Gender, Conflict and Security: Perspectives from South Asia

Shweta Singh[1]

Abstract

This article provides an overview to this special issue of *JASIA*, entitled 'Gender, Conflict and Security: Perspectives from South Asia'. Gender intersects with conflict and security and yet remains at the margins of academic theorizing, policy priority and practitioner perspectives in South Asia. This special issue puts forth fresh insights into how and why the lived experiences of women in South Asia (particularly from areas of protracted conflict such as Nepal, India and Sri Lanka) are different? And how and why these impinge on the global discourse on security? It argues that this analysis is pertinent not just from the standpoint of academic theorizing on security but also from the perspective of international security policy like the United Nations led Women, Peace and Security Agenda. This is the 17th year of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, and only Nepal and Afghanistan in South Asia have a National Action Plan. This special issue also critically examines the key gaps in the international policy on Women, Peace and Security Agenda and how it 'speaks' or 'not speaks' to the contextual reality of South Asia.

Keywords

Gender, Conflict, Security, South Asia, 'Women, Peace and Security', UNSCR 1325

Theme

Gender intersects with conflict and security yet remains at the margins of academic theorizing, policy priority and practitioner perspectives in South Asia. While there have been gender incursions into the core domains of international relations and its subfields, the discipline of international relations in South Asia still largely

[1] Assistant Professor and Assistant Dean of Students, Department of International Relations, South Asian University, New Delhi, India.

Corresponding author:

Shweta Singh, Assistant Professor and Assistant Dean of Students, Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences, South Asian University, New Delhi, India.
E-mail: shwetasingh@sau.ac.in

remains dominated by masculine, state centric, realist and neorealist analyses. The spaces for alternative ways of thinking remain narrow, and the path to challenge the dominant analysis of state, conflict and security still remains long and arduous in the region.

Current gaps in knowledge emanating from the region provide an incentive to re-interrogate the complex interplay among gender, conflict and security in South Asia. This is undergirded in the assumption that women's 'lived experiences' in South Asia are different, and there is need to push for making the 'everyday political' (Enloe, 1989) and bringing it to the 'international' realm of high politics. Enloe (2000, p. 300) states, 'Femininity as a concept and women as actors need to be made the objects of analytical curiosity when we are trying to make sense of international political processes.' The 'gendered lived experiences' in South Asia are enmeshed in differing hierarchies of identities, such as religion, caste, class and region, which call for multilayered, multi-voiced analysis of the analytical category of gender itself.

This special issue[1] puts forth fresh insights on how and why the lived experiences of women in South Asia (particularly from areas of protracted conflict, such as Nepal, India and Sri Lanka) are different? And how and why it impinges on the global discourse on security? The attempt has been made to strike a conversation between local and the global and tether the analysis theoretically to the frames of feminist security studies. From the standpoint of security, the analysis will push to rethink the normative, the ontological and the epistemological frames of enquiry through the gender lens.

This analysis is pertinent not just from the standpoint of academic theorizing on security but also from the perspective of international security policy like United Nations led Women, Peace and Security Agenda. The UN Security Council adopted the landmark Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325) on women, peace and security on 31 October 2000, through which it acknowledged the impact of armed conflict on women, brought women's 'lived experience' to the centre stage of global discourse on peace and security, and reaffirmed the need to ensure women's role in post-conflict reconstruction, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. In 2015, to mark the 15th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, the UN Security Council launched the Global Study on Resolution 1325 and unanimously passed Resolution 2242, which reaffirmed the international community's commitment to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. UN Women Global Study (2015) made a strong case for the localization of the normative agenda of Resolution 1325.

The implementation of UNSCR 1325 has been slow, and since 2004, the Security Council called on the member states to implement UNSCR 1325 through the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) or other national level strategies.[2] This is the 17th year of the UNSCR 1325, and only Nepal and Afghanistan in South Asia have drafted an NAP. South Asia, therefore, faces a critical challenge from the standpoint of the implementation of UNSCR 1325. This special issue also aims to explore key gaps in terms of international policy on Women, Peace and Security Agenda, and how it 'speaks' or 'not speaks' to the contextual reality of the region. In the process, the special issue would attempt to bridge the gap between academic and policy/practitioner discourse on gender, conflict and security.

The attempt will moreover be to facilitate cross-fertilization of ideas both from the standpoint of theory and empirical analysis.

