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## **Feminism in International Relations: Conceptual Analysis**

**Dr. Chander Bhushan Nagar**

*Assistant Professor Department of Political Science Dasaratha Deb Memorial College  
Khowai, Tripura, India*

### **Abstract**

*In everyday usage, the terms 'gender' and 'sex' are often used interchangeably. Indeed, one might say that a belief that gender differences are rooted in 'natural' or biological difference between men and women, and so are essential differences, is so prevalent that the proposition is still often simply accepted as uncontroversial. Gender studies and feminist ideas had long been accommodated within other branches of the social sciences, prior to the appearance of in International Relations, had not much noticed the relevance of gender in international relations and its related studies. With a focus on the high politics of realpolitik, the traditional western academic discipline of international relations (IR) privileges issues that grow out of men's experiences. A socialized belief that war and power politics are spheres of activity which men have a special affinity and that their voices in describing and prescribing for this world are therefore likely to be more authentic. The roles traditionally prescribe to women in reproduction, in household works and even in the economy are generally considered irrelevant to the traditional construction of the field. Ignoring women's experiences contributes not only to their exclusion but also to a process of self-selection those results in an overwhelmingly male population both in the foreign policy world and in the academic field of international relations. It has been observed that girls and women who have joined into militaries often aren't used by the men designing the force's division of labour a weapon carrying soldiers instead, they were usually deployed as cooks, porters and forced wives of male combatants (Cyntheia Enloe).*

*This paper is an attempt to analyse nature of identified gap of gender insensitivity in the discipline of international relations and its related fields. This analysis shall lay emphasis on the following aspects of IR:*

- 1) Feminism and international relations theory.*
- 2) Feminism and foreign policy.*
- 3) Feminism and peace keeping operations.*
- 4) Feminism and security studies.*
- 5) Feminism and international political economy.*

***Keywords: Realism, Rational Choice Theory, International Relations, peacekeeping Operations.***

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**Introduction:**

*“Too often the great decisions are originated and given form in bodies made up wholly of men, or so completely dominated by them that whatever of special value women have to offer is shunted aside without expression”<sup>1</sup>.*

*Eleanor Roosevelt*

As Eleanor Roosevelt and countless others have observed, international politics is a man's world. It is a world inhabited by diplomats, soldiers, and international civil servants most of whom are men. Apart from the occasional head of state, there is little evidence to suggest that women have played much of a role in shaping foreign policy in any country in the twentieth century. In the United States in 1987, women constituted less than 5% of the senior Foreign Service ranks, and in the same year, less than 4% of the executive positions in the Department of Defence were held by women<sup>2</sup>. Although it is true that women are underrepresented in all top-level government positions in the United States and elsewhere, they encounter additional difficulties in positions having to do with international politics. There are belief, widely held in the United States and throughout the world by both men and women, that military and foreign policy are arenas of policy-making least appropriate for women. The ideas like strength, power, autonomy, independence, and rationality, all typically associated with men and masculinity. These are characteristics one most value in those to whom one entrusts the conduct of the foreign policy and the defence of national interest. Those women in the peace movements, whom feminist critics of Former U.S President Mr. Donald Regan cited as, evidence for women's involvement in international affairs, are frequently branded as naive, weak, and even unpatriotic. When one thinks about the definition of a patriot, one generally thinks of a man, often a soldier who defends his homeland, most especially his women and children, from dangerous outsiders, one sometimes even think of a missile or a football team. The story of a scholar Schroeder suggests that, ‘even women who have experience in foreign policy issues are perceived as being too emotional and too weak for the tough life and death decisions required for the nation's defence. Weakness is always considered a danger when issues of national security are at stake. The president's dual role as Commander in Chief reinforces a belief that qualities one associate with manliness are of utmost importance in the selection of our presidents<sup>3</sup>. The few women who do make it into the foreign policy establishment often suffer from such kind of negative perception. Jeane Kirkpatrick is one such example, who attracted by her authoritative and forceful public style and strong anticommunist rhetoric, appointed as ambassador to the United Nations in 1981 by U.S President Mr. Donald Regan. Yet, in spite of the visibility she achieved due to her strong stance against anti-American voices at the United Nations, Kirkpatrick complained of not being taken seriously by her peers both in the United Nations and in the U.S. foreign policy establishment. Although other American ambassadors to the United Nations have also complained that they lack influence over U.S. Foreign policy making, Kirkpatrick specifically attributed this lack of respect to her sex describing herself to one

reporter as a 'mouse in a man's world', Kirkpatrick claimed that her views were seldom listened to and that she failed to have any effect whatsoever on the course of American foreign policy<sup>4</sup>.

