



The Masculinization of War and Peace: Women in Conflict Zones

Dr. Rakesh Kumar Chandrakar

Assistant Professor (Political Science)
Mahant Laxminarayan Das College,
Raipur(C.G.)

Mrs. Dhanlaxmi Diwan
Assistant Professor (Journalism Dept)
Mahant Laxminarayan Das College,
Raipur(C.G.)

Abhilasha Singh

High School Educator and Counsellor
Rajkumar College, Raipur(C.G.)

Abstract:

“The Masculinization of War and Peace: Women in Conflict Zones” critically examines how war and peace are structured through masculinist frameworks that render women's experiences peripheral and their agency invisible. Drawing from feminist international relations and postcolonial theory, the article argues that both the conduct of war and the processes of peacebuilding disproportionately affect women, particularly in the form of sexual violence, exclusion from formal political processes, and post-war marginalization. Yet women are not merely passive victims—they are often active participants, organizers, and peacebuilders. The essay explores how feminist redefinitions of security and intersectional approaches can help create more inclusive and sustainable forms of peace, challenging the dominant narratives of international politics and statecraft.

“Wars are fought by men, but women carry the burden of peace.”

This oft-repeated phrase reflects a truth embedded in both the political architecture of war and the gendered aftermath of peacebuilding. The gendered nature of conflict has long been a blind spot in mainstream political science, which often treats war and peace as gender-neutral phenomena. However, feminist political theorists argue that both war and peace are deeply **masculinized constructs**, shaping and shaped by patriarchal structures. This article explores how women experience conflict zones—not merely as passive victims but also as active participants, and how post-conflict politics frequently excludes them from the decision-making processes that define national futures.

I. The Gendered Architecture of War

Theorists like **Cynthia Enloe** have long challenged the state-centric, male-dominated narrative of conflict. She argues that war is not merely about battlefield violence but involves a wide spectrum of social, economic, and symbolic acts that are deeply gendered. War zones are not only sites of physical conflict but also of intensified patriarchal control.

For example, during armed conflict, **sexual violence is often used strategically**, not just spontaneously. It becomes a weapon of war—a means of ethnic cleansing, humiliation, and domination. The experiences of women in the Rwandan genocide, the Bosnian War, and more recently, the conflicts in Syria and Sudan, show how rape and sexual slavery become institutionalized tools of terror.

Moreover, militarization fosters hypermasculinity. It glorifies traits like aggression, physical dominance, and emotional suppression—while simultaneously feminizing peace, compassion, and vulnerability. This dichotomy reinforces the perception of men as “protectors” and women as those who must be protected, rendering women politically passive in war narratives.

II. Women as Agents: Beyond Victimhood

While women are disproportionately affected by war, they are not merely victims. In many conflict zones, **women play active roles as combatants, informants, peacekeepers, and resisters**. However, mainstream political discourse often ignores or downplays this participation.

Consider the **Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka**, where women constituted nearly 30% of the fighting force. In Colombia, the **FARC guerrilla movement** included thousands of female combatants. These women often challenge traditional gender roles, yet paradoxically, their political agency is often erased once the war ends. They are disarmed, demobilized, and expected to return to domesticity—rarely recognized as political actors in the peace process.

Furthermore, women's activism in civil society during conflicts is a powerful form of political resistance. For instance, **Liberian women**, led by Leymah Gbowee, played a pivotal role in ending the civil war through nonviolent protests and grassroots diplomacy. Despite their critical contribution, they had to fight for a seat at the formal peace negotiation table—highlighting how even peace processes are gatekept by masculinist institutions.

III. The Masculinization of Peacebuilding

Peace is often imagined as a return to “normalcy,” which implicitly assumes a return to **pre-conflict patriarchal gender orders**. This renders post-conflict reconstruction efforts deeply masculinized. **Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR)** programs, for example, typically target male combatants, sidelining female ex-combatants or civilians whose labor and trauma are no less consequential.

Even international interventions reproduce gender hierarchies. The United Nations, despite its normative commitments to gender equality (see **UN Security Council Resolution 1325**), has frequently failed to ensure women's substantive participation in peace processes. Women make up fewer than 10% of negotiators in most formal peace talks globally, a statistic that reveals the deep-rooted exclusionary nature of post-war political settlements.

Moreover, reconstruction programs prioritize infrastructure and state-building over social healing and care work—areas in which women are disproportionately engaged. Feminist scholars argue that such priorities reflect a **gendered notion of “security”**, one that values territorial integrity and economic stabilization over human security, psychological wellbeing, and community resilience.

IV. Intersectionality in Conflict Zones

It is also crucial to recognize that gender does not operate in isolation. Women's experiences in conflict are shaped by race, ethnicity, class, caste, sexuality, and religion. For instance, Dalit and Adivasi women in India's Maoist conflict zones are more likely to face sexual violence from state forces, but their suffering is underreported due to both caste and gender biases. Similarly, in Israel-Palestine, Palestinian women face the dual burden of settler colonialism and patriarchal oppression.

Queer and trans individuals face specific vulnerabilities in conflict zones—from sexual violence to being denied humanitarian aid and legal recognition. Their erasure from the gender discourse in peacebuilding efforts further limits the transformative potential of post-conflict societies.

V. Feminist Alternatives: Rethinking Peace and Security

Feminist scholars propose a redefinition of security—from a militaristic, state-centered model to a **people-centered, gender-just framework**. The concept of “**human security**”, as articulated by UNDP and feminist IR theorists, emphasizes freedom from fear and want, and the ability to live in dignity. This includes protection from gender-based violence, access to reproductive healthcare, food security, and meaningful political participation.

A successful example of feminist peacebuilding can be seen in **Rwanda**, where women's representation in Parliament (over 60%) was ensured through post-genocide constitutional reforms. While not perfect, this has allowed for more gender-responsive policies and a broader dialogue on justice and reconciliation.

Internationally, **feminist foreign policies** adopted by countries like Sweden and Canada offer new models of diplomacy that center gender equality, demilitarization, and global solidarity. Though still nascent, these approaches challenge the masculinist logic of international relations.

Conclusion: Gendered Futures of Peace

The masculinization of war and peace is not just a reflection of gender bias; it is a **structural feature of the international political system**. Women in conflict zones embody a complex political identity—they are survivors, warriors, peacemakers, and revolutionaries. Yet, state institutions, peacekeeping bodies, and even academia continue to marginalize their roles.

To transform the politics of conflict and peace, we must recognize that **feminist peace is not a “softer” peace—it is a more just one**. It calls for dismantling power hierarchies, democratizing peace processes, and valuing the full spectrum of human experiences, especially those rendered invisible by patriarchal systems. Only then can we move beyond token inclusion and build truly sustainable and inclusive peace.

References: -

- Cohn, Carol. 1987. "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12 (4): 687–718.
- Enloe, Cynthia. 1990. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gbowee, Leymah. 2011. *Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer, and Sex Changed a Nation at War*. New York: Beast Books.
- Manchanda, Rita. 2001. *Women, War and Peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Meger, Sara. 2016. *Rape Loot Pillage: The Political Economy of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1984. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Boundary 2* 12 (3): 333–58.
- Otto, Dianne. 2006. "A Sign of 'Weakness'? Disrupting Gender Certainties in the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325." *Michigan Journal of Gender & Law* 13 (1): 113–75.
- UN Women. 2015. *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*. New York: United Nations.