

Women in Times of War and Conflicts: The Misery of Sexual Violence, Fear and Pain

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Abstract— The objective of this paper is to review the position of women during times of conflict. There is mass sexual violence and torture against civilian women and girls during these periods of conflict. The 21st century is witnessing unparalleled communication and global mobility which brings out and rather highlights the ugly faces of wars and conflict that can no longer remain obscure. People are raising their voice to speak out and are receiving a global response in return. In particular, the worst sufferers-women, are making themselves and their sufferings heard. The world has witnessed armies, rebels, insurgents sexually abusing and enslaving women and girls with complete impunity. Rape and sexual exploitation of women in times of conflict should never be tolerated. Though the international community is more united in its commitment to universal Human Rights, there seems to be not much relief for women who face violation of their rights and integrity every day in almost all corners of the world.

Key words: Sexual Exploitation, Human Rights, Violence, Rape, Army, Discrimination, Women, Rebels, Military, United Nations

I. INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a major problem that can hamper a society's growth and a country's development. Why is it so common to see women disadvantaged relative to men in almost all societies in the world? At some point or the other, the societies in the world are constantly under some form of conflict. The experiences that women encounter during and in the aftermath of armed conflicts that includes wars, civil wars, terrorist attacks, genocide, partition, ethnic cleansing, etc. are horrific and deny them their integrity. Women and girls suffer most from the violence. In every context, sexual violence, especially rapes become a universal weapon of war, thereby infringing on the Human Rights of women. Women are often trafficked as sex workers across International borders and the States remain mere puppets who seem to lose control and authority during such times.

Rape has always inflicted physical harm, trauma, and social ostracism for the victim. Nowhere should one forget that such harms are put to men as well but relatively extremely less as compared to those committed to women. It is clearly nothing less than the death of the female soul. Women are increasingly and many a times deliberately, are infected with HIV through wartime rape (Jefferson, 2004). With the coming of wars, the normalcy of the economic activities is disrupted and all economic supports are destroyed which further puts women at the greater risk of trafficking and to unwillingly being forced into sex for their survival and sustenance. Therefore, even women who are not raped in times of conflicts and wars may find it necessary to have sex with other men in order to secure their food, shelter, safety and refuge not only for themselves but also for their children. For instance- Afghan refugee women living in the

city of Peshawar, Pakistan, described being forced to have sex in order to receive rent-free housing.

II. DISCUSSIONS

The problems and tough situations faced by women in areas of perpetual conflict and wars are significant in the current scenario as there are numerous conflict zones all around the world where the lives of women are drastically affected and sometimes ruthlessly demolished. The sites of conflict would not only include war zones but also areas of internal unrest. The concerns of women in such situations often remain the last priority. There is an additional strain on women who get marginalized as well as become vulnerable to attacks from the opposition as women symbolize the honour of the family. Numerous issues of great concern remain hidden- issues of their integrity, domestic violence, displacement, etc. The Japanese military trafficked thousands of women from countries across Asia and sexually enslaved them during World War II; more than 100,000 women were raped in the Berlin area directly following World War II; and hundreds of thousands of Bengali women were raped by Pakistani soldiers during the 1971 Bangladeshi war of secession (Swiss & Geller, 1993).

The Burmese government forces committed sexual violence against the ethnic Rohingya women and young girls in their puberty during security operations in northern Rakhine State in late 2016 and early 2017. After three days filled with panic and fright, a heavily pregnant woman reached to safety and delivered her new born child under the open sky. She along with many other women like her were forced out of Myanmar after the military initiated a violent crackdown (Habib, 2017).

