



INHERENT GENDERED ROLES IN WARS

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Abstract

Consistently, Gendered character is inherent in the ongoing process of warfare across human cultures. Therefore, the research focuses on analyzing the gendered issue of war and how war roles are mostly differentiated based on gender. Men and women perform a variety of roles in war which either establish gender hierarchy or transform gender relations in significant ways and also invoke femininity and masculinity in significant ways. The study also throws light on the role of women in shaping the war consequences and their victimization in warfare. The research findings also suggest the ways that need to be done to achieve Gender parity in warfare. Overall, at the end, we will be able to understand the prominent role of war and gender in social life how war and gender influence each other, and the gendered relationship of society.

Keywords: *Gendered roles, warfare, masculinity, femininity, victims of war, gender parity*

Introduction

Since ancient times wars have nurtured ‘militarized masculinity’ both socially and politically (Enloe, 2000). Wars are generally associated with courage, valor, and aggressiveness which are men’s characteristics (Parashar, 2015, p. 101). War Roles are mostly differentiated based on gender considering men as primary (and generally only) fighters (Goldstein, 2001). Fighting war is mostly considered to be the occupation of male warriors. Whereas women are poorly represented (fewer than 1%). Only 5% of women are in the armed forces even though women have acquired social and political power globally. Thus, women are largely excluded from War and Hunting. Therefore, feminists consider the gender hierarchy as part of mainstream society which is further extended to the social order produced by war.

Historically, the rise of states and civilization after the Neolithic Revolution was already a male domain. Earlier, Horses were used in the war which can be ridden by men as well as women but still women's horse riders were not included in the war. This can be due to the belief that women's physical strength is weaker than men's. But even when the mechanization of war took place and no longer physical strength was required, women’s role in a war barely affected the gender division. Non-state societies indulge more in warfare than states (Ember & Ember, Cross-cultural studies of war and peace: Recent achievements and future possibilities, 1994) might be because of physical isolation from their neighbors (Goldstein, 2001). The deep roots of



gendered roles in war don't lie in any particular historical stage (agricultural, industrial, etc.), It is the human experience that has made war a male-dominated arena.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The objective of the research article is to understand the contributions made by the women in making the war successful or unsuccessful. It will also highlight the reasons behind the consistency of gender roles in war and the challenges women face as main victims of war in public and private sphere

METHODOLOGY

While exploring the gendered issues of women in war, the study used descriptive and analytical studies, also making a comparative study while analyzing issues of traditional and current scenarios. Several internet sources and articles & Journals of research scholars are used to make it more comprehensive. Inductive and Deductive methods are also applied during this research. To meet the objective of the research, the study has adopted multi prolonged methodology, pursuing the combination of relevant methods and approaches to data collection including primary and secondary sources. Qualitative research techniques like descriptive methods have also been used while charts and diagrams are used for data representation. The database required for the study is:

- Published and unpublished reports, and documents from various international organizations, government, semi-government, and private sources
- Newspaper and other weekly and monthly magazines
- Relevant websites on Google Scholar

SOURCES

Primary Data Sources

The primary Survey will be based on both direct observation and interview techniques carried out by self-determined questionnaires and personal interviews.

- Informal interviews
- Visual observation of phenomenon and development activities



- General discussion with friends and colleagues chosen randomly to obtain their views on gender bias issues in the military.

Secondary Data sources: Information was collected from various departments associated with the concerned Research topic:

- Government and semi-government departments
- International Organizations

GENDERED INDUCEMENT IN WAR

Different types of war across different cultures and in different times and spaces have one thing in common i.e., their gendered character (Goldstein, 2001, pp. 6-9) whereas gendered roles outside war are organized in an almost infinite variety of ways (Sanday, 1981, p. 1). In the war system, the functional role of women has been credited to masculinity. It is evident in historical experience where societies have seen the man who fought as heroic not as cowards. Most of these are gendered inducements that made man serve in war which is constructed as a test of manhood.