In everyday usage, the terms 'gender' and 'sex' are often used interchangeably. Indeed, one might say that a belief that gender differences are rooted in 'natural' or biological difference between men and women, and so are essential differences, is so prevalent that the proposition is still often simply accepted as uncontroversial. Gender studies and feminist ideas had long been accommodated within other branches of the social sciences, prior to the appearance of in International Relations, had not much noticed the relevance of gender in international relations and its related studies. With a focus on the high politics of realpolitik, the traditional western academic discipline of international relations (IR) privileges issues that grow out of men's experiences. A socialized belief that war and power politics are spheres of activity which men have a special affinity and that their voices in describing and prescribing for this world are therefore likely to be more authentic. The roles traditionally prescribe to women in reproduction, in household works and even in the economy are generally considered irrelevant to the traditional construction of the field. Ignoring women's experiences contributes not only to their exclusion but also to a process of self-selection those results in an overwhelmingly male population both in the foreign policy world and in the academic field of international relations. It has been observed that girls and women who have joined into militaries often aren't used by the men designing the force's division of labour a weapon carrying soldiers instead, they were usually deployed as cooks, porters and forced wives of male combatants<sup>5</sup>. This paper is an attempt to analyse nature of identified gap of gender insensitivity in the discipline of international relations and its related fields. This analysis shall lay emphasis on the following aspects of IR:

**Feminism and International Relations (IR) Theory:** In United States of America, the discipline of international relations emerged at the beginning of the 20th century, in most cases but not always as a sub discipline of Political Science. Following World War-II, IR developed its own disciplinary identity, although it generally remained with in Political Science departments. Supported by a uniquely American conviction that most problems can be resolved by the logics of science, and largely abandoning its historical, sociological, and legal foundations, IR became increasingly committed to social scientific research. The methodologies opted from Economics were employed in theory building, the goal of which was to discover laws and regularities of states' international behaviour, particularly with respect to matters of international conflict and war<sup>6</sup>. By the decade of Seventies, Economics judged as most "scientific" of the social sciences, played an increasingly influential role in IR's methodological choices. Rational choice theories and non-cooperative game theoretic models became popular means of explaining the optimizing behaviour of self-interested power-seeking states. These positivist methodological preferences went hand in hand with certain assumptions or worldviews.

Realism, one of the most influential IR theories in the United States since 1945, portrays a world of anarchy where there is no sovereign power above states with the ability to sanction their actions. The result is an international system in which each State must act to provide its own security and survival through self-help and the accumulation of power. At best this security dilemma, the tension that results when States build their own capabilities in order to be secure and there by appear threatening to others, results in a balance of power between States at worst it results in the outbreak of conflict, which realists see as an ever-recurring phenomenon. Realists distinguish this dangerous anarchical international system from a domestic space within states where law and order, backed by legal sanctions, prevail. Realists portray States as unitary rational actors whose behaviour can be understood in terms of the imperatives of the system of anarchy. This worldview resonated with the foreign policy interests and concerns of the United States during the cold war. Liberalism, which assumes a more benign view of the international system, provided a challenge to realism in terms of its worldview but not in terms of its methodologies. Most liberal IR theorists also see states' behaviour as amenable to explanations based on Rational Choice and Game Theory models.

