

Feminist perspective in Foreign Policy – A way to women’s visibility and participation in public sphere

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December 06, 2018

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In this paper it is intended to express, articulate and analyze the role of feminist perspective in foreign policy and how can it influence the foreign policies of nations, or can it unravel the masculinity and patriarchy that is part and parcel of International Relations, what measures are to be taken by nations to decrease the gender gaps, and how exactly can this help nations achieve gender equality and make women’s visibility and participation in public spaces a reality.

International Relation is a profound area that establishes the relations among different nations and foreign policies reflect a nation’s perspective towards others. Foreign policies determine the how and why of diplomacy, wars, friendly relations etc. etc., However while doing so nations have always shown a male oriented approach and the role of women either in diplomatic positions or in war fields or in peace keeping or senior positions in external affairs has been undermined worldwide. Feminist perspective in foreign policy tries to explain the relationship between men and women in International Politics and the gender roles that are designated among them. It also tries to explain the socio-politico-economic policies the nations implement, measures taken to eradicate the gender gaps that exists in this field and how women’s equal participation in social production can bring about a change in the political structure

Feminist perspective in Foreign Policy – A way to women’s visibility and participation in public sphere

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”When we strengthen women and girls, we strengthen nations and reduce poverty. This begins with giving every woman and girl the right to control her own body.” (Isabela Lovin)

In this paper it is intended to express, articulate and analyze the role of feminist perspective in foreign policy and how can it influence the foreign policies of nations, or can it unravel the masculinity and patriarchy that is part and parcel of International Relations, what measures are to be taken by nations to decrease the gender gaps, and how exactly can this help nations achieve gender equality and make women’s visibility and participation in public spaces a reality.

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Key Words : diplomacy, external affairs, foreign policy, feminist, masculinity peacekeeping

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INTRODUCTION:

Inspired by Sweden's success of introducing women's perspective in foreign policy, Women Foreign Ministers of different countries met for the first time on 21st and 22nd September 2018 in Montreal to discuss about the various prospects of incorporating 'Women's Perspective' in a two day historic summit that was able to bring together world's top women diplomats and ministers from Andorra, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Croatia, The Dominican Republic, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Namibia, Norway, Panama, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, South Africa and Sweden which focused on issues such as 'conflict prevention, democratic growth and eliminating gender based violence. (The Hindu, 24.09.18) Canada's top diplomat Chrystia Freeland who spoke on the occasion said that "This is not about creating a pink ghetto. This is quite contrary. This is about highlighting the importance and role and the rights of women and girls in the world." Prior to this, on 20th September, 2018 the Berlin branch of Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy initiated a panel discussion on the above issue. Johan Frisell, Deputy Head of Mission of Embassy of Sweden spoke on the occasion and offered Germany all necessary support in this direction. Drawing from their experiences as representatives and diplomats, Frisell, Gartshore, Kaski, and Neuhaus advocated for the importance of feminist foreign policy, viewing its meaning as extending beyond the realm of women and girls, and including all invisible communities. (CFFP, 2018) Ms. Margot who first popularized feminist foreign policy in 2014 described FFP as "standing against the systematic and global subordination of women" and a "precondition" for achieving Sweden's wider foreign development and security policy objectives. This conference gave an opportunity to nations to define and refine the feminist foreign policy and articulate the goals that the governments are required to follow in creating a gender just society.

Leading international efforts, Johan Frisell of Sweden spoke of the nation's trailblazing efforts to implement a feminist foreign policy beyond its conceptual framework, and integrate it within the country's internal structure. A large part of Sweden's efforts was based around a holistic understanding of feminist foreign policy as existing outside the ambit of Security Council Resolution 1325, and including other key areas such as disarmament, peacekeeping and conflict resolution. Bringing up issues of gender within the Security Council has posed a challenge to the Swedish government. (ibid)

Feminist International Relations has been thought off post-cold war period. Feminists argued that the anthology of events that is seen in history is from a man's view and does not provide a ground for social inclusiveness. They believed that, women's lives, be it in national or international situation was at a disadvantaged position and hence had to reflect through other angel. They also argued that the dominant agency of political and economic activity had always ignored women's contribution and the power relations always existed with men. A feminist approach tried to eliminate such discrepancies in International arena. (Tarun Bose, 2018)

This initiative was considered as a welcome step and essential to understand what this feminist perspective in foreign policy is and how far can it help in reducing the problems faced by women and ensure her the required space in all activities of life, is the question that needs to be thought of.