Women all over the world face systemic attacks on their human rights, discrimination and violence, much of it is justified through cultural and religious arguments. When states fail to uphold women's rights and give them protection for being a citizen shows a clear picture that lives of women matter less and this further justifies violence and discrimination. The constant discrimination and violence against women is targeted at them in part or in whole because of their sex (United Nations OCHA/IRIN, 2007). The 11 year long Civil war in Sierra Leone was a devastating war in itself. Though the war didn't leave behind men, elderly, children in inflicting atrocities, it resulted in women being subjected to enormous kinds of gruesome violence. The perpetrators of most abuses were among the rebel forces, particularly the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Women, young and aged, were often raped in gangs and very often in front of their own family members (Jefferson, 2004). They sexually assaulted even the pregnant women and mutilated women's genitals with objects including knives and sharp woods. Married women in Sierra Leone had lost significant control over their sexual autonomy even before the civil war began. Under only a few instances mentioned in the customary laws, a wife could only refuse to have sexual intercourse with her husband

if she becomes physically ill, menstruating, or breastfeeding. Intercourse could also be refused during the day or during Ramadan (United Nations OCHA/IRIN, 2007). Men who usually exercised control over women's bodies in times of peace continued to do so with extreme barbarity during the times of the civil war. In another heinous instance, in Kosovo, approximately a hundred babies conceived in rape were born in a single month alone in the year 2000 (Rehn & Sirleaf 2000). In Bosnia, women impregnated by Serbs were reportedly captivated in so they could not get themselves aborted (Ward & Vann, 2002).

Another instance from the world's largest Democracy today brings a bunch of doleful incidents. The joy that India was celebrating because of its Independence from the British colonial rule in 1947 was marred by the violence and brutality that came along with the Partition. Millions of lives were uprooted and many people found their lives change dramatically. An unprecedented migration and genocidal violence and barbarity was witnessed on both sides of the border. People saw themselves being uprooted, their houses looted and they were turned to being refugees in their own lands where their ancestors had lived since ages. Thousands of women were raped and abducted. Women on both sides of the border were sold and were often forced to settle with strangers in unknown places. Ninety women, it was said, had jumped 'voluntarily' into a well and chose not to fall into enemy hands. This enemy often violated the integrity of someone's daughters, wives and sisters (Butalia, 1998). With the Taliban rising to power in Afghanistan, women and girls were discriminated, marginalized and their human rights were brutally violated. Thus, this hampered the position of women both socially and economically in almost all areas of the country. They were denied education, proper health facilities, rights, etc. Hence, it is the same testimony for almost all countries. Many Sunni women in Iraq who experienced ISIS detention and torture describe the prevalence of ISIS's gender based violence.

Many women victims and their families remain silent in order to prevent harm to the woman or girls' as well as the family's reputation. It is feared that even the babies born out of rape may face stigma.

Therefore, what one may encounter and in brief understand is the very existence of perpetual crisis that women fall into. The sexual attacks on women in Myanmar, Syria, Sierra Leone, Sudan, among others is heart-breaking and calls the International community, especially the United Nations to bring solutions to the gruesome problems that women all over the world encounter.

III. CONCLUSION

The prevalence of systematic attacks on women, their human rights and integrity points to a simple conclusion that women are the worst sufferers of all kind of conflicts. Discrimination against women is still practiced even in places where it is prohibited. The discrimination and violence women confront is targeted at them in part or in whole because of their sex and they remain subordinate and unequal to men despite of existence of various kind of laws. These laws act as mere superficial protection. Women are affected greatly by the decisions that their leaders make. During times of peace,

many states fail to uphold women's right to sexual autonomy and bodily integrity. This results in severe Human Rights Violations in times of war. Gender-based violence and more specifically "sexual violence" is common in the lives of women all around the world, during normalcy, i.e. during peace and during war. Wars never erupt in an overnight. They are known in advance in some way or the other. If wars can be anticipated, then it's important to realize that women are prone to become the worst sufferers of it. Women have suffered the consequences of war and conflict and so many will continue to do so. The National governments, civil society, and other state and non-state actors must keep conflicts at bay during times of peace, and of course at times when hostilities are mounting, to prevent sexual violence. A more rigorous training of combatants is a necessary first step in providing protection to the vulnerable sections of the society, especially the women. Combatants should be recruited and trained on lines of discipline. We as a world community should be more motivated and respond to such challenges so that women of all lands stand straight with their heads held high.

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