thinking to improve health; we need to challenge the underlying injustices and social conditions which lead to poor health outcomes.

In establishing a connection between poverty, inequality, exclusion and violence, health can be analyzed not as a medical problem, but as a human security issue. The consequences of violence-injuries, preventable deaths, torture, effects on the environment, food and water, livelihoods and social exclusion-have profound effects on the health of communities.

Recently, there was news of the death, of a mother who died due to ignorance of the medical authorities after giving birth to her child at Thane. This news serves as an eye opener to the lack of medical facilities that the lower classes and the greater victims i.e. the women of those families are receiving by the state. On one hand, we have celebrities getting special attention in cases of swine flu and on the other hand, every day there are increasing numbers of people dying out of it in government hospitals.

THE STATE

⁶V. Spike Peterson's analysis of the state as a gendered institution opens up a discussion on the subject of security that has long been assumed to be primarily within the realm of the nation state. By looking at the historical processes of the state system promises, Peterson {1992} examines the relationship of state and security by identifying the state as so gendered as to account for the systemic insecurity of women.

Muscular Nationalism

When we end up singing our national anthem 'Jana-Gana-Mana' it has become like a reflex action to shout instantly, 'Bharatmata Ki Jai'. Well, how did this concept of 'Bharat Mata' come up? Who determined India was preferably 'she' rather than a 'he'? These questions bring us to the interesting and important concept of muscular nationalism.

Motherhood, the virtuous wife, and the cowardly man are all entangled in a particular story of gender and nation-muscular nationalism. Briefly put, muscular nationalism...nation. This gendered binary remains stable as long as women do not act to challenge the expectations of chastity. It centers man versus chaste woman.

- ⁷In 1974, the Indian government published a report, towards equality, that puts status women forcefully on the national agenda by arguing that the position of Indian women had declined, not improved since 1911 {Committee on the status of women, 1974}. As a

⁶ Muscular Nationalism –Sikata BANERJEE

⁷ Redefining and Feminising Security-Rita Manchanda, EPW, Accessed on 24/08/2010

result, development and progress became gender issues. Data on gender discrimination in employment, education, land distribution, inheritance, nutrition and health became impossible to overlook.

Women's issues entered the fields of culture, religion and law, of family and community structures, of the problems of official responses to population, poverty, illiteracy, labor, and the new social movements of Dalits, environmentalists, tribals, anti-dam activists, peasants and trade unions.

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, taking stock of the first 50th independence celebrations, comments that in all these discourses, disciplines and sites of action, gender began to figure as an 'issue' as well as category of analysis. {Rajan 1999:3}.

The primary identity of an Indian male or female is citizenship whose basic definition offers a promise of equality and justice within the nation's democratic constitutional framework. Repeatedly; however, this promise is undermined by the masculinity, of nationalist ideology fiction of citizenship and the malleability of law. Instead of offering an alternative space, the nation often simply functions as an extension of family, caste and community structures and defines women as belonging in the same way as their structures. This belonging definition is contradictory, implying both "affiliated with" and "owned by". The first interpretation connotes voluntary participatory membership, the second a secondary functionalist and symbolic status. And both are constantly overlooked because social, political order is defined through women's ownership by and place in structures of family and community.

Human Security In The Militarized State

A feminist concept and framework of security to challenge the militarized state security system, calls attention to the gendered effects of that system as they impact particularly women. Through study of the gender experience of women, a feminist perspective also sheds light on the ways in which human security is destroyed by armed conflict and is systematically weakened by all forms of militarized security.

The three major problems with the present international security system that prevent it from assuring the conditions of comprehensive human security are: it is dominantly masculine rather than fully human in conception, it is designed to achieve the security of the state rather than that of persons or human groups and what is most readily evident, it addresses only one of four fundamental sources of human wellbeing—a life-sustaining environment, fulfillment of needs for survival and health, respect for individual and group dignity and identity and protection from the most severe effects of those harms the society will take care to mitigate the consequences thereof. That dominant masculinity concept—that is men's gendered perspective—of security emphasizes protection of the state from harm by other states at tragic cost to the other three sources of human security.

So, we see the need for a profound change in thinking and for widening the pool for the educated, striving, for greater sophistication of security thinking for greater sophistication of weaponry. However, we seek to shift the thinking from contemplation of greater potential for destruction to contemplation of greater potential for human well-being.

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