Before looking at the feminist foreign policy, one has to look into the ground reality women live in i.e. Do they have equal representation in education, health and politics. Are their problems represented through the appropriate agencies? Are women represented where decisions that affect them are made - in parliament, boards and legal systems? Is gender equality taken seriously while implementing the policies? Feminist foreign policy tried to answer some of these pertinent questions.

Feminist foreign policy “applies a systematic gender equality perspective throughout the whole foreign policy agenda”, the handbook states. It is structured to increase women’s ‘rights’, ‘representation’ and ‘resources’ in every aspect of its operations” (Deccan Chronicle, September 4, 2018). Feminist thinkers have for long demanded that a ‘feminist perspective’ be a part of policy making both within the nation and with other nations since half the population cannot be kept away unrepresented and their problems unresolved. Canada, Norway, Sweden have always tried to adopt such ideas and Sweden was the first country in the world to accept the feminist perspective in foreign policy. The objective was to contribute gender equality and ensure equal participation of women in all areas of social, political and economic activity so that human rights of women and children are not violated.

Sweden’s feminist foreign policy:

Among the Scandinavian nations Sweden’s policies to integrate all sections of society including women was a welcome move and governance was no barrier to it. Gender equality being one of the cornerstones of Swedish society, the aim was to ensure that everyone enjoys the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all areas of life.

Now, what necessitated Sweden to pursue feminist foreign policy and what measures did it take to achieve it? According to Foreign Affairs Minister Ms. Margot Wallstrom, the discriminatory practices that are widespread in the entire globe against women and children violating their rights is one reason for Sweden Foreign Services to adopt gender parity issues like “Rights, Representation and Resources of all women” in all spheres of activities including International Relations and foreign policy and based on the 4th ‘R’ – Reality. Essentially it is the method and perspective that is inherent in the policy and the objective is to change structures and enhance visibility of women and girls in all spheres of activity.

Recently, the Swedish foreign policy hand book was released which mentions about the gender equality perspective to all those interested in adopting the initiative. Sweden created its feminist foreign policy under foreign minister Margot Wallstrom in 2014, how it changed from top-down policy to becoming part of the entire Swedish Foreign Service, and the results it has achieved. This handbook was based on the experiences and focused on the practical implementation of the policy. The hand book also mentions about the facts-based approach that it had adopted to achieve the objective within a span of three years.

Objectives of Sweden’s Feminist Foreign policy:

1. Full enjoyment of human rights 2. Freedom from physical, psychological and sexual violence 3. Participation in preventing and resolving conflicts, and post-conflict peacebuilding 4. Political participation and influence in all areas of society 5. Economic rights and empowerment 6. Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

Core areas of integrating women:

1. **Gender Equality** : Since gender equality is not a separate women’s issue and involves the overall development of society, it becomes pertinent to understand that gender just societies have always provided equal opportunities in health, education and economic distribution. This is one of the core principles of equality where everyone irrespective of gender has the right to work and support themselves, balance career and life and live without being abused and violated of their rights. It also implies not only equal distribution of resources between men and women but also to ensure the qualitative distribution of knowledge between them. (gender equality in Sweden report.) Sweden’s feminist foreign policy is based on this core concept and is an extension of the national gender equality policy which strengthened women and girls at every stage of life and all forms by providing separate taxation, generous childcare and gender neutral parental care. In 2016, the government launched “Power, goals and agency – a feminist policy for a gender-equal future” which focused on gender equality, strategies for preventing and combating violence against women etc., since nation building process involves all these policies, much emphasis was laid down to it, which hitherto was not there till recent years and there was a wide gap in sharing of power and positions among men and women, this policy tried to