“Man is made not born” _ Simone de Beauvoir (Gilmore, 1990, pp. 11-20)

To become man and achieve manhood, men must take action and undergo ordeals or past tests. For instance, in some war-prone societies, there is a ritual where a man has to kill an enemy to marry or if he wants to be called a man. Such kinds of tests adapt males to war. Psychologically, survivors of war (both male and female) are prone to post-traumatic stress disorder *but* men are more exposed to combat trauma than females.

VICTIMIZATION OF WOMEN IN WARFARE (Public and Private sphere)

War often tried to produce and uphold patriarchal social order whereas women are often seen as upholders of social and cultural values of any war. Female bodies and their identities became the possession on which wars are waged and ideologies are played out (Parashar, 2015). It is in this context that females are the main victims of actual and symbolic rape, abduction, and strategical genocide during wartime and even in the aftermath of war. Women and children of the defeated state are often made slaves after war by the victorious. They are affected both physically and emotionally in very intimate ways. For example U.S. soldiers' intercourse with Italian women



(in US-occupied Italy) in return for cash, food, or even by force (Costello, 1986, pp. 97,99,262). Prostitution was encouraged by military commanders to prevent AIDS. However, in the current scenario, *Geneva Convention* has illegalized forced prostitution and rape in wartime. Female workers also played a major role in the army and civilian workforces and faced additional economic hardship in wartime. In the changing nature of war, they are considered both victims and survivors. As survivors of war, they have significantly affected gender norms. Modern warfare doesn't make a distinction between combatants and civilians. A large number of women and children died and were injured due to attacks by unmanned drones, landmines, explosive devices, suicide bombs, and random shootings. It has been reported that in the Iraq wars, 10% of violent deaths were of women since 2003. They became forced widows after the deaths of their husbands in war. Wives whose husbands go missing are considered to be half widows (neither wives nor widows) and didn't even receive the legal support to which widows are entitled.¹ Thus, females are disproportionately affected by wars and conflicts but still there exist moments of empowerment and agency in their war experiences. (Parashar, 2015)

WOMEN PATRONIZING WAR

Women's role in warfare is distinct in different cultural societies but generally, women don't oppose war rather they support it (Goldstein, 2001, pp. 301-322). However, society doesn't want women to fight in wars but indirectly they are also part of war. As **wives**, they perform ceremonial activities and other supportive activities (like dancing, singing, and remaining chaste) when their husbands go to war. For instance: According to Goldschmidt, Rwanda women bared their breasts and urged men to war (Goldschmidt, 1989, pp. 23-24). Even *Zulu women* too ran naked before departing warriors (Turner-High, 1971, p. 161). They also shame and insult men if male prove to be unsuccessful warriors. For example: In 1973 at Chile's coup women of the right wing threw corn at soldiers to taint them as chickens. In *Arikara culture*, American Indian women used to dance in their husband's clothes during two-day war ceremonies. Women are also witnesses to male bravery. They also perform the role of **nurses** during the war for injured soldiers and also help them in long-term recovery from combat trauma.



Figure1 Depicting violence on women, doing domestic work, shown as widows and nurses

Source: 1862 Harper's Weekly newspaper, "Our Women and the War"

Moreover, **mothers** can play a transforming role in changing the gender biases in war as child upbringing depends on mothers. So, if they train girls to be aggressive and boys to be passive, tough girls can also go to war. But in reality, it is vice-versa. They raise boys as warriors and girls as passive. Women are excluded from combat roles but they still patronize war in other ways such as by joining raids or war parties. For example: *Apache girls* and young women received physical training including riding and using knives, bows, and rifles while males were away. Thus, females through various ways participate in and support the war by promoting and rewarding warrior roles for males.

CAN WOMEN FIGHT WARS!!

Women not only supported wars but she participated in fighting too. For instance: the most famous *Apache women* warrior was *Lozen* who led and won battles over US forces but this doesn't generalize the fact that all Apache women participate in war (Goldstein, 2001, pp. 113-114). Even some women of native American and Iron Age Eurasian steppes also participated in fighting. In fact, in some battles, war prisoners are tortured and killed by women as done by Massachusetts in the 17th century and by Afghan women in the 19th century. Apart from this, women as soldiers are also prominent in the Dahomey kingdom of West Africa which showcases the spectacular example of an effective permanent standing women combat. Several individual women also fought in disguise in the US Civil War, World War I, etc. but were never depicted as frontline warriors. However, such are exceptional cases. Even in World War II, out of 800000 women, a few thousand women were seen in combat roles (apart from women as medical

workers).



