



World led by Women: The Ideological Evolution and Future of Feminist Foreign Policy

DEVIKA S PRAVEEN

Student

MA English

Central University of Rajasthan

Abstract: In the context of rising female leadership in the global arena the study envisions a future shaped by Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) which incorporates Feminist theory into the branch of International Relations. This paper delves into its ideological journey, analysing FFP initiatives in Sweden and Canada. It unpacks their core arguments, highlighting how they challenge traditional power dynamics and prioritize human rights through an intersectional lens. Exploring the incorporation of feminist theory, the paper reveals how it informs both analysis and implementation. Yet, navigating internal resistance, limited resources, and complex geopolitical realities pose persistent challenges. Despite these hurdles, the paper argues that FFP holds immense potential for a more just world order. Examining both optimistic and critical perspectives, it concludes by contemplating the future trajectory of FFP and its impact on international relations.

Keywords: International Relations, Feminism, Feminist Foreign Policy, Gender, Female representation

In the current world order, where women are subordinated to men on grounds of constructed gender roles and stereotypes, perpetrated through ideologies, discourses, and reinforced through conditioning, their underrepresentation in conventionally masculine fields like foreign policy, defence, security, and nuclear issues has started getting addressed only recently. Gender identities which are a social and political construct, affects power and defines distribution of power. They play a role in influencing the position of women in world politics, perpetrating assumptions on who should do what and what not, associating masculine qualities to fields of discipline like global politics, making them gendered and regarding them exclusive for men. The concept of Feminism as both a political ideology and a social movement has a significant hand in calling out the core principles and foundational truths of the discipline as gendered and successfully challenging the internalised gender framework through questioning women's near to complete absence from traditional IR theory and practice and thereby attempting to deconstruct the politics of gender. Feminism has become a vital and relevant paradigm in international relations, promoting equality and leadership through ambition, diplomacy, and oratory

(Corina). Feminist International Relations theory endeavours to draw attention to women's ideas, experiences, perspectives, and activities and how they play out in the global platforms of diplomacy.

Inass Abdulsada Ali, in his article "Feminist Theorising in the International Relations Discipline" examines the concepts of gender and Feminism in relation to international relations. It was in the 1980s that feminism started to be considered as an intellectual trend in IR among other theoretical approaches. The text also discusses how feminist theory is not a single voice but a whole range of perspectives that views gender through various lenses like how liberal feminism is concerned with women's inclusion in social and political spheres whereas feminist standpoint theory focuses on how knowledge of women from a marginalised perspective can provide a different viewpoint in the framework of world politics. It can be observed that a feminist way of approach emphasises the importance of social relations and individual experiences in contrast to conventional IR theories that focuses on state behaviour, authority and regards state as the best mechanism for ensuring the safety of the individual. They argue that the conventional understanding of International Relations is an incomplete picture painted from the perspective of men and is lacking. This theory which is also interdisciplinary in nature could be used as an effective tool in shedding new lights into issues like war and its consequences, viewing them from a nonconventional framework, redefining concepts of state, sovereignty, power, and rationality.

Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Relations* was one of the revolutionary works produced in the year 1989, is regarded as the one of the seminal works in Feminist International politics. The work discusses the idea that by focusing on women and gender, International Relations could more clearly illustrate the extent to which power goes into the constitution of international politics, much more effectively than conventional theories could comprehend. Jean Bethke Elshtain's *Women and War* (1987) examines how the myths of men as "Just Warrior" and women as "Beautiful souls" serves to reinforce women's position in society as noncombatants and in need of protection while securing men's identity as warriors. In the year 1988, J Anne Tickner reformulated Hans Morgenthau's principles of political realism from a feminist perspective. Feminist texts like these increased over time, that dissects and examines the issue of women and gender in the study of international relations and its practice.

Early Feminist movements that emerged in the late 19th and 20th centuries had its significant impact in International Relations as they advocated equal rights globally and challenged traditional gender roles. Early feminist thinkers, activists, and organizations emphasized the interconnectedness of women's rights and peace. They highlighted the repercussions of war and its conflict on women, often engaging in transnational networks to address issues such as disarmament, peace advocacy, and human rights violations. For instance, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), founded in 1915, became a prominent step towards the goal of women in international diplomacy. WILPF sought to influence the post-World War I peace negotiations and actively campaigned against militarism, emphasizing the role of women in preventing future conflicts and peacekeeping. Activists such as Madeleine Rees, former head of WILPF, have effectively bridged the gap between activism and policymaking. These endeavours have been instrumental in advocating for the inclusion of non-male perspectives in peace negotiations, conflict resolution, and the prevention of violence against women in conflict and post conflict zones.

