

India's Foreign Policy through a Gender Lens: India and Afghanistan Relations

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Abstract

The framing of what is India's foreign policy has been a product of a particular political context, both at national and global levels. With changing contexts and leaderships, the conduct of foreign policy became essentially contested. It is debated whether the foreign policy is a normative tool or an empirical one; whether it is about the individuals, the state or the system; whether its aim can be achieved by military and economic efficiency or not. There are no evident solutions to these questions.

This work is arguing that the understanding of foreign policy in India has been a reflection of a hegemonic masculinity based understanding of power. This has happened not solely by the fact that men have dominated the sphere of foreign policy. But also by the systemic allegiance to supposed masculine values as normal and rational. This is evident in the ways the relevance of dialogue, empathy, inclusion and intersectionality have been ignored in formulating the meaning and purpose of foreign policy. However, commitment to different versions of masculinity is reflected in various bilateral relations. The withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan after almost two decades of presence has brought the attention to India's relations with Afghanistan to the centre stage. This paper is analysing India and Afghanistan relations through a gender lens. It is tracing historical events and contemporary challenges that shape this relationship today.

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The Changing Contexts of Contemporary Indian Foreign Policy

In the past two decades, foreign policy (FP) is understood as general principles that guide the activities and relationships of one state in its interactions with other states and Non-State Actors (NSAs). The primary goal of FP is to preserve, promote and protect national interests. This understanding of the foreign policy challenges traditional notions of foreign policy at two levels. Firstly, it questions the notion that only states and their agencies are primary actors in shaping foreign policy. Secondly, it problematizes the clear separation of domestic policies and politics from foreign policy and international politics.

S. Jaishankar (2020) in his book *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* has emphasised the fact that India needs to adopt a more realist vantage point in dealing with foreign policy. He argues that our readiness to go for offensive strategies when required will bring advantages to India. He cites Krishna's strategy in the Kurukshetra war that occurred between Kauravas and Pandavas. He says to bend the rules to one's advantage is a necessary skill in foreign policy. Secondly, he expresses the fact that disruptions in power dynamics at the global level should be seen as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. Thirdly, he emphasises that there is a need to engage the 'street', and not solely the 'Lutyens elite', in the framing of Indian foreign policy.

Sumit Ganguly and Manjeet S. Pardesi (2009), Ian Hall (2014) and Harsh V. Pant (2016) analyse India's foreign policy over the years. Ganguly and Pardesi divide India's foreign policy into three main phases based on changing paradigms. They study India's foreign policy in the following phases - 1947 to 1962 as the era of Nehruvian idealism; 1962 to 1991 as the era of self-help and Nehruvian rhetoric and Post 1991 years as the era of pragmatism and realist approach. They argue that India's foreign policy has

been a product of systemic developments, national events and the personality of the Prime Minister. Ian Hall puts the perspective that India's foreign policy is an outcome of domestic factors and external factors. Hall counts the adoption of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation (LPG) as an economic strategy in 1991 and Pokharan II in 1998 as domestic factors that have acted as turning points in India's foreign policy. Hall feels that the rise of China, the rise of Islamic terrorism, the global financial crisis of the West and Asian states and the increasing economic and military interests of the US in India are external factors shaping India's foreign policy in recent decades. Harsh V Pant states that when we study the past, it becomes clear, Indian policy-makers themselves are not clear as to what the status of a great power entails and there is no clarity in India's foreign policy. Pant highlights two issues that have emerged as significant in defining India's future foreign policy. He emphasises that India will have to exploit the current structure of the international system to its advantage. For this, Pant suggests that India has to do away with its discomfort with the very notion of power and in particular its wariness of the use of "hard power".

In analysing the work of the above-mentioned scholars it becomes evident that all of them are seeing a shift in India's foreign policy. They all are hinting at the benefits of a more pragmatic and realist approach in India's foreign policy. The question is how our gendered notions of power have influenced these studies. The subsequent sections discuss the historical aspects of India and Afghanistan relations. In this paper, the impact of the deal signed by the US and the Taliban in February 2020 is analysed. The later section is focusing on gender and foreign policy in general. The last section is examining India's foreign policy with Afghanistan through a gendered lens and its implications.

