FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

Feminist theories of International Relations use gender as a socio-structurally constructed category of analysis when they analyse foreign policy, international political economy, and international security. The feminist theories became part of the discipline of international relations in the second half of 1980s, within the context of the Constructivism vs. Problem-Solving theories debate. The feminists believed that global politics might be improved and theories would be reconsidered and reformulated if people analysed International Relations with gender relations in their minds. They believed that the relationship between the two genders would be able to explain how the international system worked and how economy and politics in a global scale is built.

Currently, less than 10% of the world’s political and economic leaders are women. The claim of the feminist international relations theories is that firstly this is because of gender subordination, and secondly, this situation affects the conduct and workings of international political system including state-to-state relations, wars, economic decisions and economic relations. They also try to show how important women in fact are for foreign policy because they perform duties that no one actually questions, such as organising parties and therefore kinder, nicer relations between diplomatic delegations from different countries, as the female members of a family of diplomats generally works on the organisation of such events. The contribution of feminist theories, therefore, can be seen in changing the state-centred focus of International Relations to a more day-to-day social perspective and therefore making international relations an extension of the daily life.

Feminists define gender as a set of social constructions which describe what a man or a woman should be within the society. They claim that men are associated with characteristics such as strength, power, rationality, independence while women are associated with weakness, emotionality, dependence, and privacy. Both men and women as well as the states and societies they live in generally think men in more positive terms than women in the public arena. Foreign policies of states which are aggressive are legitimised by their hegemonic masculine values as a desirable foreign policy is thought to be maximising power and protecting its citizens from dangers from outside. These stereotypes characterise social activities, too: Men are seen as bread-winners while women are seen as individuals caring for the family’s future. The feminists believe that these stereotypes have serious consequences about how we are ruled, how states interact with each other.

Most importantly, Feminists believe that when we talk about the universal nature of the Western culture, we are making a false statement because what is described as Western culture is knowledge constructed from the lives of men, and excludes women completely, so it is not only not universal, but it is far from ever representing the real West. They also see violence and security from a different perspective. The Feminist theories of IR have a radically different understanding of security threats. For them, security threats are not only military or political, but they also include violence at home, rape, poverty, inequality in income, gender subordination, and the destruction of the planet’s ecology. Secondly, they analyse security from the lowest possible level of analysis, from the individual level and go step by step towards global level from there. They try to show how security of individual human beings is related to the perception and existence of security in the international relations of all states.

In International Relations, there are different kinds of feminist approaches. There are five major Feminist International Relations schools: