

# Locating women's 'identity' in 'identity struggle': victims of conflict and violence.

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## INTRODUCING THE PROBLEM

The search for identity of diverse groups has been a living phenomenon in today's politics. Ethnic assertion, revivalism, and the quest for a separate state are the major trajectories around which such identity struggle revolves.

The present paper seeks to examine how women becomes the marginalized group and mere recipient of violence during the identity struggle and how the identity of women constructed around her biological self is reduced to the identity of a territorial landmark that needs to be 'protected' by their community and 'conquered' by the enemy. Within this tussle it is the women who are the victims of different form of violence like rape, forced prostitution, during the time of war, which is further a representation and celebration of militant masculinity.

Women who are the victims of war rape also suffer from post war violence in the form of rejection by husband , family and community because of the stigma associated with 'rape' who ultimately are forced to live a miserable life. Further if in some cases women are accepted by their family they face another form of violence within the family i.e. domestic violence. The paper also aims to address the problems and issues that women suffers in pre-war period where their physical mobility is curbed and their personal i.e. their body becomes political which is always under surveillance, followed by war where their body is brutalized and post war trauma which includes rejection from family, spousal violence followed by suicide.

## UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE:

Violence in sociological parlance can be simply defined as deviance, breaking societal norms and values, creating turmoil and disorder in society. Violence in Durkhemian sense can be understood as a normative aspect that helps to strengthen the norms of society that governs the life of the actors

Reiss and Roth (1993)<sup>1</sup> in their work 'Understanding And Preventing Violence' comprehended the definition of violence underlying its basis on human behavior, whereby human desires and actions are shaped by the urge to harm others whom they conceptualize as hostile. Such actors are in the state of rebelliousness filled with the temperance of harmful intent that can cause both physical and psychological harm. While referring to actors perpetuating or receiving violence Reiss and Roth did not categories how violence differs in nature and forms across inter-sections of human category however scholar like Benjamin and Fancy (1998) looked at the gender dimension of violence providing the definition of gender based violence as that form of violence which is inflicted on person on the basis of the gender category that the person belongs. They further argue that gender categorization of role and responsibilities or duties which are socially constructed are responsible for the perpetuation of such violence.

These forms of violence are witnessed during the time of conflicts that takes place during various movements where women and children become the major causality. Although both men and women undergoes the trauma of violence both during and after the conflicts, the nature and forms of violence underpinning the experiences of violence varies among both men and women. The differences in experience are shaped by two important factors. Firstly, the biological difference between men and women is regarded responsible for shaping such variation in experiencing violence between men and women. Secondly, the gendered construction of violence and its socio-cultural implications.

However before beginning the discussion on the violence that woman undergoes during the time of conflict it is important to understand the pre-war situation and the role of women. (How route to empowerment is curbed by patrolling sexuality)

## DURING CONFLICT:

The forms of violence that women undergoes during conflicts includes, rape, forced prostitutions etc. If we look around the studies or work around the issue of violence, the act of rape occupies a central theme of debate which falls under the psychopathological model of study. This notion was challenged by Brownmiller's interpretation of rape as an act of indented political violence constructed around the patriarchal structures. One of the important aspects which she mentions in the beginning of her book is how the notions around raped is socially constructed where rape for men is a manifestation of their manhood, that proves their masculinity which is openly contested in public. Whereas for woman rape is subjected to women's body (private), a matter that cannot be a subject of discussion in public. (Brownmiller, 1975)

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<sup>1</sup> See Jackman 2002

Women and their body has always constituted an important element during conflict, whereby her body is related to territorial space that she occupies, the mark of their honor that needs to be protected the logic established by associating women with the identity of nation, the idea of purity actually, made the women vulnerable where in order to thwart the enemy who would destroy the honor by violating its women the community men themselves indulge in killing women on the one hand and on the other hand the enemy group celebrate their victory , dishonoring the other community by inflicting violence against women. The self inflicting violence during wars or conflict by the women of a particular community is vividly described in Gyanendra Pandey's work ' Remembering Partition'. G.Pandey mentions how in lieu of protecting the honor of the community, rather than being captive or victim by the other community women as the idiom of honor , participated in self-inflicting violence in the form of collective suicide, individual suicide. (Pandey, 2004) In response to such actions during the time of partition where the terrorized and vulnerable community took such steps ,Mahatma Gandhi describes such actions as the acts of bravery, and addressed those women who took their lives as the courageous and brave women. (Mookerjea-Leonard, 2005)

While discussing about violence during partition Urvashi Butalia's work cannot be ignored. Urvashi butalia narrates the partition theories where she mentions how women's were killed by their own fathers , husbands so that they are not polluted by men from the other community which brings one important aspect of life as how death can also be in one's control. The women's and girls who sacrificed their lives were regarded as martyrs by their family and community men. However these acts are not narrated as acts of bravery in war stories, war stories are mostly gendered which includes the narration of hyper – masculinity ( Boesten)