Historical Background of India and Afghanistan Relations

When we historically analyse India and Afghanistan relations, then it is clear that Afghanistan's strategic significance for India after 1947 has increased. By applying Kautilya's logic, the enemy's enemy is a friend, we can see a special significance of Afghanistan for India. Since the creation of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan are having differences of opinion regarding the Durand line. The tensions between India and Pakistan in political, economic, social and cultural aspects are multiple. In this case, according to I.P. Khosla, Afghanistan and India should be natural allies (Khosla 2018: 2). However, Afghanistan's tough topography (only 12% of land in Afghanistan is arable), tribal and ethnic tensions, especially between, Pashtuns (Ghilzai, Durrani) and Non-Pashtuns (Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks) have made it a difficult country to understand.

According to I.P. Khosla (1997), in understanding India and Afghanistan relationship in the post-1947 era, different phases are recognised by scholars. Broadly these phases are recognised as Period of Cordial and Mutual Understanding (1947- 1970); Period of Confusion and Policy Absence (1971-1992); Period of Hostile and Nefarious activities (1993-2001); Period of Re-strengthening the Mutual Relations (2001 onwards). In the Period of Cordial and Mutual Understanding (1947- 1970), Afghanistan is believed to maintain a policy of 'neutrality in power politics, hence, pursued the policy of friendship with all states. This policy of neutrality has converged with India's policy of nonalignment in the context of the cold war. In this phase, India and Afghanistan have moved closer with the signing of the 'Treaty of Friendship' in 1950. The common enemy for both countries has been Pakistan. However, Afghanistan has remained reluctant in condemning China's aggression in 1962. Period of Confusion and Policy Absence (1971-1992) is embedded with lots of uncertainties on both sides. The deposition of King Mohammed Zahir Shah in 1973, the Saur

revolution in 1978 and the authoritarian behaviour of Hafizullah Amin led to an increase in the power of both leftist and Islamic forces in Afghanistan by end of the 1970s. In 1979, the Soviet Union annexed Afghanistan. During this period India also had its share of domestic problems to engage with. Indira Gandhi's declaration of national emergency in 1975, followed by a coalition government led by Morarji Desai and the second phase of Indira Gandhi's rule – all followed the principle of non-alignment and stayed away from the Soviet Union controlled Afghanistan. The years between 1993 and 2001 were the Period of Hostile and Nefarious activities. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Afghanistan witnessed a violent fight between different ethnic and tribal groups to capture power. The brief rule of religious extremist forces led by Burahnudin Rabbani supported by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE and the Taliban's coming to power in 1994 kept India out of action in Afghanistan. The Taliban's strained relations with India became evident in the hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight IC 814 in 1999 and the destruction of the 'Bamiyan Buddha Monuments' in 2001. Therefore, India was more than happy to extend its support to the US-led coalition forces in the war against the Taliban in 2001 as a reaction to the 11 September 2001 terror attacks on the US. The last phase of this relationship is the Period of Re-strengthening the Mutual Relations (2001 to 2021). Under the US presence in Afghanistan, India re-established diplomatic links with this country. India has played a significant role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation program in Afghanistan since 2001. India's help in the infrastructure field is reflected in the building of Parliament, restoration of Stor Palace. India's imprint in irrigation and power projects can be seen in Salma Dam construction. India assisted in rebuilding healthcare-related activities like building of hospitals and training of doctors/nurses, medical tourism. In the field of education, the building of schools and teachers' training is

undertaken by India. India also helped in food supply and food safety (food safety agreement 2018, air freight corridor 2017, wheat supply through Chabahar Port 2017) and Armed forces training (Police training 2017). India signed with Afghanistan the Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2011 and the Regional Technical Group in 2015.

The Deal and its Implications

After almost twenty years of US military engagements in Afghanistan, in early 2020 the tables are set for talks between the Taliban and the US. Both parties are ready to compromise. The US has shown interest in talk as it realised the limitation of its military presence in shaping Afghanistan politics. The US is realising the fact that even after twenty years of its presence in Afghanistan, it has failed in curtailing the existence of the Taliban and other terrorist groups in the area. It is also aware of the fact that any future political arrangement could not evade the participation of the Taliban as China, Russia and Pakistan are ready to assist and accommodate them for political engagements. The long military interference has set in fatigue amongst the US troops, has drained lots of US dollars on bottomless investments and has made the realisation about the futility of the war. It is clear to the US that to declare war is easy but to win peace is a challenge. On the other hand, the Taliban could see that in talks with the US it can strike an agreement for the release of its soldiers from Afghan jails and withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan. This will set the stage for the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan.

