**Feminism Theory in International Relations**

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**Feminism in International Relations**

**Definition**

A body of scholarship that emphasises gender in the study of world politics

**Introduction**

* Feminist analyses interrogate how identities are constructed and reproduced, and how power relations and social and cultural norms, specifically heteronormative and patriarch norms, are constructed and maintained in varied contexts pertinent to international relations
* In the nineteenth century, Marxist work influenced and contributed to feminist thought by suggesting that the emergence of capitalism as a social and economic system brought about a clear distinction between the public world of work and the private realm of the home and the family
* Social feminist believe that women are exploited by the capitalist system both at work and at home
* Radical feminists developed the concept of patriarchy to explain the institutionalisation of male domination over women

**Patriarchy:**

Patriarchy is the word that explains a hierarchical system where men are at the top and women are at the bottom

* In short, feminists study the difference gender makes in international relations

**Principles**

* Feminists regard gender as a particular kind of power relationship.
* One of the key facets of this power relationship is the separation in society, of men who tend to engage in wage work and politics (public realm), and women, who tend to engage in domestic work and childcare (private realm)

**A critique on realism**

* Feminist work has contributed significantly to many debates in IR by, for instance: developing critiques of realism theory.
* Realism, for example, is the frequent target of feminist critique because, among other things, it is seen as a male-dominated theory about the aggressive world of states controlled by aggressive men.
* Non-violence is therefore an important part of the feminist commitment to world peace
* Feminists suggest alternative visions of security and community; broaden understanding of violence and conflict and highlight the significance of gendered identities and subjectivities in IR.

**Realists approach IR as a male world**

* In the 1970s some feminists rejected realism simply because they saw its linear form as designed to reflect male experience exclusively
* Looking at the world through a Liberal feminist 'lens' allows us to see that the world of International Relations is a man's world, in so far as the state's representatives are mainly men-politicians, soldiers, spies and so on.
* Realism advocates coercive diplomacy in which along with employing military capabilities sanctions are imposed on states. Feminists on the other hand express discontent on such policy measures.
* While realists considered war a rational act and also a continuation of political activity, feminists criticize it by offering a thorough investigation of the approach.
* According to feminists view war has gender aspect too;

*Men make war because war makes them men*

* Yet despite the repeated attempts to look more carefully at the impact of core principles of realism like balance of power, deterrence etc, feminism expresses increasing concerns about the impact of these measures on women.
* In low-income contexts, the burdens for women conditions in regard to men multiply.

**Statecraft, according to realists, a male world**

* This advocates a rejection of masculine values and desire to feminize institutions and conflict.
* ‘Bringing in' women is a first stage in developing feminist insights into the nature of the state is the critical standpoint of the feminists.
* Women have historically been excluded from political power and today remain heavily under-represented in the 'high politics' of statecraft.
* From a feminist perspective, very few women are involved in the making of foreign or defence policy, so the 'national interest' is nearly always defined by men of statecraft.
* Liberal feminists recognise that, historically, the state has not been equal and impartial in its treatment of women.
* However, for liberal feminists, male domination is largely explained by historical circumstances and accidents.
* Feminists (Radicals) advocate for a shift in the dynamics of the state security apparatus.
* Radical feminists emphasize peace as the endpoint of changing institutions and mindsets.

**Females do influence IR but through non-state channels**

* Historically the state has performed as a patriarchal site of power, but the state is not inherently patriarchal.
* That is to say, feminist organisations and women's groups have successfully lobbied to change government policies and interventions, often in ways that bring positive benefits to women.
* Critical feminists view the state both as a set of power relations and political processes in which patriarchy is both constructed and contested.
* From this perspective, feminists can work through the non-state channels to try to achieve positive changes for women.

**Women association with Private Spheres**

* Liberal feminists wish to see an ending to the exclusion of women in public life and are keen to see equal representation of women in the high offices of state and advocate the right of women to participate in combat.
* The separate spheres (private spheres) ideology presumes that women and men are inherently different and that distinctive gender roles are "natural".
* The notion dictates that men, based primarily on their biological makeup inhabit the public sphere – the world of politics, economy, commerce, and law.
* Women's "proper sphere", according to the ideology, is the private realm of domestic life, child-rearing, housekeeping, and religious education.
* There exists a clear distinction between the public world of work and the private realm of the home and the family
* Issues of inequality and question of justice have been central to feminist theory, and, from the eighteenth century onwards, feminists in the West have asserted the equal moral worth of women and men

**Advocating for Rights**

* Feminists demand equal rights and justice for women.
* In so doing, liberal feminists have internationalised the issue and also encouraged an active debate on what should be recognised as a 'human right'.
* Rights discourse is increasingly being adopted by NGOs in a variety of countries and cultural contexts around the world.
* Many transnational women's NGOs believe that human rights discourse is politically useful to disempowered groups.
* Moreover, both the conception and substantive context of human rights has been expanded to incorporate the needs of many groups-including women.

