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Gender and International Relations

COURSE CODE: B23PS03DE

Undergraduate Programme in Political Science
Discipline Specific Elective Course
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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

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Access and Quality define Equity.

Gender and International Relations

Course Code: B23PS03DE

Semester - V

Discipline Specific Elective Course
Undergraduate Programme in
Political Science
Self Learning Material

(With Model Question Paper Sets)

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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

GENDER AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Course Code: B23PS03DE
Semester- V
Discipline Specific Elective Course
Undergraduate Programme in
Political Science

SREENARAYANAGURU
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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed "blended format," a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The University aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The UG programme in Political Science offers a comprehensive study of political processes and structures. It balances theory and practice, providing essential analytical tools. The curriculum follows a chronological progression of political thought and examines various systems and international relations. Designed for aspiring civil servants and future policymakers, it also develops critical thinking skills. The course prepares learners for careers in public service, diplomacy, and political consultancy. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university's student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.

Regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V. P.

01-09-2026

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BLOCK 1

Introduction to Gender and International Relations

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UNIT 1

Conceptualizing Gender in International Relations

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the meaning and significance of gender in the study of International Relations
- describe the emergence and development of Feminist International Relations as a critical approach
- analyse the relationship between gender, power, security, nationalism, and international political economy
- examine how feminist scholars challenge traditional understandings of international politics, security, and power
- identify and explain major feminist methodological approaches used in the study of International Relations

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Prerequisite

When we think about International Relations, certain images often come to mind: presidents and prime ministers meeting at international summits, diplomats negotiating treaties, soldiers guarding national borders, wars between states, and powerful countries making decisions about global affairs. But there is another set of questions that is less frequently asked: Where are the women in these stories? Who cooks for soldiers, cares for families during war, produces clothes and goods for global markets, or experiences violence within and beyond conflict zones? Why are qualities such as strength, military power, competition, and rationality often associated with masculinity, while care, vulnerability, and domestic responsibilities are treated as less important to international politics? These questions open the door to a different way of looking at the international system. Feminist International Relations begins by questioning what conventional approaches consider

important, whose experiences are represented, whose voices are missing, and how gender relations shape power, security, conflict, peace, and the global economy. As learners move through this unit, they will discover that international politics is not confined to state leaders, armies, and diplomatic negotiations; it is also connected to the everyday lives, identities, experiences, and struggles of people across the world. The unit therefore invites learners to look at familiar international events from a new perspective and to ask a fundamental question: How does gender shape the way international politics is organised and experienced?

Keywords

Feminist international relations, gender, gender socialisation, intersectionality, feminist security, patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, gendered power, feminist curiosity, gendered international political economy

Discussion

The study of International Relations (IR) has long been dominated by state-centric and power-oriented frameworks that prioritise security, war, diplomacy, and economic competition. For much of the twentieth century, the mainstream theories of IR—Realism, Liberalism, and Marxism—operated within what feminist scholars have described as a 'gender-blind' paradigm. The actors that these frameworks primarily focused on were states, governments, international institutions, and multinational corporations. Women, as social and political agents, were largely invisible in these accounts, while gender was almost entirely absent from the discipline's conceptual vocabulary.

This invisibility was not accidental. It reflected a deeper structural reality: the modern international system was largely constructed by men, at a time when women were systematically excluded from political life in many parts of the world. Diplomacy was predominantly a male profession, and warfare was organised largely around male participation. Major theorists of the state and international politics, such as Thomas Hobbes, Hugo Grotius, Emer de Vattel, and Carl von Clausewitz, often wrote as though the political world they described represented the entirety of political reality. The domestic sphere—comprising household labour, childbirth, care work, and emotional life—was generally treated as separate from, and therefore less relevant to, the exercise of power between states.

It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that feminist scholars began to systematically challenge this omission, contributing to what became one of the most significant intellectual developments in the history of IR. The publication of *Gender in International Relations* (1992) by J. Ann Tickner, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989) by Cynthia Enloe, and the edited collection *Gendered States* (1992), edited by V. Spike Peterson, marked important milestones in

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the emergence of feminist IR as a distinct field of inquiry. These works did not simply seek to add women to existing frameworks of IR. Instead, they questioned the epistemological and ontological foundations of those frameworks. They asked how our understanding of international politics might change if gender were taken seriously as a category of analysis.

This unit introduces the foundational concepts, historical background, and core arguments of feminist IR. It begins by examining the concept of gender itself—what gender means, how it differs from biological sex, and how it operates as an organising principle in social and political life. It then traces the historical relationship between gender and the international system, from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 to the contemporary Women, Peace and Security agenda.

The unit further examines the various arguments for taking gender seriously in IR, including empirical, analytical, normative, and epistemological arguments. It also explores the gendered dimensions of power, sovereignty, the international political economy, and global governance. Finally, the unit examines the relationship between gender and human rights, one of the most contested and consequential areas of contemporary international politics.

1.1.1 Understanding the Concept of Gender

The term 'gender' is one of the most frequently used and, at the same time, most frequently misunderstood concepts in contemporary social science. In everyday language, it is often used interchangeably with 'sex', as though the two terms refer to the same thing. Feminist scholars, however, have argued since at least the 1970s that 'gender' and 'sex' refer to fundamentally different dimensions of human identity and social organisation. Conflating the two concepts can obscure important aspects of social life and political relations.

Sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics—including chromosomes, hormones, gonads, and reproductive anatomy—that are used to classify human beings as male, female, or intersex. These characteristics are primarily biological in origin, although the picture is more complex than a simple binary classification suggests. For example, an estimated 1.7 per cent of the world's population is born with intersex characteristics that do not fit neatly into either the 'male' or 'female' biological categories.

Gender, by contrast, refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, attributes, and identities that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women. Gender is not a fixed biological reality but a dynamic social and cultural construct that varies across societies, historical periods, and individual lives. What it means to be 'masculine' or 'feminine'—including which occupations, emotions, forms of appearance, and behaviours are considered appropriate for men and women—varies considerably across different societies and historical periods. For example, ideas about masculinity and femininity may differ significantly between a contemporary Scandinavian country and a traditional patriarchal village in South Asia, or between Victorian England and ancient Sparta.

The distinction between sex and gender was central to second-wave feminism during the 1960s and 1970s. Feminist scholars argued that the subordination of women was not a natural consequence of biological differences but a product of social arrangements that could, in principle, be changed. If women's subordination was

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social rather than natural in origin, then it was not inevitable. Instead, it was a political problem that required political solutions.

One of the most influential theoretical accounts of how gender operates as a social mechanism was developed by the philosopher Judith Butler in her landmark work *Gender Trouble* (1990). Butler argued that gender is performative. According to this view, gender is not simply an expression of an inner or pre-social essence; rather, it is constituted through repeated acts and practices. To describe gender as performative does not mean that gender is merely theatrical or that individuals can simply choose their gender at will. Instead, it means that social expectations and norms encourage and regulate individuals to enact femininity or masculinity through their dress, speech, gestures, bodily comportment, and everyday behaviour. When these practices are repeated over time and across different social contexts, they can come to appear natural and inevitable. In this way, the social processes and regulatory power that produce and maintain gender distinctions can become less visible.

Judith Butler's theory of performativity has important implications for political analysis. It suggests that gender categories such as 'man', 'woman', 'masculine', and 'feminine' are not merely descriptions of a pre-existing reality. They are also social constructions that are produced and reinforced through social norms, legal regulations, and cultural practices. For example, when a military institution defines combat as primarily a male role, when a foreign ministry recruits predominantly men for senior positions, or when an international organisation frames peacekeeping in terms of 'masculine' protection and 'feminine' vulnerability, these practices contribute to the reproduction of particular gender orders. Drawing on Judith Butler's insights, feminist IR scholars have examined how such practices influence the organisation and conduct of international politics.

In the context of International Relations, gender operates at multiple levels simultaneously. At the structural level, the international system itself reflects deeply gendered assumptions. Sovereignty has historically been associated with masculine qualities, warfare has largely been understood as a male enterprise, and diplomacy remained an almost exclusively male domain for much of its history. These structural features are not merely incidental. They reflect the historical circumstances in which the modern international system developed, particularly within societies where women were politically, legally, and socially subordinated.

At the institutional level, international organisations, foreign ministries, and defence establishments reflect gender hierarchies in their composition, organisational culture, and priorities. Despite significant advances in recent decades, women remain underrepresented in senior positions across many international institutions. This underrepresentation reflects not only individual forms of discrimination but also systemic barriers embedded in institutional cultures, recruitment and selection processes, and organisational norms.

At the individual level, the experiences of men and women in war zones, refugee camps, trade negotiations, and peacekeeping missions can differ significantly. These differences are shaped by gendered social expectations and inequalities. Women in conflict zones, for example, may face specific vulnerabilities, including sexual violence, forced marriage, and a disproportionate burden of ensuring household survival. These vulnerabilities differ from, although they are connected

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to, the vulnerabilities experienced by men. Such differences should not be understood simply as natural outcomes of biological differences. Rather, they are often produced or intensified by social norms and power relations that can make women's bodies sites of political and social contestation during conflicts.

Gender is also inseparable from other dimensions of social difference, including race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and disability. The concept of intersectionality, developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in a foundational 1989 essay, explains how multiple systems of inequality and oppression can interact to produce complex and overlapping forms of disadvantage. Kimberlé Crenshaw developed the concept in the context of examining the experiences of Black women in the United States. She argued that Black women could experience discrimination that was simultaneously racial and gendered, but that these experiences were not adequately recognised when racial discrimination and gender discrimination were examined separately.

For feminist IR scholars, intersectionality is an important analytical tool. Consider, for example, a woman refugee from a conflict zone in the Global South. Her experiences and vulnerabilities cannot be understood by examining gender alone. Her race, nationality, class, legal status, and the specific history of the conflict from which she has fled may all shape her circumstances in significant ways. An intersectional analysis therefore examines these different dimensions simultaneously. It can provide a more comprehensive understanding of a person's experiences than an analysis that focuses on only one dimension of social difference.

It is also important to recognise that the study of gender does not mean focusing exclusively on women. Gender is a relational concept: it concerns the social relationships between masculinity and femininity, between men and women, and among different constructions of both. Feminist IR scholars have therefore examined not only the experiences and perspectives of women but also the construction of masculinity and its relationship to militarism, nationalism, and political authority.

Cynthia Enloe, for example, has examined how militaries depend upon particular constructions of masculinity—including courage, physical toughness, aggression, emotional suppression, and stoicism—to recruit soldiers, legitimise violence, and sustain military institutions and cultures. Her work demonstrates that understanding international politics requires attention not only to women and femininity but also to the ways in which particular forms of masculinity are constructed and sustained.

Scholars such as Raewyn Connell have further developed the study of masculinity through the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity'. This refers to the culturally dominant form of masculinity within a particular social context, which establishes a standard against which other forms of masculinity and femininity are evaluated. In international politics, hegemonic masculinity has historically been associated with qualities such as toughness, rationality, independence, authority, and a willingness to use force. These qualities have often been presented as necessary characteristics for effective statesmanship and military leadership.

Understanding how hegemonic masculinity is constructed, reproduced, and sometimes challenged is therefore essential for understanding how international politics operates. A gender-sensitive approach to International Relations draws attention to these processes and demonstrates that ideas about masculinity and femininity are not separate from international politics. Rather,

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they are closely connected to the exercise of power, the organisation of institutions, the conduct of war and diplomacy, and the broader structure of the international system.

1.1.2 Gender and the International System: Historical Overview

The modern international system, which is commonly associated with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, was built around the principle of state sovereignty—the idea that each state possesses supreme authority within its territory and is not subject to external interference in its internal affairs. The Westphalian model represented a new conception of political order: a world of formally equal and legally sovereign states, each governing its own territory according to its laws and political principles. This model has shaped international politics for more than three and a half centuries and remains, in important respects, the framework within which contemporary international relations are conducted.

What is less frequently acknowledged, but has been emphasised by feminist historians and International Relations scholars, is that the Westphalian model developed at a time when women were legally, politically, and economically subordinate to men throughout much of Europe. Property rights, voting rights, rights of contract, access to education, and participation in public life were either restricted or denied to women. Women generally could not sign treaties, command armies, or represent their states in diplomatic negotiations. Thus, from its early development, the international system was largely a system of states governed by men and structured around male political authority.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the modern state system became more consolidated and international law developed, women remained largely invisible in international affairs. Diplomacy was conducted primarily by male ambassadors and ministers representing male sovereigns. Wars were fought predominantly by male armies and governed by rules formulated largely by male jurists. The emerging field of international law, developed by scholars such as Hugo Grotius, Emer de Vattel, and later Henry Wheaton, paid limited attention to the gendered dimensions of conflict, occupation, and treaty-making. Women appeared in international legal and political documents primarily as objects of protection—as 'mothers', 'wives', and 'innocents' who needed to be protected from the violence of war—rather than as autonomous political subjects possessing rights and agency of their own.

This representation of women as passive objects of protection, rather than as active political subjects, has been extensively criticised by feminist IR scholars. Judith Hicks Stiehm's analysis of the 'protected/protector' duality argues that this framework simultaneously marginalises women from positions of political authority and reinforces the masculine identity of the warrior-protector. The underlying logic is that men fight to protect women; therefore, women are presumed to be incapable of fighting; and consequently, women are excluded from institutions and roles associated with political and military authority. This circular logic has contributed to the reproduction of women's exclusion from the domains of military and diplomatic power over time.

The twentieth century brought significant changes to the gendered landscape of international politics. These changes were driven by a combination of global conflicts, feminist movements, and the development of international institutions. The two World Wars drew millions of women into industrial

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production, nursing, intelligence work, and auxiliary military roles. Their participation disrupted traditional gender arrangements and contributed to new feminist demands for political recognition and equality. Women's wartime contributions, together with subsequent attempts by governments to return women to domestic roles after the wars, generated considerable feminist activism and political mobilisation.

The interwar period witnessed the establishment of the League of Nations in 1920. Although the League had significant limitations and ultimately failed to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War, it created new opportunities for women's international activism. The Covenant of the League of Nations did not explicitly provide for women's participation in its governance structures, but the organisation created spaces through which women's organisations could engage with international diplomacy and political debates.

Organisations such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), founded in 1915 by Jane Addams and other peace activists, brought women's perspectives into debates concerning disarmament, collective security, and international justice. Jane Addams became the first American woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1931, symbolising the growing international recognition of women's contributions to peace activism.

The establishment of the United Nations in 1945 created new institutional frameworks for addressing gender inequality at the international level. The preamble to the UN Charter affirmed the equal rights of men and women, representing an important formal commitment to gender equality, although its implementation was initially limited. In 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women was established, providing the first dedicated institutional space within the United Nations system for promoting women's rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, proclaimed the equal rights and freedoms of all human beings without distinction, including distinctions based on sex. These formal commitments were significant, but they coexisted with persistent forms of gender discrimination within international institutions and national governments.

The women's liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s transformed domestic politics across many parts of the world and increasingly acquired international significance. In the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, India, and many other countries, feminist movements campaigned for legal equality, reproductive rights, economic independence, and freedom from violence. They also increasingly connected these domestic struggles with broader international issues concerning development, human rights, peace, and equality.

The United Nations Decade for Women (1976–1985) and a series of World Conferences on Women—in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995—provided important global platforms for feminist demands. These conferences contributed to the internationalisation of debates on women's rights and helped establish gender equality as an important norm within international politics.

The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, is widely regarded as one of the most comprehensive international frameworks for advancing women's rights. It identified twelve critical areas of concern, ranging from education and health to peace and security, the media, and the rights of the

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girl child. It also established objectives and mechanisms for monitoring progress and promoting accountability.

The Beijing Conference was particularly significant for the broader recognition of the relationship between women's rights and human rights. In her speech at the conference, Hillary Rodham Clinton, then First Lady of the United States, famously declared that 'women's rights are human rights'. This statement became an influential expression of the feminist argument that the human rights framework must adequately address the specific forms of discrimination, inequality, and violence experienced by women. It helped reinforce the idea that women's rights should not be treated as a separate or secondary concern but as an integral part of universal human rights.

1.1.3 Why Gender Matters in International Relations

Having established the meaning of gender and traced its historical relationship with the international system, we can now address the central question that motivates this unit: why does gender matter for the study of International Relations? The argument for taking gender seriously in IR rests on at least four distinct foundations. Each of these arguments is important in its own right, while together they provide a strong case for incorporating gender into the study of international politics.

1.1.3.1 The Empirical Argument

The first and most straightforward argument for taking gender seriously in IR is empirical. Women constitute roughly half of the world's population, yet their experiences, interests, and perspectives have been systematically excluded from many mainstream accounts of international politics. This exclusion produces a distorted and incomplete picture of the international system. As Cynthia Enloe famously asked in her book Bananas, Beaches and Bases (1989), 'Where are the women?' When we follow this deceptively simple question into military bases, banana plantations, hotels and tourist resorts, diplomatic receptions, and refugee camps, we discover that women are present throughout international politics. They perform essential forms of labour and participate in activities that are often overlooked by mainstream IR theory.

Cynthia Enloe's method of 'feminist curiosity' involves taking seriously the labour, experiences, and choices of women who are typically rendered invisible in conventional accounts of international politics. Consider, for example, the diplomatic spouse who manages the social activities and relationships of an embassy. Is she simply a supportive spouse, or does she also perform work that contributes to the functioning of diplomacy? Similarly, consider a factory worker in an export-processing zone who assembles electronic products for a global technology company. Is she merely a domestic economic actor, or is she an important part of a global supply chain shaped by international trade agreements, investment arrangements, and corporate strategies?

The same question can be asked about a sex worker who provides services to soldiers stationed at a foreign military base. Is she merely a figure of vulnerability and exploitation, or can her presence reveal something about the functioning of international military arrangements and alliances? By asking such questions, feminist scholars draw attention to people and activities that conventional approaches to IR often overlook. The empirical argument therefore demonstrates that women are not absent from international politics; rather, they have frequently been made invisible within dominant accounts of it.

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1.1.3.2 The Analytical Argument

The second argument for taking gender seriously in IR is analytical. Gender is not simply an additional variable that can be added to existing theoretical frameworks. Rather, it is a fundamental category of analysis that can transform our understanding of some of the central concepts of International Relations.

The concept of security, for example, appears very different when examined through a gender perspective. Traditional security studies have generally defined security in terms of protecting states from external military threats. The state is treated as the referent object of security—that is, the entity whose survival, territorial integrity, and political independence are to be protected. Military power is consequently regarded as one of the principal means through which security can be achieved.

Feminist scholars have argued that this conception of security is inadequate for understanding many of the security threats experienced by people around the world. Millions of individuals, disproportionately women and girls, experience serious insecurity as a result of domestic violence, sexual assault, reproductive coercion, and economic deprivation within their own societies. In such situations, the state is not necessarily a protector. It may be a perpetrator of violence or may enable violence through inadequate laws, institutions, or enforcement.

A gender-sensitive conception of security must therefore expand its focus beyond interstate military threats to include the broader range of threats to human life, well-being, and dignity. These threats may occur within the domestic sphere and may be perpetrated by individuals, social groups, private organisations, or state authorities rather than by foreign states alone. Feminist approaches consequently broaden the meaning of security by asking whose security is being protected, from what threats, and whose experiences are excluded from conventional definitions of security.

The concept of sovereignty—the foundation of the Westphalian international order—also appears differently when examined through a gender perspective. Sovereign states have historically claimed extensive authority over women's bodies, reproductive choices, family relationships, and private lives. At times, the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs has been used to shield perpetrators of gender-based violence from external scrutiny or accountability by treating violence within households as a 'private' matter beyond the legitimate scope of international concern.

The tension between state sovereignty and human rights, including women's rights, is therefore also a deeply gendered issue. Feminist scholars have been among those who have drawn attention to this tension and examined how the distinction between the 'public' and 'private' spheres can influence the protection of rights and the exercise of political power.

1.1.3.3 The Normative Argument

The third argument for taking gender seriously in IR is normative. International politics ought to promote justice, peace, equality, and human flourishing, and these goals cannot be fully achieved without addressing gender inequality. This argument has both intrinsic and instrumental dimensions.

The intrinsic dimension is relatively straightforward: gender equality is a matter of basic justice. The systematic subordination of women—including their exclusion from political power, vulnerability to violence, and economic exploitation—represents a significant form of injustice. A just international order must therefore address

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the structures and practices that reproduce gender inequality.

The instrumental dimension is particularly significant because it connects gender equality with the traditional concerns of International Relations, especially international peace and security. Feminist IR scholars have argued, supported by empirical research, that higher levels of gender equality are associated with greater political stability, democratic resilience, and more peaceful forms of conflict management.

Research by political scientist Mary Caprioli and other scholars has examined the relationship between gender equality and international conflict. Such research suggests that states characterised by higher levels of gender equality may be less likely to engage in interstate violence and more likely to pursue peaceful approaches to resolving conflicts. From this perspective, the political representation and empowerment of women are not merely matters of social justice. They may also contribute to broader conditions that support international peace and security.

The normative argument therefore challenges the assumption that questions of gender equality are peripheral to the study of international politics. Instead, it suggests that questions of justice, equality, and human well-being are central to understanding what a legitimate and peaceful international order should look like.

1.1.3.4 The Epistemological Argument

The fourth argument for taking gender seriously in IR is epistemological. This argument concerns not only what we know about international politics but also how knowledge is produced, whose perspectives are considered legitimate, and who has the authority to produce knowledge.

Feminist scholars have shown that the discipline of International Relations has historically privileged forms of knowledge produced predominantly by men and has often focused on subjects such as war, grand strategy, great-power competition, military security, and geopolitical manoeuvring. Men have also historically dominated many of the institutions and professional positions associated with the practice and study of international politics. As a result, the discipline has developed systematic blind spots concerning experiences and forms of political activity that fall outside these traditional areas of focus.

The epistemological argument is not simply that women have been excluded from the discipline, although women have historically been underrepresented in many academic departments, leading journals, and professional organisations. The argument is more fundamental. The questions that IR scholars have asked, the concepts they have developed, the forms of evidence they have considered important, and the methods they have employed have all been influenced, to some extent, by the social positions and experiences of those who produced this knowledge.

From a feminist perspective, therefore, a genuinely comprehensive and rigorous study of International Relations requires greater epistemic diversity. This involves recognising women as important producers of knowledge, incorporating gender as an analytical perspective, and expanding the conceptual vocabulary of the discipline to include the experiences and concerns of groups that have historically been marginalised by mainstream IR theories.

The epistemological argument thus encourages us to reconsider not only the conclusions reached by International Relations but also the foundations on which those conclusions are based. By asking who

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produces knowledge, whose experiences are represented, and whose experiences remain invisible, feminist IR seeks to make the study of international politics more inclusive, comprehensive, and analytically rigorous.

1.1.4 Gender, Power, and Politics in the International Arena

Power is a central concept in International Relations, and it is deeply gendered. Mainstream IR, particularly in its Realist variant, has traditionally conceptualised power primarily in terms of military capabilities and material resources—the ability of states to coerce or deter other states through the threat or use of force. This conception of power is often associated with traditionally masculine qualities: strength, forcefulness, rationality, competitiveness, and domination. In Realist theory, the international system is commonly depicted as a 'self-help' system in which states must rely on their own capabilities to survive and prosper because there is no higher authority to protect them.

This image of the international system—as an anarchic realm of competing, self-interested, and power-seeking entities—bears a striking resemblance to stereotypical constructions of masculinity, which emphasise independence, rationality, competitiveness, strength, and the capacity for domination. Feminist IR scholars have therefore questioned whether conventional understandings of power reflect particular gendered assumptions about what power is and how it should be exercised.

Feminist scholars have challenged this narrow understanding of power by drawing attention to forms of power that are often associated with traditionally feminine qualities but are nevertheless important in international politics. for example, Joseph Samuel Nye Jr.'s concept of 'soft power', refers to the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion. Although Joseph Samuel Nye Jr. did not develop the concept explicitly as a gendered theory, it provides an important point of departure for considering forms of power that extend beyond military force.

Feminist scholars have gone further by arguing that the privileging of hard and coercive power in conventional IR theory reflects a masculine bias that can distort our understanding of how power actually operates in international politics. Diplomatic persuasion, the construction and diffusion of international norms, coalition-building, negotiation, and the mobilisation of moral authority are all important forms of influence. Yet these forms of power have often received less attention than military and economic capabilities within traditional Realist frameworks.

Feminist scholars have also highlighted the gendered distribution of political power within the international system. Heads of government, senior diplomats, military commanders, and leaders of major international financial institutions have historically been overwhelmingly male. The presence of women in senior foreign-policy positions has therefore often been treated as noteworthy. Examples include Madeleine Albright, who served as United States Secretary of State from 1997 to 2001; Condoleezza Rice, who served as National Security Advisor from 2001 to 2005 and as Secretary of State from 2005 to 2009; Angela Merkel, who served as Chancellor of Germany from 2005 to 2021; Christine Lagarde, who served as Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund from 2011 to 2019; and Ursula von der Leyen, who has served as President of the European Commission since 2019. Although the participation of women in international political institutions has

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increased considerably, their representation in many positions of power remains uneven.

The relationship between gender and nationalism is another important dimension of gendered politics in the international arena. Nationalist movements and ideologies frequently represent women as symbols of the nation—as mothers who give birth to the next generation of citizens, as embodiments of cultural purity and honour, and as markers of the boundary between 'us' and 'them'. This symbolic role has concrete political consequences. Women's bodies can become sites of nationalist struggle, while the regulation of women's sexuality through laws and social norms concerning marriage, reproduction, dress, and behaviour can become a means of defining and protecting national identity.

Nira Yuval-Davis, in her influential work *Gender and Nation* (1997), analysed the multiple ways in which women are incorporated into nationalist projects. She identified several important roles: women as biological reproducers of members of ethnic and national groups; women as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic and national groups through rules governing marriage; women as central participants in the ideological reproduction of the community through the transmission of culture, language, and traditions to children; women as symbols of the collective through national iconography, such as Marianne in France and Mother India; and women as participants in national, economic, political, and military struggles.

Understanding these multiple dimensions of women's relationship with nationalism is essential for analysing contemporary international politics, particularly because national and ethnic conflicts continue to be important sources of violence and instability. Gender therefore plays a significant role not only in the symbolic construction of national identity but also in the political practices through which national communities are defined and defended.

In situations of ethnic or communal conflict, sexual violence against women belonging to an opposing group has frequently been used as a weapon of war and as a means of humiliation, intimidation, and territorial control. The systematic use of sexual violence during the Bosnian War (1992–1995), the Rwandan genocide (1994), and conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been extensively documented. Feminist scholars and activists were among those who strongly challenged the idea that rape during wartime should be regarded as an inevitable by-product of armed conflict. They argued instead that sexual violence can be deliberately used as a strategy of warfare and therefore requires international accountability.

Such advocacy contributed to the development of international legal recognition of rape and other forms of sexual violence as serious international crimes, including crimes against humanity and war crimes. These developments were reflected in the jurisprudence of the International Criminal Tribunals and were subsequently incorporated into the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The international political economy is also structured by significant gender hierarchies. The global division of labour has frequently concentrated women—particularly women in the Global South—in some of the lowest-paid, most precarious, and least legally protected forms of employment. These include garment manufacturing, domestic work, sex work, and subsistence agriculture. Export-processing zones and global supply chains often depend heavily on low-cost female labour. The low wages associated with much of this work are connected not

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simply to the nature of the occupations but also to the systematic undervaluation of work traditionally performed by women in both domestic and international economies.

International trade agreements and structural adjustment programmes have, in some contexts, contributed to the reproduction or intensification of these inequalities. When institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank impose conditions requiring reductions in public expenditure as part of lending programmes, cuts may affect public health, education, and social protection. Women can be disproportionately affected because they often depend heavily on these services both as users and as workers.

The structural adjustment programmes implemented in many developing countries during the 1980s and 1990s, as well as austerity measures introduced in various countries following the 2008 global financial crisis, had significant gendered consequences. Feminist political economists have argued that conventional economic analysis has often failed to fully account for these consequences. Examining international economic policies through a gender perspective therefore reveals how decisions concerning trade, finance, public expenditure, and economic restructuring can affect men and women differently and can reproduce existing patterns of inequality.

1.1.5 Methodological Approaches to Studying Gender in International Relations

Having established the conceptual foundations and substantive scope of gender analysis in International Relations, it is important to consider the question of method: how do feminist IR scholars conduct their research? What methodological approaches do they use to investigate the gendered dimensions of international politics? This question is important not only for understanding feminist IR as an academic field but also for undergraduate students, who need appropriate methodological tools for conducting their own research.

Feminist IR is methodologically pluralist. It does not rely on a single research method but draws upon a wide range of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Feminist researchers select methods according to the questions being asked and the phenomena being investigated. What unifies feminist approaches to research is therefore not a particular method but a set of shared commitments. These include reflexivity, attention to gender as both a variable and a structuring principle, engagement with the experiences of marginalised groups, and recognition of the ethical responsibilities involved in research with vulnerable populations.

1.1.5.1 Qualitative and Ethnographic Methods

Qualitative methods—including interviews, ethnographic observation, document analysis, and case studies—have played an important role in feminist IR research. These methods enable researchers to engage directly with the experiences of women and men in the contexts they study. They can also capture the complexity, nuance, and contextual specificity of social and political life that may be difficult to identify through large-scale quantitative research alone.

Cynthia Enloe's work represents one of the most influential applications of what she calls 'feminist curiosity'. This approach involves sustained and reflective attention to the experiences of women in the places and institutions where international power operates. By examining military bases, garment factories, tourist resorts, and diplomatic missions, and by paying attention to the

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women who work and live in these settings, Cynthia Enloe has produced influential analyses that reveal dimensions of international politics that can remain invisible from the perspective of conventional IR theory.

Her approach demonstrates the value of examining everyday activities and seemingly ordinary social relationships as part of international politics. Activities that might initially appear to be domestic, private, or economically insignificant can be connected to wider structures of international power. Feminist qualitative research therefore helps broaden the range of actors, experiences, and practices considered relevant to the study of IR.

1.1.5.2 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis involves the systematic examination of the language, texts, concepts, and representations through which political realities are constructed, interpreted, and justified. It has been widely used in feminist IR, particularly among scholars influenced by poststructuralist approaches. Feminist discourse analysts examine speeches, treaty texts, news reports, academic publications, policy documents, and institutional communications to identify how gender categories are constructed, reinforced, normalised, and sometimes challenged.

Carol Cohn's influential ethnographic and discourse-analytic study of American defence intellectuals, published as 'Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals' (1987), demonstrated how the technical and strategic language of nuclear deterrence could distance its practitioners from the human consequences of nuclear weapons. By representing nuclear warfare through abstract, technical, and highly specialised language, the discourse of nuclear strategy could make the possibility of mass destruction appear manageable and subject to rational calculation.

Carol Cohn's analysis also demonstrated that gaining access to the expert discourse of nuclear strategy required familiarity with a highly specialised and gendered vocabulary. This vocabulary privileged technical rationality and tended to exclude or marginalise embodied, emotional, and caring dimensions of human experience. Her study therefore showed that language is not simply a neutral means of describing international politics. The language used to discuss security, and warfare can shape how political problems are understood and what kinds of knowledge are considered legitimate.

1.1.5.3 Feminist Survey and Statistical Research

Feminist IR scholars have also contributed significantly to the development of gender-sensitive quantitative research, particularly in areas such as women's political representation, the gendered effects of armed conflict, and the relationship between gender equality and international peace. The development of gender-sensitive indicators—measures designed to capture different dimensions of gender inequality across countries and social contexts—has been an important contribution to the empirical study of gender and to international policy-making.

Mary Caprioli's research on gender and international conflict employed large-N statistical methods to examine the relationship between levels of gender equality within states and their propensity for interstate violence. Her findings provided important empirical support for the argument that gender equality is associated with more peaceful patterns of international behaviour.

Valerie Hudson and her colleagues extended this line of quantitative research in their book Sex and World Peace (2012). Their research examined the relationship between the status and security of women

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within states and broader patterns of state security and peacefulness. The study argued that the treatment and security of women within a society are closely connected to wider patterns of national and international security.