On 29 February 2020, the deal is finalised by Donald Trump and signed in Doha, Qatar. The deal is committed to the withdrawal of US and allied troops from Afghanistan by May 2021. The deal put obligations on the Taliban to take steps to stop terrorist groups, including itself, in Afghanistan from threatening the security of

the US and its allies. As soon as Joe Biden is elected as the next US President, he supports the withdrawal plan from Afghanistan and puts 31 August 2021 as the deadline to do so (Chaudhuri and Shende, 2020). From the time of the Doha deal, there is a sense of uneasiness in India. Narendra Modi government's insistence since 2014 on Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled political solutions in the state has been ignored in the deal. Neither plural representation of Afghanistan voices is represented in the deal nor does it count India as a significant player in charting the future course of action in Afghanistan. India's options in this scenario are to increase the pressure on the United Nations to lead the people-driven changes in Afghanistan, to align and balance its interests with that of the US, to widen its interactions with Russia, China and Iran to see that Pakistan is not unilaterally benefitting with rising of Taliban in Afghanistan.

Pakistan Factor in Afghanistan Crisis

India's aspirations in Afghanistan are tied with Pakistan. India aims to reduce Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan. India wants to prevent Pakistan-backed militants from using Afghanistan as a ground for terrorism that could threaten the interests of India. In the past twenty years, all three main leaders of Afghanistan, namely, Hamid Karzai (Pashtun lineage), Ashraf Ghani (Pashtun lineage) and Abdullah Abdullah (mixed Pashtun-Tajik), have remained in contact with India. Hamid Karzai is tilted towards India as against Pakistan as Karzai has pleasant memories of his student life in India. Similarly, Abdullah Abdullah's family is settled in India and feels closer to India. However, Ashraf Ghani, especially in his initial days in power, is believed to prefer closer ties with Pakistan rather than with India (Constantino, 2020).

India has a bad experience with the Taliban regime of 1996-2001. During this Taliban regime, Pakistan sponsored militants used the soil of Afghanistan to train for guerrilla warfare to be used in

Indian administered Kashmir. At this time, Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), send many of its Kashmir-aimed militants into eastern Afghanistan to escape from US pressure on Pakistan to end militant infiltration. However, the worst memory of the Taliban regime for Indians is associated with the hijacking of an Indian commercial plane named IC-814 by the Pakistan-based outfit Harakat-ul-Mujahideen in 1999. The hijackers coordinated with the Taliban in Afghanistan and the plane was diverted to Kandahar province in Afghanistan. The Taliban regime mediated a criminal exchange that led to the release of extremist leader Masood Azhar. This one decision is regretted by India even today. Soon after his release, Masood Azhar founded another terrorist organisation called Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and attacked the Indian Parliament building in December 2001. Thereafter, JeM has conducted many terrorist attacks against India. JeM's close association and ideological unity with the Taliban remain the main point of concern for India. Over the years, another terrorist outfit called, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) has flourished in Afghanistan with the backing of the Pakistan military to work against the Indian interests. LeT cadres carried out a major terrorist attack in the commercial capital of India, Mumbai, in 2008. LeT is believed to be more lethal than JeM. LeT has carried out attacks against Indian diplomatic facilities, government employees and aid workers in Afghanistan. LeT prefers to keep its terrorist attacks unnamed so as to escape international pressure to give up terrorist acts in Afghanistan. Ashraf Ghani in his first office took the help of Pakistan in mediating with the Taliban (Constantino, 2020). It is an open fact that the Taliban could survive and strengthen itself by 2021 only with the backing of Pakistan. It is with the collaboration of Pakistan that China, Russia and Iran, all started talking to the Taliban as a significant political player in Afghanistan. The resurrection of the Taliban is a creation of Pakistan. India will have

a limited role in Afghanistan till the time the Pakistan-Taliban nexus dictates the political contours of Afghanistan. India cannot station military troops in Afghanistan due to a lack of easy access to Afghanistan and a lack of intelligence precision to target and finish off terrorist camps in Afghanistan. Pakistan at any cost will try to prevent a bigger role for India in Afghanistan as it will threaten the internal stability of Pakistan as Pakistan believes collaboration between India and Afghanistan can promote separatist forces in Baloch and Pashtun areas in Pakistan. In the given circumstances, India has limited options in Afghanistan and the Indian government's wait and watch policy is a wise decision.