Apart from the identity of being the honor of a particular community where the identity of women gets contested, motherhood one of the important identity also gets contested, where a women fails to play the role of a mother if she bears an illegitimate child. She then is left with the option either to abort the child, and in case the child is born she is forced to reject the child. This shows how the identity of women is contested in the space of conflict. In many cases in order to avoid social stigma and exilement women chooses social and domestic security over motherhood. Mahatma Gandhi in response to the partition riots and the atrocities that women faced argues that even if a Hindu women bears the child of a muslim men, she should not be cast away neither she should be forced to leave her child as the child will not be known after the person who fathered him nor his faith. the child will be known by his mother, her faith. or it will be the child who will decide his faith that he want to practice. (Mookerjea-Leonard, 2005)

## POST WAR:

The post war effect on women is equally horrifying as the trauma that a woman undergoes during the conflict. In the post conflict period women suffers from different forms of violence. The post war violence can be defined as covert form of violence which Claudio Colaguori refers as the acts of emotional trauma, mental

torture. (Colaguori, 2010). Pierre Bourdieu refers to these forms of violence as 'Symbolic violence' these forms of violence take place through everyday interaction in terms of our behavior, actions that are further shaped and regulated by various mechanisms. Bourdieu's symbolic violence refers to such mechanism that controls and dominates the hidden structures of mind controlling one's thoughts and actions. For instance the way a female should behave in a particular social setting is already been scripted (not coded) which is required to be followed irrespective of one's will in order to avoid the consequences of the sanctions attached to the acts of deviance. Simone de Beauvoir interprets this as an important process in the construction of gendered self which is reflected in her statement 'One is not born, but, rather becomes a woman' This process of exercising domination and control on human behavior and their actions through the tools of social norms, values, social honor and status etc also defines 'symbolic violence'. The notions of 'honor', 'purity and pollution' or 'sacred and profane' becomes some important mechanisms of symbolic violence which are exercised on women in different periods of war time. However this form of violence which women faces in terms of rejection from family and community on the ground of being impure or disgrace is evident in post war or post conflict situations where, men are easily accepted by their family and community unlike the women who's becomes impure by the acts of rape, prostitution etc..

The post war situation is the worst situation when human beings witnesses different forms of loss. The helpless and homeless people were forced to live a miserable life in the refugee camps. Women's here are the worst sufferers who suffer from violence both inside and outside the camps. Because of economic pressure women had to seek work after conflict, during their stay at refugee camps, however they still face sexual violence both by men from their community and the other community.(here both the outsider community and men from the same or own community shares a similar identity i.e. perpetrators of sexual violence' and women irrespective of the differences shares one common identity' the identity of being the victim'. This shows how during conflict between groups sharing diverse identity at times forms a single homogenous identity shaped by their actions. Women who becomes an earning member later to meet the economic needs, still faces violence from their family where the male in order to assert their control over women and their income uses various forms of violence to reassert that even if women have started to perform the instrumental role male still are the head of the family. These agencies curbs the route for empowerment of women.

Domestic violence in forms of forced sex brings another important aspect of sex not as pleasure but as pain for women and for men a medium to assert one's masculinity, to relieve one's frustration. Apart from the boundaries of identity of a woman that gets blurred the boundaries of sex as pleasure and pain also gets blurred and women has to suffer the act of perversion both within and outside the family. Forced sex for Brownmiller brings into light the very fact that men and women are not equal partners in marriage. Marriage contracts defines equal right over both the partners however in reality it is the men who exercise the right over women. (Brownmiller, 1975) In the context of sexual intercourse the forceful exercise of such right in the name of marriage law is

evident where the men indulge in sexual intercourse without taking into account the consent of their partners. Women's voice are muted in the name of her duty that she needs to perform towards her husband by availing her body, and in some other cases where the women refrains, she faces different forms of threat that curbs her desires and choices.

However some scholar Julie Arostegui in her work 'Gender, conflict, and peace-building: how conflict can catalyze positive change for women' have forwarded a different perspective on the post war effect on women. she argues that the recent conflicts and its outcomes i.e. the post war effect has a positive impact on women that has provided an opportunity for women to work outside the four walls of their house, to participate in paid works outside the camps or their house an contribute towards the economic growth and development of the family. According to Julie with the taking up of new roles women regain their confidence and they walk in the path of empowerment .one of the important role that women then play is the role of social changer as with the new tasks and new roles women change and reshape the society, their roles and also their status .She provides the example of the role of the Rwanda women the victims and sufferers of the 1994 clash between the Hutus and Tutsi , who after the conflict have came together and participated in peace and equality issues. The women who becomes an earning member later to meet the economic needs, still faces violence from their family where the male in order to assert their control over women and their income uses various forms of violence to reassert that even if women have started to perform the instrumental role male still are the head of the family. These agencies curbs the route for empowerment of women

## CONCLUSION:

The concept of identity carries the need to 'sense' who one is i.e. the sense of our self, and its embodied identities in the larger social context like family, community, territory or geography underpinning one larger identity. The development of self takes place through constant interaction with the social context that cultivates to the growth of identity both personal and social. The social identity is organized around multiple sets of norms that regulate their behavior and commitment to the performance of social order. Similarly the identity of being a woman is shaped by various institutions of society which is not static but dynamic as it undergoes the process of construction in different social setting. Similarly the identity transformation that woman witness during and after the conflict has a strong relation to the route of empowerment. The pervasive character of patriarchy and the cultural notions constructed around the biological difference plays pertinent role in creating obstacle to the route of women's empowerment

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