These quantitative approaches demonstrate that feminist IR is not limited to qualitative research. Feminist scholars also use statistical evidence, comparative data, and measurable indicators to examine patterns of gender inequality and their relationship with international political outcomes. The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches strengthens feminist IR by allowing researchers to examine both the lived experiences of individuals and broader patterns across societies and states.

1.1.6 Concluding Observation

Feminist International Relations (IR) provides a critical perspective for understanding international politics by placing gender, power, inequality, and lived experiences at the centre of analysis. The unit has shown that international politics cannot be fully understood through traditional concerns such as states, military power, war, diplomacy, and national security alone. Feminist scholars have demonstrated how gender relations influence the organisation of states, international institutions, global political economy, security practices, nationalism, conflict, and everyday life. By asking where women are located within international politics and how gender shapes the experiences of different social groups, feminist IR makes visible forms of power and inequality that conventional approaches have often overlooked.

The study of feminist IR also encourages learners to critically examine how knowledge about international politics is produced. Concepts such as gender, intersectionality, hegemonic masculinity, feminist security, feminist curiosity, and gendered power help broaden our understanding of global affairs. Feminist approaches do not simply seek to add women to existing accounts of international relations; they also question the assumptions, concepts, methods, and structures through which international politics is understood. Consequently, feminist IR contributes to a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of power, security, justice, conflict, peace, and global political change.

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Recap

- Feminist International Relations emerged as a critical approach that questioned the male-centred assumptions of conventional International Relations.
- Gender is a socially constructed concept that shapes roles, identities, expectations, institutions, and relations of power. It is distinct from biological sex.
- Feminist scholars argue that gender is not simply an additional topic in IR but an important analytical category for understanding international political processes.

- The historical development of the international system took place within political, legal, and economic structures in which women were often excluded from formal power and decision-making.
- Feminist IR uses an empirical argument to demonstrate that women are present throughout international politics, even when conventional accounts make their contributions and experiences invisible.
- The analytical argument of feminist IR demonstrates that gender helps explain political institutions, security practices, conflict, diplomacy, nationalism, and global economic relations.
- Feminist approaches broaden the meaning of security by examining issues such as domestic violence, sexual violence, reproductive control, economic insecurity, and other forms of everyday insecurity alongside military threats.
- Gender and power are closely connected. Feminist scholars challenge the traditional association of power with military force and demonstrate the importance of economic, political, social, discursive, and relational forms of power.
- Nationalism and international conflict are also gendered. Women may be represented as biological reproducers of the nation, cultural symbols, guardians of community identity, and participants in political and military struggles.
- Feminist approaches to international political economy examine how globalisation, labour markets, economic restructuring, and international institutions affect women and other marginalised groups differently.
- Feminist scholars have drawn attention to gender-based violence during armed conflict, including sexual violence, and have contributed to broader understandings of violence, war, justice, and human security.
- Feminist IR employs diverse methodological approaches, including interviews, ethnography, discourse analysis, case studies, surveys, and statistical research. These approaches seek to make marginalised experiences visible while critically examining how knowledge about international politics is produced.

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Objective Questions

1. Who is one of the major scholars associated with the development of Feminist International Relations?
2. What is meant by the concept of gender?
3. Who introduced the concept of intersectionality?

4. What is meant by hegemonic masculinity?
5. Who wrote *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*?
6. What is meant by feminist curiosity?
7. How does Feminist International Relations broaden the traditional concept of security?
8. Who wrote *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security*?
9. What is meant by the gendered division of labour?
10. Name one feminist scholar who has examined the relationship between gender equality and interstate violence.
11. What is discourse analysis?
12. Who are the authors of *Sex and World Peace*?

Answers

1. Cynthia Enloe
2. Gender refers to socially constructed roles, behaviours, expectations, identities, and attributes associated with femininity, masculinity, and other gender identities.
3. Kimberlé Crenshaw
4. Hegemonic masculinity refers to a culturally dominant form of masculinity that legitimises particular patterns of male authority and gender hierarchy.
5. Cynthia Enloe
6. Feminist curiosity is an approach associated particularly with Cynthia Enloe that encourages researchers to ask where women are located within international political processes and how apparently ordinary activities are connected to structures of global power.
7. Feminist International Relations expands security beyond military and state-centred threats to include everyday forms of insecurity such as domestic violence, sexual violence, economic deprivation, and reproductive insecurity.
8. J. Ann Tickner

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9. The gendered division of labour refers to the unequal allocation of work, responsibilities, and economic opportunities according to gender.

10. Mary Caprioli

11. Discourse analysis is a method of examining language, texts, concepts, and representations to understand how political realities and meanings are constructed.

12. Valerie M. Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli, and Chad F. Emmett.

Assignments

1. Define Feminist International Relations and explain its emergence as a critical approach to the study of international politics.
2. Explain the concept of gender and discuss its significance as an analytical category in International Relations.
3. Examine the empirical, analytical, normative, and epistemological arguments of Feminist International Relations.
4. Discuss the relationship between gender and power in international politics. How does feminist IR challenge conventional understandings of power?
5. Analyse the gendered dimensions of international security, nationalism, and international political economy.
6. Discuss the major methodological approaches used in Feminist International Relations, with suitable examples.

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Suggested Reading

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UNIT 2

Feminist Theories and Approaches in International Relations

Learning Outcomes

Upon Completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the meaning, development, and significance of Feminist International Relations as an approach to the study of world politics
- identify and distinguish the major feminist approaches to International Relations, including liberal, radical, standpoint, poststructuralist, and postcolonial feminism
- analyse the relationship between gender, power, security, international political economy, conflict, and peace
- explain the concepts of intersectionality, hegemonic masculinity, social reproduction, and militarised masculinity in the context of international politics
- critically evaluate the contribution and limitations of feminist theories and approaches in understanding contemporary International Relations

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Prerequisite

International politics is often introduced through familiar images of states, presidents, diplomats, armies, borders, wars, and international organisations. Yet behind these visible institutions and events are social relations and everyday experiences that are not always given equal attention. Who performs the work that sustains economies during war and peace? Who is protected and who is expected to protect others? Whose experiences are represented when security is discussed, and whose voices remain unheard? Questions such as these provide an important starting point for understanding Feminist International Relations. By connecting international politics with gender, power, identity, work, violence, security, and everyday life, feminist approaches invite learners to reconsider some of the assumptions on which conventional theories of International Relations have been built. A

basic understanding of International Relations, particularly concepts such as state, power, security, conflict, sovereignty, and international institutions, will therefore help learners engage more effectively with the feminist theories and approaches discussed in this unit.

Keywords

Feminist international relations, gender, patriarchy, intersectionality, standpoint, poststructuralism, postcolonial feminism, hegemonic masculinity, women, peace and security, social reproduction

Discussion

Feminist International Relations (IR) theory does not constitute a single, unified body of thought. Rather, it encompasses a diverse range of theoretical perspectives that share a commitment to placing gender at the centre of the analysis of international politics and challenging gender-based inequality and injustice. These perspectives differ in their philosophical foundations, methodological approaches, empirical concerns, and political orientations. Therefore, understanding feminist IR requires an appreciation of this diversity and of the intellectual traditions from which different feminist approaches have developed.

1.2.1 Liberal Feminism in International Relations

Liberal feminism is one of the earliest and most institutionally influential strands of feminist thought. Rooted in the Enlightenment tradition of individual rights and equal citizenship, liberal feminism argues that women are rational and autonomous individuals who are entitled to the same rights, opportunities, and freedoms as men. Its primary goal is therefore to eliminate legal, social, and institutional barriers that prevent women from participating equally in public life.

In the context of International Relations, liberal feminism has focused particularly on increasing women's representation and participation in international institutions, diplomatic services, foreign policy establishments, and other centres of political decision-making. Liberal feminist scholars argue that the underrepresentation of women in international decision-making is unjust in itself and may also have practical consequences. They emphasise that more inclusive decision-making institutions can incorporate a wider range of experiences and perspectives, potentially contributing to more comprehensive approaches to foreign policy, security, development, and international cooperation.

Liberal feminist research has examined the barriers women encounter in pursuing diplomatic and political careers. These include discrimination in recruitment and promotion, the unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities, sexual harassment, and organisational cultures that have historically been dominated by men. The concept of the "second shift" is particularly relevant here, referring to the additional burden of unpaid domestic and care work that often falls disproportionately on women

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after their paid employment. Research has also examined women's political leadership and its relationship to foreign policy. Some studies suggest that women political leaders may approach particular issues differently from their male counterparts, although such differences should not be understood as universal or inherent characteristics of women.

Liberal feminist scholars have also contributed to the development and promotion of international norms and institutions concerned with gender equality. Important examples include the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda. These frameworks seek to promote women's equal participation and rights within international political and institutional structures. In this sense, liberal feminism generally seeks to reform existing institutions rather than fundamentally transform the structures of the international system.

However, liberal feminism has been criticised by other feminist perspectives. Critics argue that it may seek to include women within institutions without sufficiently questioning the structures, values, and power relations that shape those institutions. From this perspective, simply increasing the number of women in positions of authority may not be sufficient to transform gendered systems of power. Liberal feminism has also been criticised for placing excessive emphasis on individual equality and equal opportunity while paying insufficient attention to structural forms of inequality based on class, race, colonial history, sexuality, and geographical location. Postcolonial and intersectional feminists, in particular, have argued that mainstream liberal feminism has sometimes given greater attention to the experiences of educated and professional women in the Global North while overlooking the diverse circumstances and concerns of women in the Global South.

1.2.2 Radical Feminism and International Relations

Radical feminism offers a more fundamental critique of gender inequality than liberal feminism. Rather than focusing primarily on women's equal inclusion within existing institutions, radical feminism questions the patriarchal structures through which social, political, and economic power is organised. Institutions such as the state, military, and market may reproduce gender hierarchies and forms of male dominance. From this perspective, achieving gender equality requires not merely reforming existing institutions but also transforming the structures and practices that sustain patriarchy.

In the context of International Relations, radical feminism has made several important contributions. First, it has developed a sustained critique of militarism and systems of organised violence. Radical feminist scholars have questioned the assumption that military power, warfare, and organised violence are natural or unavoidable features of international politics. They have examined how militarised institutions can be associated with values such as aggression, hierarchy, domination, competition, and emotional restraint, and how these values may be connected to particular constructions of masculinity.

Scholars such as Susan Griffin and Adrienne Rich have explored connections between the domination of women, the domination of nature, and the acceptance or glorification of violence. These arguments contributed to the development of ecofeminist

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perspectives, which examine how systems of domination may operate across gender relations, human relationships with nature, and broader economic and political structures. From a radical feminist perspective, therefore, militarism is not simply a matter of military organisation or strategy; it can also be understood in relation to wider structures of gendered power.

Second, radical feminism has drawn considerable attention to sexual violence as a form of political violence and domination. During conflicts such as the Bosnian War and the Rwandan genocide, as well as in conflicts involving the Democratic Republic of the Congo, sexual violence has been used against civilian populations as a means of terror, humiliation, social disruption, and political control. Feminist scholars and activists played an important role in challenging the treatment of wartime rape as a private or incidental consequence of conflict. Their advocacy contributed to greater international recognition of sexual violence as a serious international crime. Rape has subsequently been recognised as a war crime and, under certain circumstances, as a crime against humanity in international criminal law, including within the legal frameworks of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Third, radical feminist thought has contributed to debates concerning the relationship between gender inequality and environmental destruction. Ecofeminism examines the possible connections between the domination of women and the exploitation of nature. It argues that hierarchical and exploitative systems can affect both human communities and the natural environment. Ecofeminist scholars have therefore questioned development models based heavily on extraction, accumulation, and control over natural resources.

Vandana Shiva has been an influential voice in ecofeminist debates, particularly in relation to development, agriculture, environmental sustainability, and the experiences of women in the Global South. Her work has drawn attention to the effects that particular forms of economic development and environmental exploitation can have on women's livelihoods and local communities. Ecofeminist perspectives consequently encourage us to examine environmental problems together with questions of gender, economic inequality, and social justice.

Radical feminism has also been subject to significant criticism, both from within feminist thought and from other theoretical perspectives. One major criticism concerns essentialism, which refers to the assumption that women possess a common nature or a shared set of experiences simply because they are women. Such an approach may overlook the considerable differences among women based on class, race, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, nationality, and geographical location. Critics have also argued that an excessive emphasis on women's common victimhood may unintentionally reinforce the gender binaries that feminist theory seeks to challenge. It can portray women primarily as victims and men primarily as perpetrators, without adequately recognising the complexity of gender relations and the different ways in which individuals experience, reproduce, negotiate, or challenge structures of power.

1.2.3 Standpoint Feminism and Epistemology

Standpoint feminism, developed by scholars such as Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock, and Dorothy Smith, makes an important epistemological argument: social position influences what people know and how they acquire knowledge. Knowledge

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is not produced from a completely neutral or detached "view from nowhere". Instead, knowledge is produced from particular social positions and is shaped by the experiences, interests, and perspectives associated with those positions.

The standpoint feminist argument has both a critical and a constructive dimension. From a critical perspective, standpoint feminism questions forms of knowledge that have been presented as objective and universal. It argues that much of the established knowledge about international politics has been produced from particular social locations, especially those of educated, Western, and socially privileged men, and has subsequently been presented as universally applicable. The exclusion of women and other marginalised groups from the production of knowledge can therefore result in important aspects of social and international reality being overlooked. What appears to be a "view from nowhere" may, in reality, reflect a particular social and historical standpoint.

From a constructive perspective, standpoint feminism argues that the experiences of women, particularly those who are socially marginalised or oppressed, can provide valuable insights into the operation of power. Groups that have been excluded from positions of authority may develop an understanding of social structures from a different position than those who occupy positions of privilege. Their experiences can therefore reveal forms of inequality and power that may remain less visible to dominant groups. However, standpoint feminism does not necessarily claim that women are automatically better knowers or that all women share the same perspective. Rather, it emphasises the importance of beginning research from the experiences, questions, and concerns of marginalised groups in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of social and political reality.

In International Relations, standpoint feminism has been applied to a wide range of issues. The work of J. Ann Tickner represents one of the influential applications of standpoint epistemology to IR theory. In her book Gendering World Politics (2001), she critically examined mainstream IR theories, including Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism, arguing that many of their central concepts reflect the experiences and concerns of those occupying positions of political and military power. Concepts such as security, power, and the national interest have traditionally been defined largely from the perspective of states and their political and military elites. A standpoint feminist approach, by contrast, begins by examining the experiences of those who are most affected by international insecurity, including women and children in conflict zones, displaced populations, and workers in global supply chains. It seeks to develop concepts and explanations that are more responsive to these experiences.

Standpoint feminism has also faced important criticisms. One concern is the possibility of essentialising women's experiences by assuming that women share a common standpoint. Such an assumption may overlook differences among women based on class, race, ethnicity, nationality, culture, sexuality, and geographical location. Postcolonial feminist scholars have therefore questioned which women's experiences are represented as authoritative or central within feminist scholarship. They have argued that privileging the voices of Western, educated, and relatively privileged women can marginalise the experiences of women in the Global South. Despite these criticisms, the central epistemological insights of standpoint feminism—that knowledge is situated, that social position influences what can be seen and understood, and that marginalised perspectives can enrich knowledge—have had a significant influence on feminist IR and the social sciences more broadly.

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1.2.4 Poststructuralist Feminism in International Relations

Poststructuralist feminism draws upon the insights of poststructuralist philosophy, particularly the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler. It examines how gender is constructed, represented, and maintained through language, discourse, and social practices. While some feminist approaches begin with the category of "women" as a relatively established social group, poststructuralist feminism questions how categories such as "woman", "man", "masculinity", and "femininity" are themselves produced and given meaning through particular social and political discourses.

In the context of International Relations, poststructuralist feminism focuses particularly on discourse, understood as systems of meaning through which political realities are described, interpreted, and made intelligible. It asks questions such as: How are wars justified? How is national security defined? How are refugees represented? How is the "international" distinguished from the "domestic"? How are particular groups portrayed as threats or victims? Poststructuralist feminist scholars argue that such representations are not simply neutral descriptions of an objective reality. Language and political discourse can shape how events are understood and can reproduce existing relations of power and gender hierarchy.

The work of V. Spike Peterson has been influential in feminist analyses of international politics, particularly in examining the gendered assumptions underlying the organisation of political life. Peterson has explored a number of binary distinctions that have traditionally structured political thought, such as public/private, sovereign/subject, citizen/alien, rational/emotional, and culture/nature. These distinctions are often gendered in ways that associate the first term with masculinity, authority, rationality, and political significance, while associating the second with femininity, dependence, emotion, and the private sphere. From this perspective, the state, sovereignty, citizenship, and international political authority are associated with the public and political sphere, whereas family life, reproduction, and care work have historically been relegated to the private sphere and treated as less politically significant.

Poststructuralist feminism has also made important contributions to the study of war, militarism, and political violence. The work of Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, for example, examines how women who participate in political violence are represented in political and media discourse. Women who engage in terrorism, armed struggle, or other forms of political violence are sometimes portrayed as unusual or abnormal and may be described as "mad", "bad", or manipulated by men. Such representations can obscure women's political agency and their own motivations. By examining these representations, poststructuralist feminist scholars demonstrate how political agency itself can become associated with particular constructions of masculinity.

At the same time, poststructuralist feminism has been criticised for placing considerable emphasis on language, discourse, and representation. Critics argue that excessive attention to discourse may risk overlooking material realities, such as the physical consequences of sexual violence, poverty, exploitation, displacement, and economic inequality. Materialist feminist scholars emphasise that gender inequality is produced not only through language and representation but also through economic institutions, political structures, labour relations, and embodied experiences. The tension between discursive and materialist

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approaches is therefore an important and productive debate within feminist IR. Many contemporary feminist scholars seek to examine both the ways in which political realities are constructed through discourse and the material conditions through which gendered inequalities are experienced and reproduced.

1.2.5 Postcolonial Feminism and International Relations

Postcolonial feminism represents one of the important and influential developments within feminist International Relations (IR). It emerged from the intersection of postcolonial theory, which examines the legacies of European colonialism and continuing structures of global inequality, and feminist theory, which examines gendered forms of power and inequality. Postcolonial feminism challenges the tendency of some Western feminist approaches to treat the experiences of white, middle-class, Western women as universal while overlooking or misrepresenting the diverse experiences of women in the Global South.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's influential essay "Under Western Eyes" (1984) provided a foundational critique of certain forms of Western feminist scholarship. Mohanty argued that some Western feminist writings constructed a simplified and homogeneous image of the "Third World woman" as powerless, uneducated, tradition-bound, and oppressed. Such representations can overlook the agency, diversity, and complexity of women's lives and struggles outside the West. They may also implicitly position Western women as modern, liberated, and empowered, creating a standard against which women from other societies are judged. Postcolonial feminism therefore insists that women's experiences should be understood within their specific historical, cultural, economic, and political contexts rather than through assumptions derived primarily from Western experiences.

In the context of IR, postcolonial feminism has made several important contributions. First, it has challenged the Eurocentrism of mainstream IR theory. Much conventional IR theory has been developed largely from the historical experiences of Western states and has sometimes presented those experiences as a universal model of political modernity. However, the histories of societies outside the West have been shaped by colonialism, slavery, imperialism, resistance, and unequal patterns of international economic relations. Postcolonial feminist scholars therefore argue that theories developed primarily from Western experiences cannot simply be applied universally without considering these historical differences.

Second, postcolonial feminism examines the ways in which international actors, including governments, international organisations, and non-governmental organisations, may use the language of women's rights and gender equality to justify particular forms of intervention in non-Western societies. This concern is sometimes discussed through the idea of "feminist imperialism". Scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Lila Abu-Lughod have critically examined representations of women in non-Western societies and questioned situations in which claims about women's oppression are used to legitimise political, military, or cultural interventions. From this perspective, efforts to promote women's rights should take seriously the voices, agency, priorities, and political contexts of the women whose interests are being represented.

Third, postcolonial feminism draws attention to the continuing effects of colonialism on gender relations in formerly colonised societies. Colonial rule sometimes

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disrupted existing social and gender arrangements and introduced or strengthened particular forms of patriarchal regulation through colonial law, missionary activity, education, and administrative practices. In other contexts, colonial authorities worked through local male elites and strengthened their political and economic authority. These processes could alter women's access to property, resources, education, political participation, and other forms of social power. Understanding contemporary gender inequality in the Global South therefore requires attention to both local social structures and the historical and continuing effects of colonialism.

Postcolonial feminism has also contributed to a more globally inclusive feminist understanding of international politics by drawing attention to diverse traditions of women's activism and gender-sensitive political thought outside the Western tradition. Feminist movements in regions such as India, Africa, Latin America, and the Arab world have developed through different historical experiences and have addressed issues ranging from colonialism and economic exploitation to caste, race, class, land rights, political representation, violence, and environmental justice. A genuinely global feminist IR must therefore engage with these diverse traditions rather than treating Western feminist thought as the universal standard for understanding women's experiences.

1.2.6 Critical Security Studies: A Feminist Perspective

Security is one of the central concepts in International Relations and has been an important area of feminist intervention. Traditional security studies, particularly those influenced by the Realist tradition, have generally defined security in terms of protecting states from external military threats. In this approach, the state is the primary referent object of security, meaning that the survival and territorial integrity of the state are treated as the principal concerns. Military capabilities are consequently regarded as important instruments for achieving security. Feminist scholars have questioned this approach because it often treats everyday social relations as outside the field of security and may overlook the insecurities experienced by individuals and communities within states.

Feminist security scholars have developed a multidimensional critique of this traditional understanding of security. First, they question whether the state should always be treated as the primary referent object of security. States can protect their populations, but they can also become sources of insecurity, particularly for women, minorities, displaced populations, and economically disadvantaged groups. Feminist approaches therefore place greater emphasis on the security of individuals and communities alongside the security of states. This perspective connects with the broader human security approach that gained prominence during the 1990s and expanded the understanding of security beyond military threats to include freedom from fear and freedom from want.

Second, feminist security scholars argue that security threats cannot be restricted to external military aggression. Domestic violence, sexual violence, reproductive coercion, hunger, disease, environmental degradation, and economic deprivation can also produce serious forms of insecurity. These problems may disproportionately affect women and other marginalised groups and therefore deserve attention within security studies. Cynthia Enloe's analysis of militarisation has been particularly influential in demonstrating how military priorities, practices, and ways of thinking can extend into civilian institutions and everyday life.

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From a feminist perspective, prioritising military security without considering human security can have significant gendered consequences.

Third, feminist security scholars have examined the gendered dynamics of war and armed conflict. They have challenged the idea that men naturally occupy the role of protectors while women and children occupy the role of those who require protection. This assumption can create a "protector/protected" relationship in which men are associated with military agency and women and children with vulnerability and dependence. In practice, however, women and children are often harmed by armed forces, including forces that claim to protect them. Moreover, those who are supposedly protected frequently have limited influence over decisions concerning whether wars are fought and how peace is negotiated. The work of Judith Hicks Stiehm on the protector/protected relationship and Christine Sylvester's work on the embodied experiences of war have contributed significantly to feminist analyses of security and conflict.

Fourth, feminist scholars have examined the gendered dimensions of nuclear deterrence, arms control, and weapons of mass destruction. Decisions concerning the development, deployment, and potential use of such weapons have historically been concentrated among political and military elites, who have often been predominantly male. Feminist scholars have questioned forms of strategic reasoning that treat nuclear weapons primarily as instruments of deterrence while abstracting from their human and environmental consequences. Carol Cohn's ethnographic research on defence intellectuals demonstrated how the technical language of nuclear strategy can distance policymakers and experts from the human consequences of nuclear warfare. Her work showed how specialised strategic language can make the possibility of mass destruction appear as an abstract technical problem rather than an issue involving human suffering, moral responsibility, and embodied experiences.

The feminist critique of security has contributed significantly to the development of new concepts, research agendas, and policy frameworks. It has helped broaden security studies beyond military threats and state survival, strengthened international attention to gender-based violence, and contributed to the development of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Feminist scholars have also contributed to debates concerning peacekeeping, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and the protection and participation of women in conflict-affected societies. At the same time, feminist security scholars continue to debate how critical scholarship should relate to practical policy-making. This tension between critically questioning existing structures and engaging with institutions to produce practical change remains an important feature of contemporary feminist International Relations.

1.2.7 Gender and International Political Economy

International Political Economy (IPE) examines the relationship between politics and economics at the global level, including the governance of trade, finance, investment, and development. Mainstream IPE has been predominantly concerned with states and markets, the rules and institutions governing international economic exchange, and the distribution of power and wealth among states. Gender has often remained marginal in mainstream IPE, which has tended to assume that economic relations are gender-neutral or that gender inequalities within economies are primarily domestic matters that fall outside international economic analysis.

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Feminist political economists have systematically challenged this assumption. They have shown that the global economy is structured by gender inequalities that are not incidental but fundamental to its functioning. The global division of labour often assigns women, particularly in the Global South, to some of the most precarious and poorly protected roles in global value chains. These include assembling electronics in East Asian factories, sewing garments in South Asian export zones, working in agricultural production in Latin America, and providing domestic and care work in wealthier countries. Such forms of employment are often low-paid, physically demanding, socially undervalued, and inadequately protected by labour laws. Feminist political economists therefore argue that the functioning and profitability of global capitalism depend, to a significant extent, on the availability of relatively cheap and flexible labour, much of which is performed by women.

Isabella Bakker and other feminist political economists have developed the concept of "social reproduction", which refers to the unpaid and often undervalued work required to sustain individuals, households, and communities. This includes activities such as cooking, cleaning, caring for children, looking after elderly family members, and providing support to people who are sick or dependent on others. Such work is economically essential because the paid labour force cannot be sustained without the reproduction of human life and labour. Yet much of this work is not directly compensated through the market and is inadequately represented in conventional economic measures. Feminist political economists therefore argue that a comprehensive understanding of the global economy must recognise social reproduction and examine the gender inequalities through which such work is organised and distributed.

The feminist critique of international economic institutions has been particularly significant. Structural adjustment programmes promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in many developing countries during the 1980s and 1990s commonly involved measures such as reductions in public expenditure, privatisation of state enterprises, trade liberalisation, and market deregulation. Feminist scholars have argued that these policies could have significant gendered consequences. Cuts to public health, education, food subsidies, and social protection could place additional burdens on women, who were often responsible for unpaid care work within households and communities. When public services were reduced, women frequently absorbed some of the additional work required to meet household needs. In some contexts, women's participation in paid employment also increased because household survival required additional income. However, this employment was often concentrated in insecure, poorly paid, and weakly protected sectors.

More recently, feminist political economists have examined the gendered consequences of the global financial crisis of 2008 and the austerity policies adopted in several countries in its aftermath. Women in many societies experienced the effects of austerity through reductions in public-sector employment, welfare benefits, and publicly provided care services. Because women are often disproportionately represented in public-sector employment and undertake a large share of unpaid care work, such measures can have particularly significant consequences for them. At the same time, the financial sector has historically been male-dominated, raising questions about the relationship between gendered institutional cultures and economic decision-making. However, feminist analysis generally cautions

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against assuming that women are inherently more cautious or socially responsible economic actors. The important point is not that women necessarily behave differently from men, but that gendered patterns of participation, authority, and institutional culture can shape economic decision-making and distribute the consequences of economic crises unevenly.

1.2.8 Gender and Peace: Feminist Perspectives on Conflict Resolution

The relationship between gender and peace has been a central concern of feminist IR scholarship from its early development. Feminist scholars have challenged forms of militarised masculinity that glorify war, military strength, and violence while marginalising or devaluing those who oppose violence. They have also developed broader conceptions of peace that go beyond the mere absence of armed conflict to include social justice, equality, human security, and human flourishing.

Johan Galtung's distinction between "negative peace", understood as the absence of direct violence, and "positive peace", understood as the presence of social justice and the reduction or elimination of structural violence, has been influential in feminist approaches to peace. Feminist scholars have extended this framework by emphasising the gendered dimensions of structural violence. Gender discrimination, economic inequality, poverty, political exclusion, and social subordination can constrain women's lives even when a society is not experiencing armed conflict. From this perspective, a society cannot be considered fully peaceful simply because open warfare has ended if patriarchal structures and other forms of systematic inequality continue to produce insecurity and suffering.

Feminist perspectives have also made important contributions to debates on conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Research has highlighted the value of women's participation in peace negotiations, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction. Women may bring experiences and concerns that are not adequately represented in traditional, male-dominated peace processes, including issues relating to community recovery, access to basic services, psychosocial support, displacement, family welfare, and long-term social stability. Women may also contribute to peacebuilding through community networks and relationships that cross political, ethnic, religious, or other conflict divisions. However, feminist scholars caution against treating women as naturally peaceful or assuming that all women share the same priorities. The importance of women's participation lies not in an assumed inherent difference between women and men, but in the need to make peace processes more inclusive and responsive to diverse experiences.

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda was formally established through United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 and has subsequently been developed through a series of additional resolutions, including Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467, and 2493. The agenda seeks to institutionalise the recognition of gender within international approaches to conflict prevention, peace, and security. Its four commonly identified pillars are prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery. Prevention focuses on preventing conflict and gender-based violence; protection addresses the protection of women and girls from violence and violations of their rights during conflict; participation emphasises women's meaningful and effective participation in peace and security decision-making; and relief and recovery focuses on gender-responsive humanitarian assistance, reconstruction,

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and post-conflict recovery. Together, these pillars reflect decades of feminist scholarship, activism, and advocacy concerning gender, conflict, and peace.

At the same time, feminist scholars have developed critical perspectives on the WPS agenda itself. Some critics argue that the agenda has often been implemented through institutions and states whose broader foreign and security policies may not always be consistent with feminist commitments to equality and justice. Concerns have also been raised about the securitisation of gender equality, in which women's rights and gender-based violence are framed primarily as matters of international security. Although such framing can draw attention to serious forms of violence, it can also reproduce militarised approaches by presenting military intervention as a solution to problems involving gender inequality. Scholars such as Laura J. Shepherd and Cynthia Enloe have therefore emphasised the need to examine carefully how feminist language is used by powerful political actors and whether such language genuinely challenges existing structures of power. A critical feminist approach seeks not only to increase women's participation in security institutions but also to question the forms of power, violence, and inequality that those institutions may reproduce.

1.2.9 Intersectionality and the Future of Feminist IR

The concept of intersectionality has become one of the most important analytical tools in contemporary feminist IR. Developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the context of legal theory and subsequently elaborated by scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, intersectionality refers to the ways in which multiple systems of power and inequality, including gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality, religion, and disability, interact to produce distinctive and overlapping forms of privilege and disadvantage. Intersectionality challenges analyses that examine a single dimension of inequality in isolation and emphasises that people's experiences are shaped by the interaction of multiple social identities and structures of power.

In IR, intersectionality has enriched feminist analysis in several important ways. It has challenged the tendency in some early feminist scholarship to treat "women" as a unified category with broadly shared experiences and interests. Instead, intersectional approaches emphasise the considerable diversity of women's experiences both across and within societies. A refugee woman from a conflict-affected region of sub-Saharan Africa, a domestic worker from South Asia employed in a Gulf state, a woman diplomat working in a Western foreign ministry, and a garment worker in an East Asian export-processing zone are all women, but their social positions, opportunities, vulnerabilities, and political concerns may be very different. Intersectional analysis makes it possible to recognise these differences while also identifying broader structures of gender inequality that connect their experiences.

Intersectionality has also enabled feminist IR scholars to examine the complex ways in which race, empire, and gender intersect in international politics. The history of colonialism involved both racial domination and gendered forms of control. Colonial administrations frequently regulated marriage, sexuality, reproduction, family structures, labour, and gender roles as part of broader systems of political and social control. Colonialism therefore affected not only political sovereignty and economic relations but also social relations and constructions of gender. The continuing legacies of colonialism, including global economic inequalities, racial hierarchies, and

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the marginalisation of non-Western forms of knowledge, cannot be fully understood without examining their gendered dimensions.

Transgender and queer perspectives have also made important contributions to feminist IR. Queer theory, influenced by the work of Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, challenges binary understandings of gender and sexuality and questions assumptions about what constitutes a "normal" gender or sexual identity. It also examines heteronormativity, which refers to the assumption that heterosexuality and binary gender identities are natural, normal, and universally applicable. By questioning these assumptions, queer approaches open new avenues for analysing the gendered and sexual dimensions of international politics. Issues such as the criminalisation of same-sex relationships, the persecution and displacement of LGBTQ+ persons, and international debates concerning LGBTQ+ rights demonstrate how gender and sexuality are connected to international law, human rights, state power, migration, and global politics.