This special issue, through four original essays, explores five critical questions:

- How does contemporary armed conflict in South Asia blur the boundary between 'local' and 'global'? What implications, does this have for women and security?
- Why and how are women's 'lived experience' different in the region? Why is there a need to reimagine the conflict and security discourse?
- How is women's 'agency' constituted and reconstituted during and after conflict? How does 'political masculinity' impinge on women rights and agency in South Asia? How does it impinge on power and security?
- How does 'militarization' and 'demilitarization' impinge on the understanding of conflict and post-conflict?
- To what extent do transitional justice mechanisms (like Judicial Inquiry Commissions) incorporate a gender perspective in South Asia? What implications does it have on the broader discourse on justice and security?

Relevance

The articles in this special issue aim to contribute to the widening side of the 'widening' versus 'narrowing' debates on security. More specifically, this will enrich the growing body of literature on feminist security studies, which is located at the 'crossroad of security studies, feminist international relations and feminist theory' (Stern & Annick, 2014, p. 2).

While the use of the terminology, feminist security studies,[3] as a strand within security studies in international relations, is broadly a decade old phenomenon, the question of gender and/in international relations has been nudging the discipline of international relations predominantly since the 1980s. This is reflected in the writings of scholars, such as Elshtain (1987) and Grant (1991), who challenge the philosophical foundations of international relations, specifically the domestic/international divide through the frames of political theory, history and personal narratives. This also brings in a critical epistemological challenge where feminist scholars pose the need to go beyond positivism, or strictly scientific mapping of international relations.

Scholars like Tickner (1992, 1997) critically problematize the mainstream discourse on power and security and highlight how masculinity pervades international relations as a field of study. For instance, Tickner (1997) rejects the analytic separation of explanations of war into different levels, problematizes security linked only to state borders, and rejects the divide between the international and the domestic, which also finds resonance in the writings of feminist scholars who problematize the public–private dichotomy. Enloe (1989) poses the critical question, 'Where are the women in international relations?' and argues that security cannot be restricted to the realm of 'high politics' alone. Further, scholars like Cohn (1987) underline how even the language on security is highly gendered in international relations.

While the field of feminist international relations is slowly but steadily challenging international relations and its core concepts, it has been difficult for it to find even conversational spaces in mainstream academic literature on security, which was dominated by debates on realism and neorealism. The *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* special issue in 1988 was in many ways the first attempt[4] to bring together a series of essays by scholars, such as Fred Halliday, Ann Tickner and Jean Bethke Eishtain, on *Women and International Relations*, which flagged critical questions like a feminist reformulation of realism. On the decadal anniversary of this special issue, critical developments in feminist international relations theory were underlined once again. However, in terms of earlier contributions, as Murphy (1996) and Zaleswski (1998) have argued, Carroll's work (1972) 'Peace Research: The Cult of Power' in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* in many ways raised critical questions for feminist international relations. The decade of the 1990s was marked by several path-breaking works from scholars, such as Tickner (1992), Enloe (1989, 2000), Peterson (1992), Grant (1991), Pettman (1996), Sylvester (1994), Weber (1994) and Zaleswski (1994), who in many ways shaped the contours of feminist security theory and feminist theory of international relations.

The millennium decade brought fresh normative and epistemological questions for feminist security studies. The year 2000 was significant because in this year the United Nations, through UNSCR 1325, for the first time recognized the complex connection among women, peace and security. As many feminist scholars from the global south and global north have argued, this development could be traced back to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and women's struggles/movements through the following decades. Many feminist concerns on security share ontological and epistemological boundaries with critical security studies.

Given the shared boundaries, the journal *Security Dialogue* published a special issue on gender and security in December 2004 (Hansen & Olsson, 2004). To celebrate the decadal anniversary of this special issue, another virtual special issue was published in 2014, where Stern and Annick (2014) highlighted the importance of 'critical pluralism' and pushed the conventional templates on ontology and epistemology still further by probing into issues of 'complexity, plurality and contexuality'. More specifically, the *International Feminist Journal of Politics* along with *Gender and Politics* has focused on key debates in the field of feminist security studies. The *International Feminist Journal of Politics* also published a special issue on UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011). More recently, *International Affairs* published a special issue (Kirby & Shepherd, 2016) on reintroducing women, peace and security which explores the limits and potential of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

While the scholarly literature on feminist security studies has slowly burgeoned, critical research gaps still remain. In particular, although feminist concerns on global security have been strongly debated, what is still missing from these debates is a more substantive engagement on the interaction between the local and the global. In particular, the special issue will forge a dialogue

between the local and the international, specifically from the standpoint of women's everyday 'lived experiences' in South Asia and how they impinge on debates on conflict and security.[5] The special issue will highlight the need for complex, multilayered and contextual gender analysis in South Asia since gender as an analytical category intersects with multiple but differing hierarchies of caste, class, religion and region.