Generally feminists demands following rights for women;

**Gender Equality**

* Feminists believe in working to increase equality. Feminist thought links ideas to action, insisting we should push for change toward gender equality (and not just talk about it).

**Expanding human choice**

* Feminists also believe in expanding human choice, the idea that both men and women should be able to develop their human traits, even if those go against the status quo. If a woman wants to be a mechanic, she should have every right and opportunity to do so.

**Eliminating gender stratification**

* Another feminist principle, eliminating gender stratification, proposes that laws and cultural norms that limit the income, educational, and job opportunities for women should be opposed.

**Ending sexual violence**

* Finally, feminists urge fairly straightforward for ending sexual violence and promoting sexual freedom - that women should have control over their sexuality and reproduction.

**Three colours of feminist theory**

1. Difference feminism
2. Liberal feminism
3. Post-modern feminism

**Difference Feminism**

* It focuses on valuing the unique contributions of women in international relations.
* This school admits that men are more warlike on average than women.
* It also accepts that real difference between men and women exist
* It maintained that due to innate qualities of nurturing human relations women are more effective in conflict resolution and group decision making than men
* There are two subdivisions within difference feminism;

1. Who believes that there is core biological essence to being male or female
2. Who thinks that woman’s difference is more culturally than biologically determined

**Liberal Feminism**

* They believe that women are equal to men in virtually all roles of IR
* They disagree that women have different capabilities as participants in international relations.
* For evidence they refer to past and present day women leaders and soldiers.
* Liberal feminists wish to see a complete equality of opportunity between men and women.
* Liberal feminists wish to see an ending to the exclusion of women in public life and are keen to see equal representation of women in the high offices of state and advocate the right of women to participate in combat.
* Liberal tradition holds that women and men are basically alike and that perceived gender differences are simply the effects of discrimination.
* The political project of liberalism is largely confined to securing for women the rights and privileges already enjoyed by men; a good early example would be the work of Mary Wollstonecraft who was passionate about education for girls in the late eighteenth century.
* Although not self-defined as a feminist she suggested that men and women would have the tools to be equal if they were educated in the same way.
* Accordingly Wollstonecraft's work 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman’ was heavily influential on the first wave of feminism at the end of the nineteenth century which sought political equality (most importantly women's right to vote).

**Postmodern Feminism**

* The term postmodern feminism is believed to have begun and widely used in the 1980's.
* This strand of feminist theory combines postmodernist with feminist standpoints.
* Postmodern feminism's major departure from other branches of feminism is perhaps the argument that sex, or at least gender is itself constructed through language
* Feminists especially Judith Butler criticises the distinction drawn by previous feminisms between (biological) sex and (socially constructed) gender.
* Butler while recognizing that gender is a social construct says that material things (such as the body) are not subject to processes of social construction themselves
* Feminist postmodernists try to reveal hidden subtexts connecting ender with International Relations.
* Postmodern feminists reject try to deconstruct the language of realism especially when it reflects influences of gender and sex
* For example, the first atomic bombs had male gender (“Fat Man” and “Little Boy”)
* The coded telegram informing Washington, D. C., that the first hydrogen bomb had worked said simply, “It’s a boy” (presumably being born a girl would have indicated a failure)

**Postmodernism**

* It subscribes to the idea that modernity is not a model and merely an instance that shaped the political system.
* Post-modernism also denies the idea of historical progress, saying that history is not moving forward or backward.
* Because of these assumptions that nothing is necessary, post-modernists believe that existing arrangements were merely created by human beings

**Criticism**

**Liberal Feminism**

* Liberal Feminists while focusing their attention upon "equality of opportunity" between males and females have largely ignored the study of social structural factors.
* Any society that is fundamentally unequal in its economic and social structure "equality of opportunity" is a fairly meaningless concept as men too like women are at fundamental disadvantage.

**Radical Feminism**

* Radical Feminism tends to overlook the fact that the general position of women in society has changed over time and this can only be explained in terms of wider economic and political changes in society
* Radical Feminists over-emphasise factors that separate women from men (their biology in particular and also assumptions about male and female psychology).

**Marxist Feminism**

* Marxist Feminists tend to be criticised for placing too much emphasis upon class relations in the economic sphere (women considered as part of the working class, for example) and not paying enough attention to female experiences outside the labour market (within the family / domestic sphere, for example).

**Socialist Feminism**

* Socialist Feminism is criticised for being neither revolutionary nor radical enough to create lasting solutions to the problem of female economic and social exploitation.

**Note**: Most of the Polls and the surveys conducted clearly indicate that majority of the women do not support feminism.

* According to April 2013 HuffPost/YouGov poll conducted among American adults shows that just 23 percent of women and 16 percent of men consider themselves as feminists.
* The number is much lower in other part of the world.

**Conclusion**

* Individual participation of women in international system may not reflect difference.
* However, participation of large number of women would be instrumental towards making international system more peaceful
* Contemporary feminist theory does not focus solely on the lives of women but is an analysis of the socially and culturally constructed category 'gender'.
* A great deal of feminist scholarship is concerned with practices of discrimination and exclusion.