The intersection of feminist and queer perspectives also encourages scholars to examine how international political institutions define legitimate identities and forms of belonging. Categories such as citizen, refugee, migrant, family, soldier, and victim are not always politically neutral. They may reflect assumptions about gender, sexuality, family structures, and social norms. Examining these categories helps feminist IR scholars identify forms of exclusion that may remain invisible when international politics is analysed only through states, governments, and formal institutions.

Looking to the future, feminist IR faces both significant challenges and important opportunities. Challenges include the continuing marginalisation of feminist perspectives within parts of mainstream IR, persistent gender inequalities within academic and political institutions, and the difficulty of translating critical feminist insights into policy change in political environments that may resist structural transformation. At the same time, there are growing opportunities for feminist IR. These include increasing recognition of gender equality as an important dimension of sustainable development, peace, and security; greater diversity among feminist scholars and scholarship, particularly through contributions from the Global South; and the development of intersectional and transnational feminist movements that connect different forms of inequality and oppression.

The study of Gender and International Relations is ultimately both an academic enterprise and a political project. It seeks to understand the international system as it is, including its gendered structures, inequalities, and forms of power, while also contributing to efforts to transform those structures towards greater justice, equality, and human flourishing. This dual commitment to rigorous analysis and critical engagement with political and social structures is one of the defining characteristics of feminist IR. It makes feminist IR an important and continually developing field within contemporary social science, offering new ways of understanding international politics and questioning assumptions that have long been taken for granted.

1.2.10 Comparing Feminist Approaches: A Synthesis

Having examined the major feminist approaches to International Relations, it is useful to compare them across several dimensions: their ontological commitments, which concern what they consider to be the fundamental entities, structures, and processes of international politics; their epistemological assumptions, which concern

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how knowledge about international politics can be produced; their methodological preferences, which concern the research strategies they employ; and their normative orientations, which concern the kinds of political and social change they seek to promote.

Liberal feminism works within a broadly rationalist ontology, viewing international politics as shaped by the interests, choices, and calculations of rational actors. Women are understood as equally rational and capable political actors who should have the same rights, opportunities, and access to institutions as men. Its epistemology is broadly empiricist, placing considerable value on systematic data collection, measurable indicators, and evidence-based analysis. Its methodology therefore often includes quantitative research, surveys, comparative analysis, and the measurement of women's political representation and participation across institutions and countries. Its normative orientation is generally reformist: it seeks to change the rules, practices, and structures of existing institutions so that they become more inclusive, equal, and effective.

Radical feminism adopts a more critical ontology, viewing international politics as deeply influenced by patriarchal structures and power relations that extend beyond particular institutions or policies. It examines how systems of domination, including those associated with militarism, violence, and gender hierarchy, shape political and social life. Its epistemological approach places considerable importance on experiential knowledge and consciousness-raising, particularly the knowledge that can emerge from examining women's experiences of oppression. Its methodology often includes qualitative research, interviews, case studies, and ethnographic approaches that examine the lived experiences of women in conflict zones, workplaces, households, and communities. Its normative orientation is transformative: rather than merely reforming existing institutions, it seeks fundamental changes in the structures of power that reproduce gender inequality.

Standpoint feminism develops a distinctive epistemological argument about the relationship between social position and knowledge. It emphasises that knowledge is situated and that people occupying different social positions may experience and understand structures of power differently. It therefore gives particular importance to knowledge produced from the standpoints of marginalised groups. Such knowledge can reveal aspects of power and inequality that may remain less visible from positions of social privilege. Its methodology may combine qualitative research with critical reflection on the researcher's positionality, that is, an awareness of how the researcher's own social position may influence the questions asked, the interpretation of evidence, and the production of knowledge. Its normative orientation is emancipatory: it seeks to contribute to the empowerment of marginalised groups through the production of knowledge that challenges domination and inequality.

Poststructuralist feminism adopts a constructivist ontology that focuses on the role of language, discourse, representation, and social practices in constructing gender identities and relations. It examines how categories such as "man", "woman", "masculinity", and "femininity" are produced and given meaning within particular historical and political contexts. Its epistemology is broadly interpretivist and reflexive, paying attention to the relationship between power and knowledge and questioning claims that knowledge can always be completely objective or neutral. Its methodology commonly includes discourse analysis, textual interpretation, and the study of

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political representations. Its normative orientation is largely deconstructive: it seeks to question and destabilise apparently natural or fixed gender categories and hierarchies, thereby creating space for alternative forms of identity and political possibility.

Postcolonial feminism adds an important dimension to feminist critique by examining the intersection of gender with race, colonialism, empire, and global inequality. Its ontology emphasises the historical and structural legacies of colonialism in shaping contemporary international politics and gender relations. Its epistemology is attentive to positionality and privilege and stresses the importance of recognising the experiences and knowledge of women from the Global South and other historically marginalised communities. Its methodology may include ethnography, historical analysis, textual analysis, and the recovery and examination of marginalised voices and perspectives. Its normative orientation combines a critique of Western forms of feminist universalism with an emphasis on diverse, locally grounded, and historically situated struggles for gender justice.

These approaches should not necessarily be understood as mutually exclusive competitors. Contemporary feminist IR scholars frequently draw upon insights from several feminist traditions. For example, empirical research on women's political participation may be combined with a radical analysis of patriarchal structures; standpoint theory may inform research methodology alongside poststructuralist analysis of discourse; and postcolonial and intersectional perspectives may be used to examine how gender interacts with race, class, colonial histories, and global inequalities. This theoretical pluralism reflects the complexity of international political phenomena and demonstrates the intellectual diversity and continuing development of feminist IR as an academic field.

The comparison also reveals that feminist approaches differ not only in their explanations of international politics but also in the questions they consider important. Liberal feminism often asks how women can gain equal access to existing institutions; radical feminism asks how patriarchal structures and practices produce inequality; standpoint feminism asks whose experiences and knowledge have been excluded; poststructuralist feminism asks how political categories and identities are constructed through discourse; and postcolonial feminism asks how gender relations are shaped by colonial histories, racial hierarchies, and unequal global structures. Taken together, these approaches broaden the scope of IR by encouraging scholars to examine international politics from multiple perspectives rather than relying on a single theoretical framework.

1.2.11 Masculinities and International Relations

Feminist IR has not confined its attention to women but has also examined masculinity as a gendered social phenomenon with significant implications for international politics. The study of masculinities in IR draws on the broader field of critical masculinity studies and has been associated with scholars such as Raewyn Connell and Michael Kimmel, as well as IR scholars including Charlotte Hooper, Cynthia Enloe, and Sandra Whitworth. This body of scholarship examines how different constructions of masculinity shape international political behaviour, institutions, identities, and outcomes.

Raewyn Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity" has been particularly influential. Hegemonic masculinity refers to a culturally dominant model of masculinity that establishes ideals against which other forms of masculinity, as well as femininity, are evaluated. It does not necessarily describe the actual behaviour of most men.

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Rather, it represents a normative ideal of what a "proper" or socially valued man is expected to be. In international politics, dominant forms of masculinity have often been associated with characteristics such as toughness, aggression, rationality, independence, emotional control, competitiveness, and the willingness to use force. Such characteristics may become associated with effective leadership, military competence, and state power.

Charlotte Hooper's Manly States (2001) provides a systematic analysis of the construction of masculinity in IR discourse. Hooper examines different ideals of masculinity, including the rational technocrat, the muscular nationalist, and the civilised diplomat, and demonstrates how these ideals have influenced the theory and practice of international politics. She also traces their connections with imperial expansion, class relations, and racial hierarchies. Her analysis demonstrates that the gendered culture of international politics is neither timeless nor natural; rather, it has been historically constructed and remains open to political contestation and change.

The relationship between masculinity and military culture has been extensively examined within feminist IR. Military institutions have historically been strongly masculinised and organised around ideals such as physical toughness, emotional control, discipline, group solidarity, courage, and the capacity and willingness to use violence. Feminist scholars have examined how these norms influence not only soldiers but also broader political cultures of militarism. Militarism refers not simply to the existence of military institutions but also to the wider social and political process through which military values, priorities, and solutions become normalised and influential in society. Cynthia Enloe's concept of "militarised masculinity" helps explain how particular ideals of manhood become closely associated with military service, authority, aggression, and the capacity to use force.

The construction of masculinity in international politics also has important implications for men's experiences of conflict. Men are often disproportionately exposed to direct battlefield violence and may be targeted for killing, torture, detention, or forced recruitment because of assumptions about their gender and their presumed relationship to combat. At the same time, the suffering of men in conflict has sometimes received less attention in accounts that primarily focus on women's experiences of violence. Feminist scholars have therefore called for a more comprehensive understanding of gender in conflict. Such an approach recognises both the privileges that may be associated with dominant forms of masculinity, including access to political authority and military command, and the costs that masculine expectations can impose on men, including pressure to fight, suppress vulnerability, and sacrifice their lives in armed conflict.

The study of masculinity in IR also encompasses the gendered dimensions of economic and political power. The concentration of political and economic leadership among men cannot be understood simply as a consequence of discrimination against individual women. It is also connected to broader cultural expectations about leadership, authority, rationality, competence, and decisiveness, many of which have historically been associated with masculinity. Understanding these expectations and the ways in which they are reproduced, challenged, and transformed requires treating masculinity as a social construction with significant political consequences.

The election or appointment of women to positions of political leadership, for

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example, does not simply alter the gender composition of political elites. It can also challenge established assumptions about who is considered suitable for positions of authority and what qualities are associated with effective leadership. At the same time, women leaders may themselves be expected to demonstrate characteristics traditionally coded as masculine, such as toughness, decisiveness, and military strength. The study of masculinities therefore helps feminist IR move beyond a simple comparison between women and men and instead examine how gendered expectations shape political institutions, identities, leadership, security practices, and international relations more broadly.

1.2.12 Concluding Observation

Feminist International Relations has significantly expanded the scope of international political analysis by placing gender, power, inequality, and lived experiences at the centre of the study of world politics. As this unit has demonstrated, feminist IR is not a single or unified theory but a diverse field comprising liberal, radical, standpoint, poststructuralist, postcolonial, intersectional, and other approaches. These perspectives differ in their assumptions about knowledge, power, social structures, and political change, yet they share a broad concern with exposing gendered inequalities and questioning assumptions that have traditionally shaped the discipline of International Relations. Feminist scholars have shown that issues such as war, security, diplomacy, international political economy, peacebuilding, nationalism, migration, and global governance cannot be adequately understood without examining the ways in which gender relations influence them.

The study of feminist theories and approaches also encourages learners to look beyond conventional distinctions between the international and the domestic, the public and the private, and the powerful and the powerless. Feminist IR demonstrates that international politics is experienced not only by states, governments, diplomats, and military leaders but also by women, men, children, workers, migrants, refugees, and communities whose everyday lives are affected by global political and economic processes. The study of masculinities and intersectionality further demonstrates that gender does not operate independently of race, class, nationality, sexuality, colonial history, and other structures of power. Feminist IR therefore offers both an analytical framework for understanding international politics and a critical perspective on the possibilities for creating a more just, equal, peaceful, and inclusive global order.

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Recap

- Feminist International Relations examines international politics by placing gender and gendered power relations at the centre of analysis.
- Gender is socially constructed and differs from biological sex; it shapes identities, expectations, institutions, and political relations.
- Feminist IR emerged partly as a critique of the gender-blind assumptions of mainstream International Relations theories.

- Liberal feminism emphasises equal rights, opportunities, representation, and women's participation in existing political institutions.
- Radical feminism examines patriarchy, militarism, violence, and structures of domination and seeks deeper structural transformation.
- Standpoint feminism argues that social position influences knowledge and that the experiences of marginalised groups can reveal otherwise hidden structures of power.
- Poststructuralist feminism examines how language, discourse, representation, and social practices construct gender identities and political realities.
- Postcolonial feminism challenges Eurocentrism and examines the relationship between gender, colonialism, race, empire, and global inequality.
- Feminist security studies broadens the meaning of security beyond military threats to include gender-based violence, economic insecurity, displacement, and other forms of everyday insecurity.
- Feminist International Political Economy examines gendered divisions of labour, social reproduction, global production, financial crises, and the unequal effects of economic policies.
- Feminist approaches to peace emphasise positive peace, women's participation in peace processes, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.
- Intersectionality and the study of masculinities demonstrate that gender operates through complex relationships with race, class, sexuality, nationality, colonial history, and other structures of power.

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Objective Questions

1. What does Feminist International Relations primarily seek to examine?
2. Who is associated with the concept of "hegemonic masculinity"?
3. What is meant by gender?
4. Which feminist approach emphasises equal rights and opportunities within existing institutions?
5. What is the central epistemological argument of standpoint feminism?
6. Which feminist approach focuses particularly on discourse, language, and representation?

7. Who developed the concept of intersectionality in the context of legal theory?
8. What does "social reproduction" refer to?
9. What is the main focus of the Women, Peace and Security agenda?
10. Which United Nations Security Council resolution formally established the Women, Peace and Security agenda?
11. What is meant by "positive peace"?
12. What does "hegemonic masculinity" refer to?

Answers

1. It examines how gender and gendered power relations shape international politics, institutions, processes, and experiences.
2. Raewyn Connell
3. Gender refers to socially constructed roles, expectations, identities, behaviours, and relationships associated with femininity, masculinity, and other gender identities.
4. Liberal feminism
5. Standpoint feminism argues that social position influences knowledge and that the experiences of marginalised groups can provide important insights into structures of power.
6. Poststructuralist feminism
7. Kimberlé Crenshaw
8. Social reproduction refers to the paid and unpaid activities required to sustain human life, households, communities, and the labour force, particularly care and domestic work.
9. It seeks to address the gender dimensions of conflict and peace by promoting prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery.
10. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000.
11. Positive peace refers to conditions of justice, equality, social well-being, and the reduction or elimination of structural violence, rather than merely the absence of armed conflict.
12. Hegemonic masculinity refers to a culturally dominant model of masculinity that establishes socially valued ideals of manhood and helps sustain gender hierarchies.

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Assignments

1. Explain the emergence and significance of Feminist International Relations as a critical approach to the study of world politics.
2. Discuss the major arguments of liberal and radical feminism in International Relations.
3. Explain the epistemological foundations of standpoint feminism and examine its contribution to Feminist International Relations.
4. Examine the poststructuralist feminist approach to International Relations with reference to discourse, representation, and power.
5. Discuss the major arguments of postcolonial feminism and explain its critique of Western feminist approaches to international politics.
6. Explain the concept of intersectionality and examine its significance for understanding gender and international relation

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UNIT 3

Gender Mainstreaming in Global Governance

Learning Outcomes

Upon Completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the concept and significance of gender mainstreaming in global governance
- examine the development of gender mainstreaming through the Beijing Platform for Action and the United Nations system
- analyse gender mainstreaming in international financial institutions and regional organisations
- explain gender budgeting and its role as a tool of gender mainstreaming
- critically evaluate the achievements, limitations, and future challenges of gender mainstreaming

Prerequisite

Before studying gender mainstreaming, learners should understand that gender inequality is not limited to personal relationships or domestic life; it is also reflected in institutions, policies, economies, security systems, and global decision-making. The central question is therefore: What happens when we examine every major area of governance from the perspective of its different effects on women and men? Gender mainstreaming emerged from this question and seeks to make gender equality a concern across the entire policy process rather than treating it as a separate issue.

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Keywords

Gender equality, beijing platform for action, UN women, women, peace and security, gender budgeting, gender impact assessment, intersectionality, gender-responsive development, sustainable development goals

Discussion

Gender mainstreaming has become a major international strategy for promoting gender equality in global governance. Instead of treating gender equality as a separate "women's issue", gender mainstreaming seeks to integrate a gender perspective into policies, institutions, programmes, and decision-making processes at all levels. This unit examines the conceptual foundations, development, institutionalisation, achievements, and limitations of gender mainstreaming, with particular attention to the Beijing Platform for Action and its continuing influence on global gender policy.

1.3.1 Conceptual Foundations of Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming refers to the process of assessing the implications of policies, programmes, and other actions for women and men. It requires gender considerations to be incorporated into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies across political, economic, and social sectors. Its ultimate objective is to promote gender equality and prevent policies from reproducing existing inequalities.

The concept was formally defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1997. It developed from earlier approaches to gender and development, particularly Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD).

Women in Development (WID), which became influential during the 1970s and 1980s, focused on integrating women into existing development programmes. However, it was criticised for treating women primarily as beneficiaries and for paying insufficient attention to the structural inequalities that limited their access to resources, education, employment, and political power.

Gender and Development (GAD), which emerged in the late 1980s, shifted attention from women as a separate category to gender relations and power structures. It argued that development processes are not gender-neutral and that gender inequality must be addressed by transforming unequal social and institutional relationships.

Gender mainstreaming developed from the GAD approach but extended it to the functioning of institutions themselves. Rather than adding separate programmes for women, it sought to incorporate gender equality into all policies and stages of decision-making. It therefore requires policymakers, administrators, and institutions to consider the different effects that policies may have on women and men.

An important distinction is between gender mainstreaming as a strategy and gender equality as a goal. Mainstreaming is valuable only when it contributes to meaningful reductions in gender inequality. There is also a distinction between integration and transformation. Integration involves

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adding a gender perspective to existing policies, whereas transformation involves questioning and changing the structures and practices that produce inequality.

Effective gender mainstreaming requires more than technical tools such as gender analysis and gender-sensitive indicators. It also requires political commitment, institutional accountability, appropriate resources, and the meaningful participation of women and women's organisations. Without these conditions, mainstreaming can become a bureaucratic "box-ticking" exercise that produces formal commitments without changing underlying power relations. The central challenge is therefore to ensure that gender mainstreaming remains a transformative strategy rather than becoming merely an administrative procedure.

1.3.2 The Beijing Platform for Action: A Turning Point

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, was a major turning point in the international promotion of gender equality. The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted by 189 governments, established gender mainstreaming as an important global strategy and called for a gender perspective to be incorporated into policies and programmes.

The Beijing conference built on earlier UN initiatives, particularly the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975 and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies adopted in 1985. These developments gradually shifted international policy from viewing women as a special target group towards recognising gender inequality as a structural issue requiring changes across society and institutions.

The Beijing Platform for Action identified twelve critical areas of concern: poverty; education and training; health; violence against women; armed conflict; the economy; power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights; the media; the environment; and the girl child. This broad agenda demonstrated that gender inequality affects almost every area of political, economic, and social life.

The Platform also established mechanisms for implementation and review. Governments were encouraged to develop national action plans and strengthen institutional mechanisms for advancing women's rights. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has played an important role in reviewing progress. Subsequent review processes, including Beijing+5, Beijing+10, Beijing+15, Beijing+20, and Beijing+25, have assessed achievements and identified continuing challenges.

An important feature of the Beijing process was the participation of women's organisations and other civil society groups. Thousands of activists participated in the parallel NGO Forum and sought to influence government negotiations and international policy. This demonstrated the importance of feminist civil society in shaping global gender policies.

The achievements since Beijing have been significant but uneven. Progress has occurred in areas such as girls' education, maternal health, women's political participation, and the recognition of violence against women as a major international concern. However, substantial inequalities remain. Women continue to face gender-based violence, unequal economic opportunities, unequal care responsibilities, and underrepresentation in political and economic decision-making. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these inequalities by increasing care burdens, economic insecurity, and gender-based violence in many societies.

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The Beijing Platform for Action therefore remains an important framework for understanding international efforts towards gender equality. At the same time, its implementation demonstrates a central problem of gender mainstreaming: international commitments do not automatically produce social transformation. Their effectiveness depends on political will, institutional capacity, resources, accountability, and the ability of women's movements and civil society to demand meaningful implementation.

1.3.3 Gender Mainstreaming in the United Nations System

The United Nations (UN) is a major site of gender mainstreaming in global governance. Its system includes the General Assembly, Security Council, Secretariat, specialised agencies, funds, programmes, and treaty bodies. Gender mainstreaming has developed across these institutions, although its implementation varies considerably.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), established in 1946 under the Economic and Social Council, has been the main intergovernmental body dealing with gender equality. It develops international standards, reviews progress, and provides a forum for governments and civil society. However, its limited enforcement powers have restricted its ability to ensure implementation.

The establishment of UN Women in 2010 strengthened the UN's institutional capacity for gender equality. It brought together four earlier UN entities dealing with women's issues and was given responsibilities for normative work, support to member states, country-level programmes, and coordination of gender mainstreaming across the UN system. Its effectiveness, however, depends on cooperation among UN agencies with different mandates and priorities.

Gender mainstreaming has been particularly important in the area of peace and security. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, recognised the effects of armed conflict on women and called for greater women's participation in peace and security decision-making. Subsequent resolutions strengthened the Women, Peace and Security framework, particularly on conflict-related sexual violence and women's participation in peace processes.

Despite these developments, implementation remains uneven. Gender concerns are not consistently incorporated into Security Council decisions, and women continue to be underrepresented in peace and security institutions. Similar variations exist within the UN development system, where organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have introduced gender policies and programmes.

Overall, the UN has established important norms and institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming. However, the gap between formal commitments and actual implementation remains a major challenge. Stronger political commitment, institutional accountability, resources, and women's participation are necessary for meaningful progress.

1.3.4 Gender Mainstreaming in International Financial Institutions

International financial institutions (IFIs), particularly the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), influence economic policies through lending, technical assistance, and policy advice. Their adoption of gender mainstreaming has therefore had significant implications

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for developing countries, but it has also generated important feminist criticisms.

The World Bank began addressing women's issues through the Women in Development approach during the 1970s and moved towards gender mainstreaming during the 1990s. Its Gender Mainstreaming Strategy was adopted in 2001, followed by a Gender Action Plan in 2006. The Bank increasingly presents gender equality as both a matter of rights and a means of improving economic development. Its research, gender-disaggregated data, and programmes on women's economic empowerment have contributed to greater recognition of gender inequalities in development policy.

However, feminist critics argue that the World Bank often justifies gender equality mainly through economic efficiency and development returns. This instrumental approach may treat women as resources for economic growth rather than as rights-bearing individuals. Critics also argue that promoting women's employment without addressing unequal wages, unpaid care work, and precarious labour conditions may reproduce existing inequalities.

The IMF has incorporated gender analysis more explicitly since the mid-2010s, particularly into its economic assessments and policy programmes. Its research highlights the economic costs of gender inequality and argues that reducing gender gaps can contribute to economic growth. While this has brought gender concerns into macroeconomic policy, critics question an approach that primarily justifies equality through its contribution to GDP.

Feminist economists have also examined the gendered effects of IMF-supported economic adjustment, including reductions in public expenditure, cuts in subsidies, and labour-market reforms. Such policies may increase women's unpaid care responsibilities and expose them to insecure employment. Although the IMF has increasingly recognised these concerns and introduced gender-related assessments, critics argue that deeper changes to macroeconomic policies are still necessary.

Thus, gender mainstreaming within IFIs represents both progress and limitation. While gender equality has become more visible in economic policy, feminist perspectives emphasise that meaningful mainstreaming must address the structural inequalities underlying economic institutions rather than simply demonstrate the economic benefits of including women.

1.3.5 Gender Mainstreaming in Regional Organizations

Regional organisations have developed their own approaches to gender mainstreaming, reflecting their different political, economic, and social contexts. Important examples include the European Union (EU), African Union (AU), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and regional organisations in Latin America.

The European Union has one of the most developed regional frameworks for gender mainstreaming. The Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) established gender mainstreaming as a legal obligation across EU policies. The EU combines anti-discrimination laws, positive action, gender budgeting, gender impact assessment, and the integration of gender perspectives into different policy areas. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), established in 2007, supports this process through research, data, and tools such as the Gender Equality Index. However, differences among member states show that regional commitments do not always produce equal outcomes.

The African Union has promoted gender equality through the Maputo Protocol, adopted in 2003, which provides a comprehensive

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framework for women's political, economic, health, and reproductive rights. The AU has also adopted gender policies and promoted equal representation within its institutions. Implementation, however, varies across member states.

ASEAN has addressed gender equality through regional declarations and institutions concerned with the rights of women and children. Its progress has been relatively gradual because of the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs and differences among member states.

In Latin America, the Inter-American Commission of Women, established in 1928, has played an important role in promoting women's rights. The Belém do Pará Convention of 1994 recognised violence against women as a human rights issue and strengthened regional action against gender-based violence.

Regional organisations have therefore contributed significantly to establishing gender norms and mechanisms. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming depends on domestic political commitment, institutional capacity, and the willingness of member states to implement regional commitments.

1.3.6 Gender Budgeting as a Tool of Mainstreaming

Gender budgeting is the application of gender analysis to public budgets in order to promote gender equality. It recognises that government revenue and expenditure can affect women and men differently and may either reduce or reproduce existing inequalities.

Gender budgeting does not mean creating separate budgets for women. Instead, it incorporates gender analysis into the normal budget process. It examines how public spending in areas such as education, health, social protection, and infrastructure affects different groups. It can also consider the gender effects of taxation and recognise the economic importance of unpaid care work, which is largely performed by women.

Gender budgeting developed in Australia during the 1980s and has since been adopted in various forms by many countries and international institutions. Organisations such as the World Bank, IMF, and regional development banks have promoted it as a tool of gender-responsive economic governance. Its effectiveness is greatest when supported by political commitment, gender expertise, reliable data, and institutional accountability.

However, gender budgeting faces several limitations. Governments may lack technical capacity and gender-disaggregated data, while political and fiscal constraints can limit its implementation. It may also become a formal exercise without producing significant changes in resource allocation. Gender budgeting is therefore most effective when connected to broader policies addressing structural gender inequalities.

1.3.7 Gender Mainstreaming in Peace and Security

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is a major application of gender mainstreaming in the field of international peace and security. It began with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 and has developed into a broader framework for addressing women's participation, protection, and rights in conflict and peacebuilding.

The WPS agenda is commonly organised around four pillars: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery. Participation promotes women's meaningful involvement in peace negotiations, reconstruction, and security decision-making.

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Protection focuses on preventing gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence during armed conflict. Prevention addresses the causes of conflict and the role of gender equality in sustainable peace. Relief and recovery seek to ensure that humanitarian assistance and post-conflict reconstruction respond to the different needs of women and men.

Despite these commitments, women's participation in formal peace processes remains limited. Women are often included as observers or civil society representatives rather than as negotiators and mediators. Greater participation can help bring women's rights, social justice, reconciliation, and transitional justice into peace agreements, but male-dominated political and security institutions continue to restrict their involvement.

Protection from conflict-related sexual violence has also become an important part of the WPS agenda. International institutions have increasingly recognised sexual violence as a serious international crime and security concern. However, implementation remains uneven because of limited resources, institutional resistance, and abuses committed even within some peacekeeping operations.

Feminist scholars have raised concerns about the securitisation of gender, whereby women's rights may be subordinated to security priorities. They also warn against portraying women only as victims rather than as agents of peace and political change. Thus, effective WPS implementation requires not only protecting women but also recognising their agency and ensuring meaningful participation in peace and security processes.

1.3.8 Gender Mainstreaming in Development and Humanitarian Action

Development assistance and humanitarian action are important areas of gender mainstreaming because their policies and programmes directly affect people's access to resources, services, security, and opportunities. Gender mainstreaming seeks to ensure that these interventions recognise the different needs and experiences of women and men.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015, strengthened the global commitment to gender equality. SDG 5 focuses specifically on achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls, addressing areas such as discrimination, violence, unpaid care work, political participation, economic rights, and reproductive health. Gender equality is also recognised as relevant to other SDGs, including education, health, employment, and environmental sustainability.

International development agencies and donors use various tools to monitor gender equality in development assistance. The OECD Development Assistance Committee's Gender Equality Policy Marker, introduced in 1997, helps identify aid programmes that address gender equality. However, critics argue that some programmes receive a gender-related classification without making substantial changes to their design or addressing structural inequalities.

Gender mainstreaming is also important in humanitarian action during conflicts, disasters, and other crises. Gender-sensitive approaches seek to ensure appropriate access to food, sanitation, healthcare, shelter, and protection. Humanitarian responses may otherwise overlook women's specific needs, particularly reproductive healthcare, personal safety, and increased care responsibilities. Cash and voucher assistance can also affect gender relations, although its impact depends on local social norms and household power relations.

An intersectional approach further recognises that women experience crises

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differently depending on factors such as poverty, displacement, age, disability, and social marginalisation. The localisation of humanitarian assistance has also highlighted the importance of supporting local and women-led organisations, which often have strong knowledge of community needs but receive limited international funding.

Therefore, gender mainstreaming in development and humanitarian action requires more than women's participation in programmes. It requires gender-sensitive planning, adequate resources, reliable data, local participation, and attention to the structural inequalities that shape women's experiences of development and crisis.

1.3.9 Gender Mainstreaming and the Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, provide a universal framework of 17 goals and 169 targets for sustainable development up to 2030. Gender equality is incorporated into this framework both as a specific goal and as a cross-cutting concern across the wider SDG agenda.

SDG 5 aims to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". Its targets address discrimination, violence against women, harmful practices such as child marriage, unpaid care work, women's participation in decision-making, sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic resources, technology, and gender-responsive policies. This represents a broader approach than treating women's empowerment as a separate development sector.

Gender equality is also connected to other SDGs. For example, poverty reduction, quality education, health, decent work, climate action, and peace and strong institutions all depend partly on reducing gender inequalities. This demonstrates that gender equality is not only a separate policy objective but also an important condition for sustainable development.

Effective monitoring of gender-related SDGs requires reliable data disaggregated by sex and other relevant factors. However, many countries face limitations in collecting data on issues such as violence against women, unpaid care work, and women's access to land and economic resources. Weak statistical capacity can therefore make it difficult to measure progress accurately.

The 2023 midpoint review of the 2030 Agenda showed that progress towards gender equality remains inadequate. Violence against women continues, women's political representation remains unequal, and progress in areas such as maternal health and economic participation is uneven. The COVID-19 pandemic also intensified several existing gender inequalities.

The SDGs therefore provide an important framework for gender mainstreaming, but their success depends on implementation. Achieving gender equality requires adequate financing, reliable data, institutional accountability, and sustained political commitment. Treating gender equality as a cross-cutting priority rather than a separate sector is essential for achieving the broader goals of sustainable development.

1.3.10 Critiques and Limitations of Gender Mainstreaming

Although gender mainstreaming has become a major global strategy for promoting gender equality, feminist scholars and activists have questioned its effectiveness. The main criticisms concern the gap between formal commitments and actual implementation, the tendency to reduce gender equality to technical procedures, and the possibility of weakening feminist political demands.

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A major problem is what has been described as "gender fatigue" or "mainstreaming malaise". Gender mainstreaming may become a routine bureaucratic exercise in which gender action plans, training programmes, and impact assessments are formally completed without producing substantial institutional change. Gender specialists may also lack the resources and authority needed to influence major decisions. This can result in "gender washing", where institutions demonstrate commitment through language and procedures without addressing underlying inequalities.

The feminist scholar Sylvia Walby distinguishes between "thin" and "thick" gender mainstreaming. Thin mainstreaming adds gender considerations to existing policies without questioning their goals or power structures. Thick mainstreaming seeks to transform policy objectives, decision-making processes, and accountability mechanisms so that gender equality becomes central to governance. Much existing practice remains closer to the thin form.

Postcolonial and decolonial feminists have also criticised mainstreaming for sometimes reflecting Western assumptions about gender equality. Policies designed by international institutions may overlook local experiences and priorities and can reproduce unequal relationships between the Global North and Global South. A more inclusive approach should therefore recognise diverse understandings of gender equality and support locally grounded strategies.

Another limitation is the insufficient attention to intersectionality. Gender inequality interacts with class, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, and other forms of disadvantage. Treating women as a single, homogeneous group can therefore hide important differences in their experiences. Intersectional mainstreaming seeks to address these overlapping inequalities.

Critics have also debated the relationship between institutional gender mainstreaming and feminist social movements. The professionalisation of gender advocacy may shift attention from grassroots mobilisation towards technical policy processes. At the same time, engagement with international institutions has helped feminists secure important rights and policy commitments. The challenge is therefore to combine institutional action with sustained social and political mobilisation.