Russia factor in Afghanistan Crisis

In the late 1990s, the Taliban and Al Qaeda supported Islamist separatist movements in Chechnya. However, Vladimir V. Putin is considered a leader who successfully crushed these separatist movements. This also raised Putin's position as a leader both at national and global levels. With the 9/11 attacks on the US, the power dynamics changed. The US decided to attack Afghanistan to destroy Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. Putin supported and shared important maps of Afghanistan with the US and its allies to fight against Al Qaeda. With the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001, Russia re-established its diplomatic relations with Afghanistan (Tarzi, 2021).

Russia helped the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to establish International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan in 2001. Russia did not oppose ISAF's taking responsibility for the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan in 2006. Putin did not oppose NATO's participation in Afghanistan, in part to legitimise his own contentious activities in Chechnya.

Russia at this time expected that the US-led forces will defeat the Taliban and a stable government will be established in Afghanistan. Russia thought that cooperation with the US will help in fighting against international Islamist militancy. However, it soon became clear that the Taliban is neither vanishing from Afghanistan nor have Afghanistan witnessed a stable government of its own. The stay of the US and its allies got prolonged. In the meantime, the US and its allies supported “colour revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine and this caused upset to Russia. Further, the increase in narcotics trafficking in the Afghanistan and Central Asia region also acted as a security threat to Afghanistan. Russia also sensed that oil and gas infrastructure in Afghanistan is benefitting the US and China. All these developments made Russia question the presence of the US and its allies in Afghanistan. In the situation where the US is withdrawing from Afghanistan and China is trying to increase its influence in Afghanistan, Russia is seeking friendship with Pakistan and the Taliban to play a larger role in the region.

The China factor in Afghanistan Crisis

With the announcement of the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan in February 2020, China has acted as one of the first nations to advance ambassadorial networks with the Taliban, which has arose to power once again in the tragedy-stricken country. It is an important point to note that China since the two decades of US-led governance of Afghanistan has maintained a low profile. China from a distance has been keenly observing the longest US war in Afghanistan taking its toll in terms of both natural/human resources and human lives.

China has an unsaid economic interest in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is rich in mineral deposits According to a Reuters report, the estimated worth of mineral deposits is up to \$3 trillion. Afghanistan is perhaps the ground for the world's largest reserves

of lithium. Lithium is the key element of the large-capacity lithium-ion batteries which are widely used in electric vehicles and the renewable energy industry. The fact is that China dominates Lithium-Ion Battery Production worldwide and it plans to seek a long-term contract with the Taliban to improve Afghanistan's enormous unexploited lithium reserves in return for mining rights and ownership arrangements (Gupta, 2021). The Taliban which is facing a crunch for funds and friends will lap up the offer from China. Afghanistan is also endowed with many other natural resources such as bauxite, chromium, copper, coal, gold, gemstones, gypsum, iron ore, lead, marble, natural gas, oil, sulphur, talc, travertine, uranium and zinc. In the initial days of recapturing power in Afghanistan, the Taliban has taken control of these mineral deposits. In this scenario, China can offer the best deal of political impartiality and economic investment. China is seeing the best opportunity in Afghanistan to implement its expertise in infrastructure and industry building, along with undisputed access to mineral deposits. China's strategic Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI) could get a renewed life with the inclusion of Afghanistan. China can plan a Peshawar-to-Kabul motorway. The extension of BRI beyond Pakistan to Afghanistan can open doors for easy access for China to Central Asia and the Middle East. The reluctance of India to join BRI can be counter-checked with Afghanistan's inclusion in the BRI project (Gupta, 2021). In this way, China's long-drawn dream of controlling South Asia by displacing India's predominance in the region can be fulfilled.

China's only worry in moving closer to the Taliban regime is that Afghanistan could become a probable sanctuary for the Uyghur extremist group, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). ETIM could react against the "extensive suppression of Uyghurs" by Chinese troops in Xinjiang. In a July 2021 meeting between China's foreign minister Wang Yi and the deputy leader of the

Taliban Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Wang Yi said that he hoped the Taliban would give peace an important chance in Afghanistan. He further stated that China looks forward to the Taliban for ensuring that terrorism will not be promoted either within Afghanistan or in nearby countries. This shows China's wish to have stability in Afghanistan. China wants to ensure that terrorist insurgencies don't spread over into the Xinjiang province.