Figure 2 Women at War: World War II

Source: *The Atlantic*, Alan Tylor

They participated as anti-aircraft gunners, pilots, snipers, and infantrywomen. This incident indicates that women fought as efficiently as men.¹ Guerrilla armies also consisted of women fighters, especially in the Cold War and post-Cold War era. For example: FMLN in Central America, Vietnamese communities, Tamil tiger of Sri Lanka, etc. also appointed women guerrillas. Women were also in partisan forces of Yugoslavia, Italy, Greece, France, Poland, and Denmark.² Thus, Women can also be mobilized into combat support and can become effective military leaders (“warrior queens”). Additionally, they are supportive actors at the bottom of military hierarchies.

However, their experiences are only documented as victims and worst sufferers of war, only men are recognized in their war roles. However, participation and support of women in combat roles in military and non-military states vary from culture to culture. For example, women who fought in the military resistance of Kashmiri were different from that of Tamil women who fought in Sri Lanka to the Maoist resistance in Nepal. Several women continued to participate in war and perceived the advocates of rape and violence as their ‘enemy’ (Parashar, 2015).

CONSISTENCY OF GENDERED ROLES IN WAR

❖ Causes of Gender biases in warfare

- It is often believed that the biological *aspect* of males is the main factor behind the association of terms like war and aggression with males. Testosterone is the key to aggression (Konner, 1988, p. 33). On average, woman is considered less strong than men. Males have an upper hand over females due to higher spatial abilities than females. Still, there is no possible explanation for not including women in combat roles as an exceptional minority of females are stronger, spatially adept, and more competitive than males (Goldstein, 2001, pp. 128-182). Thus, still, women's role in warfare is significantly low (fig 3)

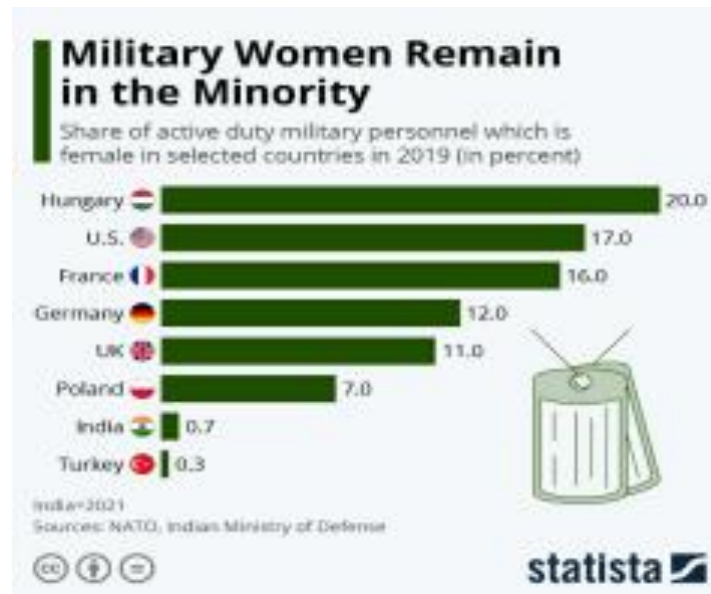


Fig 3: Source: Katharina Buchholz, Sept 23, 2021

- Gender inequality at the domestic level can also be one of the reasons that states make wars (Sjoberg p.134). It also led to the “*male supremacist complex*” (Harris, 1974, pp. 83-107) i.e., the male has so-called God complex types that they are superior to females.
- According to most cross-cultural studies, activities like wife beating (along with war-like sports), beliefs in malevolent magic, several criminal punishments, and feuding are seen in societies with frequent wars. Thus, to some extent, the frequency



of war can be correlated with gender inequality cross-culturally but modestly and evenly. (Goldstein, 2001)

- *Pattern of Marriage & Disloyalty of Women:* One of the reasons for practicing endogamy (within one's community) marriage system was also because husbands had to go to war outside their community. So, when war happened between different communities, then there was a myth that women might have mixed loyalties towards their current husbands and their family of origin. Therefore, due to disloyalty problems, they are excluded from warfighting, planning, and access to weapons. (Adams, 1983). However, the participation of females in war is more matrilineal than patrilineal. However, the majority of wars were done by patrilineal societies.