Finally, gender mainstreaming faces growing political opposition from anti-gender and conservative movements in different parts of the world. Opposition to gender equality, reproductive rights, and related policies can weaken international commitments. Gender mainstreaming therefore requires not only technical mechanisms but also political commitment, accountability, participation, and continued efforts to challenge structural inequalities.

1.3.11 Concluding Observation

Gender mainstreaming has become an important strategy for promoting gender equality across global governance. From the Beijing Platform for Action and the United Nations system to international financial institutions, regional organisations, peace and security, development, humanitarian action, and gender budgeting, gender perspectives are increasingly incorporated into policy and decision-making.

However, the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming depends on more than formal commitments. Persistent institutional inequalities, inadequate resources, weak accountability, limited political commitment, and resistance to gender equality continue to restrict its transformative potential. Feminist critiques also highlight the importance of intersectionality, local perspectives, women's agency, and grassroots mobilisation. Gender

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mainstreaming can contribute meaningfully to global equality only when it challenges the structures that reproduce gender inequality rather than becoming a purely technical or bureaucratic exercise.

Recap

- Gender mainstreaming seeks to incorporate gender perspectives into policies, programmes, and decision-making.
- It developed from earlier Women in Development and Gender and Development approaches.
- The Beijing Platform for Action of 1995 established gender mainstreaming as an important global strategy.
- The Commission on the Status of Women has played a central role in advancing gender equality within the UN.
- UN Women was established in 2010 to strengthen institutional action on gender equality.
- Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) established the Women, Peace and Security agenda.
- International financial institutions have increasingly incorporated gender into economic and development policies.
- Regional organisations have developed different frameworks for gender mainstreaming.
- Gender budgeting examines the gendered effects of public revenue and expenditure.
- Gender mainstreaming is important in development and humanitarian action.
- Feminist scholars criticise its bureaucratisation, depoliticisation, and limited transformative impact.
- Gender equality is both a specific objective and a cross-cutting concern within the Sustainable Development Goals.

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Objective Questions

1. What is meant by gender mainstreaming?
2. Which approach preceded Gender and Development (GAD) in international development policy?
3. In which year was the Beijing Platform for Action adopted?
4. Which UN body was established in 1946 to promote women's rights and gender equality?
5. In which year was UN Women established?
6. Which UN Security Council Resolution established the Women, Peace and Security agenda?
7. Name one major international financial institution that has incorporated gender mainstreaming into its policies.
8. What is gender budgeting?
9. Which regional organisation incorporated gender mainstreaming into its legal framework through the Treaty of Amsterdam?
10. What are the four major pillars of the Women, Peace and Security agenda?
11. Which Sustainable Development Goal specifically focuses on gender equality?
12. What is meant by intersectionality in the context of gender mainstreaming?

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Answers

1. Gender mainstreaming is a strategy of incorporating gender perspectives into policies, programmes, institutions, and decision-making processes to promote gender equality.
2. Women in Development (WID)
3. 1995
4. Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)
5. 2010

6. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325
7. World Bank / International Monetary Fund (IMF)
8. Gender budgeting is the application of gender analysis to public budgets to assess and promote gender equality.
9. European Union (EU)
10. Participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery
11. SDG 5
12. Intersectionality refers to the way gender interacts with other forms of inequality, such as class, race, ethnicity, disability, and sexuality, producing different experiences of disadvantage.

Assignments

1. Explain the concept and significance of gender mainstreaming in global governance.
2. Examine the role of the Beijing Platform for Action in promoting gender mainstreaming.
3. Discuss the role of the United Nations in advancing gender mainstreaming.
4. Explain gender budgeting as a tool of gender mainstreaming.
5. Analyse the Women, Peace and Security agenda from a gender mainstreaming perspective.
6. Critically examine the major limitations and feminist critiques of gender mainstreaming.

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BLOCK

Gender and Security

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UNIT 1

Gender and Conflict

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the relationship between gender and armed conflict from a feminist International Relations perspective
- identify and analyse the gendered dimensions of armed conflict, including the experiences of men, women, boys, and girls
- explain the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and militarised masculinity and examine their relevance to conflict and security
- analyse conflict-related sexual violence and explain why it may function as a systematic or strategic form of violence
- analyse selected case studies of gender and conflict, including Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Prerequisite

Imagine two people living in the same conflict zone. Both experience the destruction of their homes, the loss of family members, and the collapse of their livelihoods. Yet their experiences of conflict may still be very different. One may be expected to take up arms because society associates masculinity with courage and military service. Another may be exposed to sexual violence because her body is treated as a symbol of the community. A boy may be abducted and transformed into a combatant, while a girl may be forced into domestic or sexual servitude within the same armed group. At the same time, women who remain outside the battlefield may become the primary providers for their families and may participate in peacebuilding and reconstruction. This raises an important question: If war affects different people differently, can we really understand conflict without understanding gender?

The study of gender and conflict begins with this question. It moves beyond the conventional image of war as a confrontation between armies and asks what

happens to individuals, families, communities, and social institutions. It examines how ideas about masculinity and femininity shape participation in war, how gender-based violence operates, how economic structures influence vulnerability, and how people reconstruct their lives after conflict. This perspective provides the intellectual starting point for the present unit.

Keywords

Gendered security, hegemonic masculinity, militarised masculinity, gender-based violence, conflict-related sexual violence, intersectionality, child soldiers, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), women, peace and security, peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction.

Discussion

In this unit, we examine how armed conflict is shaped by, and in turn shapes, gender relations. Conflict is never entirely gender neutral. It produces different experiences for men, women, non-binary individuals, and children, and these experiences are shaped by structures deeply embedded in patriarchal norms, militarised masculinity, and social hierarchies. By studying gender and conflict, we gain important tools for understanding not only who suffers during war, but also how and why the effects of conflict are distributed along gendered lines.

2.1.1 Why Gender Matters in Conflict Studies

Traditional conflict studies, particularly those rooted in realist and neorealist approaches to international relations, have often treated war and armed conflict as gender-neutral phenomena. States, armies, and insurgent groups were primarily analysed through the concepts of power, strategy, security, and national interest. The bodies and identities of the people within these structures, as well as those who fought and those who were affected by warfare, were frequently rendered invisible. Feminist scholars challenged this approach by drawing attention to the ways in which gender shapes the causes, experiences, and consequences of conflict.

Cynthia Enloe, one of the most influential scholars in feminist international relations, famously asked, "Where are the women?" in her landmark 1989 book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. This apparently simple question opened up a wide field of inquiry. When we ask where women are in situations of conflict, we discover that they are present in many different roles: as combatants, refugees, caregivers of the wounded, victims and survivors of sexual violence, peace negotiators, community organisers, and participants in post-conflict reconstruction. Yet conventional accounts of war have often failed to acknowledge these roles adequately.

Gender, as used by feminist scholars, is not synonymous with women or biological sex. Gender refers to the socially constructed

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roles, behaviours, expressions, expectations, and identities associated with being male, female, or another gender. These constructions vary across cultures and historical periods. However, they frequently produce hierarchies in which masculinity is associated with power, rationality, authority, and agency, while femininity is associated with passivity, emotionality, care, and vulnerability. In situations of armed conflict, these gendered hierarchies can have serious and sometimes lethal consequences.

Gender analysis in conflict studies reveals several critical dimensions. First, it demonstrates that conflict affects men and women differently and that many of these differences are socially produced rather than simply natural or biological. Second, it reveals that certain forms of violence, particularly sexual violence, may be used systematically as instruments of warfare. Third, it demonstrates that post-conflict reconstruction can reproduce existing gender inequalities unless these inequalities are consciously addressed. Fourth, gender analysis highlights the importance of women's participation in peace processes and the potential contribution of such participation to more inclusive and durable peace agreements.

2.1.2 Gendered Dimensions of Armed Conflict

Armed conflict produces a wide range of gendered harms and experiences. Understanding these experiences requires us to move beyond the battlefield and examine the broader social environment in which war takes place. Conflict affects combatants and civilians, households and communities, institutions and economies. Gender influences the roles individuals occupy within these structures and shapes both their vulnerabilities and their possibilities for agency.

2.1.3 Men, Boys, and Militarised Masculinity

Men and boys constitute the majority of combatants in most armed conflicts. This is not simply because men are physically stronger or naturally more aggressive. Such explanations are forms of biological determinism and fail to recognise the important role of social and cultural processes. Men are disproportionately recruited as soldiers because particular constructions of masculinity associate manhood with warrior identity, courage, physical strength, endurance, and a willingness to sacrifice oneself for the collective. In many countries, systems of military conscription have also historically been explicitly gendered, requiring men to serve while excluding or restricting women.

Raewyn Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity" is particularly important for understanding these processes. In *Masculinities* (1995), Connell argues that masculinity is not a single, uniform identity. Rather, there are multiple forms of masculinity, organised within relations of power. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the culturally dominant form of masculinity that establishes expectations regarding how men are expected to behave. In conflict settings, hegemonic masculinity may emphasise toughness, emotional control, sexual dominance, physical courage, and readiness to use violence. These expectations can also harm men themselves by creating barriers to seeking assistance for trauma, encouraging risk-taking, and disciplining men who do not conform to dominant masculine norms.

The militarisation of masculinity refers to the process through which military service, soldiering, and warrior identities become associated with masculine identity. This process can have profound consequences. Soldiers may be trained to suppress emotions

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such as fear, grief, and empathy when these emotions are considered incompatible with the performance of military violence. When conflicts end, veterans may experience difficulties in reintegrating into civilian life because they have internalised behavioural expectations developed within military environments.

The psychological consequences of warfare also need to be understood within these gendered contexts. Veterans may experience trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while masculine norms that discourage emotional expression or help-seeking can make it difficult for some men to seek psychological support. Thus, the gendered organisation of military life can affect not only how men participate in conflict but also how they experience and respond to its aftermath.

Boys are also deeply affected by conflict through their recruitment into armed groups. The United Nations has documented the continued recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts in different parts of the world. While boys constitute a significant proportion of child combatants, girls are also recruited and experience conflict in distinct ways. Boys recruited as child soldiers may be forced to participate in violence, sometimes against members of their own communities. Such practices can be used to destroy their civilian relationships and create dependence upon armed groups. Recruitment may therefore involve deeply gendered processes that draw upon ideas of masculine initiation, brotherhood, courage, and warrior identity.

2.1.4 Women and Girls in Armed Conflict

Women and girls experience armed conflict in ways shaped by their social position, reproductive roles, and vulnerability to gender-based and sexual violence. However, it is important not to reduce women's experiences of conflict to victimhood. Women are also agents in situations of conflict. They participate as combatants, resisters, community organisers, peace activists, caregivers, negotiators, and survivors who contribute to rebuilding their communities.

Civilian casualties in contemporary conflicts often fall disproportionately upon women, children, and older persons. The transformation from conventional inter-state warfare towards internal armed conflicts and forms of asymmetric warfare has increased the exposure of civilian populations to violence in many contexts. Women may face particular dangers, including sexual violence, forced displacement, loss of household income, increased care responsibilities, and gender-based violence in displacement and refugee settings.

Women's health can also be severely affected by armed conflict. Maternal mortality may increase when healthcare infrastructure is destroyed or becomes inaccessible. Reproductive violence can include forced pregnancy, forced sterilisation, and denial of reproductive healthcare. Pregnant and lactating women may also face increased risks of malnutrition and poor health when food supplies and medical services are disrupted.

At the same time, focusing exclusively on women's suffering can unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes that portray women only as passive victims. Feminist scholars have therefore emphasised women's agency and political participation during conflict. Women have served as combatants in numerous conflicts, including as members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, the Kurdish Peshmerga and Women's Protection Units (YPJ) in Iraq and Syria, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, and various revolutionary movements in Latin America. In some cases, military participation created opportunities for women

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to challenge established gender norms. However, participation in armed struggle did not automatically produce lasting gender equality.

2.1.5 Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War

Sexual violence in armed conflict is neither simply incidental nor an inevitable consequence of warfare. In many situations, it has been systematic, strategic, and connected to broader political and military objectives. Understanding conflict-related sexual violence therefore requires attention both to its scale and to the conditions that make it possible.

Sexual violence in conflict can include rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, forced pregnancy, genital mutilation, and trafficking. The United Nations Security Council has recognised sexual violence as a tactic of war and terrorism and as a means through which groups may pursue ethnic cleansing. Major cases, including Rwanda in 1994, Bosnia-Herzegovina during the 1990s, the Democratic Republic of Congo from the late 1990s onwards, and areas controlled by ISIS from 2014, have drawn international attention to the systematic use of sexual violence.

Scholars have identified several possible strategic purposes behind the use of sexual violence during conflict. First, it can function as a means of ethnic or communal persecution. By attacking women's bodies and reproductive capacities, perpetrators may seek to attack the identity and continuity of an opposing community. Such violence may also be connected to gendered ideas of men as protectors of women and families. Second, sexual violence can be used to terrorise civilian populations and encourage displacement. Third, it can contribute to the destruction of social cohesion because survivors may experience stigma, rejection, and ostracism within their communities. Fourth, sexual violence may be used within armed organisations as a means of rewarding fighters or maintaining group cohesion.

Elisabeth Jean Wood's comparative research on sexual violence in civil wars challenges the assumption that sexual violence is an inevitable by-product of armed conflict. Some armed groups have used sexual violence extensively, while others have not. Wood demonstrates that organisational and ideological factors, including leadership norms, political commitments, and recruitment practices, influence whether armed groups use sexual violence. This finding is important because it suggests that conflict-related sexual violence is not unavoidable and that organisational practices can influence its occurrence.

International law has gradually recognised conflict-related sexual violence as a serious international crime. It may constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, and, in particular circumstances, an act of genocide. The landmark 1998 decision of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in *Prosecutor v. Akayesu* established that rape could constitute an act of genocide when committed with the relevant genocidal intent. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in 1998, explicitly recognises rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, and other forms of sexual violence as war crimes and crimes against humanity under specified circumstances.

2.1.6 Gender and the Political Economy of Conflict

Armed conflicts do not occur in an economic vacuum. They are embedded within economic structures, and these structures are themselves deeply gendered. The political economy of conflict refers to the ways in which economic interests, access

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to resources, patterns of wealth distribution, and systems of power interact with armed violence.

In resource-rich conflict zones, economic grievances and competition over natural resource wealth can contribute to armed violence. Examples include the oil fields of South Sudan, the diamond mines of Sierra Leone, and mineral deposits in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Such conflicts also have distinct gendered dimensions. Women are frequently excluded from formal economic participation even before conflict begins, and conflict can push them further into economic insecurity. The destruction of livelihoods may disproportionately affect women because they often have less access to credit, land ownership, employment opportunities, and legal protections.

Conflict can also create new gendered labour relations. The destruction of formal economies may push women into informal and sometimes dangerous forms of economic activity, including trading across conflict lines and insecure domestic or other informal work in displacement settings. In some circumstances, women may also be pushed into survival economies, including sex work. At the same time, the death or displacement of male household members may force women to become household heads. Patriarchal social structures, however, may leave women with limited legal rights, economic resources, and social support to perform these responsibilities.

Paul Collier's influential "greed and grievance" model of civil war, although not explicitly gendered, has been criticised by feminist scholars for paying insufficient attention to the ways in which gender relations shape both the causes and consequences of conflict. Feminist political economists argue that gender inequality can itself contribute to conditions associated with conflict and that economic rights, access to resources, and women's participation in economic decision-making are important components of conflict prevention and post-conflict recovery.

2.1.7 Ethnic, Racial, and Class Intersections with Gender in Conflict

Gender does not operate in isolation. It intersects with ethnicity, race, class, religion, nationality, age, and other social categories to produce complex and overlapping forms of vulnerability and agency. The concept of intersectionality, developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides an important framework for understanding these relationships.

In ethnic conflicts, women's bodies can become sites of nationalist contestation. Women may be constructed as the biological and cultural reproducers of the nation and may therefore become targets of ethnic persecution. The mass rapes committed during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, were not only attacks on individual women but were also connected to attempts to attack Bosniak identity. Similarly, Yazidi women enslaved by ISIS were targeted in ways that reflected the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and religious identity.

Class differences are equally important. Poor women, women with limited formal education, and women living in rural areas may experience compounded vulnerabilities during conflict. They may have fewer resources with which to flee, fewer social and institutional connections that can provide protection, and less access to legal institutions that could offer redress. Wealthier women are not immune from conflict-related violence, but they may have greater access to financial resources, transportation, legal assistance, and alternative forms of protection and recovery.

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Intersectionality therefore encourages us to avoid treating "women" as a single and homogeneous category. Women's experiences of conflict are shaped by multiple and overlapping social positions. A gender-sensitive analysis must therefore consider how gender interacts with other structures of power and inequality.

2.1.8 Child Soldiers: Gender and Age in Conflict

The phenomenon of child soldiers illustrates particularly clearly the intersection of gender and age in situations of armed conflict. Children are recruited and used by armed forces and armed groups in several contemporary conflicts, and their experiences are shaped by gender in complex ways.

Boys recruited as child soldiers are commonly deployed as fighters, but they may also serve as porters, spies, messengers, and attendants to commanders. Their recruitment is frequently gendered and may involve rituals of masculine initiation, the destruction of civilian emotional relationships, and the cultivation of a hyper-masculine warrior identity. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda and the use of abducted boys under Joseph Kony illustrate how armed groups can exploit and manipulate existing processes of gender socialisation.

Girls are frequently recruited into different but overlapping roles. They may serve as fighters, but they may also be used as "bush wives", a term referring to girls and women forced into sexual or domestic relationships with commanders or combatants. They may also be assigned roles as cooks, nurses, porters, and caregivers. Their experiences of conflict can therefore differ substantially from those of boy soldiers.

The reintegration needs of girl soldiers are also distinct. They may require reproductive healthcare, psychosocial support, education, livelihood opportunities, and assistance for children born as a result of wartime sexual violence. However, international disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programmes have historically often been designed around assumptions about the male combatant. As a result, they may fail to recognise girls who were not formally classified as fighters or to address their specific experiences and needs.

2.1.9 Case Studies: Gender and Conflict in Context

The following case studies demonstrate how gender interacts with ethnicity, political violence, sexual violence, economic structures, and post-conflict reconstruction. They also illustrate that the gendered consequences of conflict continue long after formal hostilities have ended.

Rwanda (1994)

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 provides one of the most extensively documented examples of the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and mass violence. Over approximately 100 days, between 500,000 and 800,000 people, primarily Tutsis and moderate Hutus, were murdered. Sexual violence was a central feature of the genocide. United Nations estimates indicate that between 250,000 and 500,000 women and girls were raped during this period.

Sexual violence in Rwanda was not simply spontaneous or incidental. It was organised and facilitated by the Interahamwe militia and other groups and was explicitly framed in ethnic terms. Women's bodies became a site through which ethnic hatred and violence were expressed. The consequences were devastating. Many survivors contracted HIV/AIDS, experienced long-term psychological trauma, became pregnant as a result of rape, or faced rejection and ostracism within their communities.

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The post-genocide period in Rwanda has also been notable for women's political representation. During the 2010s, Rwanda had the highest proportion of women members of parliament in the world. This transformation reflected several factors, including demographic changes following the genocide, deliberate policy measures adopted by the post-genocide government, and women's own political mobilisation.

However, high levels of formal political representation should not automatically be equated with complete gender equality. Representation in political institutions does not necessarily eliminate inequalities in economic, social, cultural, or household relations. The Rwandan case therefore demonstrates both the possibilities and the limitations of institutional approaches to gender equality following conflict.

Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992–1995)

The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina witnessed widespread and systematic sexual violence. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) subsequently recognised particular forms of such violence as crimes against humanity. Estimates suggest that approximately 20,000 to 50,000 women were raped during the conflict, primarily, though not exclusively, Bosniak Muslim women. Detention and rape camps were established in which women were held and subjected to repeated sexual violence, sometimes for extended periods.

Feminist scholars, including Rhonda Copelon, have analysed the Bosnian case to demonstrate that wartime rape should not be understood simply as an accidental by-product of male aggression. Instead, it can constitute a form of gender-based persecution and a serious international crime. Such analysis contributed to broader debates about the recognition of violence against women within international humanitarian and criminal law.

The Bosnian case also demonstrates the importance of intersectionality. The women targeted by sexual violence experienced violence through the combined operation of gender and ethnic identity. Their bodies became sites through which perpetrators attempted to attack not only individuals but also the identity and social cohesion of communities.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (1998–Present)

The eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has experienced prolonged armed conflict accompanied by widespread sexual violence. Various armed groups and military actors have been accused of using rape and other forms of sexual violence against civilians. The conflict has attracted international attention because of the scale and brutality of violence against women and girls.

Denis Mukwege, a Congolese gynaecologist and founder of Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, has played a prominent role in providing medical care and support to survivors of sexual violence. His work brought international attention to the experiences of survivors in eastern DRC, and he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018.

The DRC case also illustrates the relationship between sexual violence and resource extraction. Eastern DRC is rich in coltan, cassiterite, gold, and other minerals. Armed groups have financed their activities through the exploitation and control of natural resources. Violence, displacement, and insecurity can facilitate the exploitation of mineral wealth. Women's bodies and communities therefore become part of the broader terrain of resource-related conflict.

The case demonstrates that gender-based violence cannot always be separated from economic and political structures. Sexual

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violence, displacement, resource extraction, armed mobilisation, and weak institutional protection can interact to produce prolonged forms of insecurity.

2.1.10 Concluding Observation

Gender is an important analytical category for understanding the causes, experiences, and consequences of armed conflict. Traditional approaches to conflict have often concentrated on states, military power, strategic interests, and battlefield violence. A gender-sensitive approach expands this perspective by examining how conflict affects people differently according to their gender, social position, and relationship to existing structures of power. It also draws attention to forms of violence and labour that have frequently remained outside conventional accounts of war.

The study of gender and conflict also demonstrates that women should not be understood only as victims and men only as combatants. Men, women, boys, and girls can occupy multiple and changing roles during conflict. Gender norms can encourage militarised forms of masculinity, expose women and girls to particular forms of violence, shape the experiences of child soldiers, and influence access to economic resources and political participation. Intersectionality further reminds us that gender interacts with ethnicity, race, class, religion, age, nationality, and other social identities. Understanding these intersections is essential for analysing conflict in a comprehensive manner.

The study of conflict-related sexual violence demonstrates that gendered violence can have political, military, social, and symbolic dimensions. At the same time, the work of scholars such as Elisabeth Jean Wood shows that sexual violence is not an inevitable consequence of war. Organisational structures, leadership practices, political commitments, and social norms can influence its occurrence. The cases of Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo further demonstrate that the consequences of conflict continue beyond the formal cessation of hostilities. Gender-sensitive peacebuilding, reconstruction, justice, and reintegration therefore require attention to both structural inequalities and the agency of people affected by conflict.

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Recap

- Traditional approaches to conflict have often treated war and security as gender-neutral issues, concentrating mainly on states, military power, strategy, and national interest.
- Feminist approaches demonstrate that gender is an important category for understanding the causes, experiences, and consequences of armed conflict.
- Cynthia Enloe's question, "Where are the women?", encourages scholars to examine the often-invisible roles of women in international politics, war, and security.
- Gender is socially constructed and involves roles, expectations, behaviours, identities, and relations of power associated with masculinity, femininity, and other gender identities.

- Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity helps explain how particular forms of masculinity become culturally dominant and become associated with characteristics such as toughness, authority, courage, and readiness to use violence.
- Militarised masculinity connects military service, soldiering, and warrior identities with particular constructions of masculinity and can affect both men's participation in conflict and their experiences after war.
- Women and girls experience particular forms of vulnerability during armed conflict, including sexual violence, displacement, loss of livelihoods, increased care responsibilities, and reproductive violence. However, they are also political agents, combatants, peace activists, negotiators, and community organisers.
- Conflict-related sexual violence can be systematic and strategic rather than simply an accidental consequence of warfare. It can be used to terrorise populations, persecute communities, encourage displacement, and attack social cohesion.
- Elisabeth Jean Wood demonstrates that sexual violence is not inevitable in war. Organisational structures, ideological commitments, leadership practices, and military institutions can influence whether armed groups use sexual violence.
- Gender intersects with ethnicity, race, class, religion, nationality, and age. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality provides an important framework for analysing these overlapping structures of power and vulnerability.
- Child soldiers experience conflict in gendered ways. Boys and girls may perform different roles within armed groups, and gender-blind DDR programmes may fail to address the specific needs of girl soldiers and other children associated with armed groups.
- The cases of Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo demonstrate that gender remains central to understanding violence, displacement, sexual violence, political participation, resource extraction, and post-conflict reconstruction.

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Objective Questions

1. Who is the feminist scholar associated with the question "Where are the women?" in International Relations?
2. What is meant by hegemonic masculinity?
3. Who developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity?

4. What is meant by militarised masculinity?
5. Mention any two forms of conflict-related sexual violence.
6. What are the two major purposes of intersectionality in the study of gender and conflict?
7. What is meant by child soldier?
8. What is meant by Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR)?
9. Which international tribunal established that rape could constitute an act of genocide in appropriate circumstances?
10. Name the three major case studies discussed in the unit on gender and conflict.
11. What was the significance of the Rwanda genocide of 1994 from a gender perspective?
12. Who is Denis Mukwege, and what is his contribution to addressing conflict-related sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

Answers

1. Cynthia Enloe is the feminist scholar associated with the question "Where are the women?" She used the question to draw attention to the often-invisible roles and experiences of women in international politics and conflict.
2. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the culturally dominant form of masculinity that establishes expectations about how men should behave. In conflict settings, it may emphasise toughness, emotional control, physical courage, sexual dominance, and readiness to use violence.
3. The concept of hegemonic masculinity was developed by Raewyn Connell.
4. Militarised masculinity refers to the process through which military service, soldiering, and warrior identities become associated with masculine identity. It can encourage characteristics such as toughness, emotional suppression, courage, endurance, and readiness to use violence.
5. Any two forms of conflict-related sexual violence are rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, forced pregnancy, forced sterilisation, genital mutilation, and trafficking.

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6. Intersectionality helps explain how gender interacts with other social categories such as ethnicity, race, class, religion, nationality, and age. It helps reveal how these overlapping structures can create different forms of vulnerability and agency during conflict.

7. A child soldier is a child who is recruited or used by armed forces or armed groups. Children may be used as fighters, porters, spies, messengers, cooks, nurses, or attendants.

8. Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) refers to processes through which members of armed forces or armed groups are disarmed, released from military structures, and supported in returning to civilian life.

9. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) established in the Prosecutor v. Akayesu case that rape could constitute an act of genocide when committed with the relevant genocidal intent.

10. The three major case studies are Rwanda (1994), Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992–1995), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (1998–present).

11. The Rwanda genocide of 1994 demonstrated the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and mass violence. Sexual violence was used systematically against women and girls and was connected to ethnic persecution. Women's bodies became sites through which ethnic hatred and violence were expressed.

12. Denis Mukwege is a Congolese gynaecologist and the founder of Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo. He has provided medical care and support to survivors of sexual violence and brought international attention to conflict-related sexual violence in eastern DRC. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018.

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Assignments

1. Explain why gender is an important analytical category in the study of armed conflict.

2. Examine Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity and discuss its relevance to the study of militarised masculinity.

3. Discuss the gendered dimensions of armed conflict with reference to the experiences of men, women, boys, and girls.

4. Examine conflict-related sexual violence as a political and strategic phenomenon. Discuss the contribution of Elisabeth Jean Wood to understanding variation in sexual violence during war.

5. Discuss the Rwandan genocide as a case study of the intersection between gender, ethnicity, sexual violence, and post-conflict political representation.
6. Examine the experiences of women during the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina and explain how the case contributed to international recognition of conflict-related sexual violence.
7. Discuss the relationship between gender-based violence, resource extraction, and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
8. "Women should not be understood only as victims of armed conflict." Discuss this statement with suitable examples.

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UNIT 2

Women, Peace, and Security

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the historical exclusion of women from formal peace negotiations and international security institutions
- describe the origin, significance, and major provisions of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325
- explain the four major pillars of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda: Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery
- explain the major feminist critiques of the WPS agenda, including co-optation, implementation gaps, and elite capture
- analyse the gendered dimensions of UN peacekeeping and the challenges associated with sexual exploitation and abuse
- explain the role of National Action Plans and regional organisations in implementing the WPS agenda

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Prerequisite

Imagine a country emerging from a long period of armed conflict. The fighting has stopped, a peace agreement has been signed, and political leaders are preparing to rebuild the country. At first glance, it may appear that peace has finally been achieved. But ask a few more questions. Who participated in negotiating the peace agreement? Who decided what the new constitution would contain? Who determines how land will be distributed? Who speaks for survivors of sexual violence? Who receives compensation? Who decides how displaced families will return? Who participates in rebuilding local communities?

Now imagine that most of the people making these decisions are the same political and military leaders who negotiated the end of the war, while women who experienced displacement, sexual violence, poverty, and the loss of family members remain outside the formal process. Can such a peace be considered fully inclusive?

This question takes us directly into the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. The central concern of this unit is not simply whether women are affected by war. It is whether women are recognised as political actors who have the right to participate in decisions about conflict, peace, security, justice, and reconstruction. The WPS agenda therefore asks us to rethink what peace means, who gets to define it, and whose voices should shape the transition from war to peace.

This unit examines the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, one of the most significant normative frameworks to emerge from feminist advocacy in international relations. The WPS agenda is built on the recognition that sustainable peace requires the full and equal participation of women at all stages of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction. The agenda also recognises that women experience armed conflict in distinct ways and that their experiences, knowledge, and political participation are essential to the processes of building and sustaining peace.

The development of the WPS agenda represents an important shift in the way international security is understood. Traditional approaches to security have generally concentrated on states, military capabilities, territorial integrity, and relations between states. Feminist approaches broaden this understanding by asking whose security is being protected, whose voices are included in peace processes, and how gender relations influence both conflict and peacebuilding. The WPS framework therefore connects questions of security with questions of equality, participation, protection, justice, and human rights.

This unit traces the historical background, content, achievements, and critiques of the WPS agenda, beginning with the landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 and extending to subsequent international, national, and regional initiatives. It also examines women's participation in peace negotiations, their roles in post-conflict reconstruction, feminist perspectives on peacekeeping, and the continuing challenges associated with implementing the WPS agenda.

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Keywords

Women, peace, and security, UNSCR 1325, participation, protection, prevention, relief and recovery, national action plans, transitional justice, peacebuilding, gender-sensitive peacekeeping.

Discussion

2.2.1 Historical Background: Women's Exclusion from Peace Processes

For most of modern history, peace negotiations have been an almost exclusively male domain. The diplomats, military commanders, political leaders, and state representatives who negotiated the end of major conflicts were overwhelmingly men. Historical examples, from the Congress of Vienna in 1815 to the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and the Dayton Accords in 1995, demonstrate the dominant role of men in formal diplomatic processes.

This exclusion was not accidental. It reflected the gendered architecture of international politics, in which the public sphere of war, diplomacy, statecraft, and security was largely associated with masculinity, while women were frequently relegated to the private sphere of family, household, and community. Traditional assumptions about political authority therefore treated men as legitimate representatives of states and communities while women's political experiences and perspectives were often considered secondary.

The exclusion of women from peace negotiations has important consequences. Peace agreements negotiated without meaningful women's participation may fail to address the gender dimensions of conflict, including sexual violence, displacement, access to land and property, reproductive health, family separation, and the protection of women's rights. When peacebuilding focuses only on ending armed confrontation between organised combatants, it may overlook the everyday forms of insecurity experienced by civilians.

Women's exclusion from formal negotiations has not, however, meant their absence from peacebuilding. At the community level, women have historically played important roles in conflict prevention, humanitarian assistance, reconciliation, and social reconstruction. Women have organised community networks, supported displaced populations, negotiated local ceasefires, and worked to reunite families separated by conflict.

The experience of Leymah Gbowee and the women of the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace provides an important illustration of grassroots women's peace activism. Women from different ethnic and religious communities organised collectively to pressure the warring parties in Liberia to negotiate. Their movement demonstrated that women who were excluded from formal political negotiations could nevertheless exercise significant political influence from outside conventional institutions. Gbowee received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for her contribution to peacebuilding.