Iran Factor in Afghanistan Crisis

With the recapturing of Afghanistan by the Taliban, the priority of Iran is to prevent new refugee flows, weapons deals and drug smuggling. The economic costs of the Taliban seizure will be important for Iran. Economically, Iran and Afghanistan are interconnected in multiple and intense manners. In the background of the US sanctions and cutting off of Iran from the global geo-economic order, Iran unexpectedly found a trading partner with locals of Afghanistan. This trade relationship is based more on non-oil commodities from Iran. This trade was most often done in local currencies. With the shortage of hard currencies with the Taliban, this trade is sure to suffer. Another point is that with the end of dollar deliveries the inflationary tendencies will skyrocket in Afghanistan. With inflation, Afghan business houses and households will need to reduce demand, including demand for Iranian goods. With the double burden of higher inflation and lower incomes, hardships for ordinary Afghans will increase both in domestic and commercial aspects. This development in Afghanistan is bad for Iranian non-oil exports as the demand for both consumer and agricultural goods will fall. Afghanistan's political and economic instability and uncertainty is bad news for Iran. The recent efforts among governments in the region to endorse a common agenda for connectivity now seems in jeopardy. In the connectivity project, Iran's role is crucial as the development of the port of Chabahar is seen as an essential way

for India to a new trade channel connecting to central Asia and Afghanistan by evading Pakistan. With the coming back of the Taliban in Afghanistan, India-Afghanistan bilateral trade is sure to suffer. It will have a spillover effect on Iran and Afghanistan relations as the necessary upgrades to transport infrastructure necessary to fully realise the trade corridor, such as additional connections between the Afghan and Iranian railway systems, are doubtful to be completed. In December 2020 only a part of the railway track connecting Iran and Afghanistan was completed. There are general security concerns that will prevent the construction of new infrastructure. The funding by multilateral development banks for multiple transport and energy projects in Afghanistan will be suspended if the Taliban remain the dominant political force in Afghanistan. The regional connectivity project had an indirect and yet significant positive value for Iran as under the US sanctions it cannot directly reap the benefits of funding of infrastructural projects by multilateral development banks. Iran has lost its last chance to connect with the region. On one hand, some of the Iranian leaders may be happy with the withdrawal of the US and its ally's troops from Afghanistan as a symbol of the US's political failure to establish peace in Afghanistan. However, in economic terms, withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan is a piece of bad news for Iran. The international funding and presence of global powers in Afghanistan had benefitted Iran to reap economic benefits. With the better Afghan economy, Iran's economy also witnessed growth. Now everything seems unsettled and uncertain (Batmanghelidi, 2021).

Gender and Foreign Policy

Gender is invisible in foreign policy theorisation and practice. It is only in the past three decades that scholars have brought gender lenses to analyse foreign policy. Eric M. Blanchard (2003) discusses three ways in which foreign policy is aligned with gender

by feminists. The first school of feminists accept stereotypes about aggressiveness as natural to men and passiveness to women. They speak about utilising maternal thinking in shifting foreign policy narrative from militarism to peace. The second school of feminists rejects the idea that this natural binary opposition between men and women defines foreign policy. They emphasise the fact that women have the right to equal representation on issues of both war and peace. The third school of thought presents the view that war and military structures are embedded in patriarchy and it is supported by both men and women. This work agrees with the third school of feminists that men and women are influenced by patriarchal values and therefore their take on foreign policy has a continuum rather than opposition. However, this work stretches the argument to the third gender as well. It is not only men and women but also all persons who are identifying themselves between and beyond binary opposition of gender that is embedded in a patriarchal context. Therefore, we cannot completely agree with scholars like Ulf Bjereld (2001) and Sara Angevine (2017) who argue that just by adding/increasing women's representation as policymakers, the definition and performance of foreign policy will change. It is not biology but patriarchy that defines foreign policy.

Amy Kaplan (1994) stresses the fact that foreign policy is seen as a strategy to protect domestic core values from external threats. This perspective might appear gender-neutral for many but not for feminists. Although there is no outwardly expression of gender in this formulation, it indirectly feeds on the idea that men are protectors of the nation-state and women against foreign aggression. Here women are assumed to be passive and dependent on aggressive and independent men. Cornelius Adebahr and Barbara Mittelhammer (2020) emphasise that there is a need to problematize the concept of foreign policy wherein military

