



Feminist Epistemology of International Relation



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ABSTRACT

The central theme of the paper I conclusively summarize is to sketch all forms of gender biasness and feminist critics and then reformulation of political theory and specifically International relations. The paper consists of elements of writings of a whole spectrum of feminist works and scholarship from 19th to 21st century. Hence, precisely feminist epistemology is an emancipatory and critical study which advocates for the equality of the sexes and gender in every sphere of life through comprehensively “revamping” the domain of knowledge of world politics and political philosophy. Therefore, the nature and aim of feminist epistemology is a basic part of greater struggles which feminist have fought and are still struggling for and towards a just and equal society and world.

It is not in giving life but risking life, that men is raised above the animal: That is why superiority has been accorded not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills. (Simone de Beauvoir)

Keywords - Feminism, International Relations, Epistemology

Feminist studies began in 1980s with critical and path breaking literature and researches which brought about major shift in the traditional I.R theories. The major attempt of the feminist scholar was at breaking the powerful bond among ‘manly man’, states and war by introducing “gender” as a primary relevant category and analytical tool to understand global power relations as well as normative positions from which to construct alternative world order. Moreover, feminist studies though is an area of research, a domain of knowledge in itself but is deeply linked with political movement, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish and achieve political economic, personal and social equality of sexes. So, we can certainly find a major relation between feminism and feminist epistemology. As feminist movements have campaigned and continued to campaign for women’s rights to vote, to hold public office, to work, to earn fair and equal wages, to own property to receive education, to enter contract and to have maternity leave, feminist epistemology very keenly and in coherence with socio political movements have led to a struggle in the domain of knowledge as well. Feminist epistemology is actually a criticism of political philosophy from Aristotelian Greek tradition to liberal democratic tradition and also to the age of realist school of thought.

It is a criticism based on gender biasness and discrimination against women embedded in these philosophies and in the process of building of knowledge of politics itself. Further it is a struggle to incorporate and analyze 'gender' into the studies of political philosophy and lately into newly emerging major disciplines as international relation basically this incorporation and analysis of gender as a variable into major political philosophies and other domain of knowledge is to elucidate fault lines in the knowledge domain and at the same time to eliminate such faults and biasness to reproduce and degenerate a more fair unbiased inclusive and comprehensive knowledge base which help to understand the world in its totality with the said voices and experiences of both men and women.

Feminist perspective of international relations is the area of research and domain of knowledge which introduces the way to see how gender helps to structure world politics. It helps us to understand the continuous subordination of a particular sex that is female. Feminist studies enquire into centuries old marginalized position of women in every space of authority and position of power ranging from social, economic to political domain. This discrimination and biasness surface in the form of gendered vocabulary, practices and knowledge of domestic and international affairs. Therefore, feminist epistemology brings about a challenge to institutionalized gendered concepts and practices in world politics. Moreover, this paper will also enquire into gender relations according to feminist studies in various approaches of international relations itself. Simultaneously it will also elucidate on the feminist reformulation and reconceptualization of various concepts in the principle international relation studies. It is necessary to mention here that the feminist studies have also evolved as an emancipatory study by putting forward gender sensitive studies in order to acknowledge, strengthen and emancipate women in the global world affairs. Moreover feminist epistemology urges for a social and political change through the normative writings and also tend to create a more comprehensive and inclusive domain of knowledge of world system.

Major focus

The first section of the paper focuses on various crucial arguments such as gender 'neutral' account of sexual discrimination and 'public private distinction. These arguments claim that important aspects of the liberal democratic conception of Justice, privacy etc. are male biased. Hence this part focuses on the anatomy of major stands of political philosophy to elucidate forms of gender biasness in its theories. The second section of the paper describe the development of feminist international relations. It will deal with three overlapping forms of feminist approaches to international relations to further elaborate the contribution of these studies to the knowledge of international relations. These three forms of feminist studies are (a) empirical feminism, (b) analytical feminism and (c) normative feminism. Finally, the last section will consist of various strands of feminist theories such as liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, feminist social constructivism, feminist post structuralism etc.

So, all the above three sections of the paper will enquire into major questions as – Where are women in Global politics?

How are the types of power necessary to keep unequal gender structures in place perpetuated?

Does it make any difference to states policy practices that their foreign and security policies are often legitimated through appeals to various types of masculinity? Does it make a difference that it is predominantly men who fight wars?

Answering these questions may help us to see that what is so often taken for granted in how the world is organized, keeping in place certain social arrangements and institutional structures that contribute to the subordination of the women and other disadvantaged groups.

As earlier mentioned, feminist theories have introduced gender as an empirical category and analytical tool for understanding global power relations as well as normative position from which one can consider alternative world order. So, we must first look into this term Gender as defined by and widely accepted by various strands of feminist scholars. Feminist defined gender as a set of socially constructed characteristics that define what we mean by masculinity and femininity also, gender is a system of social hierarchy in which masculine characteristics are more valued than feminine ones. Hence, gender finally goes on to become as a structure that signifies unequal power relationship between women and men. Feminism in international relation is a constitutive theory which shifts the study of international relations away from a singular focus on inter state relations towards a comprehensive analysis of trans national actors and structures and their transformations. Simultaneously, with their focus on non-state actors, marginalized people and alternative conceptualization of power and relationships, feminist perspective brings fresh thinking and action to world politics.