The historical exclusion of women from formal peace processes therefore raises an important question: if women experience conflict and contribute to peacebuilding, why have they been systematically excluded from decisions about ending wars and constructing peace? The WPS agenda emerged partly as an answer to this question.

2.2.2 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)

The adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on 31 October 2000 marked a significant turning point in international norms concerning gender and security. It was the first Security

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Council resolution specifically addressing the impact of armed conflict on women and the contribution of women to conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding.

UNSCR 1325 established a normative foundation for recognising women not merely as victims of armed conflict but also as political actors and agents of peace. It called for greater participation of women in peace processes and decision-making, stronger protection of women and girls from gender-based violence, and greater attention to gender dimensions in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction.

The WPS agenda that developed around UNSCR 1325 is commonly organised around four interconnected pillars: Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery.

Participation refers to the full and meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, political decision-making, and post-conflict governance. The participation pillar challenges the historical exclusion of women from formal political institutions and peace processes.

Protection focuses on protecting women and girls from gender-based violence during armed conflict and other situations of insecurity. This includes protection from rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, trafficking, and other forms of conflict-related sexual violence.

Prevention concerns both the prevention of armed conflict and the prevention of gender-based violence. It encourages international actors and states to address the structural and political conditions that contribute to violence rather than responding only after violence has occurred.

Relief and Recovery focuses on ensuring that humanitarian responses, reconstruction programmes, and post-conflict recovery processes address the specific needs of women and girls. This includes access to healthcare, education, livelihoods, justice, housing, and other forms of social and economic support.

UNSCR 1325 was followed by a series of related Security Council resolutions that expanded and developed the WPS framework. Resolution 1820, adopted in 2008, specifically addressed sexual violence in armed conflict. Resolution 1888 of 2009 established the Office of the United Nations Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Resolution 1889 of 2009 focused on women's participation in peacebuilding. Resolution 1960 of 2010 established monitoring and reporting mechanisms concerning conflict-related sexual violence. Resolution 2106 of 2013 strengthened accountability mechanisms, while Resolution 2122 of 2013 focused particularly on women's access to justice and participation. Resolution 2242 of 2015 linked the WPS agenda with counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism. Resolution 2467 of 2019 further emphasised a survivor-centred approach to conflict-related sexual violence.

Together, these resolutions constitute a substantial international normative framework. They demonstrate the gradual institutionalisation of feminist concerns within international security governance.

However, the existence of international norms does not automatically guarantee their implementation. There remains a substantial gap between normative commitments and practical outcomes. National governments may formally endorse UNSCR 1325 while failing to provide adequate resources, institutional mechanisms, monitoring systems, or political support for implementation. Women's representation in formal peace

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negotiations also continues to remain limited in many contexts.

The WPS agenda therefore has two dimensions. First, it is a normative framework that establishes principles concerning participation, protection, prevention, and recovery. Second, it is a continuing political project through which activists, governments, international organisations, and civil society groups attempt to translate these principles into practice.

2.2.3 Women in Peace Negotiations: Evidence and Analysis

The participation of women in peace negotiations has become one of the central concerns of the WPS agenda. The argument for women's participation is based not simply on the principle of equality but also on the recognition that peace processes benefit from broader representation and wider participation.

A frequently cited study by Thania Paffenholz and colleagues, published through UN Women, examined ninety peace processes between 1990 and 2010. The study found that women's groups and organisations could exercise significant influence on peace negotiations and that women's meaningful participation was associated with more comprehensive peace processes and greater attention to issues such as civilian protection.

Women's participation can take different forms. Women may participate directly as negotiators, mediators, political representatives, or members of official delegations. They may also participate indirectly through civil society organisations, women's movements, community organisations, religious networks, humanitarian groups, and advocacy campaigns.

Why can women's participation contribute to peacebuilding? Several explanations have been proposed. First, women may bring attention to issues that are sometimes neglected in traditional security negotiations, including civilian protection, displacement, healthcare, education, family reunification, and social reconciliation. Second, women's civil society organisations may have strong connections with local communities and therefore provide information and perspectives that formal political actors may lack.

Third, women may sometimes function as bridge-builders across political, ethnic, religious, or community divisions. Women's organisations have frequently created networks that cross the boundaries separating conflict communities. Such networks can create opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation.

Fourth, the inclusion of women can broaden the social legitimacy of a peace process. When a peace agreement is negotiated only by military and political elites, large sections of the population may feel excluded from the process. Wider participation can help connect formal peace negotiations with the needs of communities affected by conflict.

At the same time, it is important not to describe women as "natural peacemakers." The idea that women are inherently more peaceful than men because of their reproductive or caring roles has been widely criticised by feminist scholars. Such an argument can itself reinforce gender stereotypes by presenting women as naturally caring, peaceful, and non-violent.

Women are not inherently peaceful. Women have participated in armed conflicts as combatants, political leaders, activists, supporters of armed movements, and members of military organisations. Their political positions can also differ significantly

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according to class, ethnicity, religion, ideology, nationality, and political context.

The argument for women's participation in peace processes therefore should not depend on the assumption that women are naturally peaceful. Instead, the case for inclusion rests on democratic equality, political representation, recognition of women's experiences, and the value of diverse participation in peacebuilding.

Women's participation should also be meaningful rather than symbolic. Merely increasing the number of women present in a negotiation does not necessarily give them influence over the outcome. Meaningful participation requires access to decision-making, negotiation authority, resources, information, and institutional support.

The distinction between numerical representation and substantive influence is therefore central to understanding the WPS agenda. Counting women is important, but counting alone cannot demonstrate whether women have actually influenced peace processes.

2.2.4 Feminist Critiques of the WPS Agenda

Despite its significance, the WPS agenda has attracted extensive criticism from feminist scholars and activists. These critiques do not necessarily reject the WPS framework. Instead, they seek to deepen, expand, and transform the agenda by drawing attention to its limitations and contradictions.

One of the most important critiques concerns the possible co-optation of feminist demands by military and security institutions. Scholars such as Lene Hansen, Carol Cohn, and Laura J. Shepherd have examined the ways in which feminist ideas have been incorporated into the policies of militaries, NATO, national governments, and international security institutions.

From this perspective, there is a danger that the transformative feminist core of the WPS agenda may become diluted when it is incorporated into institutions whose primary concerns remain military security and strategic interests. Instead of challenging militarised and patriarchal structures, gender equality may sometimes be incorporated into existing security practices without fundamentally changing them.

This concern is particularly visible when the protection of women is invoked as a justification for military intervention. The condition of Afghan women, for example, was invoked in political discussions surrounding the US-led intervention in Afghanistan. Critics argued that using women's rights as a justification for military action could instrumentalise feminist concerns and reduce complex questions of gender justice to a security narrative.

A second major criticism concerns the implementation gap. The WPS framework has developed an extensive normative architecture, but implementation remains uneven. Women's representation in formal peace negotiations, UN peacekeeping leadership, national security institutions, and other decision-making bodies remains below equal representation in many contexts.

National Action Plans for UNSCR 1325 can also vary substantially in their quality and implementation. Some contain detailed commitments, monitoring mechanisms, and budgetary provisions, while others may remain largely aspirational. Without institutional accountability, adequate funding, and measurable targets, formal commitments may not produce significant change.

A third critique concerns whose voices are represented within the WPS agenda. Critics argue that international WPS processes have sometimes privileged formal civil society organisations that are urban,

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educated, professionalised, and connected to international networks. This can result in the marginalisation of rural women, poor women, minority women, indigenous women, displaced women, and other groups directly affected by conflict.

This problem can be described as a form of elite capture, in which the voices of a relatively small group of women become more visible internationally than those of women who experience conflict at the grassroots level.

Laura J. Shepherd's discourse analysis of WPS resolutions has also demonstrated how women are sometimes represented primarily as vulnerable victims requiring protection. Although protection is an essential component of the WPS agenda, an exclusive emphasis on women's vulnerability can reinforce stereotypes that portray women as passive and dependent.

Feminist approaches therefore call for a balance between protection and agency. Women should be recognised as individuals who require protection from violence, but they should also be recognised as political actors, decision-makers, peacebuilders, negotiators, activists, and agents of social transformation.

A deeper feminist approach to WPS therefore asks not only whether women are included in existing security institutions but also whether those institutions themselves need to be transformed.

2.2.5 Women's Roles in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Post-conflict reconstruction is a profoundly gendered process. The transition from war to peace creates opportunities for social and political transformation, but it can also produce new forms of inequality or reinforce existing patriarchal structures.

Post-conflict reconstruction involves much more than rebuilding physical infrastructure. It includes constitutional reform, legal reform, economic recovery, political institution-building, transitional justice, reconciliation, social reintegration, education, healthcare, and community reconstruction. Each of these processes has gendered consequences.

Women often carry significant responsibilities during and after conflict. They may become household heads because male family members have been killed, displaced, imprisoned, or otherwise separated from their families. They may become primary caregivers, income earners, community organisers, or political representatives.

However, the increased responsibilities women assume during conflict do not automatically result in greater equality after the conflict. Post-conflict institutions may attempt to restore pre-war social arrangements, including patriarchal patterns of land ownership, employment, political representation, and family authority.

Gender-sensitive reconstruction therefore requires attention to both women's immediate needs and the structural inequalities that shape their lives.

2.2.5.1 Legal and Constitutional Reform

Post-conflict periods can create important opportunities for constitutional and legal reform. New political institutions may provide opportunities to recognise gender equality, women's political participation, equal citizenship, and protection from discrimination.

Rwanda's post-genocide constitution of 2003 provides an important example. It established a mandatory 30 percent quota for women in decision-making bodies, and women's representation in parliament subsequently exceeded this constitutional

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minimum. The constitutions adopted in South Africa in 1996 following apartheid and East Timor in 2002 following independence also incorporated commitments to gender equality and women's rights.

Constitutional provisions can provide an important legal foundation for gender equality. They can establish rights, create institutional mechanisms, and provide a basis for challenging discriminatory practices.

However, formal legal equality does not automatically produce substantive equality. In many post-conflict societies, customary and informal legal systems continue to influence everyday life. These systems may contain rules or practices that restrict women's rights to property, inheritance, marriage, political participation, or economic resources.

Patriarchal social norms can also undermine constitutional protections. A woman may possess a formal legal right but lack the social, economic, or institutional resources necessary to exercise that right.

Effective legal reform therefore requires more than constitutional provisions. It requires institutions capable of enforcing laws, public awareness of rights, accessible judicial systems, trained officials, and social conditions that enable women to claim and exercise their legal rights.

2.2.5.2 Transitional Justice and Gender

Transitional justice refers to the mechanisms through which societies address serious human rights violations committed during periods of armed conflict, political repression, or authoritarian rule. These mechanisms may include truth commissions, criminal tribunals, reparations programmes, institutional reforms, and other processes designed to acknowledge past violence and establish accountability.

Gender is an important dimension of transitional justice because women and men may experience political violence differently. Women may experience sexual violence, forced displacement, loss of reproductive autonomy, gender-based persecution, and economic dispossession. These forms of harm require specific recognition within transitional justice processes.

Historically, truth commissions have often underrepresented women's experiences, particularly experiences of sexual violence. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission provides an important example. Although the Commission made significant contributions to documenting apartheid-era violence, women initially found limited opportunities to testify about violence committed directly against them. Women frequently spoke about violations suffered by male family members rather than describing their own experiences.

Later truth commissions in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and other countries attempted to incorporate more gender-sensitive approaches. These efforts demonstrate the importance of designing transitional justice mechanisms that recognise the particular forms of violence experienced by women.

Fionnuala Ní Aoláin has written extensively on gender and transitional justice. Her work emphasises the importance of designing reparations programmes around the specific harms experienced by women, including sexual violence, reproductive harms, displacement, and economic losses.

Reparations may take different forms, including financial compensation, healthcare, education, housing, livelihood assistance, public acknowledgement, and institutional reforms. A gender-sensitive approach recognises that women may require different forms of assistance depending on the nature of the harm they experienced.

Transitional justice therefore involves not only punishing perpetrators but also

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recognising survivors, addressing structural inequalities, and creating conditions in which past forms of violence are less likely to be repeated.

2.2.5.3 Economic Recovery and Women's Rights

Post-conflict economic recovery programmes have often been gender-blind. When reconstruction programmes fail to recognise existing gender inequalities, they may unintentionally reproduce or deepen inequalities in land ownership, employment, access to credit, education, and economic decision-making.

Women who become household heads during conflict may face particular difficulties after hostilities end. For example, property restitution programmes may return land to male relatives or recognised male household members rather than to women who actually managed or occupied the land during the conflict.

Access to finance is another important issue. Microfinance programmes have often been promoted as a mechanism for women's economic empowerment. Such programmes can provide women with access to credit and opportunities for income generation. However, critics argue that microfinance alone cannot eliminate structural barriers such as unequal property rights, unpaid care responsibilities, limited access to markets, and gender discrimination.

Post-conflict economic reconstruction should therefore address broader structural conditions. Women's economic empowerment may require secure land rights, access to credit, vocational training, employment opportunities, childcare, education, healthcare, and legal protection.

Gender equality is also closely connected to broader development outcomes. When women have meaningful access to economic resources and decision-making, households and communities can benefit from increased economic security and improved access to education and healthcare.

The economic dimensions of WPS therefore demonstrate that peacebuilding cannot be separated from questions of livelihood, property, labour, and economic justice.

2.2.6 Feminist Perspectives on Peacekeeping

United Nations peacekeeping operations have been an important focus of WPS advocacy. UNSCR 1325 called for greater participation of women in peace and security institutions, including peacekeeping.

The presence of women in peacekeeping operations is often discussed in terms of both representation and operational effectiveness. Women peacekeepers may be better positioned in some contexts to communicate with women in host communities, receive reports of sexual violence, conduct searches involving women, and engage with women's civil society organisations.

The presence of female peacekeepers can also challenge the perception that security institutions are exclusively masculine spaces. Women's participation may contribute to the broader transformation of gender norms within security institutions.

However, the presence of women should not automatically be assumed to transform peacekeeping. Simply increasing the number of women in military or police roles does not necessarily change the institutional culture of the organisation.

The UN's record concerning sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers has also generated serious concern. Reports of sexual exploitation and abuse involving

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peacekeeping personnel in Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, and other contexts have damaged the legitimacy of peacekeeping missions and raised questions about accountability.

The issue of peacekeepers acting as perpetrators rather than protectors presents a significant challenge to the WPS protection pillar. The presence of female personnel alone cannot solve institutional problems involving power, accountability, military culture, and sexual exploitation.

Sandra Whitworth has examined the gendered dimensions of UN peacekeeping and the ways in which military and peacekeeping institutions construct particular understandings of masculinity, femininity, authority, and security.

A feminist perspective on peacekeeping therefore requires attention not only to the number of women employed in peacekeeping missions but also to institutional culture, accountability, power relations, local participation, and the experiences of communities affected by peacekeeping operations.

2.2.7 The WPS Agenda Beyond the United Nations: National and Regional Frameworks

The WPS agenda has expanded beyond the United Nations through National Action Plans, regional organisations, national governments, and civil society movements.

National Action Plans (NAPs) are government documents that establish strategies for implementing the principles of UNSCR 1325. They may identify national priorities, institutional responsibilities, timelines, indicators, and mechanisms for monitoring implementation.

As the WPS agenda has developed, more than one hundred countries have adopted National Action Plans. However, the quality and effectiveness of these plans vary considerably. Some contain detailed commitments, dedicated resources, monitoring mechanisms, and clear institutional responsibilities. Others remain largely symbolic or lack sufficient funding and implementation mechanisms.

Several Nordic countries, including Finland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, and Denmark, have been prominent in incorporating WPS commitments into areas such as defence, development, diplomacy, and international cooperation.

Regional organisations have also incorporated WPS principles into their institutional frameworks. The African Union has developed its own WPS framework. The European Union has adopted a strategic approach to Women, Peace, and Security. NATO has also committed itself to integrating gender perspectives into military and security operations.

The diffusion of WPS norms through regional organisations represents an important development because it demonstrates that gender and security have become recognised concerns beyond the UN system.

At the same time, feminist scholars have raised questions about the ways in which WPS norms are interpreted by security institutions. When gender perspectives are incorporated primarily into military operations, there is a risk that the broader transformative objectives of the WPS agenda may become subordinated to traditional security priorities.

The expansion of WPS therefore creates both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, wider institutional adoption can provide resources, political recognition, and mechanisms for implementing gender-sensitive peace and security policies. On the other hand, institutionalisation can potentially narrow the meaning of feminist demands

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if gender equality becomes reduced to a technical component of security policy.

The continuing development of the WPS agenda therefore requires attention to both institutional implementation and feminist transformation. The central question is not simply whether international institutions recognise women but whether women have meaningful power to influence decisions about peace, security, justice, and reconstruction.

2.2.8 Concluding Observation

The Women, Peace, and Security agenda represents a major development in feminist approaches to international relations and global security. It challenges the traditional understanding of security by placing women's experiences, participation, rights, and political agency within international peace and security debates. The adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000 created an important international framework based on participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery. Subsequent Security Council resolutions expanded this framework to address sexual violence, justice, peacebuilding, accountability, and women's participation.

At the same time, the development of the WPS agenda demonstrates that the creation of international norms does not automatically produce social and political transformation. Feminist scholars have drawn attention to the implementation gap, the limited participation of women in formal peace processes, the marginalisation of grassroots voices, and the possibility that feminist demands may be incorporated into militarised security structures without challenging their underlying assumptions. A meaningful WPS approach therefore requires more than simply increasing the number of women in existing institutions. It requires attention to power, representation, agency, justice, economic rights, institutional accountability, and the transformation of gendered structures of security. The continuing importance of the WPS agenda lies precisely in this effort to connect peace and security with equality and social transformation.

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Recap

- Women have historically been excluded from formal peace negotiations and major international security institutions.
- The exclusion of women reflects the gendered structure of international politics, where war, diplomacy, and statecraft have often been associated with masculinity.
- Women have nevertheless played important roles in grassroots peacebuilding, conflict prevention, humanitarian action, reconciliation, and community reconstruction.
- Leymah Gbowee and the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace illustrate the political significance of women's grassroots peace activism.
- UNSCR 1325, adopted in 2000, established a major international framework for Women, Peace, and Security.

- The four major pillars of the WPS agenda are Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery.
- Subsequent UN Security Council resolutions expanded the WPS framework to address sexual violence, accountability, justice, peacebuilding, and women's participation.
- Women's participation in peace processes is important for democratic inclusion, recognition of women's experiences, and broader social representation.
- Feminist scholars reject the idea that women are naturally peaceful and instead emphasise women's political agency and the importance of meaningful participation.
- Feminist critiques of WPS focus on co-optation, implementation gaps, elite capture, and the representation of women primarily as victims.
- Post-conflict reconstruction provides opportunities for legal, political, economic, and social transformation but can also reproduce patriarchal inequalities.
- The WPS agenda extends beyond the United Nations through National Action Plans, regional organisations, peacekeeping institutions, and civil society movements.

Objective Questions

1. What is meant by the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda?
2. Which United Nations Security Council Resolution formally established the international WPS framework?
3. In which year was UNSCR 1325 adopted?
4. What are the four major pillars of the WPS agenda?
5. Who was Leymah Gbowee?
6. Why is women's participation important in peace negotiations?
7. What is meant by the idea of women as "natural peacemakers"?
8. What is meant by the implementation gap in the WPS agenda?
9. What is meant by elite capture in the context of the WPS agenda?
10. What is transitional justice?

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11. What is a National Action Plan under the WPS framework?
12. Why is gender-sensitive peacekeeping important?
13. Name the scholar associated with critical analysis of gender and UN peacekeeping.
14. Name the scholar who has written extensively on gender and transitional justice and reparations.
15. What is the central feminist concern regarding the possible militarisation or co-optation of the WPS agenda?

Answers

1. The Women, Peace, and Security agenda is an international normative framework that seeks to promote women's participation in peace and security processes while addressing their protection and specific needs during conflict and post-conflict recovery.
2. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325
3. 2000
4. Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery
5. Leymah Gbowee was a Liberian peace activist who helped organise the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace and received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011.
6. Women's participation can broaden representation, bring attention to civilian and community concerns, strengthen social inclusion, and provide perspectives that may be absent from traditionally male-dominated peace negotiations.
7. The idea of women as "natural peacemakers" suggests that women are inherently more peaceful than men. Feminist scholars have criticised this idea because it reinforces essentialist gender stereotypes.
8. The implementation gap refers to the difference between formal commitments to the WPS agenda and their actual implementation in practice.
9. Elite capture refers to a situation in which the voices and interests of relatively privileged, urban, educated, or internationally connected women receive greater attention than those of grassroots and marginalised women.

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10. Transitional justice refers to mechanisms used by societies to address serious human rights violations following conflict or authoritarian rule, including trials, truth commissions, reparations, and institutional reforms.

11. A National Action Plan is a government framework that establishes strategies, priorities, responsibilities, and measures for implementing UNSCR 1325 and the wider WPS agenda.

12. Gender-sensitive peacekeeping recognises that women, men, girls, and boys can experience insecurity differently and seeks to incorporate gender perspectives into peacekeeping operations and institutional practices.

13. Sandra Whitworth

14. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin

15. The concern is that feminist demands may be incorporated into military and security institutions in ways that support existing militarised structures rather than transforming the patriarchal and militarised systems that contribute to gender inequality and violence.

Assignments

1. Explain the historical exclusion of women from formal peace processes.
2. Discuss the significance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in the development of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.
3. Explain the four major pillars of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.
4. Examine the importance of women's participation in peace negotiations.
5. Critically examine the argument that women are "natural peacemakers."
6. Discuss the major feminist critiques of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.
7. Analyse the role of women in post-conflict constitutional and legal reform.
8. Explain the gender dimensions of transitional justice.
9. Discuss the importance of women's economic rights in post-conflict reconstruction.
10. Examine the gendered dimensions of UN peacekeeping.
11. Explain the role of National Action Plans in implementing UNSCR 1325.
12. "The Women, Peace, and Security agenda represents both an important normative achievement and an unfinished feminist project." Discuss.

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UNIT 3

Gender and Militarization

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the concept of militarization from a feminist perspective
- analyse the relationship between masculinity, soldiering, and military institutions
- discuss the major arguments surrounding women's integration into combat roles
- explain the relationship between militarized masculinity and sexual harassment and assault in military institutions
- analyse the relationship between militarization, nationalism, and gender
- analyse gender, sexuality, terrorism, and militarization through feminist approaches
- discuss demilitarization and human security from the perspective of gender justice

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Prerequisite

Imagine two societies facing the same external security threat. In the first society, political leaders respond by increasing military expenditure, expanding the armed forces, celebrating soldiers in popular culture, and presenting military strength as the main symbol of national power. In the second society, the government also takes security seriously but invests heavily in diplomacy, social welfare, education, healthcare, and community resilience.

Now ask a different set of questions. In the first society, who is expected to become a soldier? What kind of behaviour is considered masculine? Who is expected to protect the nation? What roles are women expected to perform? Who benefits

economically from military expenditure? What happens to people who do not conform to dominant gender and sexuality norms?

These questions take us beyond the traditional study of military power. They direct attention towards militarization as a social process. Feminist scholars ask how military values become embedded in everyday life and how ideas about masculinity, femininity, sexuality, nationalism, and citizenship help sustain militarised systems.

The central question of this unit is therefore: What happens when militarism becomes more than an institution and becomes a way of organising social life? Exploring this question helps us understand why gender is central to the study of militarization, political violence, nationalism, arms production, terrorism, and peace.

Keywords

Militarization, militarized masculinity, militarized femininity, combat exclusion, military sexual trauma, masculinist protection, gendered nationalism, anti-militarist feminism, homonationalism, human security

Discussion

This unit examines militarization as a deeply gendered social process. Militarization refers not only to the expansion of military forces and weaponry but also to the broader cultural, political, economic, and ideological process through which military values, institutions, and priorities come to influence and dominate social life. As Cynthia Enloe explains, militarization is a gradual process through which a person, institution, or social practice becomes increasingly controlled by, or dependent upon, military ideas and priorities.

Gender is central to this process because militarization both depends upon and reproduces gendered hierarchies. Military institutions have historically been associated with masculinity, while women have frequently been positioned as supporters, dependants, victims, or symbols of the nation. At the same time, militarization constructs particular expectations about masculinity, femininity, sexuality, citizenship, and political authority.

Understanding the relationship between gender and militarization is therefore essential for critically analysing contemporary security politics. A feminist approach does not examine militarization only in terms of the size of armies or the quantity of weapons possessed by states. It also asks how military values enter everyday life, how particular forms of masculinity become associated with violence and national strength, how women participate in and resist military institutions, and how militarisation affects different social groups.

2.3.1 Defining Militarization: A Feminist Approach

The concept of militarization is broader than simply having a large military. It encompasses the social, cultural, economic,

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political, and ideological dimensions of military power. A society becomes militarized when military values such as hierarchy, obedience, toughness, sacrifice, discipline, patriotism, and readiness for violence become normalised across civilian life.

Militarization can therefore be found in many areas of everyday social life. It may appear in school curricula that celebrate military heroes, in popular entertainment that presents war as heroic, in political cultures that equate national strength with military power, and in economic arrangements that depend heavily on arms production and defence industries.

Militarization can also shape political language. Terms such as "security," "strength," "defence," and "national interest" may become closely associated with military solutions. Political leaders may be evaluated according to their willingness to demonstrate military strength, while diplomacy, compromise, negotiation, and cooperation may sometimes be represented as signs of weakness.

Feminist scholars have been particularly attentive to the gendered dimensions of militarization because they are both pervasive and frequently hidden. The military is one of the most explicitly gendered institutions in modern society. It has historically excluded women entirely in many contexts, later admitted them only into restricted roles, and continues in many settings to operate according to institutional norms historically associated with masculinity.

Understanding militarization therefore requires a gender analysis. It is necessary to examine not only who serves in the military but also how military institutions construct ideas about masculinity and femininity.

Cynthia Enloe's concept of "militarized femininity" is particularly useful in this context. Just as military institutions construct and demand particular forms of masculinity from male soldiers, they may also construct particular forms of femininity among women associated with military institutions. The supportive wife, patriotic mother, nursing sister, and self-sacrificing military family member are examples of gendered roles that can support military institutions.

These feminized roles are essential to the functioning of military systems but have often been socially and politically undervalued. Women's unpaid domestic labour, emotional support, caregiving, and reproductive labour can enable soldiers to participate in military institutions. Feminist analysis therefore makes visible forms of labour that traditional military studies may overlook.

Militarization should consequently be understood as a social process rather than simply a military condition. It operates through institutions, cultural representations, gender norms, economic structures, and everyday practices.

2.3.2 Masculinity, Soldiering, and the Military Institution

The relationship between masculinity and military service is both historically significant and socially constructed. Different societies and historical periods have developed different relationships between military service and masculine identity. The important point from a feminist perspective is that the association between masculinity and soldiering should not be treated as natural or biologically predetermined.

In many modern nation-states, the relationship between masculinity and military service has been reinforced through conscription systems, nationalist ideology, political institutions, and popular culture. The image of the male soldier as the embodiment of national manhood—brave, disciplined, patriotic, physically strong, and willing to

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sacrifice his life for the nation—has played an important role in nationalist projects across different regions.

From nineteenth-century European nationalism to postcolonial nation-building in Asia and Africa, military service has often been associated with masculine citizenship. The soldier becomes not simply an employee of the state but a symbolic representation of national strength and loyalty.

The construction of the soldier as masculine produces several important consequences. First, it creates social pressure on men to demonstrate their masculinity through military service. Men who refuse military service, desert, or are considered physically unfit may experience social humiliation and ostracism. Such reactions have historically involved explicitly feminising language, suggesting that men who fail to meet military expectations are insufficiently masculine.

Second, masculine military norms can shape institutional cultures in ways that create difficulties for women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and men who do not conform to hegemonic masculine expectations. Toughness, emotional control, physical aggression, heterosexuality, and willingness to use violence may be treated as indicators of successful military masculinity.

Third, the gendered organisation of military citizenship can produce political inequalities. When military service is constructed as an important marker of citizenship and military institutions are dominated by men, political authority and social recognition may become disproportionately associated with masculine identities.

The connection between masculinity and soldiering has also been challenged from within military experience itself. Literature emerging from the First World War, including the poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, challenged romantic representations of war. Their writings drew attention to fear, psychological suffering, mutilation, trauma, and death.

Such literary critiques are important for feminist and anti-militarist scholarship because they challenge the assumption that military masculinity is necessarily heroic. They reveal the human costs that can remain hidden behind cultural representations of courage, sacrifice, and national glory.

A feminist analysis therefore asks how particular forms of masculinity are produced and rewarded within military institutions and what happens to those who do not conform to them.

2.3.3 Women in the Military: Integration, Resistance, and Continuing Inequality

The integration of women into armed forces represents one of the significant gender transformations of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The historical movement from almost complete exclusion towards formal inclusion in many military roles demonstrates both the possibilities and limitations of equality within deeply gendered institutions.

Women have participated in warfare throughout history. They have served as nurses, camp followers, spies, messengers, resistance fighters, intelligence agents, and combatants. However, formal integration into standing military institutions has generally been a more recent development.

The experience of women in the military demonstrates that formal inclusion does not necessarily eliminate gender inequality. Women may gain access to military institutions while continuing to experience occupational segregation, sexual harassment, unequal promotion opportunities, discrimination, and institutional cultures structured around masculine norms.

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2.3.3.1 Historical Overview

Women have participated in warfare in many different societies and historical periods. Their participation has often been rendered invisible in conventional histories of war, which tend to focus on male soldiers and military commanders.

During the Second World War, the Soviet Union integrated women into a variety of military roles, including combat positions. Female pilots, snipers, and infantry personnel participated in military operations, while the "Night Witches" bomber regiment became one of the most well-known examples of women's military participation during the war.

However, this integration was largely driven by military necessity rather than by a commitment to feminist equality. After the war, many women were demobilised and encouraged to return to domestic roles.

In the post-war period, women's military integration proceeded gradually and unevenly. Israel introduced mandatory military service for women in 1948, although women were initially excluded from many combat positions. The United States gradually expanded women's participation in its volunteer military from the 1970s. Other countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, and Norway, also expanded women's military participation.

Australia opened all military combat roles to women in 2011, while the United States opened all military occupations, including combat roles, to women in 2015.

These developments represent important changes in formal military policy. However, feminist analysis emphasises that formal equality and substantive equality are not necessarily the same. Women may legally have access to military occupations while continuing to face institutional cultures, practices, and expectations that privilege masculine identities.

The question therefore extends beyond whether women are permitted to join the military. It also concerns whether military institutions themselves are transformed by women's participation.

2.3.3.2 The Combat Exclusion Debate

The debate over women's exclusion from combat roles has been one of the most contested issues in military policy. Arguments against women's participation have generally focused on physical capacity, unit cohesion, military effectiveness, and social norms.

The physical-capacity argument suggests that women, on average, have lower levels of physical strength than men and may therefore be less capable of meeting the demands of combat. Average physical differences between men and women do exist. However, feminist scholars and military reformers have questioned whether average differences provide a sufficient basis for excluding all women from specific military occupations.

The physical requirements of military occupations vary considerably. Some individual women may meet or exceed the physical standards required for particular combat positions. From this perspective, fitness standards can be applied to individuals rather than using sex as an automatic basis for exclusion.

The unit-cohesion argument suggests that women's presence in military units may disrupt the social bonds among male soldiers that are considered important for combat effectiveness. However, studies of integrated military units in different contexts have challenged the assumption that the presence of women necessarily undermines cohesion.

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Feminist critics have also questioned arguments that assume male soldiers cannot control their sexual behaviour when women are present. Such arguments may shift responsibility for sexual harassment from perpetrators and institutions to women themselves. From a feminist perspective, the problem should instead be addressed through institutional accountability, effective prevention, professional standards, and mechanisms for reporting and responding to harassment.

The combat-exclusion debate therefore illustrates a broader question concerning gender equality: should institutions adapt their standards and cultures to accommodate individuals on the basis of their abilities, or should gender categories continue to determine who can occupy particular social roles?

2.3.3.3 Sexual Harassment and Assault in the Military

The integration of women into military institutions has not always been accompanied by sufficient measures to prevent sexual harassment and assault. Military sexual trauma is commonly used as an umbrella term for experiences of sexual harassment and sexual assault occurring within military contexts.

