

Gendered Appartus of a Military: The Role of Military Wives in Defining Security

Authors : Taarika Singh

Abstract : Military wives – women married to army officers have largely been recognized as mere supporters or as auxiliaries to military men rather than propagators of thought and ideologies. The military wife (and her participation) is often dismissed as 'private', 'domestic', or 'trivial' and is acknowledged, if at all, only as an (inevitable/normative) entity, seen as a natural product/outcome of militarization. It is because the military wife has come to be constructed and accepted as normative by states and militaries that women of the military are easily 'trivialised' and are made to appear to be socially, politically, or theoretically irrelevant and/or insignificant. This paper, using ethnography-- structured and semi-structured interviews -- makes a gendered analysis of militarization, by bringing the military wife to the forefront and placing her at the nexus of the military and state apparatus. Moving away from gendered analyses that focus on the impact of militarization on women or draw attention to the ways in which militarization has been challenged/resisted by women, the paper pays attention to the centrality of women in shaping, validating, and perpetuating militarization, patriarchal control, and gendered hierarchies. The paper will demonstrate how military wives accept and comply with patriarchy as an institutional form of social organization that extends beyond the family and kinship relations into the military as an organization of the state. The paper will draw attention to the ways in which military norms, patriarchal values, and belief systems shape the social personhood, identity, and worldview of military wives; as a consequence of which, women play a central role in upholding and reproducing social inequalities and hierarchies; in shaping social status, and power relationships amongst men and women within and outside the military. The paper will allude to the processes and ideologies via which women a) accept and reproduce men as exclusive holders of power, status, and privilege; and b) recognize international relations, politics, and matters related to security to be male dominated arenas inviting overwhelming masculine participation. In doing so, the paper will argue that women of the military play a critical role in perpetuating and upholding gendered meanings associated with the notion of and discourse around security. The paper will illustrate how military wives accept and assume security to be inherently a gendered idea -- a masculine notion, a male dominated arena, as something granted by men. In other words, the paper will demonstrate how the militarization of the military wives and the perpetuation of militarization by military wives plays a crucial role in propagating and perpetuating security to be a masculine notion or a male dominated arena. The paper will then question the degree to which such gendered analyses can shape the broader meanings, definitions, and discourses around security, matters related to security, and security threats.

Keywords : gender, militarisation, security, women

Conference Title : ICWPS 2022 : International Conference on Women, Peace and Security

Conference Location : Zurich, Switzerland

Conference Dates : July 28-29, 2022