Until the 1980s the field of international relations studied the causes of war and conflict and the global expansion of trade and commerce with no particular reference to people. The use of abstract categories such as 'state', 'system', and security discourses of world politics whether related to conventional forces or nuclear weapons and thereby nuclear deterrence have very effectively removed the 'people' as agent embedded in their socio cultural and historical context in international relations. It must be noted here that this very essential element of international relation is in stark contradiction with the basic tenants on which the discipline emerged following the end of world war I. It is so because international relation emerged out of a context of horrific war and thereby with an aim to democratize foreign policy making and empower people as citizen- subjects rather than objects of statecraft.

Feminist epistemology did not emerge in a vacuum, of course it is a part of greater transformation in the discipline itself brought about by constitutive theories such as critical theory, constructivism, green political theory etc. but its emergence is directly influenced by 'waves of feminism' which in the world politics are feminist struggle against unjust power structure and sexual discrimination.

History

Charles Fourier, a utopian socialist and French philosopher is credited with having coined the term 'Feminism' and 'feminist' first appeared in France and the Netherland in 1872. The Oxford English dictionary lists 1852 as the year of first appearance of 'feminist' and 1895 for "feminism". The history of modern western feminist movements is divided into three 'waves'. Each wave dealt with different aspects of the same feminist issues. The first wave comprised women's suffrage movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries promoting women's right to vote. The second wave is associated with the ideas and actions of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s. The second wave campaign for legal and social equality for women. The third wave is a continuation of, and a reaction to, the perceived failures of second-wave feminism, which began in 1990s.

Theoretical debates and concepts

Alison Jagger says that a commitment to eliminating the subordination of women unifies the diverse strand of feminist theory but this agreement soon dissolves into radically different accounts of that subordination and of the measures recalled to eliminate it. Mainstream political philosophy has defended or at least accepted sexual discrimination. Moreover, according to feminist researches while traditional views about sexual discrimination have been progressively abandoned even though the principles which were developed with men's experience and interest in mind are incapable of adequately recognizing

women's needs or incorporating women's experiences. So here I present basic argument and lines of thought upon which feminist have based their studies.

Argument: Gender neutral account of sexual discrimination. the primitive theory of political philosophy depicts that for centuries male theorists on all points have argued upon the belief that there was a 'foundation in nature' for the confinement of women to the family and for the legal and customary subjection of women to their husbands within the family. There was restriction on civil and political rights of women on the basis of arguments that women are by nature unsuited for political and economic activities outside the home. But contemporary theorist has progressively abandoned this assumption of women's natural inferiority. They have accepted that women like men, should be viewed as free and equal beings, of self-determination and a sense of justice and hence free to enter the public realm. Yet, these anti-discrimination statutes have not brought about sexual equality.

'The difference approach', forwarded by Catherine Mackinnon who studied and surveyed about the effects of equal rights in united states to sexual discrimination offers an explanation to why is there still gender inequality and male domination over women even after legislations and shifts from traditional to modern liberal waves of thinking. This is so because sex discrimination as commonly interpreted involves the arbitrary and irrational use of gender in the aboding of benefits or positions. The problem is that the roles may be defined in such a way as to make men more suited to the role even under gendered neutral competition for example the first concerns the use of minimum height and weight rules for access to certain jobs, such as fire fighters, police and the army. These rules are officially gendered neutral but since men are on average taller, and heavier than women these rules operate to screen out most women from being able to apply for the positions. So from this example we can understand that the problem here is not old-fashioned prejudice or chauvinism, the employer using these height weight restrictions may pay no attention to the gender of the applicants.

So, before we decide whether gender should be taken in to account, we come to know how gender has already been taken onto account. This in turn results in a system of cultural identification in which masculinity is associated with income earning and femininity is defined in terms of sexual and domestic services of men and nurturing of children.

After having analyzed gendered neutrality arguments through different approach in detail the basic arguments and criticism of feminist scholarship in to the larger perspective. We can now in the light of above arguments move further to investigate and analyze feminist epistemology in international relation.

The three approaches of feminist epistemology of international relation

In the new millennium with the growth and range of gender and international relations scholarships, feminists have recently given explicit accounts of their alternative methodological approaches to research on global politics. Increasingly scholars are bringing the insights of feminist praxis to bear on discussions of peace and democratization processes, security operations, the meaning of universal human rights and, more just economic globalization policies. So, within feminist scholarship there are resources for developing normative guidelines about the possibility for global dialogue across ethnic, cultural, national, racial, sexual and gendered differences on the basis of their empirical and analytical studies. Feminist efforts to reinterpret power and suggest that international relations scholars have underestimated the pervasiveness of power and precisely what it takes to reproduce a grossly uneven and hierarchical world order. Many of these feminist contributions sort to deconstruct and subvert Realism,' the dominant power politics 'the explanation of post war international relations. Therefore, feminist epistemology focusses on reconceptualization of power and attention to the margins of global

politics which has allowed international relation scholars to recognize and comprehend new political phenomenon and importantly new angles, the experience of non-elites. The feminist international relation has been divided into three categories namely empirical feminism, analytical feminism and normative feminism.