Thus, women's participation in wars was quite low but this understanding of war does not truly explain the gendered war roles as there are 2/3rd of cultures where marriage patterns vary. Polygyny is practiced mostly in that society where there is a high mortality rate of men in warfare (Ember, Warfare, Sex Ratio, and Polygyny, 1974)

WOMEN AND PEACE

Generally, it is assumed that masculinity is related to aggression and men are inclined towards violence and wars whereas femininity is emotional and passive and females' natural inclination is towards peace and non-violence. Therefore, war as a social institution upholds its gendered character. However, there is a clear division between sexes where men are seen in combatant roles and women as victims of injuries for whom honor wars are fought. A famous example of such an honor war is '*Mahabharata*' which was fought to take revenge for disrespect to Draupadi by *Pandavas*. Radical feminists claimed that women are associated with peace and rejected the idea of women fighting in men's wars. Thus, linking equality with peacefulness may be the deconstruction of gendered political and social structures of gender subordination (Sjoberg p.138)

Women are also seen in peacekeeping roles as mediators in negotiating wars. For instance, Andamanese Islands women settle quarrels and bring it to an end. Husbands take their wives to enemy villages as wives depict that they desire peace. This was the case among Kawai-Papua. In the 19th century in modern societies, peace activism was started by women for suffrage rights. However, the challenge posed to peace activism was that it indirectly led to the masculinization of war by interpreting peace as feminine and creating a mechanism where men are induced to fight. Thus, if we consider peace *as feminine* that means we see war as a symbol of *masculinity* the term which is generally associated with men. However, in a literal sense masculinity doesn't refer to men or women the term masculinity simply justifies the strength and aggressive nature.



The same is the case with femininity. Thus, there can be masculine women and feminine men.

WAY FORWARD/ SUGGESTIONS

- The gendered experience of female soldiers should be taken into account to frame effective policies in post-conflict periods according to Sierra Leone and Megan Mackenzie. If the war experience of women is excluded that means we are excluding them from peace and development initiatives in the post-war movement.
- During war women are expected to cope with the number of injuries and their health system therefore training support should be provided to health systems that can enable them to deal with such situations. (Puechguirbal, 2009)
- Gender issues should also be incorporated into conflict and security analysis.
- Several International Agreements such as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and 1820 have acknowledged the importance of protecting women in situations of conflict and fragility. Such roles of international Agreements need to be consolidated and executed to achieve gender equality during the war and after the war.
- The role of women in conflict resolution and state-building in sustaining peace should also be encouraged.
- To improve the impact of gender training on other men, males should be engaged as trainers. For an effective gender mainstreaming process, gender responsiveness should be developed among top managers.

Major Findings

- In such a period of mechanization of war, the participatory and supportive role of women in war indicates that women are as efficient as men in fighting wars and also led successful wars irrespective of their biological aspects. Such context can be seen in the examples mentioned in this research.
- Women are the major victims and survivors of war. They have to face violence both in the public sphere (on the battlefield) and in the private sphere (domestic level) as a wife, widows, nurses, prisoners of war, etc.
- Women's participation in peace discussions and negotiations helps prevent conflict from recurring.
- Gender equality is the key element in the prevention of violent conflict and is a key factor in a country's security and stability.



Conclusion

It can be concluded that women's voices are critical in engendering or sustaining war and in its resolution (Parashar, 2015). There are many stakeholders and multiple experiences of war which are gendered for both men and women. Women's bodies become the gendered turf for many years if masculinity is deployed to preserve the conditions that perpetuate wars. The almost omnipresent nature of consistent gendered roles suggests that there is no single factor that can explain the near universality of gender roles in relationships how gender influences war roles and in turn how war influences the range of cultural patterns of sex and gender within those societies. Without war, such gender relationships could be quite different than what exists.

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