The special issue will also critically investigate, through the gender lens, notions of power, masculinity, militarism, militarization, state, conflict/post-conflict, victim/agency and justice. And how each of these, enmeshed in South Asian contextual reality, impinges on the debates on security and highlights the normative, the ontological and the epistemological challenge to the field of security studies from a South Asian perspective.

From the standpoint of epistemology, the special issue will attempt to foreground 'critical pluralism' (Biersteker, 1989, as cited in Shepherd, 2013) and nudge the methodological boundaries beyond positivism in particular. The attempt will be to conceptualize 'everyday experiences' and rethink the normative, ontological and epistemological foundations of security studies, more specifically feminist security studies.

The Contributions

The four articles in this special issue address the critical questions highlighted at the outset and aim to strike a conversation between the local and global from the standpoint of South Asia.

Imtiaz Ahmed's article highlights the limits of positivism in understanding women's insecurity in a world informed and dictated by masculinity or what he refers to as *purush jat*. The article makes a strong case for the need to make the 'methodological quest local' and tether it to the 'lived experiences' of women in South Asia. For this, he takes recourse to dialectics but problematizes the Western dialectical method and underlines the need to recognize the contributions of Chinese and Indian dialectics. While the former upheld the dialectics of *yin-yang* relationship (i.e., balancing the opposites) with 'continuity through change' as a style of thought, the latter 'developed what is known as the *prasangika* method—the method of examining all possible alternative interpretations of the opponent's proposition, showing the absurdity of the respective consequences and thus refuting it' (Solomon, 1978). Ahmed argues that addressing woman's state of insecurity from the standpoint of *yin-yang* relationship and/or *prasangika* can make a far more meaningful contribution to the task of demystifying masculinity and engendering security in South Asia. Ahmed's essay underlines the need to draw on local knowledge systems, indigenous philosophical traditions and oral and textual traditions to understand and conceptualize 'lived experiences' of women in South Asia and their state of security/insecurity. The essay brings to fore the local epistemological traditions in conversation with and sometimes challenging the dominant Western epistemological traditions.

K. C. Luna, Gemma Van Der Haar and Dorothea Hilhorst's article examines how the Maoist conflict in Nepal affected women ex-combatants and non-combatants, looking at shifts in gender roles during and after the conflict particularly from the standpoint of current livelihood challenges. The authors argue that changing gender roles largely depends upon everyday practice of gender division of labour and power as it evolved during and after the conflict. Further, they argue that the conflict had different and contradictory effects: Both categories of women experienced a shift in gender roles, with women taking on tasks earlier reserved for men, but this effect was strongest among ex-combatants during conflict. In the aftermath of conflict, these changes were partly reversed and especially ex-combatant women faced severe livelihood challenges and returned to traditional gender roles. The authors not only provide comparative analysis of the conflict and post-conflict periods from the standpoint of livelihood challenges but also map local, context specific, differentiations in terms of caste, class and ethnicity. The article also considers how women experience state and non-state responses meant to improve their livelihoods security in the post-conflict setting. The article is based on in-depth fieldwork in Chitwan and Kathmandu districts of Nepal. It draws on interviews with women ex-combatants/non-combatants and key informant interviews.

B. Rajeshwari's study highlights how communal riots (in India) bring different experiences for men and women. She foregrounds this through her analysis of the Mumbai riots (1992–1993) and Gujarat riots (2002). She argues that while men and women experience communal riots differently, post-riot justice mechanisms like Judicial Inquiry Commissions (India) do not recognize this distinction. The article pursues three main objectives. First, it attempts to underline how feminist studies, which aim to study critical questions emerging from women's everyday experiences, in most cases end up focusing on war/conflict. The article moreover contends that the field of feminist security studies has not adequately addressed critical questions on violence against women, particularly in situations of communal riots, from standpoint of justice and security. Second, the article asserts that the intrinsic linkage between justice and security remains under-researched in local contexts, specifically in South Asia. The author argues that the modus operandi of post-riot justice mechanisms, such as Judicial Inquiry Commissions (in India), remain understudied from feminist perspectives. She argues further the need to problematize singular, official version of truth that ignores the varied experiences of women as victims of post-riots situations, in this case Mumbai (1992–1993) and Gujarat (2002). Finally, the article attempts to bring to the fore gaps in understanding in the global normative ideas of justice and prosecution that are embedded in frameworks such as the UNSCR 1325 and the UNSCR 2122. In so doing, the article recommends a bottom-up examination of these frameworks from the standpoint of the 'local', a point that also underlines the aims of this special issue.