enforced security is seen as masculine and peace based security as feminine. In this chapter we can see when we use masculine/feminine prism to understand foreign policy then it makes foreign policy significant only for a few. It also views certain types of interests as natural. In the context of India, we can say that as upper caste, upper class heterosexual Hindu men embedded in patriarchal values (hegemonic masculinity of India) are predominantly represented in the policymaking process, their security perspectives are valued more. If this particular category of policymakers believe that national security can be ensured only by prioritising hard power over soft power, then that becomes the norm. In this scenario, the victory in war is equated with the success of the foreign policy. The issues of environment, health and social justice are either ignored or pushed to the periphery in formulating foreign policy. Victoria Scheyer and Marina Kumskova (2019) cites R.W. Connell's work in which she names the process of shaping institutions and organisations according to specific gender norms as 'the gender regime of an institution' which creates a supportive setting for exclusion. This is true, in most countries, the top positions of decision-making hierarchies are dominated by men and supposed masculine principles. Scheyer and Kumskova (2019) observe that this is often overlooked in a patriarchal society as gender is invisible when only the masculine is present.

Anita Gurumurthy, Nandini Chami and Sanjana Thomas (2016) highlight the fact that gender biases are not only in conventional ways of defining foreign policy through militarism but also in the contemporary method of a digital world driven national security discourses. They cite the fact that in the digital paradigm 'authoritarian neoliberalism' creates the myth of 'masculine entrepreneurialism' and 'misrecognition' of women. Digital technology is used both by the state and the market for surveillance of the poor and powerless, irrespective of gender.

The government and market in the name of connectivity and transparency compromise privacy and perspectives of the powerless. In this hegemonic exercise, omissions and silences are as significant as presence and assertions. What is not seen, heard and spoken by the framers of foreign policy is a gendered and political response to consolidate the male vote bank during the elections (Gurumurthy et al 2016). Deborah Stienstra (1994/1995) also highlights the fact that there is a silence maintained by foreign policymakers with regard to violence against women (both in war and peace times) as women are not part of these decision making processes. We can add to that it is not only the absence of women per se but also persons who are sensitive to gender questions. Even those who identify themselves as men can speak for women and the third gender if they have the inclination and intention to do so. The absences and silences are invisible to the framers of foreign policy as there is a lack of plurality in representatives' social, cultural and economic backgrounds (not only limited to gender identities). Gitta Shrestha, Deepa Joshi and Floriane Clement (2019) emphasise the fact that the performance of hegemonic masculinity makes the side-lining of ethics of care and distributive justice as basic organisational values. After looking into the contributions of the above-mentioned scholars, we can understand that what is significant in foreign policy is a constructed notion. Therefore, it can be changed. However, the realisation that something is wrong in the current hegemonic masculinity based formulations of foreign policy is the first step towards change. Countries like United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Australia, Costa Rica and Germany have already started the process to reframe and redefine foreign policy as a concept. But a country like India and its decision-makers have failed even to acknowledge the gaps and silences inherent in its hegemonic masculinity based foreign policy. India needs to reimagine its social and governmental structures and how they interact with

both global and local power hierarchies. These aspects are focused in the coming section wherein India and Afghanistan relationship is analysed through a gender lens.

India and Afghanistan Relations through a Gender Lens

As discussed in the above section, there is no outward expression of gender in the foreign policy formulation. However, it indirectly feeds on the idea that men are protectors of the nation-state and women against foreign aggression. The concept of humanitarian intervention and the idea of 'responsibility to protect' associated with it reflects the hegemonic masculinity embedded in the superpower nation-state and its allies. With respect to Afghanistan, India has supported this 'protective armour' of the superpowers both in 1979 Soviet Union's intervention and in 2001 US's intervention. India on the one hand, as we have seen already in the earlier sections of this paper, claims to have historically enriched social-cultural relations with Afghanistan. On the other hand, India uncritically sides with superpower interventions in establishing puppet governments from above in Afghanistan. In doing so, India fails to understand that in a non-western society like Afghanistan, the hegemonic masculinity of men is hurt when 'government from above' is established by foreign powers. As Lina Abirafeh (2007) highlights the fact that in a traditional and patriarchal Afghan society the basic social entity is the family – the private domain. The hegemonic masculinity of men believes in the protection of society as inherently connected to the protection of women. For Afghan men and women, women's paid work outside the home is a sign of their utter poverty and hardship. It is seen as an insult to men's dignity. It leads to questioning men's ability to provide. To provide and protect for one's family and nation is the basis of the honour of men. A man who fails to do so has no honour in the eyes of his family members and community members. Therefore, the campaigns for