bridge the gap. Gender policies are formulated as four basic aims: (i) equal division of power and influence, giving men and women the same rights and possibilities to participate in society and to shape the conditions essential for decision-making, (ii) economic equality, giving men and women the same rights and possibilities as regards education and remunerated work leading to lifelong economic independence, (iii) equal distribution of unpaid house- and care-work, giving men and women equal responsibilities and rights in these areas, and, (iv) to put an end to men's violence against women, giving women, men, girls and boys the same rights and possibilities to physical integrity. Also Sweden's commitment to international covenants and treaties like CEDAW, Protection of Human Rights, Beijing Declaration, The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, the 2030 agenda for sustainable development goals, the EU action plan for gender equality and women's empowerment are some of the reasons for Sweden to achieve gender equality. In essence, Gender equality is a right on its own, argues, Margot, and is also the most effective means for achieving other goals, such as the eradication of terrorism, economic growth, and improvement in health (Thompson, 2018). The objective of Sweden's gender equality is: "*Women and men shall have the same power to shape society and their own lives.*" However it is to be noted that while nations like USA, UK, France are far behind to incorporate gender parity issues, smaller nations like, Iceland, Cuba, Norway, Sweden, Ireland, Canada could go ahead and create conditions for gender just societies. While Iceland tops the nations in achieving this, it takes USA another 100 years to achieve this in all spheres of activity. (socio-economic-political rights of women to be protected) (world economic forum report, 2016)

2. **Political Representation:** Statistics at world level reveal that women are under-represented in politics and masculinity and power are synonyms to each other. However, some small under-developed nations have done a marvelous job in giving equal opportunities for women. Rwanda tops the list (61.3%), followed by Bolivia (53.1%), Cuba (48.9%), Iceland (47.6%), Nicaragua (45.7%) and Sweden (43.6%). With Sweden placed at sixth place. "Swedish society and politics share a broad common understanding regarding basic values of gender equality and equal treatment" (Sweden's policy on gender equality report) and equal representation is provided by the political parties 1994 onwards. Earlier, like in any other country, even in Sweden there were only 3 women representatives. Gradually women's representation increased and today's Sweden's government has a tag to its credit that it is called a 'Feminist Government'. As far as the current Government is concerned, 12 out of 24 ministers – or 50% – are women. The influential ministerial positions of both foreign affairs and finance are held by women. This relative gender balance was achieved voluntarily and without the need to resort to gender quotas. Women's political participation has not only increased international gender initiative campaigns but also peace keeping process, environmental and climatic issues. One of the cornerstones of Sweden's policy of peace and security was ensured through UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security which was adopted in 2000, and which – together with seven subsequent resolutions – constitutes the international agenda for women, peace and security. The agenda focuses on women's increased participation, condemns conflict-related sexual violence etc., To pursue this issue, Sweden took up the issue at local, UN, NATO, EU, Council of Europe in cooperation with Nordic nations. Another initiative launched in 2015 was Women's mediation network to promote peaceful conflict resolutions during and after war. This network comprises all women and has been actively working in conflict driven countries like Afghanistan, Columbia, Georgia, Somalia etc., #Morewomenmorepeace was another initiative launched to involve women in peace keeping.
3. **Economic Participation:** In so far as labor work force participation and decision making is concerned, it is conducive to the initiatives taken to achieve gender parity. Some of the key concerns are gender pay gap has constantly reduced and Sweden again has been at the top position in world ranking. Though pay differences remain, to a very great extent this problem has been addressed and both men and women are paid equally. Another important campaign initiated is SHE campaign where both men and women are trained to acknowledge the role played by women.

What India needs to learn from Sweden?

It is not just India, but the whole world should look at the way Sweden's Feminist Policy is being implemented

and how it is fast moving ahead. As seen, issues are to be looked from the SHE perspective and measures taken to eradicate the evils that haunt the society. In such a vast country today it has only 15 women diplomats working in external affairs ministry. The glass ceiling has to be broken in administration, politics, business and decision-making boards. Women's representation in all these areas is very negligible. India being a multi-cultural, linguistic, closed nation has to go a long way in coming anywhere near to the ideals implemented by Sweden

Conclusion:

Feminist Foreign Policy though new to international studies, has been discussed, debated, refined, defined and implemented in Nordic nations especially Sweden and Canada, Germany other nations on its way. Integrating women in all spheres of national policy decisions, eradicating all forms of violence against her, creating equal spaces for men and women in social development, involving women in peace keeping, decision-making, adhering to international covenants like protecting human rights etc. are some of the core issues concerning feminist foreign policies. Unless women are given equal scope and opportunity in national level, nations cannot progress. Programs to tackle women's issues should be integrated at all levels and when this is initiated, nation can be free of violence, sexual harassment at all levels, economic and social discriminatory practices at work place, gender pay gap etc., can be curbed. Hence Gender equality is not just an initiative but a total outlook, approach towards women's problems.

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