The feminist agenda entered in IR at the end of the 1980's. Like feminists in other disciplines, IR feminists have claimed that instrumental rationality, based on rational choice theory, is a model extrapolated from the highly individualistic competitive behaviour of Western men in the marketplace, which IR theorists have generalized to the behaviour of States. Rather than uncritically assume the State as a given unit of analysis, IR feminists have investigated the constitutive features and identities of gendered states and their implications for women's and men's lives<sup>7</sup>. Feminists have asked whether it makes a difference that most foreign policy leadership in the world are men and why women remain so fundamentally disempowered in matters of foreign and military policy. They have questioned why States' foreign policies are so often legitimated in terms of typically hegemonic masculine characteristics and why wars have been fought mostly by men. These constitutive questions have rarely been asked in IR. There are questions those probably could not be asked within the epistemological and methodological boundaries of positivist social science like feminists in other disciplines. IR feminists have expressed scepticism towards a body of knowledge that, while it claims to be universal and objective, is in reality based on knowledge primarily from men's experiences. An ontology based on unitary States operating in a social, anarchical international environment does not provide an entry point for feminist theories grounded in an epistemology that takes social relations, particularly gender relations, as its central category of analysis. Feminist ontology is based on social relations that are constituted by historically contingent unequal political, economic, and social structures. Unlike practitioners of conventional social science, IR feminists generally prefer historical or sociological analyses those begin with individuals and the hierarchical social relations in which their lives are situated. Whereas much of IR is focused on explaining the behaviour of States. The feminists are motivated by emancipatory goals investigating the often

disadvantaged lives of women within States or international institutions and structures in order to change them, commencement of its investigations from the perspective of the lives of individuals on the margins who have never been the subject matter of IR, feminist analysis is often bottom-up rather than top-down. Feminists in IR are linking the everyday lived experiences of women with the constitution and exercise of political and economic power at state and global levels.<sup>8</sup>

They have focused on the effects of international politics and the world economy on relational and distributional gender inequality and on how gender inequalities serve to support these same structures. Identity issues, including race and culture as well as gender, have been at the core of feminist investigations. Feminists in IR are demonstrating how gender is a pervasive feature of international life and international politics, the implications of which go well beyond its effects on women.

**Feminist and foreign policy:** Whereas, writings on feminism in international relations are active since Eighties, the context of feminism in foreign policy has not been of great interest to scholars in this field. Interestingly, literature on foreign policy also becomes questionable, when scholars pose the classic liberal feminist question: where are the women? It is because of two reasons; firstly, feminist scholars have been trying to make visible the presence and work of women in international relations that complements the foreign policy process. Secondly, feminists have, along with other critical scholars, been pushing for an enlargement of the scope of the field, which has somewhat marginalized the study of traditional foreign policy processes and establishments. In the real world too, there are days when formal foreign policy only seems like one of many players and streams in the shrinking world of international relations. Four strands can be identified in relation to feminist interest in foreign policy, which do not quite add up to an answer to the question posed earlier. The first strand is that classic question, 'Where are the women?' While one spots a prominent woman at senior levels in foreign policy establishments every now and then a minister, a senior diplomat or even a female head of state or government who takes an interest in foreign relations -the assumption that they are still in a minority across roles and ranks seems plausible. Numbers are hard to come by. More than two decades after Cynthia Enloe's first posed this question, answers are still scarce<sup>9</sup>. The second strand, discovered during repeated keyword searches for feminism and foreign policy are focussing around specific local topics related to foreign policy. There was also some research that sought to relate and compare the domestic policies of a State with its policies on international development and relations. This has been of special interest in States whose domestic policies reflect feminist concerns and advocacy on social issues. The third strand is critical analysis of both foreign policy and other official international engagement through a feminist framework. Even this is surprisingly rare<sup>10</sup>. The fourth strand, in effect, relegates foreign policy to one dimension of international relations rather than being central to it. It is tempting to characterize the changes introduced in United States foreign policy by the administration of President Barak Obama as the makings of a feminist foreign policy<sup>11</sup>. One thing that President Obama did was to lift ban on US

funding for family planning programmes. There is now an Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, and 'Melanie Verveer' comes to this post from a long career in women's rights work. The problem of pervasive sexual violence has received attention in both State Department rhetoric and programming. The US Secretary of State has spoken out often and forcefully on this at platforms as diverse as UN Security Council debates and civil society programmes those are organized during her visit. There is a qualitative difference between this and the use by the earlier administration of Afghan women's rights as an excuse to attack the Taliban. Official concern about Afghan women came long after petitions and email 'forwards' had circulated about what they were experiencing, and right around the US intervention in Afghanistan. With this administration, however, concern about women's rights may still serve a strategic end, but it is consistent and built into the agenda and programmes of the US foreign policy establishment. In a recent article, Verveer writes that President Obama has 'endeavoured to put women at the heart of its foreign policy'. But what about the rest of U S foreign policy? Is feminist thinking confined to thinking about women and women's rights<sup>12?</sup>