Shweta Singh underlines the need to rethink the 'normative' in the UNSCR 1325 from the standpoint of the 'local', in this case Sri Lanka. She posits that the UNSCR 1325 needs to be situated within the larger discourse on international norms, and challenges to the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 in varied 'local' contexts can be evaluated through the theoretical frameworks provided by existing literature on

norms diffusion. She argues that post-war Sri Lanka is an interesting site for a 'bottom-up' critical examination of the UNSCR 1325, given that Sri Lanka continues to be marred with militarization and the formation of a military–development–security complex. Singh makes three core assertions in her article. First, she argues for the need to go beyond the neat classification of contexts as conflict and post-conflict; rather, cases like Sri Lanka fit more aptly in the category of 'post-war' given the continued militarization and formation of a military–development–security complex. Second, she argues for the need to problematize gender as homogenous and women as coherent and stable category of analysis. She brings in her analysis how intersecting identities of religion (Hindu and Muslim) and ethnicity (Tamil-Hindu and Tamil-Muslim) challenge the universal and homogenizing notion of gender. The article foregrounds the need to map varied local/lived experiences of women (female-headed household, widows, ex-combatants) in post-war Sri Lanka, and the imperative need to situate women vis-à-vis the context of analysis. Singh further argues for the need to look beyond women as victims or agents. She asserts that women in post-war Sri Lanka can more aptly be classified as *controlled actors* as women's capacity or agency to act is structurally and culturally controlled, and that inhibits their capacity to act or perform. Also, in many cases, this agency brings in extra burden for women given the structural (militarization) and cultural (patriarchal norms) controls embedded in the local contexts. Finally, Singh argues that the three core assertions (underlined above) put forth from the standpoint of Sri Lanka also speak to the broader contextual reality in South Asia. She makes a strong case not only for the localization of the 'normative' in the UNSCR 1325 but also for three-level bottom-up analysis (local–regional–international) to comprehensively understand why the UNSCR 1325 fails or succeeds to influence state behaviour.

The articles bring to fore the specific South Asian contextual reality (from the standpoint of lived experiences of women) and how it impinges on the debates on gender, conflict and security. All four articles put together in this special issue forge a dialogue between the local and the global, and underline the strong need to not only 'localize' but also 'regionalize' perspectives on gender, conflict and security.

Notes

1. The articles compiled in this special issue were earlier presented at the Conference on 'Gender, Conflict and Security: Perspectives from South Asia', held on 23–24 April 2015 in New Delhi, India. The conference was jointly organized by the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWOMEN) and South Asian University. The conference also received partial support from the Embassy of Switzerland in India. The introduction to this special issue partially draws (section on theme) on the concept note that was written by the author for the conference (see Singh [2015] available at http://www.sau.int/pdf/genderConflict.pdf [accessed on 9 June 2017]).

2. As of January 2017, 63 nations have created NAPs on UNSCR 1325. It is argued that NAPs would be a guiding national policy document and would offer a comprehensive tool to governments to articulate policy priorities and coordinate the implementation of UNSCR1325 at the national level. For more details refer to http://www.peacewomen.org/member-states (retrieved on 26 March 2017).

3. Stern and Annick (2014, p. 2) state, 'FSS includes approaches, for instance, that pay attention to the workings of gender in order to ask questions about security; it also includes scholarship that refuses any line of distinction that separates "security" from the workings of gender.' They state that the first mention of the label FSS known to them is in the work of Aradau (2004, cited in Stern & Annick [2014]), and the term gradually gained prominence with the organization of FSS panels for the annual International Studies Association (ISA) conference. For details, refer to Note 1 of Stern and Annick (2014).
4. See Grant and Long (1988). A similar first conference was held in California (Peterson, 1992).
5. This also reaffirms earlier assertions by scholars, such as Manchanda (2001) and Chenoy (2002), who pushed for a distinctive understanding of women's lived experience in South Asia from the standpoint of conflict and security. But, what still stands under-researched is how these lived experiences impinge on the sub-terrains of feminist security studies, and particularly the critical dialogue between the local and global.

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