women's rights to move out of the household for getting an education or employment is directly linked with the failure of Afghani men. The idea of women defying the family borders is seen as an imposition of foreign ideology emasculating the Afghani men at large (Abirafeh, 2007). Elizabeth Boulton (2020) has highlighted the importance of renegotiating gender perspectives in Afghanistan. She has cited the need for addressing not only the exploitation of women in Afghanistan but also of 'boy rape' (bacha bāzī) prevalent in Afghanistan. She equally speaks for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Queer, Asexual, Inter sexed + (LGBTQAI +) communities in Afghanistan. Boulton states the fact that gender issues are not limited to women but to other genders and sexualities. Even boys and men have violent experiences in Afghan society (Boulton, 2020). The revival of the Taliban could take place as a means to undo the harm done to the 'honour' of Afghan men and nation-state by the US and its allies since 2001. In post-2001 Afghanistan when India has sided with the US in empowering Afghani women through US-led Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), India is seen as pursuing a foreign policy that simultaneously has a submissive admission to the vision of the superpower US and an aggressive imposing attitude towards people of Afghanistan. Here, this behaviour can be seen as an 'Arthnarishwar' masculinity of India's foreign policy where the supposed feminine quality of submissiveness and absolute obedience to the US reflects the submissiveness of a wife to her husband. This femininity with the US is counterbalanced with aggressive masculine behaviour with Afghani people. In this process, India in its foreign policy has moved away from the 'strategic autonomy'. India has a side-lined political dialogue with local communities in Afghanistan to know people's perspectives on coming out of foreign occupation. India's foreign policy in the post-second coming of the Taliban to power has to adopt empathy for Afghan communities. India also has to

show sensitiveness to the different ethnic compositions of the Afghani society. India has to engage beyond Pashtun leaders. India has to emphasise faith in Afghan leaders to stand for a version of Islamic traditions where men and women are seen as partners in building their homes and the nation-state. The whole concept of 'honour' has to be expanded in a new Islamic light where violence attached with honour has to be replaced with love. It is a huge task as changes in social norms is tougher than political and economic changes. India has to develop a foreign policy that moves beyond the individualistic concept of security to a community-driven security paradigm. India can bring in its historical cultural relations to an advantage to situate intersectional identities playing political games in Afghanistan. The real issue in Afghanistan is not their political or economic well-being but that of social well-being. With the years of foreign occupation and revival of regressive interpretation of Islam, the toxic masculinity based on honour, violence and revenge is permeating Afghan society (both in private and public spheres). The only way to change this is more dialogue with different stakeholders in Afghan society.

The beginning of India's foreign policy in this changed scenario after the withdrawal of the US troops is to acknowledge that everything was not perfect under the US intervention. India has to accept the failures of the US military troops as well as NGOs to connect with the people's sentiments, security and safety, especially that of Afghani men. As Muntazir Ali (2009) and Aarya Nijat and Jennifer Murtazashvili (2015) state that most of the local NGOs in Afghanistan are dependent on foreign aid. This Ali calls as a 'rentier civil society'. Predominantly, NGOs and their operations supported by foreign aid are concentrated in urban centres of Afghanistan. In this case, civil society is seen as an extension of occupying force. One of the most important limitations of the NGOs supported by the US and its allies

in Afghanistan is the lack of efforts to promote peace and harmony among different communities (Ali, 2009; Nijat and Murtazashvili, 2015). Anastasiya Hozyainova (2014) and Farhana Rahman (2017) emphasise the fact that rather than using the liberal democratic legal framework for addressing gender questions in Afghanistan, one should rely on an Islamic legal framework. Afghan society is better receptive to the narrative that Islam is not against gender justice but a particular interpretation of Islam by mullahs and extremist leaders are leading to gender injustices (Hozyainova, 2014; Rahman, 2017). Even this task is a difficult one in the given situation but is better than outright rejection of the Islamic arrangement of social life. India in its foreign policy can reflect an acceptance of an alternative Islamic way of arranging life based on cooperation and empathy.