**Feminism and Peace Keeping Operations:** The research on gender and development has shown that providing basic rights and entitlements to women can have large positive effects where, women do comparatively better will have improved prospects for successful peace-building operations under the auspices of the United Nations (UN), because it is easier for women to express a voice in the peacemaking process and to elicit broader domestic participation<sup>13</sup>. The peace keeping operations under United Nations have many advantages those can help in strengthening the effectiveness of peace building efforts, but the effectiveness of these efforts will depend on a society's domestic capacity and social capital. After 1945, the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations has increased by the relative status of women. The cases of peacekeeping were fairly a success in countries where the status of women is comparatively high, relative to men prior to the conflict. The cases of States where women have poor social standing relative to men are much more likely to fail<sup>14</sup>.

The end of the Cold War has brought a fivefold increase in UN peacekeeping operations and the evolution of traditional peacekeeping operations into more comprehensive peace building missions. Diminished strategic competition between the major powers in the 1990s stimulated demands for stronger human rights protection in international law and calls for limits to state sovereignty. Similarly, a new neo-liberal internationalism gained ground, especially among practitioners in international relations, emphasizing the connection among underdevelopment, lack of democratic institutions, and human rights violations (Duffield, 2001). Whereas States have traditionally intervened in other States' domestic affairs primarily to defend their strategic interests, humanitarian concerns, such as preventing human suffering in severe civil wars, have increasingly become cited as a rationale for involvement in other states, as witnessed by interventions in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Somalia. Thus, protecting human rights and fostering political settlements have increasingly become central objectives in

peacekeeping operations. If one accepts the premise that peace building requires domestic institutions to handle reconstruction and those UN operations may substitute for low domestic capacity, why should one expect women to be important for the peace building process? Several field studies of intrastate wars identify women as active social and economic agents to be reckoned with (Sorensen, 1998; Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002). The lack of attention to women in peace building and post-conflict reconstruction stems to a large extent from the emphasis on security that has dominated much of the existing thinking on humanitarian operations, whereas civil society and social networks are generally not accorded much relevance.

Despite an empirical analysis and recognition of casual evidence from the experiences of particular operations that including women in the peace building process can enhance the prospects for success, it is also clear that UN missions often have not been particularly successful in realizing their gender-mainstreaming goals. UN organizations, such as the Women's Fund at the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), have highlighted policies that render support to women and local communities and enhance the ability of war torn countries to rebuild domestic capacity. The challenge is, however, to move beyond awareness-raising rhetoric to the implementation of the recommended policies. Ultimately, the largest challenge to women's integration in post-conflict reconstruction is the complexity of peace building operations, since they involve too many actors at multiple levels of authority and decision making power. It is often hard to identify women who could contribute to the peace building process, as women are primarily organized at the grassroots level. It is characteristic that so far only one woman has been Special Envoy in UN missions (in Georgia) and only four women have been appointed as deputy heads in various UN missions (Guatemala, DRC, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Georgia) (UNIFEM, 2004)<sup>15</sup>.

**Feminism and Security Studies:** Though realism has been a long-standing theory of international relations, its views do not reflect the changing reality of the international system. Though States still predominate, the vast majority of disputes are no longer inter-State but rather intra-State in nature, the number of disputes those occur between states has declined rapidly for the past two decades, a trend that persists to presently<sup>16</sup>. This marked decline in inter-state war saw a rapid increase in intra-state conflict during the waning years of the Cold War. Even though a number of civil wars have since started to decrease, these still outnumber the amount of inter-state wars that have occurred in recent history. Thus, the nature of war has been changing in such a way that it is currently characterized not by the struggles of two contending state armies but rather by various factions who, in fighting frequently target civilians. For this reason, among others, realists adherence to national security has come increasingly under attack by a diverse range of theorists. The feminist scholars have argued that new threats to security demand new solutions quite at odds with the power politics prescriptions of traditional international relations theory. Realism continues to maintain its narrow conception of security, as its 'state-centric, militaristic'. The definition of security emanates from a masculine bias

inherent in the theory. The feminist scholars have argued cogently that the gendered nature of the theory prevents it from viewing the whole picture with respect to security and that it correspondingly sees only 'a partial view of reality. They have also observed that men have long been ascribed certain characteristics such as 'strength, power, autonomy, independence and rationality'. For these reasons, men have been seen as rightfully operating in the public domain while women have been relegated to the private because they are seen as weak, peaceful, cooperative and reliant on others for protection<sup>17</sup>. Feminists argue that from these social constructions, the hegemonic masculinity outlined above is projected by realists on to the behaviour of States whose success as international actors is measured in terms of their power capabilities and capacity for self-help and autonomy. The State is viewed as aggressive, as males are viewed as aggressive. Indeed, for realists, this masculine trait is necessary in an anarchic international system where states are struggling for power. If a State were not aggressive, if it was unable to rely on its own capabilities, it could be seen as weak and dominated by other States.