Thinkers like Cynthia Enloe, bell hooks, and Carol Cohn have contributed largely in bringing valuable insights into the gendered dimensions of international relations. Enloe's work, for instance, emphasized the significance of everyday experiences and how they intersect with geopolitics highlighting the roles women play in conflict zones, in labour forces linked to global economies, and as active participants in shaping international politics beyond conventional male-dominated spheres. Also, they helped to critique the conventional understanding of security, broadening it beyond military concerns to encompass human security, which includes factors like economic well-being, health, and freedom from violence. Their work has significantly influenced policy discussions and decision-making processes in international organizations like the United Nations, where resolutions such as UNSCR 1325 underlines the significance and impact of women's participation in peace and security efforts.

Feminist foreign policy has evolved from Sweden to 11 countries across Europe, North America, and Africa, with potential for greater impact on climate change, migration, militarism, and bodies (Columba). Sweden's feminist foreign policy which is adopted in 2014, stands as a pioneering approach in international relations in how it efficiently manages to integrate gender equality, human rights, and women's empowerment into its diplomatic endeavours and bringing them into global platforms, recognizing that it is fundamental for sustainable peace, security, and development. This includes promoting women's participation in peace processes, increasing representation in decision-making roles, and addressing gender-based violence worldwide. Sweden becomes commendable in actively championing women's rights, supporting initiatives aimed at enhancing access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and reproductive rights for women and girls globally. This includes providing financial support to organizations working toward gender equality and advocating for legal and policy changes that benefit women worldwide. The state collaborates with international organizations, governments, and civil society to promote gender equality as it uses its diplomatic influence to encourage other nations to adopt similar feminist approaches and engages in dialogues on gender-related issues in multilateral forums. Annika Bergman Rosamond evaluates that Swedish feminist foreign policy is rooted in cosmopolitan care for vulnerable women and girls, but may exhibit pitfalls and inconsistencies, such as equating gender with women and prioritizing results-oriented strategies over thorough gender analysis.

Under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's leadership, Canada has actively pursued a feminist foreign policy. In 2017, Canada launched its Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) committing to allocate foreign aid and development resources with a strong focus on advancing gender equality and supporting women and girls in developing countries. The country has been a vocal advocate for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. It actively supports women's participation in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and post-conflict reconstruction efforts globally. Canada has also incorporated gender considerations into its diplomatic engagements and trade policies promoting the inclusion of women in trade negotiations, advocating for gender-responsive trade policies that benefit women entrepreneurs and workers. These measures influenced international dialogues and policies on gender equality and women's rights by playing a pivotal role in advocating for the adoption of feminist principles in global forums and discussions. The country also collaborates with various stakeholders, including governments, civil society organizations, and international institutions, to advance its feminist foreign policy agenda. By fostering

partnerships at global level, Canada amplifies its impact and fosters collective action toward gender equality. J Thomson in his article about Sweden's and Canada's foreign policy agendas says that Sweden and Canada both use the term "feminist" in their foreign policies, but understand it differently, with Sweden focusing on domestic and international commitments to change, and Canada focusing on the private sector.

The representation of women in high-ranking diplomatic roles globally has seen gradual improvement but remains an area that requires sustained attention and enrichment. On closer inspection, it could be concluded that while progress has been made, women are still underrepresented in key decision-making positions within foreign affairs and international relations. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of women assuming high-level diplomatic roles. Several countries, including Germany, New Zealand, and the United States, have had female foreign ministers or secretaries of state, contributing to a more diverse diplomatic landscape. The representation of women in high-ranking diplomatic positions varies significantly across regions. Some countries and regions have made substantial strides in promoting gender equality in diplomatic leadership, while others continue to face significant challenges in achieving parity.

