



# Feminist Approach to International Relations

**For Prelims:** [World War 2](#), [Cold War](#)

**For Mains:** Feminist Approaches to International Relations.

## Why in News?

After [World War 2](#), the changing global order witnessed the **rise of non-state actors, ethnic tensions, and the Cold War**. This necessitated alternative approaches to International Relations (IR), including the **Feminist Perspective** that views the international arena through a gendered lens.

## What is the Origin of Feminist Perspective of International Relations?

### ▪ **Positivists and Post-Positivists:**

- The feminist perspective in IR emerged from the "**Third Debate**" between positivists and post-positivist scholars in the 1980s.
  - Positivists believed that IR is a **value-neutral field with definitions and structures such as anarchy and nation state are fixed**.
  - Post-positivists challenged this view and **called for critical analysis, pluralism, and diversity** in IR (which till then was dominated by realist and liberal perspectives).

### **Note:**

- Realists believe the **international arena is in a state of anarchy** (there is no overarching sovereign power to govern nation states and tell them what to do).
  - Therefore, states are constantly involved in 'power politics', trying to safeguard their own interests and security.
- Liberal scholars on the other hand prioritize cooperation. While they agree on the premise of the global order being anarchic, they contend that instead of power, **nation states actively seek alliances** in order to safeguard their interests.
- **Feminists:**
  - Feminist **challenged the masculine assumption of human nature** inherent in these perspectives, arguing that it neglected social reproduction and **development as integral aspects of human nature**.
  - They view the global order as a **socially constructed hierarchy that perpetuated gender subordination**.
  - Feminist criticize the marginalization of women's experiences in war, conflict, and diplomacy. They argued that women's voices, knowledge, perspectives, and experiences were **often overlooked or subsumed under a male-centric "universal"** experience.

## How has Women's Participation in Discussing War and Conflicts been?

- In international conflict, women are often **portrayed as vulnerable** and in need of protection, but this perspective has marginalized them from **participating in discussions and processes of war**.
- There is a masculinisation of the sphere of war and conflict, where women are made completely invisible in spite of their **active role during war and conflicts** such as taking care of wounded persons and becoming prostitutes to support their war torn families.
- Even within the discourse of protection, the exclusive targeting of women through **rape and sexual violence is seen as an effect of war** and not as a **key military strategy used by nations for ethnic cleansing** and genocide.

## How do Different Feminist theories contribute to the Understanding of Existing Challenges in IR?

- **Liberal Feminist:**
  - While liberal feminist theory does not fundamentally challenge the traditional ideas of IR, it questions the content. Liberal feminists look on the role of the **gender gap in global politics and the disproportionate effect of war** on women in the form of sexual violence and trafficking.
  - They call for **more female participation in high-level politics** and contend that the presence of more women leaders would facilitate peaceful and humanitarian policies.
- **Constructivist Feminist:**
  - Constructivist feminist theory looks at how **gendered identities play a role in global politics**. It looks at gender as the **core component which influences structures and personal relationships**.
    - It places emphasis on the idea of gender and how it **upholds unequal global material conditions**.
  - While liberal feminism focuses on achieving formal equality and individual rights for women within existing structures, **constructivist feminism examines how gender is socially constructed** and seeks to transform societal norms and power relations for **true equality**.
- **Feminist Post Structuralist:**
  - A feminist post structuralist approach talks about binary linguistic oppositions in IR like order/anarchy, developed/underdeveloped, national/international etc, which perpetuate and **seek to empower the masculine over the feminine**.
  - They are highly critical of the assertion that more women in high-level diplomatic positions would **lead to pacifist policies as it seeks to further essentialise** and reinforce certain characteristics as feminine.
- **Postcolonial Feminist:**
  - It seeks to challenge the **assumption of universality of women's experience** across regions and cultures.
  - It is especially **critical of liberal feminists'** approach of looking at women in the **Global South as powerless**, lacking agency and helpless or as one homogenous category.

## How is the Feminist Approach to IR Relevant in Present Times?

- **Gender Inequality:**
  - The feminist approach highlights the **need to address gender disparities** and challenges traditional power structures **that perpetuate inequality**.
  - It sheds light on how **gender shapes global politics**, including issues related to security, development, and human rights.
- **Peace and Security:**
  - Feminist scholars and activists have **challenged traditional notions of security and broadened the concept to include human security**, which encompasses the well-being and rights of individuals and communities.
  - They have highlighted the disproportionate impact of conflicts on women, **advocated for women's inclusion in peace processes**, and emphasized the importance of addressing **gender-based violence** as a security issue.
- **Global Governance:**

- The feminist approach to IR challenges the **male-centric nature of global governance** and institutions.
- It calls for greater **gender equality in decision-making bodies** and promotes the inclusion of women's perspectives and voices in shaping global policies and agendas.
- It also pushes for the recognition of care work and the redistribution of resources and power in more equitable ways.
- **Transnational Feminism:**
  - The feminist approach to IR recognizes the importance of transnational feminist networks and movements. It acknowledges the **interconnectedness of women's struggles globally and the need for collective action** to address common challenges.
  - It highlights the significance of **cross-border solidarity and cooperation** in promoting gender equality and social justice.

## Conclusion

- While feminist IR theories have gained traction, they still remain marginal within the discipline. With environmental policies and non-state actors playing an even bigger role in the global arena, **feminist theories have much potential** in analysing and offering real world solutions.

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