Empirical feminism

Empirical feminism turns our attention to women and gender relations as empirical aspects of international relations, it corrects the denial or misrepresentation of women in world politics due to false assumptions that male experiences can count for both men and women, and that women are either absent from international politics and activities or not relevant to global process. This is so because the international relations have been largely focused on conflict and anarchy and way of practicing statecraft and formulating strategies that is excessively focus on competition and fear. Empirical feminism can further divide into three parts.

(A) Researches which shows how the inclusion of women can bring about positive changes in world socio economic order .In this category we can include those studies which reveal that how the most efficient allocation of international development fund or aid is often to provide with agricultural technology ,credit financing ,education to women .investing in girls education is one of the most cost efficient development policies resulting in positive gains for a whole community by raising income and lowering population

(B) Researches which shows effects of globalization on women. These studies take up the issues and questions of victimization as well as empowerment of women. Under force of globalization which explains the current status of women vis a vis world order which is of discrimination, exploitation and empowerment happening simultaneously through gendered ideas. The phenomenal growth of sex tourism and transnational trafficking of girls for prostitution makes a part of foreign exchange, national income and thereby world economy. Simultaneously the provision of employment opportunities and credit facilities of developing regions actually goes on to empower women and there by elimination of patriarchal institutions.

(C) Researches showing role of women in decision making body at international level. The gender streaming where on the one hand have allowed many women to join policy making ranks on the other hands the persistent gender biasness has ghettoized women to less powerful agencies and to administrative posts rather than decision making positions. For example, world percentage of women in parliaments in 2012 is 15.1 %, percentage of women un upper houses of senate in 2012 is 18.4%. percentage of women in single house or lower houses of parliament 2012 is 20.5%

Analytical Feminism

It uses gender as theoretical category to reveal the gender bias of international relation concepts and thereby reconceptualize and retheorize international relation through feminist perspective .The hegemonic western brand of masculinity is associated with autonomy ,sovereignty ,the capacity for reason and objectivity an universalism .Analytical feminism is associated with the absence of or lack of all these characteristics .Feminist scholars argued that these above mentioned are identified specifically with masculinity and men's experiences and knowledge derive from an exclusive male dominated public sphere . The path breaking work of J Ann Tickner which was formulated in 1989 to deconstruct Hans Morgenthau principle of political realism is the most important work in the realm of analytical feminism. In this article she problematizes and criticizes all the six principle of power politics and there by

questioning the basic concepts of international relation as ‘security and power’. She reconceptualizes concept of security as basically security of human including men, women and children and not just territorial security. she also reformulates the concept of power as not mere domination or a tool of zero sum game in anarchical world order but power as a possibility of collective empowerment.

Normative Feminism

Normative feminism focusses on process of theorizing and the role of scholarship in a normative agenda for global social and political change. Cynthia Enloe’s research radically subvert conventional ways of knowing and doing international relations. For example, she considers the withdrawal of Russian mother’s support for the soviet army due to the gross and unaccountable sacrifice of their sons in the USSR-Afghanistan war as one of many personal expressions of gendered power that led to the delegitimization of the Soviet regime and the end of the cold war.

Different theoretical approaches that are built on feminist theories in international relations

(A) Liberal feminism

Liberal feminist documents various aspects of women’s subordination. They have investigated problems of refugee women, income inequality between women and men and human rights violation incurred disproportionately by women such as trafficking and rape in war. Liberal feminist believes that women ‘equality can be achieved by removing legal and other obstacles that have denied them the same right and opportunities as men.

(B) Feminist critical theory

It has roots in Gramscian Marxism. It explores both the ideational and material manifestation of gendered identities and gendered power of global politics. Sandra Whitworth in her book “Feminism and international relations 1994 claims that understanding gender depends only in part of material condition of women and men in particular circumstances.

(C) Feminist social constructivism

It builds on social constructivism. Feminist constructivist study the processes whereby ideas about gender influence global politics as well as the ways that global politics shape ideas about gender. Elizabeth Frugal in her book “The Global construction of Gender “1999 uses feminist constructivism to analyze the treatment of home-based work in international law. Frugal shows how ideas about femininity have contributed to the international community’s debates about institutionalizing these home-based workers’ rights.

(D) Post-colonial feminism

It focuses on colonial relations of domination and subordination, established under European imperialism in the 18th and 19th century. Post colonialist claim that these dominants relationships persist, and that they are built in to the way western knowledge portrays people and countries in the south today. Post-colonial feminism makes similar claims about the way western feminism has constructed knowledge about nonwestern women. Chandra Mohanty in 1988 suggests that women subordinations

must be addressed within their own cultural context, rather than through some universal understanding of women's need.

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