Sexual harassment and assault have been documented in militaries in different countries. Women have generally been disproportionately affected, although men can also experience sexual violence and harassment.

In the United States, Department of Defense reports have documented continuing concerns about sexual assault and harassment within the armed forces. A 2014 RAND Corporation study estimated that approximately 20,000 service members experienced sexual assault during that year and that reporting remained limited.

The gendered culture of military institutions can contribute to conditions in which sexual harassment and violence occur. Military environments may valorise toughness, aggression, emotional control, and dominance. Hierarchical structures can also make it difficult for junior personnel to report misconduct involving senior personnel.

The close-knit nature of military units may create additional pressure to maintain group loyalty. Personnel may fear professional consequences, social isolation, retaliation, or damage to their careers if they report sexual violence or harassment.

Feminist scholars have therefore argued that military sexual violence should not be understood simply as the result of a few individual perpetrators. It can also be connected to institutional structures and gender norms. Addressing the problem requires more than improving reporting systems. It requires institutional accountability, effective prevention, survivor support, independent investigation mechanisms, and critical examination of the gender norms associated with militarized masculinity.

2.3.4 Militarized Masculinity and Political Violence

Militarized masculinity refers to forms of masculinity associated with military identity, soldiering, discipline, physical toughness, emotional suppression, and the legitimate use of violence. Its influence does not necessarily end when soldiers leave military institutions. Military experiences can shape identities and social relationships in civilian life.

Paul Higate's edited volume *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (2003) examines how military experiences influence men's identities and how these identities can continue after military service.

Veterans may carry gender expectations developed within military environments into

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their civilian relationships, workplaces, and family lives. Expectations concerning toughness, emotional control, authority, and self-reliance may sometimes create difficulties in intimate relationships or in situations where emotional vulnerability and communication are important.

The relationship between militarized masculinity and domestic violence has also attracted scholarly attention. Some research has identified elevated levels of intimate partner violence among certain veteran populations and has examined the possible relationship between combat experiences, trauma, and gender norms.

However, such relationships should not be understood deterministically. Military service does not mean that a person will become violent in intimate relationships, and many veterans do not engage in domestic violence. Feminist analysis instead draws attention to the broader social conditions and gender norms that can influence patterns of violence.

Militarized masculinity can also influence political culture. Political environments that equate strength with military power and portray diplomacy, negotiation, and compromise as weakness may create cultural conditions that make the use of force more politically acceptable.

Gendered political rhetoric can therefore shape foreign policy decision-making. Leaders may feel pressure to demonstrate toughness, strength, and willingness to use force in order to avoid being portrayed as weak.

A feminist analysis of political violence thus examines not only military institutions but also the cultural meanings attached to masculinity, strength, leadership, and national power.

2.3.5 The Arms Trade and Its Gendered Dimensions

The global arms trade is an important part of the international political economy of security. Arms production, marketing, trade, and use are structured by gendered assumptions and institutions.

The production of weapons has historically been concentrated in states with highly developed military-industrial complexes. Major arms-producing states include the United States, Russia, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and China. These industries have traditionally employed predominantly male workforces in production, engineering, design, military research, and related occupations.

The relationship between arms production and masculinity is also cultural. Weapons are frequently marketed through images associated with power, strength, protection, control, and virility. Such representations can contribute to the cultural association between weapons and masculine identity.

Small arms and light weapons are particularly important from a gender perspective. Their proliferation in conflict and post-conflict settings can increase insecurity among civilian populations. Women and children may face particular risks, including domestic violence, community violence, forced displacement, and insecurity in public spaces.

Organisations such as the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) and the Control Arms Campaign have drawn attention to the gender dimensions of arms control and disarmament.

Feminist analysis also examines military expenditure at the national level. The allocation of resources to defence institutions may affect the availability of resources for health, education, social welfare, housing, and other areas of social policy.

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This is sometimes described through the "guns versus butter" framework, which highlights the trade-off between military expenditure and civilian social spending. Feminist political economists add a gender dimension by asking which social groups benefit from military expenditure and which depend more heavily on public investment in healthcare, education, childcare, and social welfare.

The gendered political economy of militarization therefore involves more than the production and sale of weapons. It includes questions concerning employment, public expenditure, welfare, social reproduction, and the distribution of political and economic resources.

2.3.6 Nationalism, Militarism, and Gender: The Protective State

The relationship between nationalism, militarism, and gender is a central concern of feminist security studies. Nationalist ideologies frequently represent the state as the protector of women and women as symbols of national identity.

This relationship can simultaneously valorise military power and restrict women's political agency. Women may be represented as vulnerable citizens who require protection from external threats, while men are constructed as protectors who are expected to defend the nation.

The "protection racket" framework developed by scholars including Iris Marion Young provides an important way of analysing this relationship. In her influential 2003 essay, "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State," Young examined the relationship between protection and political authority.

The protector-protected relationship can appear to offer security, but it may also create unequal relations of power. If men or state institutions are constructed as protectors and women as those who require protection, women may be positioned as dependent rather than as autonomous political subjects.

Young also connected the logic of masculinist protection with post-9/11 security politics. Citizens may be encouraged to surrender certain freedoms or accept expanded state authority in exchange for protection from threats. The relationship resembles patriarchal family structures in which the protector exercises authority over those supposedly being protected.

Nationalist movements frequently mobilise women as symbols of national identity while restricting their substantive political rights. The figure of the "mother of the nation" is common across nationalist ideologies. Women may be represented as mothers, cultural guardians, reproducers of the nation, and symbols of national purity.

Women may therefore be expected to produce future generations, support soldiers, mourn fallen heroes, preserve cultural traditions, and embody national identity. Yet they may remain excluded from strategic decisions concerning war, peace, defence, and foreign policy.

2.3.6.1 Gendered Nationalism in the Indian Context

The relationship between nationalism and gender can also be examined in the Indian context. Feminist scholarship has explored how religious nationalism can construct particular expectations regarding women's bodies, sexuality, family roles, cultural identity, and political participation.

Scholarship by Tanika Sarkar and Uma Chakravarti, among others, has examined the relationship between gender, religion, community, and nationalism in India.

The figure of the woman as guardian of cultural identity can become particularly

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significant within nationalist discourse. Women may be represented as responsible for maintaining the cultural and moral boundaries of the community. At the same time, political participation may be encouraged in ways that reinforce particular gender roles.

The Indian case therefore illustrates the intersection of gender, nationalism, religion, and political mobilisation. A feminist analysis does not treat nationalism simply as a political ideology but examines how national identities are produced through gendered representations of women and men.

2.3.7 Anti-Militarist Feminist Activism

Feminist anti-militarism has a long and significant history. Women's peace movements have challenged militarised politics, arms production, nuclear weapons, war, and political violence in different parts of the world.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), founded in 1915 during the First World War, is one of the oldest international women's peace organisations. Its founders included Jane Addams and Emily Greene Balch. Both were later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The organisation developed a feminist critique of militarism that connected war with patriarchy, imperialism, economic exploitation, and social inequality. Its work demonstrates that feminist approaches to security have historically included not only demands for women's inclusion within military institutions but also demands for disarmament and the transformation of militarised political systems.

The Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp in the United Kingdom provides another important example. Established in 1981 in protest against the deployment of US cruise missiles at RAF Greenham Common, the camp continued for almost two decades.

Women at the camp used explicitly feminist and non-violent forms of protest. They organised demonstrations, formed human chains around the military base, used domestic objects symbolically, and developed alternative forms of political community.

The Greenham Common movement challenged both nuclear militarism and conventional assumptions about women's political roles. It demonstrated that women could become important political actors in debates about national security and nuclear weapons without entering traditional military institutions.

Contemporary feminist anti-militarism includes campaigns for nuclear disarmament, advocacy for gender-sensitive arms control, opposition to military intervention, and criticism of drone warfare.

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017, is an important example of contemporary anti-nuclear activism. Feminist scholars such as Roxanne Lynn Doty and Christine Sylvester have also examined the relationship between peace activism, gender, and international relations theory.

2.3.8 LGBTQ+ Identities, Militarism, and the "Homonationalism" Critique

The relationship between gender, sexuality, and militarism has become increasingly important as LGBTQ+ individuals have gained formal access to military institutions in many countries.

In the United States, the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy was repealed in 2011,

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allowing LGBTQ+ service members to serve openly. Similar developments have occurred in several other Western militaries.

The formal inclusion of LGBTQ+ personnel has been regarded by many LGBTQ+ rights organisations as an important equality development. However, queer feminist and critical race scholars have also developed a critique of the political uses of LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Jasbir Puar developed the concept of "homonationalism" to describe processes through which LGBTQ+ rights can become incorporated into nationalist and geopolitical projects. According to this critique, the recognition of LGBTQ+ rights may sometimes be used to construct Western liberal democracies as progressive and civilised in contrast to societies represented as backward or intolerant.

Within this framework, LGBTQ+ inclusion in military institutions can become part of a broader narrative used to justify geopolitical interventions or to construct particular societies as threats.

The critique of homonationalism does not mean that LGBTQ+ rights are unimportant. Nor does it suggest that military inclusion has no significance for LGBTQ+ individuals who wish to serve. Rather, the concept encourages critical attention to the geopolitical contexts in which rights claims are deployed.

A feminist and queer analysis therefore asks how gender and sexuality are connected to nationalism, military power, race, religion, and international hierarchy.

2.3.9 Gender and Terrorism: Feminist Analyses

Terrorism, whether perpetrated by state or non-state actors, is deeply gendered. Conventional approaches to terrorism often focus on ideology, political motivation, organisational structure, or security threats. Feminist approaches add another dimension by examining how gender norms influence recruitment, radicalisation, political violence, and representations of perpetrators.

The overwhelming majority of perpetrators of terrorist violence have historically been men. Yet conventional security discourse often treats their gender as irrelevant. Feminist analysis challenges this omission by asking how particular forms of masculinity may influence political violence.

Michael Kimmel's research has examined the relationship between masculinity, humiliation, social status, and violent political movements. Some men may be attracted to extremist organisations partly because these organisations provide a sense of belonging, authority, masculine identity, or restoration of perceived status.

This does not mean that all male terrorists are motivated by a "crisis of masculinity." Terrorism has multiple causes, and individuals participate in violent movements for different political, ideological, social, and personal reasons. A gender analysis adds one dimension to the broader explanation.

Women involved in terrorism and political violence have attracted particular attention precisely because their participation challenges conventional gender expectations. Female suicide bombers and female members of armed organisations have participated in conflicts involving Palestinian organisations, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Boko Haram, ISIS, and other groups.

Mia Bloom's research demonstrates that women become involved in terrorism for complex reasons, including political commitment, ideological beliefs, personal loss, coercion, socialisation, and other factors.

Treating female terrorists simply as passive victims manipulated by men can

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therefore obscure their political agency and the complexity of their motivations. At the same time, acknowledging agency does not mean ignoring coercion, structural inequality, or gendered violence.

The WPS agenda also became connected with counter-terrorism through UNSCR 2242 of 2015. The resolution encouraged the inclusion of women in counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism strategies.

Feminist critics have raised concerns about this linkage. Organisations such as WILPF have argued that connecting WPS too closely with counter-terrorism can securitise the feminist agenda. Women's participation may then be valued primarily because it contributes to security and counter-terrorism objectives rather than because gender equality is itself a political and ethical goal.

This debate demonstrates an important tension within feminist security studies: should women's participation be promoted because it improves the effectiveness of security institutions, or because women have an equal right to participate in political decisions? Feminist approaches generally emphasise the importance of retaining gender justice as an objective in itself.

2.3.10 Demilitarization and Gender Justice

If militarization is understood as a gendered social process that reproduces particular forms of inequality and political power, then demilitarization can be understood as an important feminist concern.

Demilitarization does not simply mean reducing the number of soldiers or weapons. Feminist peace researchers argue that it should also involve transforming the cultural, political, economic, and ideological structures that normalise militarism.

A comprehensive approach to demilitarization may therefore involve arms reduction, disarmament, reduction in military expenditure, conversion of military industries, strengthening of civilian institutions, investment in social welfare, and transformation of gender norms associated with violence and military power.

Costa Rica provides an interesting comparative case. The country abolished its military in 1948. The absence of a permanent military has allowed Costa Rica to develop a political culture in which national resources and institutions are organised differently from those of states with large standing armies.

Costa Rica is not a society without gender inequality, and the abolition of its military should not automatically be interpreted as the cause of all positive social outcomes. Nevertheless, scholars have debated whether demilitarization has contributed to different political and social priorities and whether the relationship between demilitarization and gender equality may operate in both directions.

Feminist security scholars have also drawn attention to the concept of human security. Human security shifts the focus of security analysis from the protection of states and territories towards the security of individuals and communities.

The United Nations Human Development Report of 1994 articulated an influential understanding of human security around concerns including freedom from fear and freedom from want. This approach resonates with feminist security studies because it broadens the meaning of security beyond military threats.

From a feminist perspective, people may remain insecure even when their state is militarily powerful. Poverty, gender-based violence, discrimination, lack of healthcare, food insecurity, displacement, and political exclusion can all threaten human security.

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Demilitarization and gender justice therefore involve rethinking the meaning of security itself. Instead of asking only whether a state has sufficient military power to defend its territory, feminist security studies asks whether individuals and communities can live free from violence, fear, deprivation, discrimination, and structural inequality.

2.3.11 Concluding Observation

Militarization is not simply a matter of military forces, weapons, or defence expenditure. It is a broader social process through which military values and priorities enter political institutions, economic systems, cultural practices, and everyday life. Feminist analysis demonstrates that this process is deeply gendered. Militarized institutions frequently depend upon particular constructions of masculinity, while women may be positioned simultaneously as those who require protection, supporters of military institutions, symbols of the nation, and political actors who challenge militarism. The relationship between gender and militarization therefore reveals how security institutions are connected to wider systems of social power.

The feminist study of militarization also demonstrates that military power is contested. Women's participation in armed forces has challenged historical exclusions, while feminist peace movements have challenged the assumption that security requires military strength. Anti-militarist activism, critiques of masculinist protection, analyses of the arms trade, and debates about LGBTQ+ inclusion and homonationalism have expanded the meaning of security. Feminist approaches to terrorism similarly demonstrate that both male and female participation in political violence must be understood through complex relations of gender, agency, ideology, and power. Ultimately, demilitarization from a feminist perspective requires more than reducing weapons. It requires transforming the social and political structures that normalise militarism and developing broader understandings of security based on human well-being, equality, freedom from violence, and gender justice.

Recap

- Militarization is broader than the expansion of military forces and includes cultural, political, economic, and ideological processes.
- Militarization is deeply gendered because military institutions have historically been organised around particular forms of masculinity.
- Cynthia Enloe's concept of militarized femininity draws attention to the often-invisible roles women perform in support of military institutions.
- Military service has frequently been associated with masculine citizenship, courage, sacrifice, toughness, and national loyalty.
- Women's integration into armed forces has expanded significantly, but formal inclusion does not automatically eliminate institutional gender inequalities.
- The debate over women's participation in combat roles involves questions concerning physical standards, unit cohesion, institutional culture, and equality.

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- Sexual harassment and assault remain important concerns within military institutions, and feminist scholars connect them to institutional structures and militarized gender norms.
- Militarized masculinity can influence civilian life, political culture, family relationships, and understandings of national strength.
- The arms trade is gendered through patterns of production, marketing, military expenditure, and the social consequences of weapons proliferation.
- Nationalist ideologies can construct men as protectors and women as those requiring protection, thereby reinforcing gendered power relations.
- Feminist anti-militarist movements have challenged war, nuclear weapons, arms production, and militarised political cultures.
- Demilitarization and human security offer alternative ways of understanding security by focusing on human well-being, freedom from violence, equality, and social justice.

Objective Questions

1. What is meant by militarization?
2. Who developed the concept of militarized femininity?
3. What is militarized masculinity?
4. Why has military service historically been associated with masculine citizenship?
5. What is meant by combat exclusion?
6. What is military sexual trauma?
7. Name the scholar who edited *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State*.
8. What is meant by the concept of masculinist protection?
9. Who developed the concept of homonationalism?
10. What is the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)?
11. What was the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp?
12. Why is the arms trade considered a gendered issue?
13. What is meant by gendered nationalism?
14. What is demilitarization?
15. What is human security?

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Answers

1. Militarization is the social, political, cultural, economic, and ideological process through which military values, institutions, and priorities become increasingly influential in society.
2. Cynthia Enloe
3. Militarized masculinity refers to a form of masculinity associated with military identity, toughness, discipline, emotional control, physical courage, and the legitimate use of violence.
4. Military service has historically been associated with masculine citizenship because men have frequently been constructed as soldiers, protectors, defenders of the nation, and symbols of national strength.
5. Combat exclusion refers to the formal or informal restriction of particular groups, historically including women, from military combat roles.
6. Military sexual trauma refers to sexual harassment and sexual assault experienced within military institutions or military-related contexts.
7. Paul Higate
8. Masculinist protection refers to a gendered relationship in which men or state institutions are constructed as protectors while women and other citizens are positioned as those requiring protection, potentially reinforcing unequal relations of authority and dependence.
9. Jasbir Puar
10. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom is an international women's peace organisation founded in 1915 that has advocated peace, disarmament, women's rights, and opposition to militarism.
11. The Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp was a women's peace protest established in the United Kingdom in 1981 against the deployment of US cruise missiles at RAF Greenham Common.
12. The arms trade is considered gendered because weapons production, military industries, military employment, weapons marketing, military expenditure, and the consequences of weapons proliferation are shaped by gender relations and gendered political priorities.
13. Gendered nationalism refers to the ways in which nationalist ideologies construct particular roles and identities for women and men, including representations of women as mothers, cultural guardians, or symbols of national identity and men as protectors and defenders.

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14. Demilitarization refers to the reduction and transformation of military power and militarised political, economic, cultural, and social structures.

15. Human security is an approach to security that shifts attention from the security of states and territories towards the security and well-being of individuals and communities, including freedom from fear and freedom from want.

Assignments

1. Define militarization and explain its significance from a feminist perspective.
2. Discuss Cynthia Enloe's contribution to the feminist study of militarization.
3. Examine the relationship between masculinity and military service.
4. Analyse the major arguments surrounding women's participation in combat roles.
5. Discuss sexual harassment and assault in military institutions from a feminist perspective.
6. Explain the concept of militarized masculinity and examine its influence beyond the military.
7. Analyse the gendered dimensions of the global arms trade.
8. Explain Iris Marion Young's concept of masculinist protection.
9. Discuss the relationship between nationalism, militarism, and gender.
10. Examine the contribution of feminist anti-militarist movements to peace and security debates.
11. Explain Jasbir Puar's concept of homonationalism and its relevance to militarism.
12. Discuss the feminist understanding of demilitarization and human security.

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3

BLOCK

Gender and Development

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UNIT 1

Gender and Economic Development

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the relationship between gender and economic development and identify how gender inequalities shape economic outcomes
- understand the significance of unpaid care work and the care economy in national and global economic frameworks
- critically assess the impact of structural adjustment programmes and neoliberal economic reforms on women
- examine the gender dimensions of poverty, access to credit, land rights, and entrepreneurship

Prerequisite

Imagine a woman who wakes up before everyone else in her household. She prepares food, arranges children's school needs, cleans the house, cares for an elderly family member, and then spends several hours working in a field, shop, factory, or office. At the end of the day, she returns home and continues with household responsibilities. Which part of her day counts as "economic work"?

This simple question opens an important debate in feminist economics. If only the hours spent in paid employment are counted, a major part of her contribution disappears from economic statistics. Yet the household, labour market, and wider economy depend upon the work she performs. The study of gender and economic development begins by making this invisible work visible and asking a broader question: Who produces economic value, who receives it, and who bears the hidden costs of economic development?

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Keywords

Feminist economics, gender pay gap, labour force participation, care economy, unpaid work, structural adjustment, gender-responsive budgeting, microfinance, women's economic empowerment, Sustainable Development Goal, human capital

Discussion

3.1.1 Introduction

The relationship between gender and economic development is one of the most important and contested themes in contemporary political science and development studies. For much of the twentieth century, mainstream economics treated the economy as a largely gender-neutral domain. Resources were assumed to be distributed through market mechanisms, labour was valued primarily according to productivity, and development was measured through aggregate indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or GNP per capita. Within these frameworks, women were often largely invisible. This invisibility did not mean that women were not working. Rather, much of the work performed by women was outside the boundaries of what conventional economic statistics recognised as productive activity.

Women have historically performed enormous amounts of work in raising children, caring for older and sick family members, cultivating subsistence plots, collecting water and firewood, preparing food, maintaining households, and supporting community life. Much of this work is unpaid and takes place within households or communities. Because it does not always enter formal markets, it has traditionally received limited recognition in national income accounting. As a result, conventional measurements of economic development have often underestimated the contribution of women to economic and social life.

This invisibility is connected with deeper structures of patriarchy. Patriarchy refers to social arrangements in which men have greater access to power, resources, authority, and decision-making, while women experience systematic disadvantages. These arrangements operate through both cultural norms and formal economic institutions. Gender inequalities can therefore be found not only in wages and employment but also in property ownership, access to credit, education, healthcare, social security, political decision-making, and the distribution of unpaid work.

Over the past several decades, feminist scholars, international organisations, women's movements, and grassroots organisations have challenged the assumption that economic processes are gender-neutral. Feminist scholarship has demonstrated that gender inequality is not simply a question of individual discrimination. It is also connected with the organisation of markets, households, states, labour systems, and international economic institutions.

The study of gender and economic development therefore requires us to look beyond conventional indicators of economic growth. Economic development concerns not only the expansion of national income but also the distribution of resources,

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opportunities, capabilities, security, and freedom. A country may experience economic growth while significant sections of women continue to experience low wages, insecure employment, limited property rights, unpaid care burdens, and restricted access to economic decision-making.

This unit provides a comprehensive introduction to the gender dimensions of economic development. It begins with the intellectual development of Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD) approaches. It then examines feminist economics and the contributions of major scholars such as Ester Boserup, Marilyn Waring, Amartya Sen, and Nancy Folbre. The unit subsequently considers women's participation in labour markets, occupational segregation, the gender pay gap, unpaid care work, structural adjustment programmes, land and asset ownership, gender and poverty, gender-responsive budgeting, and international frameworks for women's economic empowerment.

3.1.2 From Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD): An Intellectual History

The recognition of gender as an important category of analysis in development studies emerged through a long intellectual and political process. Development thinking initially paid limited attention to women. During the post-war period, development was generally understood in terms of economic growth, industrialisation, modernisation, and the expansion of productive capacity. Women were frequently treated as dependants of male household members rather than as economic actors in their own right.

The intellectual history of gender and development can broadly be understood through three approaches: Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD). Each approach emerged in a particular historical context and reflected different understandings of the relationship between women, economic development, capitalism, and gender relations.

3.1.2.1 The WID Approach: Women as a Resource

The Women in Development approach emerged during the early 1970s. It was strongly influenced by the pioneering work of Danish economist Ester Boserup, particularly her 1970 study Woman's Role in Economic Development. Boserup produced one of the earliest systematic analyses of women's contributions to agriculture and economic production in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Boserup demonstrated that development programmes frequently failed to recognise women's productive contribution. In many agricultural societies, women performed a substantial proportion of agricultural labour. Yet modernisation programmes often directed agricultural technology, training, credit, and other productive resources primarily towards men. Women were therefore excluded from the benefits of development even when they were important contributors to agricultural production.

The WID approach proposed that women should be integrated into existing development programmes. Women should receive access to resources such as credit, education, technology, employment opportunities, and training on terms comparable to men. WID therefore challenged the assumption that women were merely dependants and emphasised their role as economic actors and contributors to development.

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An important feature of WID was its use of an efficiency argument. It suggested that women represented an underutilised economic resource and that development outcomes could be improved by integrating women into productive activities. This approach made WID relatively acceptable to mainstream development institutions because it could connect gender equality with economic efficiency.

However, WID was also subject to important criticisms. Critics argued that it treated women as a relatively homogeneous category and paid insufficient attention to differences of class, race, ethnicity, caste, location, and other social positions. More importantly, WID focused on integrating women into existing development structures rather than transforming the structures themselves. If those structures were patriarchal and unequal, simply adding women to them could leave underlying inequalities unchanged.

3.1.2.2 The WAD Approach: Women and Development

The Women and Development approach emerged during the 1970s and was influenced by dependency theory and socialist feminist thought. WAD criticised WID for being too optimistic about the possibilities of integrating women into existing capitalist development structures.

WAD argued that capitalist development did not merely fail to include women. It also depended upon and exploited women's labour. Women's productive and reproductive labour was essential to the functioning of economic systems. Reproductive work includes activities such as childbearing, child-rearing, household maintenance, and the reproduction of labour power. Much of this work was unpaid and performed by women.

WAD also drew attention to the international division of labour. Women in developing countries were often concentrated in low-paid and insecure sectors of global production. Export-oriented industries frequently relied on women's labour because employers could take advantage of existing gender norms and social expectations.

The WAD perspective therefore connected gender inequality with class relations and global capitalism. It argued that women's economic position could not be understood separately from broader structures of production and exploitation.

At the same time, WAD was criticised for giving greater analytical importance to class and capitalism than to gender relations themselves. In some formulations, gender inequality appeared to be treated largely as a consequence of capitalist exploitation. Later feminist scholarship argued that patriarchy and capitalism needed to be studied together, while also recognising that gender relations could not be reduced entirely to class relations.

3.1.2.3 The GAD Approach: Gender as a Social Relation

The Gender and Development approach emerged during the 1980s and became increasingly influential in international development policy during the 1990s. GAD represented a significant conceptual shift. Instead of focusing exclusively on women, it examined gender as a social relationship.

Gender refers to socially constructed roles, expectations, responsibilities, opportunities, and power relations associated with being identified as a woman, man, or another gendered subject within a particular society. Gender relations influence access to resources, authority, employment, education, property, political participation, and social security.

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The GAD approach therefore asks not simply, "How can women be included in development?" but also, "How are social and economic institutions organised through gender relations?" This makes GAD more concerned with transforming unequal structures.

The work of Caroline Moser was particularly influential in developing gender planning within development policy. In Gender Planning and Development, Moser distinguished between practical gender needs and strategic gender interests.

Practical gender needs refer to immediate needs that arise from women's existing social roles and material conditions. These may include access to clean water, healthcare, childcare, housing, sanitation, food, and income. Addressing these needs can improve women's living conditions.

Strategic gender interests concern longer-term changes in gender relations. These may include equal property rights, freedom from violence, greater political representation, economic autonomy, and changes in the division of labour within households and society.

The distinction is important because a development programme may improve women's immediate conditions without necessarily transforming gender inequalities. For example, providing women with access to clean water can reduce their workload, but changing inheritance laws or increasing women's control over property may more directly challenge structural inequality.

The movement from WID to WAD and GAD therefore represents a broader shift from the integration of women into development to the transformation of gender relations within development.

3.1.3 Feminist Economics: Challenging the Invisible Foundation

Feminist economics emerged as an important field of scholarship during the late twentieth century. The establishment of the International Association for Feminist Economics in 1992 and the launch of the journal Feminist Economics in 1995 contributed to the institutional development of the field.

Feminist economics does not simply add women to conventional economic models. It questions some of the assumptions on which mainstream economic analysis is based. One such assumption is the idea of the rational, self-interested economic individual, sometimes described through the concept of homo economicus.

Feminist economists argue that people do not make economic decisions in isolation. Their decisions are shaped by families, institutions, social expectations, power relations, and unequal access to resources. Economic activity also depends on forms of work that conventional economic models have historically undervalued, particularly care work and unpaid domestic labour.

Feminist economics therefore broadens the meaning of economic activity. It examines markets as well as households, paid employment as well as unpaid work, production as well as reproduction, and individual choices as well as institutional structures.

3.1.3.1 Marilyn Waring and the Critique of GDP

One of the influential critiques of conventional economic measurement was developed by New Zealand economist and politician Marilyn Waring. In her 1988 book *If Women Counted*, Waring examined the United Nations System of National Accounts

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and questioned what conventional economic statistics defined as productive activity.

Waring argued that national accounting systems systematically excluded many forms of unpaid labour. Domestic work, childcare, elder care, subsistence production, and voluntary community work can consume enormous amounts of time and contribute substantially to human well-being. Yet because these activities frequently occur outside formal markets, they are not always included in GDP calculations.

The critique has important implications. If an unpaid woman grows food for her household, prepares meals, collects water, cares for children, and supports elderly family members, much of this work may remain economically invisible. If the same services are purchased through the market, however, they become visible as monetary transactions.

Waring's work therefore encouraged scholars and policymakers to question whether GDP alone can provide a complete picture of economic welfare and development. It also contributed to greater attention to time-use surveys and the measurement of unpaid work.

3.1.3.2 Amartya Sen and the Capabilities Approach

Amartya Sen developed the capabilities approach as an alternative to narrow income-based understandings of development. In *Commodities and Capabilities*, Sen argued that development should be understood in terms of people's real freedoms and capabilities to lead lives they have reason to value.

Income is important, but it is not the only determinant of human well-being. Two people with similar incomes may have very different capabilities because of differences in health, education, social discrimination, family responsibilities, access to public services, and political freedom.

The capabilities approach is particularly useful for understanding gender inequality. Women may have access to income but still experience limited capabilities if they lack control over household resources, freedom of movement, education, healthcare, political voice, or protection from violence.

Sen's influential essay "More Than 100 Million Women Are Missing," published in 1990, drew attention to abnormal sex ratios in parts of South Asia, West Asia, and China. Sen linked these demographic patterns to systematic discrimination affecting nutrition, healthcare, and access to resources.

The idea of "missing women" highlighted the most extreme consequences of gender inequality. Gender discrimination can affect not only economic opportunities but also survival itself.

The capabilities approach consequently broadened development analysis from income and economic growth towards human freedom, agency, well-being, and substantive equality.

3.1.3.3 Nancy Folbre and the Care Economy

Nancy Folbre made an important contribution to feminist economics through her analysis of care work and the care economy. In *Who Pays for the Kids*?, Folbre examined the economic significance of caring for children and the relationship between care work, families, and economic institutions.

Care work is essential to the functioning of society. Children must be cared for and socialised before they become adult workers. Sick and elderly people require care. Workers need food, rest, emotional support, and household maintenance. In this sense, economic production depends upon social reproduction.

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However, the benefits of care are widely distributed while the costs are often concentrated on individuals and households. Women continue to perform a disproportionate share of unpaid care work in many societies.

Folbre described this as a structural free-rider problem. Society benefits from care, but the economic and social costs of providing that care may be borne disproportionately by those who perform it.

The concept of the care economy therefore challenges the traditional division between "productive" economic activity and supposedly non-economic household activity. It shows that care is an essential foundation of the wider economy.

3.1.4 Women and the Labour Market: Participation, Segregation, and the Pay Gap

Women's participation in paid employment is one of the major indicators used to examine their economic position. However, participation alone does not provide a complete picture. The nature of employment, wages, working conditions, occupational status, social security, working hours, and opportunities for advancement must also be considered.

3.1.4.1 Patterns of Female Labour Force Participation

Female labour force participation refers to the proportion of working-age women who are employed or actively seeking employment. Female labour force participation varies considerably across countries and regions.

According to the figures presented in the source material, global female labour force participation has remained substantially below male participation. The source notes that women's participation was approximately 47 percent compared with about 72 percent for men in 2023.

Regional differences are also significant. Female labour force participation tends to be relatively high in parts of sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia and the Pacific, while it is substantially lower in the Middle East and North Africa and South Asia.

India provides an important case for analysis. Women's participation in paid and recognised economic activity has historically been affected by several factors, including social norms, household responsibilities, limited employment opportunities, occupational segregation, safety concerns, and the availability of suitable work.

It is important to recognise that low female labour force participation does not necessarily mean that women are economically inactive. Women may perform extensive unpaid domestic, agricultural, family, and care work that is not captured by conventional labour force measures.

The relationship between economic development and female labour force participation is also complex. Economic growth can create employment opportunities for women, but it can also produce forms of work that are insecure, informal, poorly paid, or difficult to combine with family responsibilities.

3.1.4.2 Occupational Segregation

Women and men are not distributed equally across occupations. Gender-based occupational segregation refers to the concentration of women and men in different types of employment.