Germany has had significant female representation in high-ranking diplomatic roles. For instance, Angela Merkel served as the Chancellor of Germany for 16 years, demonstrating strong leadership in international affairs. Ursula von der Leyen also held the position of Germany's Minister of Défense and later became the President of the European Commission, contributing to shaping EU policies. The United States has seen women assuming crucial diplomatic roles. Hillary Clinton served as the Secretary of State, leading U.S. foreign policy initiatives during her tenure. More recently, Kamala Harris became the first female Vice President of the United States, broadening the narrative of female leadership in global politics. New Zealand stands out for its emphasis on gender equality in diplomacy. Former Prime Minister Helen Clark was instrumental in international development as the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Moreover, Jacinda Ardern, the former Prime Minister, has been an advocate for progressive policies and inclusive diplomacy. Margot Wallström, as Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs, played a key role in promoting feminist principles in international relations, focusing on issues like women's rights and peacebuilding efforts. Norway has actively worked towards gender parity in diplomacy. Gro Harlem Brundtland served as the Prime Minister and later became the Director-General of the World Health Organization. Additionally, Norway appointed a woman, Ine Eriksen Søreide, as its Minister of Foreign Affairs, continuing the tradition of women in key diplomatic roles. India has seen notable women diplomats rising to high-ranking positions. Vijayalakshmi Pandit served as the President of the United Nations General Assembly, representing India on the global stage in 1953. Additionally, women like Nirupama Rao and Sushma Swaraj held crucial diplomatic posts, contributing significantly to India's foreign policy initiatives.

According to Uspenskaya & Kozlova, Feminist foreign policy (FFP) is a relevant and strategic approach to international relations, promoting gender equality and sustainable development. Female leaders in Foreign Relations often bring diverse perspectives and priorities to foreign policy agendas. They tend to emphasize issues such as gender equality, human rights, social welfare, and peacebuilding, contributing unique insights that widens the scope of diplomatic discussions. They frequently advocate for women's rights both domestically and in their international engagements. They prioritize policies and initiatives aimed at empowering women,

addressing gender-based violence, and promoting inclusivity of all genders in diplomatic negotiations. While female leaders' influence on shaping foreign policy agendas is substantial, they often face challenges such as stereotyping, gender bias, and barriers to their ideas being a part in male-dominated decision-making positions. Nevertheless, their leadership remains instrumental in advancing gender-sensitive policies and amplifying women's voices on the global stage thereby championing gender equality and rights in international Relations.

Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) aims to mainstream gender in various external actions, including defence, trade, and diplomacy, but its implementation varies across countries and has weak evidence for impact (Hicks). Implementing of a feminist foreign policy faces several obstacles and resistance as it makes attempts in altering established international relations paradigms. Traditional norms often prioritize military, state and economic interests over gender equality and social justice, impeding the implementation of feminist foreign policies. These policies may even be perceived as divisive or as neglecting other crucial diplomatic priorities, leading to resistance within governments and international organizations. Allocating adequate resources for gender-responsive initiatives within foreign policy frameworks can be challenging. Limited funding and competing priorities may constrain the effective implementation of policies aimed at promoting women's rights and gender equality. Cultural relativism and societal norms in various regions may pose challenges as some cultures may be resistant to external influences advocating for women's rights or may prioritize different societal values, hindering the acceptance of feminist principles in diplomacy.

Apart from all its significance and necessity, there are concerns and debates surrounding the feasibility and effectiveness of feminist foreign policies. Practical implementation challenges regarding the feasibility of integrating gender perspectives across all areas of foreign affairs without neglecting other pressing global issues can be a pressing issue. Another argument is that the potential overemphasis on the idea of gender might overlook other critical aspects of diplomacy, potentially leading to the marginalization of other essential issues such as security, economy, and geopolitics. Scepticism regarding the impacts and outcomes of policy could be another obstacle that stands in the way of smooth implementation of feminist foreign policy. Resistance from traditional diplomatic circles which are predominantly male dominated can act as a buffer in inclusion of feminist perspectives regarding them as disruptive to conventional diplomatic practises and as a threat to status quo.

Addressing such issues requires nuanced approaches that acknowledge the complexities and concerns of integrating feminist principles into foreign policy. Balancing diverse diplomatic priorities, advocating for adequate resources, engaging in dialogue with diverse stakeholders, and deconstructing and redefining deeply ingrained norms and social structures are essential steps in advancing feminist foreign policies while navigating the criticisms and barriers they face. Continuous evaluation, accommodation, adaptation, and dialogue are essential for enhancing the feasibility and effectiveness of feminist foreign policies on the global stage and is greatly determinant of the future of feminist approach in International Relations.

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