Torunn Wimpelmann (2017) cites the fact that the Afghani leaders who formed government in Afghanistan after 2001 are equally to be blamed for the revival of the Taliban in the country. They were highly corrupt and opportunists. These tendencies get magnified in the absence of a clear legal paradigm. The official legal structure in post-2001 Afghanistan is a collage of codified laws taken from sharia, secular laws and un-codified Islamic jurisprudence. The civil servants also have allegiance to different bodies of law. The civil servants committed to the Taliban era co-existed with new government civil servants. At large, all of them believe in a traditional society like Afghanistan informal justice reached through reconciliation between conflicting parties is better than standardised laws. Hamid Karzai's presidency is witness to his appeasement of both traditional power bases and foreign donors in a highly personalized and impulsive way (Wimpelmann, 2017). India, in an honest re-evaluation of its foreign policy with Afghanistan, has to begin with understanding the prevalence of high levels of corruption and mistrust among politicians and people at large. India has to admit the violence perpetrated by the US and its allies in Afghanistan in supposed peace

times since 2001. India has to choose its mediators and negotiators very carefully in Afghanistan, especially without being carried away with the US interests in the region. India has to develop a pragmatic and autonomous foreign policy towards Afghanistan.

Rebecca Winthrop (2003) highlights the fact that Afghani society firmly believes in gender segregation. When the US and its allies started using girls educated in the western model of education in Pakistan to teach men and women in Afghanistan, Afghani men were uncomfortable interacting with better qualified Pakistani women trainers. Afghani men desire to achieve professional skills like typing, computer skills, English language and professional writing. However, they want to learn it in a gender-segregated atmosphere. Winthrop affirms the fact that social change takes a longer time than political change. To be successful in development efforts in Afghanistan, any player must work with (and not work for) the people for whom they are envisioned (Winthrop, 2003). This is the area where India's foreign policy can establish closer links with Afghanistan. For this, firstly, India has to shed its 'big brother' syndrome in South Asia. Then India has to re-orient its foreign policy from 'power over' to 'power to' approach. The hegemonic masculinity based on 'power over' has dominated India's foreign policy in South Asia for a long. This is evident from the Nehru era when India has unilaterally interfered in the internal matters of Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Now, India has to restrain itself from doing so in Afghanistan. The wait and watch approach by the current government is a pragmatic decision in the given situation. Rajeshwari Krishnamurthy (2014) emphasises the fact that India's 'no-boots-on-the-ground' policy and minimum interference in the internal issues of Afghanistan and a development-driven presence, have been fruitful. However, better ideas are also needed in India's foreign policy (Krishnamurthy, 2014). Today we

realise its significance more than ever. To bargain with Taliban dominated political arrangement in Afghanistan has to be a cautious step. India has to simultaneously show firmness and flexibility in dealing with the Taliban. India has to express its willingness to work with the people of Afghanistan. India can utilise its economic and cultural power in doing this. India can offer to Taliban continuance of funding of infrastructural facilities. Another significant contribution which India can make is to train Taliban administrators with professional skills such as computer skills and English speaking required for integrating the Afghan economy with the global neoliberal economic order. Infrastructure and informed personnel are the foundations of any administration. India can chip in this sphere as it has an upper hand in the skilled labour force as compared to Pakistan. India can bargain with the Taliban to have a higher role in gender-segregated administration and empowerment projects. India can bring development efforts to rural areas of Afghanistan and also to the homeschooling of girls. Simultaneously, India has to be firm with the Taliban when it comes to its commitment to arresting terrorist activities against India from Afghan soil.

Here again, the Ardhnarishwar masculinity, that of softness (supposed feminine quality) and stiffness (supposed masculine quality), is the future for India's foreign policy with Afghanistan. Too much firmness in dealing with the Taliban will close the channels of communication with Afghanistan which India can ill afford to do. Too much flexibility will liquidate India's national security concerns. A middle path based on Arthnarishwar masculinity is the need of the hour.

Looking forward

The present situation in Afghanistan is that of turmoil. There is instability in the political, economic, social and cultural structures of the country. Establish a meaningful relationship with

Afghanistan is a challenge for India's foreign policy. Yet, it is an opportunity for India to relook its foreign policy at large. One of the significant learnings from this experience is that India has to maintain the 'strategic autonomy' in its foreign policy. India cannot afford to blindly follow the US interests. India's image as a nuclear power enabled state and also a knowledge centre has to be used with utmost care in formulating its relationship with Afghanistan. As the discussions above have shown, gender is not explicitly mentioned in foreign policy. However, gendered notions affect the decisions we make as foreign policy. The hegemonic masculinity based on notions of militaristic, aggressive and competitive vigour in foreign policy is outdated. At least, it is clear from the Afghanistan experience. We need a new foreign policy paradigm that combines the best of supposed masculine and feminine qualities to best serve India's national interest through foreign policy. The Ardhnarishwar masculinity is the future gender lens to formulate India's foreign policy.

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