Horizontal segregation occurs when women and men are concentrated in different sectors or occupations. Women may be disproportionately represented in education, healthcare, domestic service,

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textile production, and other occupations that are often relatively low-paid.

Vertical segregation occurs when women are under-represented in senior positions within occupations or organisations. This is often associated with the concept of the "glass ceiling," which refers to invisible institutional and social barriers that restrict women's advancement into higher-level positions.

The concept of the feminisation of labour has also been used to describe the increasing concentration of women in low-paid, flexible, insecure, and informal employment. Guy Standing's work on flexible labour highlighted the relationship between global economic restructuring and insecure forms of employment.

The global garment industry is a frequently cited example. Women constitute a large proportion of garment workers in many developing economies, where employment may involve low wages and limited labour protections.

The Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh in 2013 brought international attention to the working conditions in global garment supply chains. More than 1,100 workers were killed, many of them women. The disaster illustrated how global production systems, labour regulation, gender norms, and workplace safety can intersect.

3.1.4.3 The Gender Pay Gap

The gender pay gap refers to the difference between the average earnings of men and women, usually expressed as a percentage of men's average earnings.

The gender pay gap can be influenced by several factors. These include differences in occupation, working hours, education, work experience, career interruptions, discrimination, bargaining power, and caring responsibilities.

Human capital theory, associated with economists such as Gary Becker, explains wage differences partly in terms of differences in education, skills, training, and labour market experience. However, the explanatory power of this argument is limited when women and men possess similar or comparable levels of education but continue to experience substantial differences in earnings.

Occupational segregation provides another explanation. If women are concentrated in lower-paid occupations, their average earnings will tend to be lower even where there is no direct wage discrimination within individual occupations.

Discrimination theory focuses more directly on unequal treatment. It examines situations in which women and men with comparable qualifications and work responsibilities receive different rewards.

The work of economist Claudia Goldin has provided another important perspective. Goldin has argued that a significant part of the remaining gender pay gap in high-income economies is connected with the economic rewards associated with long hours, continuous availability, and career continuity. These characteristics can disadvantage workers who have substantial caregiving responsibilities.

Such jobs can be described as "greedy jobs" because they provide disproportionately high economic rewards to workers who can offer long and inflexible hours. Because women continue to perform a disproportionate share of unpaid care work, they may be less able to benefit from such employment structures.

The gender pay gap therefore cannot always be understood simply as a question of unequal pay for identical work. It can also reflect the broader organisation of work, family responsibilities, and social reproduction.

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3.1.5 The Care Economy and Unpaid Work

One of the major contributions of feminist economics has been the recognition of the care economy. The care economy includes the wide range of activities necessary for sustaining human life and social reproduction.

Care work includes caring for children, older persons, sick people, and persons with disabilities. It also includes cooking, cleaning, collecting water and fuel, household maintenance, subsistence production, and voluntary community work.

Women perform a disproportionate share of unpaid care work in many societies. Time-use studies demonstrate significant differences in the amount of time women and men spend on unpaid household and care activities.

This unequal distribution has economic consequences. Time spent on unpaid care can reduce women's opportunities for paid employment, education, political participation, leisure, and skill development. It can also contribute to women's economic dependence and reduce their ability to accumulate independent income and assets.

The care economy also demonstrates the relationship between household and market economies. Paid economic production depends upon the reproduction of workers and communities. Therefore, unpaid care work is not separate from the economy; it is one of the foundations on which the wider economy operates.

3.1.5.1 The 3Rs Framework: Recognition, Reduction, and Redistribution

The 3Rs framework provides an important policy approach to unpaid care work. The three Rs are Recognition, Reduction, and Redistribution.

Recognition means acknowledging unpaid care work as economically and socially valuable. This may involve collecting time-use data, incorporating care work into policy analysis, and recognising the contribution of unpaid carers.

Reduction means reducing the amount of unnecessary and physically demanding unpaid work. Public investment in water supply, sanitation, electricity, transport, healthcare, childcare, and other infrastructure can reduce the time required for household tasks.

Redistribution means changing how care responsibilities are shared. Care can be redistributed between women and men, households and the state, and families and the market. Policies such as parental leave, public childcare, elder care services, social protection, and flexible working arrangements can support this redistribution.

The 3Rs approach therefore moves beyond simply recognising that women perform unpaid work. It asks how societies can transform the unequal distribution of care.

3.1.6 Structural Adjustment Programmes and Their Gender Impacts

Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) became widespread during the 1980s and 1990s, particularly in countries facing debt crises. International financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank attached structural reform conditions to many lending programmes.

SAPs commonly included policies such as trade liberalisation, financial liberalisation, privatisation of public enterprises, reduction in government expenditure, removal of subsidies, and currency devaluation.

Feminist economists and women's organisations were among the important

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critics of these programmes. Their central argument was that macroeconomic policies do not affect all members of society in the same way.

Cuts in public spending can have significant consequences for households. When public healthcare, education, food subsidies, water services, or other social services are reduced, families may have to compensate for the loss of public provision.

Women frequently absorb these costs through unpaid labour. They may spend more time caring for sick family members, preparing food, obtaining water, working for income, or supporting children when public services decline.

The DAWN network, or Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, founded in 1984, played an important role in feminist critiques of structural adjustment. Scholars such as Gita Sen and Caren Grown were associated with this tradition of analysis.

Their work drew attention to the unequal distribution of the social costs of economic crisis and adjustment. The central concern was that policies designed to restore macroeconomic stability could shift hidden costs from the state to households and, within households, disproportionately to women.

Isabella Bakker's concept of the privatisation of social reproduction further illustrates this process. When states withdraw from social provision, responsibilities that were previously supported through public services can be transferred to households. Within many households, women absorb these responsibilities through unpaid labour.

This perspective highlights an important principle of feminist political economy: macroeconomic policy is not gender-neutral.

3.1.7 Gender, Land Rights, and Asset Ownership

Access to land and other productive assets is an important source of economic power and security. In many rural societies, land provides income, food security, social status, housing, collateral for credit, and political influence.

Women's access to land has historically been more restricted than men's. Formal laws, customary practices, inheritance systems, family structures, and social norms can all affect women's property rights.

Women may work extensively in agriculture without having independent ownership or control over land. In some contexts, land is formally registered in the name of male household heads. Women may gain access to land through marriage but lose that access after divorce or widowhood.

Even where laws formally guarantee equal property rights, women may experience difficulties exercising those rights. Limited awareness of legal provisions, social pressure, patriarchal family structures, lack of legal assistance, and economic dependence can prevent women from claiming their formal entitlements.

The relationship between land rights and women's empowerment is therefore multidimensional. Secure land ownership can increase women's bargaining power within households, strengthen their economic independence, improve their access to formal credit, and provide greater security in situations such as marital breakdown or widowhood.

Studies from different regions have associated secure land rights for women with improved household welfare, greater investment in children's education, improved nutritional outcomes, and stronger bargaining power.

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The South Asian context is particularly significant because land and inheritance continue to be closely connected with family structure, caste, community, and customary practices. Strengthening women's land rights therefore requires not only legal reform but also institutional and social change.

3.1.8 Gender and Poverty: The Feminisation of Poverty

The concept of the "feminisation of poverty" was popularised by Diana Pearce in a 1978 article. The concept highlighted the argument that women are disproportionately represented among people experiencing poverty.

Women's poverty can be linked with several structural factors. Women may be concentrated in low-paid and informal employment, have fewer assets, receive lower wages, perform disproportionate unpaid care work, and face legal or social restrictions on economic participation.

However, the concept of feminisation of poverty requires careful measurement. Poverty statistics are often collected at the household level. Household-level data can hide inequalities within households because it does not necessarily show how income, food, healthcare, education, and other resources are distributed between individual members.

For example, a household may be classified as non-poor even though women within the household have little independent income or control over household resources.

Sylvia Chant has therefore argued for greater precision in analysing women's poverty. She distinguishes among the feminisation of poverty, the feminisation of responsibility, and the feminisation of deprivation.

The feminisation of responsibility refers to the increasing responsibility placed on women for maintaining household welfare. The feminisation of deprivation refers to the multiple forms of disadvantage that women may experience, including limited access to income, assets, services, time, and decision-making.

This perspective is important for policy. Anti-poverty programmes cannot focus only on household income. They must also consider women's control over resources, unpaid care responsibilities, property rights, employment opportunities, and access to social protection.

3.1.9 Gender-Responsive Budgeting

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is one of the important policy instruments developed through feminist economic analysis. GRB involves examining government budgets to identify how public revenue and expenditure affect women and men differently.

Gender-responsive budgeting does not mean preparing a completely separate budget for women. Rather, it means applying a gender perspective to the entire budgetary process.

For example, expenditure on public transport may appear gender-neutral, but its impact can differ between women and men depending on patterns of mobility, employment, safety, and caregiving responsibilities. Similarly, spending on healthcare, education, housing, sanitation, employment, and social protection may have different consequences for different groups.

The origins of gender-responsive budgeting are associated with initiatives in Australia during the 1980s. Feminist economists and policy scholars such as Rhonda Sharp and Debbie Budlender made important contributions to the development of gender-sensitive budget analysis.

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South Africa subsequently developed an influential gender-responsive budgeting initiative during the post-apartheid period.

India introduced a Gender Budget Statement as part of the Union Budget in 2005. Gender budgeting has subsequently become an important component of policy discussions concerning women's welfare and empowerment.

The effectiveness of gender-responsive budgeting depends on implementation. Merely identifying expenditure for women does not automatically produce gender equality. Effective GRB requires gender-sensitive policy analysis, reliable data, institutional capacity, monitoring, and accountability.

3.1.10 SDG 8, WEPs, and the International Policy Framework for Women's Economic Empowerment

International policy frameworks have increasingly recognised the relationship between gender equality and economic development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, placed gender equality and women's empowerment within the broader framework of sustainable development.

Sustainable Development Goal 5 focuses specifically on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Sustainable Development Goal 8 focuses on decent work and economic growth and is particularly relevant to women's economic participation.

SDG 8 calls for sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. Target 8.5 focuses on full and productive employment and decent work for women and men, including equal pay for work of equal value.

Target 8.8 concerns the protection of labour rights and the promotion of safe and secure working environments. This is especially significant for women working in vulnerable forms of employment, including domestic work, garment manufacturing, informal employment, and some forms of migrant labour.

Another important international framework is the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs). The WEPs are a joint initiative associated with UN Women and the United Nations Global Compact. They provide a voluntary framework through which businesses can promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace, and community.

The WEPs encourage organisations to promote principles such as gender equality in corporate leadership, equal opportunity, non-discrimination, health and safety, education and training, and supply-chain responsibility.

Voluntary corporate commitments, however, cannot replace binding legal standards and effective labour regulation. Their significance lies partly in encouraging organisations to recognise gender equality as a component of corporate governance and responsible business practice.

The international policy framework therefore combines several approaches: legal equality, labour standards, social protection, corporate responsibility, decent work, gender-responsive budgeting, and broader development goals.

3.1.11 Concluding Observation

Gender is not an external or secondary dimension of economic development. Economic institutions, labour markets, households, public policies, and development

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strategies are all shaped by gender relations. The historical exclusion of women's unpaid work from conventional economic measurement demonstrates how definitions of economic value can themselves reflect social power relations. Feminist approaches have therefore expanded the meaning of economic development by drawing attention to care work, social reproduction, unequal access to resources, labour-market discrimination, property rights, and women's economic agency.

The movement from WID to WAD and GAD reflects an important evolution in development thinking. While WID emphasised women's integration into development, WAD connected women's position with capitalism and global structures, and GAD shifted attention towards gender relations and structural transformation. Feminist economists such as Ester Boserup, Marilyn Waring, Amartya Sen, and Nancy Folbre further broadened the understanding of development by questioning conventional measures of economic value, highlighting capabilities, and recognising the economic importance of unpaid care. Contemporary policy frameworks such as gender-responsive budgeting, SDG 8, and the Women's Empowerment Principles demonstrate continuing efforts to translate these insights into institutional practice.

Recap

- Gender relations are deeply connected with economic institutions and development processes.
- Conventional economic measurement has historically undervalued or excluded large amounts of women's unpaid work.
- The WID approach focused on integrating women into existing development programmes.
- The WAD approach connected women's position with capitalism, class, and the international division of labour.
- The GAD approach shifted attention from women alone to gender relations and structural inequalities.
- Feminist economics challenges the assumption that markets are the only important site of economic value.
- Marilyn Waring highlighted the exclusion of unpaid work from conventional national accounting systems.
- Amartya Sen's capabilities approach shifted attention from income alone to substantive freedoms and human capabilities.
- Nancy Folbre highlighted the importance of care work and the unequal distribution of the costs of social reproduction.

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- Women experience inequalities in labour force participation, occupational distribution, wages, and access to leadership positions.
- Structural adjustment and other macroeconomic policies can have gendered consequences because reductions in public services may increase women's unpaid care responsibilities.
- Gender-responsive budgeting, SDG 8, and the Women's Empowerment Principles provide important contemporary frameworks for addressing women's economic inequality.

Objective Questions

1. What does WID stand for?
2. Who wrote Woman's Role in Economic Development?
3. What is the central focus of the GAD approach?
4. What is feminist economics?
5. What is meant by the gender pay gap?
6. What is occupational segregation?
7. What is meant by the "glass ceiling"?
8. What is the care economy?
9. What are the three Rs of unpaid care work?
10. What are Structural Adjustment Programmes?
11. Why are women's land rights important for economic empowerment?
12. Who popularised the concept of the "feminisation of poverty"?
13. What is gender-responsive budgeting?
14. Which Sustainable Development Goal focuses on decent work and economic growth?
15. What are the Women's Empowerment Principles?

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Answers

1. WID stands for Women in Development
2. Ester Boserup wrote Woman's Role in Economic Development
3. The GAD approach focuses on gender relations and the structural inequalities that shape the opportunities and responsibilities of women and men.
4. Feminist economics is an approach to economics that examines gender relations and challenges conventional assumptions about markets, labour, households, care, and economic value.
5. The gender pay gap is the difference between the average earnings of women and men.
6. Occupational segregation refers to the concentration of women and men in different occupations or sectors of employment.
7. The glass ceiling refers to invisible social and institutional barriers that restrict women's advancement to higher-level positions.
8. The care economy refers to the paid and unpaid activities involved in caring for people and sustaining social reproduction.
9. The three Rs are Recognition, Reduction, and Redistribution.
10. Structural Adjustment Programmes are packages of macroeconomic reforms involving measures such as liberalisation, privatisation, reduction of public expenditure, and removal of subsidies, often associated with international financial assistance.
11. Women's land rights can strengthen economic security, bargaining power, access to credit, and control over productive resources.
12. Diana Pearce popularised the concept of the "feminisation of poverty."
13. Gender-responsive budgeting is the analysis of government budgets from a gender perspective to identify and address their different impacts on women and men.
14. Sustainable Development Goal 8 focuses on decent work and economic growth.
15. The Women's Empowerment Principles are a voluntary framework associated with UN Women and the United Nations Global Compact for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in business and the workplace.

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Assignments

1. Explain the relationship between gender inequality and economic development.
2. Discuss the major differences between WID, WAD, and GAD approaches.
3. Examine the major contributions of feminist economics to the study of economic development.
4. Analyse the causes and consequences of the gender pay gap.
5. Discuss the importance of unpaid care work and the care economy from a feminist perspective.
6. Critically examine the gendered consequences of Structural Adjustment Programmes.
7. Explain the significance of women's land and property rights for economic empowerment.
8. Discuss the concept of the feminisation of poverty and its major criticisms.
9. Explain the concept and significance of gender-responsive budgeting.

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UNIT 2

Gender and Human Development

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the concept of human development and distinguish it from purely economic measures of development such as GDP per capita
- describe the construction, components, and limitations of the Human Development Index (HDI) and its gender-sensitive variants
- analyse the Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Inequality Index (GII) as tools for measuring gender gaps in human development
- critically assess the relationship between gender equality and human development outcomes such as child mortality, economic growth, and democratic governance
- apply Amartya Sen's and Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach to the analysis of gender and human development

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Prerequisite

Imagine two countries with almost identical levels of GDP per capita. In one country, women have high literacy, access to healthcare, control over reproductive decisions, opportunities for paid employment, and significant participation in political institutions. In the other, women have limited mobility, poor access to healthcare, high levels of unpaid care work, restricted political participation, and little control over household resources.

If we measure only GDP, the two countries may appear almost identical. But if we ask what women in each country are actually able to do and be, the differences become much clearer.

This is the central thread running through the unit: development is not simply about how much a society produces; it is also about the freedoms, capabilities,

opportunities, and dignity available to the people who live in that society. A gender-sensitive understanding of development therefore asks not only whether a society is becoming richer, but also whether women and men are gaining genuinely equal opportunities to live healthy, secure, autonomous, and meaningful lives.

Keywords

Human Development Index (HDI), Gender Development Index (GDI), Gender Inequality Index (GII), capabilities approach, UNDP, health and nutrition, maternal mortality, social reproduction, political participation

Discussion

3.2.1 Introduction

Human development is a concept that fundamentally reoriented the way scholars, policymakers, and international organisations think about development. For most of the twentieth century, development was largely equated with economic growth, particularly the expansion of a country's output as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Gross National Product (GNP) per capita. Countries that achieved high rates of economic growth were generally considered to be developing successfully, while countries that failed to achieve sustained economic growth were regarded as underdeveloped. Human welfare, social equity, and the quality of people's lives were often assumed to follow automatically from economic growth.

The human development paradigm, pioneered by Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq and Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen, and advanced through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s annual Human Development Reports beginning in 1990, challenged this assumption at its foundation. Development, in this framework, is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a process of expanding the freedoms and capabilities of human beings. The central question is therefore not simply, "How much has the economy grown?" but also, "What are people actually able to do and be?"

The gender dimensions of human development are both profound and pervasive. Across virtually all societies, women and girls have experienced systematic disadvantages in access to education, healthcare, nutrition, economic opportunities, and political voice. These disadvantages are not simply reflections of economic poverty. They are also rooted in gender-based discrimination, patriarchal social norms, unequal power relations within households, discriminatory institutions, and unequal access to resources and decision-making.

A gender-sensitive understanding of human development therefore requires attention to both material resources and social relations. Two societies may have similar levels of national income but produce very different outcomes for women depending on the distribution of resources, access to public services, social norms, legal protections, and political participation. Similarly, economic growth may coexist with serious gender

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inequalities in health, education, employment, bodily autonomy, or political representation.

This unit begins by introducing the concept of human development and its foundational intellectual frameworks, particularly the capabilities approach associated with Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. It then examines international measurement tools developed to capture gender dimensions of human development, including the Human Development Index (HDI), Gender Development Index (GDI), and Gender Inequality Index (GII). Subsequent sections examine specific domains of gender and human development, including education, health and nutrition, maternal mortality, the "missing women" problem, social reproduction, and political participation. The unit concludes with an analysis of India's human development performance through a gender lens, including the Kerala model and its limitations, and considers alternative frameworks for measuring gender and human development.

3.2.2 The Human Development Paradigm: Core Concepts and Origins

The human development paradigm was formally launched with the publication of the first UNDP Human Development Report in 1990. The report was closely associated with the intellectual leadership of Mahbub ul Haq and the contribution of Amartya Sen. Its famous statement that "people are the real wealth of a nation" represented a major conceptual shift in development thinking.

The human development perspective challenged approaches that treated economic growth as the primary objective of development. Economic growth is important because income and resources provide people with opportunities. However, income alone does not tell us whether people are healthy, educated, secure, politically empowered, or able to live lives that they have reason to value.

The human development approach therefore places people at the centre of development. It considers health, education, knowledge, living standards, political participation, security, equality, and freedom as important dimensions of human well-being. Economic resources remain significant, but they are understood as means through which people can expand their capabilities.

This approach also draws attention to inequalities within societies. National averages may conceal significant differences between social groups. A country may have a high average income but still have large inequalities between women and men, between urban and rural populations, or between different social and ethnic groups. Human development analysis therefore requires attention to distribution as well as aggregate achievement.

From a feminist perspective, this shift is particularly important because traditional economic measures frequently underestimate women's contributions and overlook forms of disadvantage that occur within households. Unpaid care work, domestic labour, reproductive responsibilities, unequal access to food, and restrictions on mobility may have major effects on women's capabilities without appearing directly in conventional economic statistics.

3.2.2.1 The Human Development Index (HDI)

The Human Development Index (HDI) is one of the most widely used composite measures of human development. It was developed under the intellectual leadership of Mahbub ul Haq, with the contribution of Amartya Sen and other development scholars, as an alternative to development measures based primarily on national income.

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The HDI combines three broad dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. These dimensions are represented through indicators relating to life expectancy, education, and income. The index therefore attempts to provide a broader picture of development than GDP per capita alone.

The HDI was deliberately designed to be relatively simple. Mahbub ul Haq wanted an indicator that could communicate the idea of human development as effectively as GDP communicated economic performance. The simplicity of the HDI contributed significantly to its international visibility. Country comparisons and rankings based on the HDI became an important part of international development discussions.

However, the original HDI had an important limitation from a gender perspective. It was largely gender-blind. It measured average achievements within a country without showing how these achievements were distributed between women and men. A country could therefore have a relatively high HDI while simultaneously experiencing substantial gender inequality.

For example, a country may have high average educational attainment while women remain disadvantaged in access to particular fields of study or employment. Similarly, high average life expectancy may conceal significant differences in health outcomes between women and men. Average income can also hide large differences in economic resources and employment opportunities.

The limitations of the original HDI contributed to the development of gender-sensitive measures. These measures attempt to identify whether improvements in human development are distributed equally across gender groups and whether women experience disadvantages that national averages conceal.

3.2.3 The Capabilities Approach: Sen and Nussbaum

The capabilities approach, developed by Amartya Sen and later significantly extended by philosopher Martha Nussbaum, provides an important philosophical foundation for the human development paradigm. It has also become highly influential in gender and development scholarship.

The central argument of the capabilities approach is that the appropriate basis for evaluating human well-being and development should not be limited to income, utility, or the possession of resources. Instead, attention should be given to what people are actually able to do and be. These real opportunities are referred to as capabilities.

The approach distinguishes between resources, capabilities, and functionings. Resources are the goods and services available to individuals. Capabilities refer to the genuine opportunities people have to use resources in ways that enable them to live the lives they value. Functionings refer to the actual states of being and doing that people achieve.

This distinction is particularly useful for understanding gender inequality. Two women may possess similar formal rights or resources but have very different capabilities because of differences in social norms, household power, mobility, safety, or access to institutions.

3.2.3.1 Sen's Capabilities Framework

Amartya Sen distinguishes between functionings and capabilities. Functionings are the various states of being and doing that a person can achieve. These may include being well-nourished, being educated, being healthy, participating in community life, working, or taking part in political activities.

Capabilities, by contrast, refer to the real freedoms or opportunities that a person has

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to achieve these functionings if they choose to do so.

The distinction can be illustrated through the example of fasting. A person who voluntarily chooses to fast and a person who is unable to obtain food may both experience the functioning of not eating. However, their capabilities are very different. The first person has the capability to be well-nourished but chooses not to exercise it temporarily. The second person lacks the genuine opportunity to obtain adequate food.

This distinction is particularly important in gender analysis. A woman may legally have the right to own land, for example, but social norms may prevent her from controlling, selling, renting, or using that land as collateral. She therefore possesses a formal resource or legal entitlement but may lack the effective capability to use it.

The capabilities approach also directs attention to the social and institutional conditions under which resources are converted into achievements. Poverty is therefore not the only source of disadvantage. Patriarchal institutions, discriminatory laws, social norms, violence, unequal household bargaining power, and restrictions on mobility can all reduce women's capabilities.

The capabilities approach also provides a strong normative basis for understanding gender discrimination as a development problem. Gender inequality is not simply an issue of economic inefficiency. It involves restrictions on women's freedom and opportunities to live lives that they have reason to value.

3.2.3.2 Nussbaum's List of Central Capabilities

Martha Nussbaum extended the capabilities approach in a direction that has been particularly influential in gender and human development analysis. While Sen deliberately avoided specifying a fixed list of capabilities that every society must recognise, Nussbaum proposed a list of central human capabilities that she considers fundamental to a life worthy of human dignity.

Nussbaum argues that societies should ensure that all people have access to a minimum threshold of these central capabilities. Her framework is particularly significant for feminist analysis because several of the capabilities directly address women's health, bodily integrity, emotional development, political participation, and control over material resources.

Nussbaum identifies ten central capabilities:

- **Life** — Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length and not having one's life reduced prematurely to a condition in which it is no longer worth living.
- **Bodily Health** — Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; being adequately nourished; and having adequate shelter.
- **Bodily Integrity** — Being able to move freely from place to place; being secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; and having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and choice in matters of reproduction.
- **Senses, Imagination, and Thought** — Being able to use the senses, imagine, think, and reason in a genuinely human way, supported by adequate education.
- **Emotions** — Being able to form attachments to people and things outside oneself and to experience emotional development without being overwhelmed by fear, anxiety, or traumatic abuse and neglect.
- **Practical Reason** — Being able to form a conception of the good and

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engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's own life.

- **Affiliation** — Being able to live with and towards others and having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation.
- **Other Species** — Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the natural world.
- **Play** — Being able to laugh, play, and enjoy recreational activities.
- **Control over One's Political and Material Environment** — Being able to participate effectively in political choices, hold property, seek employment, and work under conditions of mutual recognition and respect.

Nussbaum's framework demonstrates that human development cannot be reduced to income or economic production. Bodily autonomy, freedom from violence, education, political participation, emotional well-being, and control over material resources are all important components of a dignified human life.

For feminist analysis, the concepts of bodily integrity and control over one's political and material environment are particularly important. They draw attention to forms of inequality that conventional economic indicators often fail to capture.

3.2.4 Measuring Gender in Human Development: GDI and GII

The recognition that the HDI did not adequately capture gender inequalities encouraged the development of additional measures. The UNDP introduced the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) in 1995. These measures represented important attempts to make gender inequalities more visible within international development measurement.

The measurement framework was subsequently revised. In 2010, the UNDP introduced the redesigned Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Inequality Index (GII). These measures provide different perspectives on gender and human development.

The GDI focuses on gender gaps in human development achievements, while the GII focuses on gender inequalities in reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market participation.

3.2.4.1 The Gender Development Index (GDI)

The Gender Development Index (GDI), in its redesigned form, measures gender gaps in human development achievements across the three dimensions represented in the HDI: health, education, and income.

The GDI is calculated by comparing female and male achievements in these dimensions. The ratio of female HDI to male HDI is used to express the gender gap.

A GDI value close to 1 indicates relatively high gender equality in human development achievements. Values below 1 indicate that women's achievements are lower than men's in the dimensions included in the measure.

The importance of the GDI lies in its ability to reveal gender gaps that an overall HDI can conceal. A country may have a high overall HDI while women continue to experience disadvantages in education, income, or health.

The GDI therefore encourages researchers and policymakers to move beyond national averages and examine how human

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development achievements are distributed between women and men.

At the same time, the GDI has limitations. Like the HDI, it captures only selected dimensions of human development. It does not directly measure gender-based violence, unpaid care work, political power, bodily autonomy, or many other dimensions of gender inequality.

3.2.4.2 The Gender Inequality Index (GII)

The Gender Inequality Index (GII), introduced by the UNDP in 2010, measures gender-based disadvantage across three broad dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market participation.

The reproductive health dimension includes indicators related to maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates. The empowerment dimension focuses on women's and men's representation in parliamentary institutions and educational attainment. The labour market dimension examines participation in the labour force.

The GII provides a summary measure of gender inequality. Lower values indicate lower levels of measured gender inequality, while higher values indicate greater disadvantage.

The GII has nevertheless been criticised on methodological grounds. The choice of indicators is partly influenced by the availability of internationally comparable data. Parliamentary representation, for example, captures one aspect of political empowerment but cannot represent the full range of political participation or agency.

Similarly, maternal mortality captures an extremely serious reproductive health outcome but does not capture the full range of reproductive rights, access to healthcare, bodily autonomy, or experiences of reproductive coercion.

Despite these limitations, the GII remains an important international indicator. It provides a basis for cross-national comparison and encourages governments and international organisations to monitor gender inequalities in health, empowerment, and economic participation.

3.2.5 Gender and Education as Human Development

Education is central to the human development paradigm. Access to quality education expands individual capabilities by strengthening the ability to think critically, participate in political and social life, obtain employment, make informed decisions about health and reproduction, and exercise greater autonomy.

The gender gap in education refers to systematic inequalities in educational access, participation, attainment, quality, and outcomes between girls and boys or women and men.

Education is not simply an instrument for employment. It can transform social relationships and expand individual agency. For women and girls, access to education can affect marriage age, fertility decisions, health practices, political participation, economic opportunities, and bargaining power within households.

3.2.5.1 Historical Patterns and Contemporary Progress

Over the past half-century, the global gender gap in basic education has narrowed substantially. In many regions, girls have achieved near-parity with boys in primary education enrolment. In several middle-income and high-income countries, girls have also surpassed boys in secondary and tertiary education enrolment.

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However, global averages conceal considerable variation. Gender gaps remain significant in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, conflict-affected regions, and marginalised rural communities.

Educational inequality is also more complex than enrolment alone. A country may achieve gender parity in school attendance while continuing to experience gender gaps in learning outcomes, subject choice, access to technology, higher education, and the transition from education to employment.

For example, women may be concentrated in fields that are socially associated with care and education, while men may be overrepresented in engineering, technology, and some scientific and technical disciplines. These patterns can subsequently contribute to occupational segregation and wage inequality.

3.2.5.2 Why Girls' Education Matters for Human Development

The development literature has identified several pathways through which girls' education contributes to human development.

- **Demographic transition:** More educated women tend to have greater access to information and reproductive choices. Education is often associated with later marriage, lower fertility, and greater investment in children's health and education.
- **Child health:** Maternal education is strongly associated with improved child health outcomes. Educated mothers are generally more likely to have access to health information, use healthcare services, and adopt preventive health practices.
- **Economic participation:** Education can expand women's employment opportunities and improve their access to higher-paying occupations. Women's economic participation can strengthen household incomes and contribute to broader economic development.
- **Political participation:** Education is associated with greater political awareness and participation. Educated women may be more likely to participate in elections, community organisations, civil society, and public decision-making.
- **Empowerment:** Education can strengthen women's bargaining power within households and increase their ability to make decisions concerning marriage, employment, health, reproduction, and children's education.

However, education alone cannot eliminate gender inequality. Its benefits depend on the wider social, economic, and institutional environment. When labour markets remain discriminatory or social norms restrict women's mobility and employment, educational achievements may not translate fully into economic and political empowerment.

3.2.6 Gender, Health, and Nutrition as Human Development

Health is one of the central dimensions of human development and a fundamental capability in Martha Nussbaum's framework. Gender shapes health outcomes in complex ways.

Biological differences between male and female bodies influence patterns of disease, mortality, and reproductive health. However, many gender differences in health are socially produced. Gender roles, social norms, household power relations, income inequalities, access to healthcare, and unequal

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distribution of food can all shape health outcomes.

Women may experience barriers to healthcare because of restrictions on mobility, lack of financial resources, limited decision-making power, domestic responsibilities, or social expectations. Reproductive health is particularly important because pregnancy and childbirth create specific health needs that require accessible and quality healthcare services.

3.2.6.1 The Missing Women Problem Revisited

Amartya Sen's concept of "missing women", introduced in a widely discussed 1990 essay and developed further in his subsequent work, remains one of the most influential demonstrations of how gender discrimination can produce measurable demographic consequences.

Sen observed that in societies characterised by strong son preference and gender discrimination, the number of women in the population was lower than would be expected from natural demographic patterns.

The concept of missing women refers to women who are absent from the population because of premature mortality associated with gender discrimination. Such discrimination may occur through unequal nutrition, inadequate healthcare, neglect during illness, differential treatment of children, sex-selective abortion, or other forms of gender-based disadvantage.

Sen's original estimates suggested that more than 100 million women were missing globally. Subsequent researchers have revised the estimates and examined the relative contributions of sex-selective abortion, differential infant and child mortality, and adult mortality.

The missing women debate demonstrates that gender inequality is not simply a question of social attitudes. It can have direct demographic consequences and can determine who survives and who does not.