While recent feminist writings on the topics of international relations and human security make a compelling and valuable case for shifting the focus of security from the State to the individual, the writings has been woefully negligent of acknowledging the unique circumstances which males find themselves in. As Matthew C. Guttman explains, too often masculinity is either ignored or considered so much the norm that a separate inventory is unnecessary. Then, too, gender' often means women and not men. While sexual torture and the rape of civilian women in conflict situations is a well-studied topic, almost no attention is given to the same topic when it pertains to men<sup>18</sup>.

### **Feminism and International Political**

**Economy:** Historically, mainstream International Political Economy has focused on states, markets, and the relations between the two. Further, it has largely assumed the ontological premises of rational-choice individualism. However, with the changing dimensions in the development of discipline a new focus has been brought to the study of micro activities of the individual human being. An increasing set of debates on gendered labour, social movements and role and problems of women labourers has diverted the debates in political economy towards feminism.

While feminism is not solely concerned with issues of equality, equality in entitlement to health care, education, pensions, unemployment benefits and other forms of social security has been an important strand in feminist politics. One of the tasks of feminist economists has been to assess the impact of government expenditure and expenditure cuts on women as a group. It is pertinent to ask, therefore, what impact does military expenditure have on women as a group? For poor women in the 'least developed' countries, access to economic and social security is still an aspiration that is very far from reach. However, feminist economists have demonstrated that the transfer of resources from the military to the civilian sector of the economy would, in all countries



– reap social and economic benefits for all people, but especially women. In developing countries, military expenditure often very high has a negative impact on areas like expenditure on health care and education, which have already been hit hard by decades of debt repayment and structural adjustment<sup>19</sup>.

Another important fact to mention is the studied trend related to the ‘Feminization of Poverty’ due to the structural adjustment programmes. The term ‘feminisation of poverty’ used by the authors is at least two and a half decades old. It was as widely discussed in the late 1970s, as it was controversial. Diana Pearce (1978) was the first one to use the term to describe the contradiction in the labour market of the US and Canada observed since 1970. She and her supporters contended that feminisation of poverty had plagued almost all industrialised nations.<sup>20</sup>

They used the term to describe the fact that poverty incidence among women had increased despite the dramatic increase in their labour force participation, education, professionalization, etc. And its rate of increase was much higher than that for men. Thus concern regarding female poverty was increasing. At the same time, however, scholars like Battle (1991) argued that the “popular image of feminisation of poverty is a myth; it is generally exaggerated and is at best only partially true”<sup>21</sup>. According to him, the standard method of measuring poverty through income or expenditure is defective since it hides more than what it reveals. By definition, such measures include only monetary aspects and ignore important nonmonetary aspects of well-being such as leisure, freedom, flexible-job hours, and so on. The apparently high and/or increasing poverty rate among female-headed households was largely due to exclusion of such nonmonetary benefits available to them either as divorcees or single mothers. Several of them might be operating below their capacities in the labour market and earning less than men due to the preference for leisure or non-market activities. Similarly, female poverty caused due to the breaking up of families should be considered as the cost paid for increased privacy and autonomy that are also normal goods like leisure and there is no reason to believe that these choices are not rational<sup>22</sup>.

**Conclusion:** To study the theoretical dimensions of international relations its being a pertinent question as women’s are underrepresented in the literately contributions so, as in the theories as well. The masculinity of State and its different attributions have always been a male dominated concern. The feminist scholars have debated and contradict its literary foundations on factual basis. With an increasing emphasis on gender sensitivity in the applied ideas of international polity, it should be a necessity to recognize the voice of gender sensitivity one the one hand with an idea that ‘Feminism’ should not exclusively a female centric debate in IR rather it should be based on parity, as analyzed in case of war victims (not necessarily a female but male as well).

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