



Feminist' Foreign Policy

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This article is based on “**Why India needs a ‘feminist foreign policy’**” which was published in The Indian Express on 09/04/2021. It talks about the need for adopting feminist foreign policy for India.

Recently, India has been elected to the UN Commission on the Status of Women for a four year term in September 2020, where India commits itself to promote the paradigm of gender equality, development and peace.

Ironically, in the recently released **World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Report 2021**, India had slipped 28 spots to rank 140 out of the 156 countries covered.

If India want its aspirations to become actions, than India should consider adopting a **Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP)** framework. The FFP framework is a more formal designed approach that goes beyond a purely development model to wider access, representation and decision making.

What is Feminist Foreign Policy Framework?

- A feminist foreign policy as a political framework explores this very realm, first introduced and advocated by Sweden in 2014.
- FFP builds on **three central principles** of feminist perspectives on diplomacy and security, which include **broadening the understanding of security, decoding internal power relations, and acknowledging women’s political agency.**
- In this sense, FFP is an effort to move beyond the traditional notions of war, peace, and development assistance to incorporate other arenas of foreign policy, including economics, finance, health, and the environment.
- By doing so, the framework looks at security in a more holistic way and incorporates the effects of its policies on **women and marginalized groups.**
- FFP framework is a reaction attributed to the fact that for centuries, men have monopolized the conduct of diplomacy and foreign relations.

- Data indicates that the **inclusion of diverse voices** makes for a better basket of options in decision making.
 - This results into realisation that it is not only necessary to include women in peacebuilding and peacekeeping but the wider gamut of diplomacy, foreign and security policy.
 - In many ways this would translate into a **bottom-up development approach**.
- Since Sweden embarked on this path, several other countries — Canada, France, Germany and, more recently, Mexico — have forged their own, adopting either a feminist foreign policy or a gendered approach to aspects of policy making.

Why India Needs a FFP framework?

- The FFP approach provides steppingstones for India to follow en route to equality, common well-being, and peace.
- The FFP framework can also provide India opportunities to eliminate existing barriers restricting the participation of women and other marginalized groups in India's decision-making processes.
- An emphasis on women in leadership could catalyze an internal shift in India domestically and help subvert strictly defined patriarchal gender roles.
- Empirical research has suggested that gender equality is an important prerequisite for the economic and social development of a nation, the strengthening of democratic institutions, and the advancement of national security.
- A FFP framework however must be tailored for the Indian context, which could also be a starting point for an internal shift in focus on gender as well, from a purely development paradigm to wider arenas of access, empowerment and decision making.
- Adopting a FFP could offer India an opportunity to create a conducive environment for peace, eliminate domestic barriers against women, and assist in building stronger bilateral relationships.

Policy Initiatives Taken By India Under FFP Framework

- From 2007 when India deployed the first ever female unit to the UN Mission in Libya to supporting gender empowerment programmes through SAARC, IBSA, IORA and other multilateral fora, India's programmes have been targeted at making women the engines for inclusive and sustainable growth.
- Similarly, many of India's overseas programmes in partner countries have a gender component, as seen in Afghanistan, Lesotho and Cambodia.
- At internal policy level, 2015 saw a gender budget exercise within the MEA towards development assistance.

Associated Challenges

- **Women’s Subjugation:** India’s historical record on women’s rights—or rather, women’s subjugation—makes it unlikely to swiftly and effectively adopt a FFP framework.
India in some ways reflects this widening gap, where the number of ministers declined from 23.1 per cent in 2019 to 9.1 per cent in 2021. The number of women in Parliament stands low at 14.4 per cent.
- **Patriarchy:** Patriarchal values are so deeply ingrained within Indian society that India has hardly managed to bring about a change in the system of inequity at home.
Women have traditionally been excluded from the conduct of foreign policy on the basis that a typical “female approach” would be more inclined to “soft-security” matters—including human rights, women empowerment, migration and trafficking—and distract from a focus on more important hard security issues.

Way Forward

- **Women in Decision Making:** Our gender-based foreign assistance needs to be broadened and deepened and equally matched with lower barriers to participation in politics, diplomacy, the bureaucracy, military and other spaces of decision making.
India can make a stronger commitment to include women at the decision-making tables, either through a quota system or simply by ensuring that there is an equal representation of men and women.
- **Greater Representation:** India can move towards a FFP by actively appointing women to posts at various policy levels and involving them directly in the conduct of its foreign relations.
This should not mean merely increasing women representation, but to create environments that foster innovative thinking and allow for diverse representation.
- **International Collaboration:** India can collaborate with various international, regional, and national civil society organizations to ensure the proper implementation of the FFP framework.

Conclusion

Exploring the framework in the Indian context will not only provide fresh perspective to our foreign policy machinery, but also deepen the global understanding on how a developing democratic nation that comes from strong cultures of patriarchy may consider adoption of an FFP Framework.

Drishti Mains Question

If India want its aspirations to become actions, then India should consider adopting a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) framework. Comment.