3.2.6.2 Son Preference, Sex-Selective Abortion, and the Child Sex Ratio

Son preference refers to the systematic preference for male children over female children. It has been particularly significant in parts of South and East Asia.

Son preference can operate through several mechanisms. Families may provide boys with better nutrition, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. Girls may receive less food or medical attention. In contexts where prenatal sex determination is available, technological developments may also facilitate sex-selective abortion.

India has attempted to address sex selection through legislation. The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PC-PNDT) Act, enacted in 1994 and strengthened in 2003, prohibits the misuse of prenatal diagnostic techniques for determining the sex of a foetus.

However, legislation alone cannot eliminate the social roots of son preference. Gender inequality in inheritance, marriage practices, dowry, family expectations, and perceptions of sons as economic and social security can sustain preferences for male children.

The child sex ratio has therefore been an important indicator of gender inequality in India. The Census recorded a decline in the child sex ratio between 1991 and 2011, followed by changes in subsequent survey estimates. Such patterns demonstrate the continuing importance of monitoring gender discrimination from birth and even before birth.

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3.2.6.3 Maternal Mortality: A Measure of Gender and Development

Maternal mortality refers to the death of a woman during pregnancy, childbirth, or within a specified period after the end of pregnancy from causes related to or aggravated by pregnancy.

Maternal mortality is one of the clearest indicators of gender and human development because most maternal deaths are preventable through adequate healthcare, nutrition, skilled birth attendance, emergency obstetric services, and timely access to medical treatment.

Persistent maternal mortality therefore reflects not only medical conditions but also the availability and quality of health systems. It can also reflect women's lack of autonomy, unequal access to household resources, early marriage, poor nutrition, and limited access to reproductive healthcare.

Globally, maternal mortality has declined substantially since 1990, although progress has been uneven. The Sustainable Development Goal 3.1 seeks to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to below 70 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030.

India has also experienced a substantial decline in maternal mortality. However, considerable variation exists between states. Kerala has recorded very low maternal mortality in comparison with several other Indian states.

The contrast between states demonstrates the importance of public health infrastructure, women's education, institutional delivery, antenatal care, nutrition, and social development. Maternal mortality is therefore not simply a medical indicator; it is also an indicator of social and gender development.

3.2.6.4 Nutrition and Gender

Nutrition is a foundation of human development. Adequate nutrition is essential for cognitive development, physical growth, resistance to disease, reproductive health, and productive capacity.

Gender inequality can influence nutritional outcomes in multiple ways. In households experiencing food insecurity, women and girls may be expected to eat after other family members or may receive smaller portions. Such practices can affect women's health throughout the life cycle.

Women's nutritional status is particularly important because maternal nutrition influences pregnancy outcomes and the health of children. Poor nutrition can therefore create an intergenerational cycle of disadvantage.

India presents a significant nutritional paradox. Economic growth and reductions in income poverty have occurred alongside persistent problems of undernutrition and anaemia among women and children.

The National Family Health Survey provides evidence of continued nutritional challenges among Indian women and children. These problems reflect the interaction of poverty, gender discrimination, inadequate public health infrastructure, sanitation challenges, and unequal access to food and healthcare.

3.2.7 Social Reproduction and Gender

Social reproduction refers to the processes through which societies reproduce themselves across generations. It includes not only biological reproduction but also childcare, elderly care, household maintenance, socialisation, education, the transmission of cultural values, and the daily and generational reproduction of labour power.

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Social reproduction is fundamental to the functioning of any society. Children must be cared for and socialised, older people may require care, households must be maintained, and workers must be able to recover and reproduce their capacity to work.

Yet much of this work is unpaid or poorly paid and remains largely invisible in conventional economic measures. Women continue to perform a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and care work in many societies.

The concept of social reproduction has been developed extensively by Marxist and socialist feminist scholars, including Lise Vogel, Silvia Federici, and Tithi Bhattacharya. Their work draws attention to the relationship between household labour, care work, capitalism, and gender inequality.

Tithi Bhattacharya's Social Reproduction Theory argues that "life-making" activities are central to the functioning of capitalist societies. Labour power used in production is itself reproduced through processes that occur within households and communities.

From a gender perspective, this means that economic development cannot be fully understood by examining paid employment alone. Unpaid care work enables paid economic activity to continue. When care services are reduced through austerity or when families experience economic crisis, women frequently absorb additional unpaid work.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a particularly clear illustration of this problem. School closures, disruptions in healthcare, restrictions on mobility, and increased household care requirements placed additional burdens on women in many societies.

The study of social reproduction therefore broadens human development analysis by asking not only whether people have income or employment, but also who performs the work necessary to sustain households and communities.

3.2.8 Gender and Political Participation as Human Development

Political participation is an important dimension of human development in both Sen's and Nussbaum's frameworks. The ability to participate in the governance of one's society includes voting, standing for election, engaging in public discussion, joining political organisations, participating in civil society, and holding public officials accountable.

Gender inequality in political participation is therefore both a manifestation of gender inequality and a limitation on human development.

Women's political participation can also influence policy priorities. Research on political decentralisation in India has shown that women's participation in local government can influence attention to public services and community concerns.

The reservation of seats for women in local government institutions in India has created important opportunities for women's political participation. Panchayati Raj institutions have provided many women with direct experience of electoral politics and public decision-making.

However, numerical representation does not automatically produce substantive equality. Women representatives may face social resistance, limited access to resources, political interference, or expectations that male relatives will exercise authority on their behalf.

The distinction between descriptive and substantive representation is therefore

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important. Descriptive representation concerns the presence of women in political institutions. Substantive representation concerns whether women's participation contributes to the articulation and advancement of issues affecting women and other marginalised groups.

Political participation should consequently be understood as both an outcome of human development and a means through which further development can occur.

3.2.9 Beyond the HDI: Alternative Frameworks for Gender and Human Development

The HDI and its gender-sensitive variants have had a major influence on development research and policy. However, feminist scholars have pointed out that no single index can capture the complexity of human well-being and gender equality.

Indicators necessarily select particular dimensions of human life for measurement. What is not measured can easily become less visible in policy discussions. Consequently, gender-sensitive human development requires supplementary frameworks capable of capturing dimensions such as unpaid care work, violence, time poverty, bodily autonomy, and political agency.

3.2.9.1 The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) and Gender

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), associated with Sabina Alkire and James Foster and developed through work at the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), measures poverty across multiple dimensions rather than income alone.

The MPI considers different forms of deprivation relating to health, education, and living standards. Its major contribution is the recognition that poverty can involve several simultaneous disadvantages.

However, a major concern from a feminist perspective is that household-level measurements may hide inequalities within households. A household may be classified as non-poor even though a woman or girl within that household experiences serious deprivation.

For this reason, feminist researchers have called for greater use of individual-level and gender-disaggregated measures. Such approaches can examine differences between women and men in nutrition, education, employment, access to resources, and freedom from violence.

The gender-sensitive measurement of poverty is therefore important because poverty is not experienced uniformly by all members of a household.

3.2.9.2 Well-being Frameworks and Gender

The broader "beyond GDP" movement has questioned the use of economic output as the primary indicator of social progress. Scholars such as Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi have contributed to debates on the measurement of economic performance and social progress.

Alternative well-being frameworks include the OECD's Better Life approaches, national well-being measurement systems, and Bhutan's Gross National Happiness framework.

Feminist economists have contributed to this broader debate by arguing that gender equality should be treated as a central component of well-being rather than as an additional or supplementary concern.

Important dimensions include freedom from gender-based violence, unpaid care

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work, time use, bodily integrity, reproductive autonomy, political participation, and access to economic resources.

The principle that "what you measure is what you manage" is particularly significant in this context. Measurement frameworks influence what governments identify as problems and what they consider policy priorities.

A gender-sensitive approach to human development therefore requires both quantitative indicators and qualitative understanding. Numbers can reveal patterns of inequality, but understanding the causes of those patterns requires attention to institutions, social norms, power relations, and lived experiences.

3.2.10 Concluding Observation

Human development represents a major shift from an understanding of development based primarily on economic growth towards an approach centred on human well-being, freedom, and capability. The work of Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen established an influential framework for understanding development in terms of what people are able to do and be. Martha Nussbaum further developed the capabilities approach by identifying central human capabilities related to life, health, bodily integrity, education, affiliation, political participation, and control over one's material environment. These perspectives are especially important for gender analysis because they reveal how formal equality can coexist with substantial differences in actual capabilities.

The gender dimensions of human development extend across education, health, nutrition, social reproduction, employment, and political participation. Measures such as the GDI and GII have made gender inequalities more visible, but they cannot capture every aspect of women's lives. The experiences of India and Kerala demonstrate both the importance of public investment in education and health and the persistence of inequalities in employment, care work, political power, and freedom from violence. A comprehensive understanding of gender and human development therefore requires moving beyond aggregate economic indicators and examining the distribution of capabilities, resources, opportunities, and power within societies.

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Recap

- Human development shifted development thinking away from a narrow emphasis on economic growth towards human well-being and capabilities.
- Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen played central roles in developing the human development paradigm.
- The HDI measures selected dimensions of human development, including health, education, and standard of living.
- The original HDI was limited because it focused on average achievements and did not adequately reveal gender inequalities.
- Sen's capabilities approach distinguishes between functionings and capabilities.

- Martha Nussbaum developed a list of central capabilities that includes health, bodily integrity, education, political participation, and control over one's environment.
- The GDI examines gender differences in human development achievements.
- The GII measures gender inequality through reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market participation.
- Education contributes to women's capabilities, economic opportunities, health, political participation, and empowerment.
- Gender discrimination in health and nutrition can produce severe consequences, including maternal mortality and the problem of missing women.
- Social reproduction highlights the importance of unpaid care and domestic work in sustaining households, communities, and economies.

Objective Questions

1. Who is widely associated with the development of the Human Development Index along with Amartya Sen?
2. What does HDI stand for?
3. What is meant by human development?
4. What is the difference between a functioning and a capability in Amartya Sen's approach?
5. Who developed the list of ten central human capabilities?
6. What does the Gender Development Index measure?
7. What are the three broad dimensions measured by the Gender Inequality Index?
8. What is meant by the concept of "missing women"?
9. What is son preference?
10. What is maternal mortality?
11. What is meant by social reproduction?
12. Name any two scholars associated with Social Reproduction Theory.
13. What is meant by political participation as a human capability?
14. Why do feminist scholars argue that conventional human development indicators are insufficient for measuring gender equality?

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Answers

1. Mahbub ul Haq is widely associated with the development of the Human Development Index, together with the intellectual contribution of Amartya Sen.
2. HDI stands for Human Development Index
3. Human development refers to the expansion of people's opportunities, freedoms, capabilities, and well-being.
4. A functioning is an achieved state of being or doing, while a capability is the real freedom or opportunity to achieve different functionings.
5. Martha Nussbaum developed the influential list of ten central human capabilities.
6. The Gender Development Index measures gender gaps in human development achievements, particularly in health, education, and income.
7. The Gender Inequality Index measures gender-based disadvantage in reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market participation.
8. "Missing women" refers to women who are absent from populations because of premature mortality associated with gender discrimination and related practices.
9. Son preference refers to the systematic preference for male children over female children.
10. Maternal mortality refers to the death of a woman during pregnancy, childbirth, or within the specified post-pregnancy period from causes related to or aggravated by pregnancy.
11. Social reproduction refers to the processes through which societies reproduce themselves, including childcare, household maintenance, care work, socialisation, and the reproduction of labour power.
12. Lise Vogel, Silvia Federici, and Tithi Bhattacharya are among the scholars associated with Social Reproduction Theory.
13. Political participation as a human capability refers to people's ability to participate meaningfully in political decision-making and public life.
14. Feminist scholars argue that conventional indicators may overlook intra-household inequality, unpaid care work, gender-based violence, bodily autonomy, political agency, and other dimensions of women's lived experiences.

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Assignments

1. Explain the meaning and significance of the human development paradigm.
2. Discuss the major features of Amartya Sen's capabilities approach and its relevance to gender analysis.
3. Examine Martha Nussbaum's central capabilities and explain their significance for women's human development.
4. Explain the Gender Development Index and Gender Inequality Index. Discuss their importance and limitations.
5. Analyse the relationship between women's education and human development.
6. Discuss the concept of "missing women" and explain its relationship with son preference and gender discrimination.
7. Examine maternal mortality and nutrition as indicators of gender inequality in human development.
8. Explain the concept of social reproduction and discuss its significance for feminist development analysis.
9. Discuss women's political participation as a dimension of human development.

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UNIT 3

Women's Empowerment and Global Governance

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- define women's empowerment as a multidimensional concept encompassing economic, social, political, and psychological dimensions
- trace the history and evolution of the global governance architecture for women's rights, from the early United Nations conventions to the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals
- critically evaluate key international instruments for women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325
- analyse the role of UN Women, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and other multilateral institutions in advancing gender equality through global governance

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Prerequisite

Imagine that an international organisation adopts a global commitment stating that women should have equal political rights. Another international agreement calls for the elimination of discrimination against women. A global development agenda establishes a target for gender equality. A Security Council resolution calls for women's participation in peacebuilding.

These commitments may appear distant from everyday life. But consider a woman who wants to contest a local election, a girl seeking access to education, a rural woman attempting to obtain land or credit, a survivor seeking justice for domestic violence, or a woman demanding participation in a peace negotiation. In each of these situations, global norms can potentially influence national laws, public policies, institutions, and social practices.

This raises an important question: How does a promise made at the global level become a meaningful right in the everyday life of a woman?

The answer is not simple. International agreements require national implementation. National laws require effective institutions. Institutions require resources and political commitment. At the same time, women's movements, civil society organisations, courts, communities, and individuals can pressure governments to translate international commitments into practice.

The study of women's empowerment and global governance is therefore not only about international organisations and treaties. It is also about understanding the relationship between global norms, national institutions, local communities, and women's agency. This connection provides the central thread for understanding this unit.

Keywords

CEDAW, beijing platform for action, UN women, commission on the status of women (CSW), Women, Peace and Security (WPS), security council resolution 1325, SDG 5, transnational feminist networks, gender mainstreaming, feminist foreign policy, gender-based violence, reproductive rights, UNFPA

Discussion

3.3.1 Introduction

Women's empowerment and global governance represent two of the most dynamic and contested areas of contemporary international politics. Over the past seven decades, the international community has constructed an elaborate architecture of norms, institutions, treaties, programmes, and policy frameworks designed to advance gender equality and women's rights across the world. This architecture, which spans the United Nations system, regional organisations, international financial institutions, national governments, and a vast network of civil society organisations, represents one of the significant achievements of twentieth-century multilateralism. It has produced legally binding conventions, global action plans, sustainable development targets, institutional mechanisms, and monitoring processes that have, in many contexts, contributed to improvements in women's lives.

Yet, the gap between normative commitments and practical realities remains substantial and, in some respects, has become more visible. Despite decades of international conventions and action plans, gender-based violence remains widespread; women continue to be underrepresented in political leadership in many countries; reproductive rights remain contested in numerous contexts; and the care economy that sustains households and societies remains systematically undervalued and disproportionately borne by women. At the same time, authoritarian nationalism, religious conservatism, and anti-gender

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movements in different parts of the world have generated organised resistance to several of the gender equality gains achieved during the past few decades.

Global governance, therefore, should not be understood simply as a system through which international organisations formulate rules that states automatically implement. It is a complex process involving states, international organisations, civil society organisations, social movements, advocacy networks, courts, experts, and other non-state actors. These actors negotiate, contest, reinterpret, and implement global norms in different political and social contexts. Women's empowerment has consequently become an important site of interaction between global norms and local realities.

This unit provides a comprehensive introduction to women's empowerment and global governance. It begins by examining the concept of women's empowerment, its theoretical foundations, and its major dimensions. It then traces the evolution of the global governance architecture for women's rights, from the early United Nations conventions of the 1950s and 1960s through the landmark Beijing Platform for Action of 1995, the Millennium Development Goals, and the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015.

The unit subsequently examines major institutional and normative mechanisms, including CEDAW, the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women, and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. Particular attention is given to the Women, Peace and Security agenda, feminist foreign policy, gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and the role of transnational feminist networks. Finally, the unit examines the challenges involved in translating global commitments into national action, with particular reference to India. It concludes by considering the continuing tensions surrounding global governance, including implementation gaps, political backlash, sovereignty concerns, cultural debates, and the possibilities for a more inclusive and feminist form of multilateralism.

3.3.2 The Concept of Women's Empowerment: Meanings and Dimensions

'Empowerment' has become one of the most frequently used, and also one of the most contested, concepts in development policy and gender studies. The concept has intellectual roots in civil rights, popular education, and feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. One important influence was the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, particularly his concept of conscientisation, which refers to the development of critical consciousness among oppressed groups as a basis for collective action and social transformation. Feminist scholars and activists subsequently adapted these ideas to analyse the structural sources of women's subordination and to emphasise women's capacity to act collectively to transform unequal social relations.

In development policy, the concept of empowerment was significantly advanced through the work of feminist organisations and networks, including Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). It was subsequently incorporated into the policy frameworks of organisations such as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and various agencies of the United Nations system. However, the institutional mainstreaming of empowerment also generated an important debate. Several feminist scholars have argued that, as the concept entered mainstream development policy, its political and transformative dimensions were sometimes diluted. Empowerment could increasingly be presented as an instrument for achieving

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economic growth, poverty reduction, or institutional efficiency rather than as a process of challenging unequal structures of power.

Women's empowerment is therefore broader than the provision of resources or opportunities to individual women. It involves the capacity of women to make meaningful choices, exercise agency, participate in decision-making, challenge discriminatory structures, and influence the institutions that shape their lives. Empowerment can occur at the individual, household, community, institutional, national, and international levels.

The concept is also multidimensional. Economic empowerment may involve access to employment, income, land, property, credit, and productive resources. Social empowerment may involve access to education, healthcare, social networks, and freedom from discriminatory social practices. Political empowerment includes participation in political institutions, representation in decision-making bodies, voting rights, leadership, and the ability to influence public policy. Psychological empowerment involves self-confidence, self-worth, critical consciousness, and the ability to recognise and challenge conditions of subordination.

An important feature of the concept is that these dimensions are interconnected. For example, access to education may increase a woman's economic opportunities, but economic resources alone may not produce genuine empowerment if she lacks control over household decisions. Similarly, political representation may increase women's visibility in public institutions, but representation may have limited transformative effects if women representatives lack decision-making authority or remain constrained by patriarchal political structures.

3.3.2.1 Naila Kabeer's Framework: Resources, Agency, and Achievements

One of the most widely used academic frameworks for analysing women's empowerment is that developed by Naila Kabeer in her influential 1999 article, 'Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment', published in Development and Change. Kabeer defines empowerment as the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in contexts where this ability was previously denied to them. Her framework identifies three closely interconnected dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements.

Resources refer to the conditions and pre-requisites that make empowerment possible. These are not limited to material resources such as income, land, property, employment, or credit. They also include human resources such as education, health, knowledge, and skills, as well as social resources such as information, social networks, community relationships, and membership in organisations. Access to resources provides individuals with greater possibilities for exercising meaningful choices.

For example, a woman may have access to a microcredit programme, but the existence of credit alone does not necessarily guarantee empowerment. The significance of the resource depends on whether she can control the use of the money, participate in economic decision-making, and benefit from the income generated. Similarly, access to education becomes more empowering when it expands a woman's capacity to make decisions and participate independently in social and economic life.

Agency refers to the process through which individuals define their goals and act upon them. It is the dimension of empowerment that

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connects resources with outcomes. Agency includes visible decision-making, but it is broader than decision-making alone. It can involve negotiation, bargaining, resistance, protest, collective action, and other forms of strategic behaviour.

Kabeer's concept of agency is particularly important because it recognises that women do not necessarily exercise power only through direct confrontation. Negotiating within households, resisting discriminatory expectations, developing alternative strategies, forming collective organisations, and challenging social norms can all constitute forms of agency. Agency may therefore be exercised in both individual and collective ways.

Kabeer also distinguishes between 'power to' and 'power over'. 'Power to' refers to the ability to achieve desired outcomes and exercise meaningful choices, whereas 'power over' refers to control or domination over others. Genuine empowerment does not necessarily require women to acquire power over other individuals. Instead, it can involve expanding women's capacity to act, choose, participate, and transform conditions that constrain their lives.

Achievements refer to the outcomes that result from the exercise of agency. These may include improvements in income, education, health, nutrition, employment, political participation, and freedom from violence. Achievements can also be collective. Changes in gender norms, legal reforms, institutional reforms, and public policies may represent collective achievements generated through women's individual and collective agency.

Kabeer's framework is valuable because it avoids reducing empowerment to a single measurable indicator. Women's empowerment cannot be adequately understood simply by examining employment rates, income levels, educational attainment, or political representation. These indicators are important, but empowerment also involves whether women have the capacity to make strategic choices and whether social structures enable or constrain those choices.

3.3.2.2 Empowerment versus Integration: A Critical Distinction

A critical tension runs through discussions of women's empowerment: the distinction between empowerment as transformation and empowerment as integration. Transformation-oriented empowerment seeks to change the structures of power that subordinate women, including patriarchal institutions, discriminatory gender norms, unequal legal systems, and economic arrangements. Integration-oriented approaches, by contrast, seek to incorporate women more fully into existing structures by increasing women's economic participation, political representation, and access to institutions without necessarily challenging the underlying structures themselves.

This distinction can be connected to the Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) debates discussed in Unit I. Many mainstream development organisations, including international financial institutions, bilateral donors, and international NGOs, have adopted approaches that frame women's empowerment partly in terms of economic efficiency. In such approaches, women's empowerment may be justified on the grounds that women's participation in the economy contributes to economic growth, productivity, poverty reduction, and human capital development.

Such arguments can generate important policy benefits, but feminist scholars have raised concerns about the instrumentalisation of empowerment. Wendy Harcourt, Andrea Cornwall, and Bina Agarwal, among others, have emphasised the importance of treating women's empowerment as a substantive

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objective rather than merely as a means to achieve other development goals.

The distinction is important because a woman may enter an existing institution without gaining meaningful power within it. For example, increasing the number of women in a workplace does not automatically eliminate gender discrimination. Similarly, increasing the number of women representatives in political institutions does not necessarily transform patriarchal political practices. Integration can therefore be an important step towards equality, but it does not necessarily constitute structural transformation.

Transformative empowerment requires attention to the distribution of power, resources, opportunities, and decision-making authority. It also requires recognition of the ways in which gender intersects with class, caste, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, age, nationality, and other forms of social difference. An intersectional approach therefore asks not only whether women are included, but also which women are included, under what conditions, and with what capacity to influence decisions.

3.3.3 History of the Global Governance Architecture for Women's Rights

The global governance architecture for women's rights has been constructed over several decades through a complex process of negotiation, advocacy, institutional development, and political contestation. Its development reflects the changing understanding of women's rights within international politics. Initially, international discussions often focused on formal equality and legal status. Over time, the agenda expanded to include economic, social, political, reproductive, and bodily rights, as well as issues of violence, peace and security, development, and participation.

The establishment of the United Nations in 1945 created an important institutional framework for international cooperation on human rights and gender equality. The UN Charter affirmed the principle of equal rights of men and women. In 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established as a specialised intergovernmental body to promote women's rights and monitor progress towards gender equality.

During the following decades, the United Nations adopted several instruments concerning women's rights. The Convention on the Political Rights of Women was adopted in 1952 and addressed women's rights to vote, hold public office, and exercise public functions. The Convention on the Nationality of Married Women was adopted in 1957, addressing the discriminatory loss or change of nationality that women could experience through marriage. The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages followed in 1962.

The adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1979 represented a major development because it provided a comprehensive international legal framework addressing discrimination against women. CEDAW was followed by the UN Decade for Women (1976–1985), which included three major world conferences: Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, and Nairobi in 1985. These conferences expanded international attention to women's participation in development, equality, and peace.

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, represented another major milestone. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action established a comprehensive framework for advancing gender equality across twelve critical areas.

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The 1990s also saw increasing recognition of women's rights within the broader human rights framework, including through the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights and the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted in 2000, included gender equality as one of the global development priorities. However, the MDGs were criticised for treating gender equality largely through a limited set of measurable indicators. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015, subsequently provided a more comprehensive framework. SDG 5 specifically focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, while gender dimensions are integrated across the wider 2030 Agenda.

This historical evolution demonstrates that global governance for women's rights has not been a linear process. It has involved advances, compromises, political contestation, institutional innovations, and periods of resistance. Feminist movements and civil society organisations have played a major role in pushing women's rights from the margins of international politics towards the centre of global governance.

3.3.4 CEDAW: The International Bill of Rights for Women

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 and entered into force in 1981. It is the most comprehensive international legal instrument specifically addressing discrimination against women. It is often described as the 'international bill of rights for women'.

CEDAW defines discrimination against women and establishes obligations for states to eliminate discrimination in political, economic, social, cultural, civil, and other fields. The Convention is significant because it does not restrict discrimination to formal legal inequality. It also recognises the importance of addressing social, cultural, and institutional structures that reproduce women's unequal status.

The implementation of CEDAW is monitored by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, commonly known as the CEDAW Committee. States parties submit periodic reports on measures taken to implement the Convention, and the Committee examines these reports and issues concluding observations.

CEDAW therefore represents both a legal instrument and a mechanism of international accountability. Its practical influence depends significantly on domestic implementation, political commitment, judicial interpretation, civil society advocacy, and the ability of women and women's organisations to use international standards within national contexts.

3.3.4.1 Key Provisions of CEDAW

CEDAW contains 30 articles and establishes a broad range of obligations for states parties. These obligations include the elimination of discrimination, the adoption of appropriate legislative and policy measures, and efforts to modify discriminatory social and cultural practices.

Article 2 requires states to pursue a policy of eliminating discrimination against women through appropriate legislative and other measures. It establishes the broader obligation of states to address discrimination through law and public policy.

Article 5 requires states to take appropriate measures to modify social and cultural patterns of conduct based on ideas of the

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inferiority or superiority of either sex or on stereotyped roles for men and women. This provision is particularly significant because it recognises that legal equality alone may not be sufficient to eliminate discrimination.

Article 7 guarantees women's rights to participate in political and public life on equal terms with men. It covers the right to vote, stand for election, participate in public policy, and hold public office.

Article 10 addresses equality in education. It requires states to ensure equal access to education and to eliminate discriminatory practices and gender stereotypes in educational opportunities and materials.

Article 11 addresses equality in employment. It includes provisions concerning equal employment opportunities, equal remuneration, social security, maternity protection, and protection against discrimination on grounds of pregnancy or maternity.

Article 12 addresses equality in access to healthcare. It requires states to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in healthcare and includes specific attention to healthcare related to pregnancy, childbirth, and the postnatal period.

Article 14 addresses the situation of rural women. It recognises the particular challenges faced by rural women and requires states to ensure their participation in development planning and access to healthcare, education, credit, markets, technology, land, and other resources.

Article 16 addresses equality in marriage and family relations. It includes equal rights to enter into marriage, choose a spouse, exercise parental responsibilities, and enjoy rights concerning property and family relations.

Together, these provisions demonstrate that CEDAW treats women's equality as a multidimensional issue. It addresses not only political and legal rights but also education, employment, health, family relations, economic resources, and social norms.

3.3.4.2 CEDAW and India

India ratified CEDAW in 1993, with reservations concerning Article 16 and Article 29(1). The reservation concerning Article 16 reflects the sensitivity surrounding family law and personal law in India. Different religious communities have historically been governed by different personal laws in areas such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and family relations.

Since ratification, India has submitted periodic reports to the CEDAW Committee. The Committee has examined India's progress and identified areas requiring further attention. Issues raised in the context of India's implementation have included child marriage, gender-based violence, dowry-related violence, discrimination, women's economic participation, property and inheritance rights, and women's representation in political and public life.

CEDAW has also been used by civil society organisations in India as an advocacy framework. Women's organisations and human rights groups have submitted information and shadow reports to international monitoring mechanisms, drawing attention to gaps between legal commitments and actual implementation.

The Indian experience demonstrates the complex relationship between international norms and domestic institutions. International commitments can provide important normative and advocacy resources, but their practical impact depends on domestic legislation, judicial institutions, administrative capacity, social movements, political priorities, and public awareness.

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3.3.5 The Beijing Platform for Action (1995): A Landmark Framework

The Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in September 1995. It brought together representatives of governments, international organisations, and civil society organisations from across the world. The conference adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), which remains one of the most comprehensive international policy frameworks for advancing gender equality.

The Beijing Platform for Action identified twelve critical areas of concern requiring international and national action. These areas included women and poverty; education and training; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and the media; women and the environment; and the girl child.

The BPfA did not create a new international treaty. Instead, it provided a detailed framework for implementing existing commitments and establishing policy priorities. It identified strategic objectives and actions for governments, international organisations, civil society organisations, and other actors.

One of the important features of the Beijing framework was its recognition that gender equality cannot be achieved through isolated programmes directed only at women. Gender relations are embedded across political, economic, social, legal, and cultural institutions. Consequently, policies in areas such as employment, education, health, trade, environment, security, and governance must also take gender into account.

3.3.5.1 Gender Mainstreaming: The Beijing Paradigm Shift

One of the most significant contributions associated with the Beijing Platform for Action was the strengthening of gender mainstreaming as a strategy for achieving gender equality. Gender mainstreaming involves incorporating a gender perspective into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes rather than treating gender as a separate or marginal policy concern.

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defined gender mainstreaming in 1997 as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, and programmes, in all areas and at all levels.

Gender mainstreaming represented an important shift in development thinking. Instead of establishing separate 'women's projects' alongside mainstream development activities, governments and institutions were expected to examine how all policies affect women and men differently.

For example, a transport policy may appear gender-neutral, but the availability, cost, safety, and timing of transport can affect women and men differently. Similarly, agricultural policies may affect women differently where women have less access to land ownership, credit, technology, or extension services. A gender-mainstreaming approach therefore requires policymakers to examine the gendered consequences of policies before and after implementation.

At the same time, feminist scholars have identified limitations in the implementation of gender mainstreaming. When gender mainstreaming becomes a bureaucratic procedure rather than a political process, it can lose its transformative potential. The preparation of a gender impact assessment

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or the inclusion of a gender component in a policy document does not necessarily change the distribution of power and resources.

Gender mainstreaming is therefore most meaningful when it is accompanied by institutional accountability, adequate resources, gender-sensitive data, political commitment, and meaningful participation by women's organisations and affected communities.

3.3.6 UN Women and the International Institutional Architecture

The global governance architecture for women's rights within the United Nations system involves multiple institutions with different mandates, resources, and constituencies. These institutions include UN Women, the Commission on the Status of Women, the CEDAW Committee, UNFPA, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and other specialised agencies and programmes.

Understanding this institutional architecture is important because global gender governance does not operate through a single organisation. Different institutions contribute to norm development, monitoring, research, technical assistance, financing, advocacy, and programme implementation.

3.3.6.1 UN Women

UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, was established by the United Nations General Assembly in July 2010. It brought together four previously separate UN entities: the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

UN Women has a broad mandate to support member states in developing international standards and norms, provide technical and financial support for the implementation of gender equality commitments, coordinate gender-related activities within the UN system, and advocate for the rights and empowerment of women and girls.

Its work covers areas including women's political leadership and participation, women's economic empowerment, ending violence against women and girls, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda. It also works on gender-responsive planning, data, policy development, and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The creation of UN Women was itself a response to concerns about fragmentation within the UN system. Bringing several previously separate institutions together was intended to strengthen institutional coherence and political visibility. However, the organisation continues to face the broader resource and implementation constraints associated with global gender governance.

3.3.6.2 Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal intergovernmental body within the United Nations system dedicated specifically to gender equality and the advancement of women. It was established in 1946 and meets annually in New York.

The CSW brings together representatives of UN member states, UN agencies, and civil society organisations. Its functions include reviewing progress on gender equality, developing international standards, identifying emerging issues, and negotiating agreed conclusions on priority themes.

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The CSW has played an important role in the development of international norms concerning women's rights. Its annual sessions also provide an important forum in which governments and civil society organisations interact. Non-governmental organisations have historically used CSW processes to advocate for stronger international commitments and to bring local and national experiences into international policy debates.

At the same time, negotiations within the CSW can be politically contentious. Governments have different legal systems, cultural contexts, political priorities, and ideological positions concerning issues such as reproductive rights, family, sexuality, gender identity, and women's autonomy. As a result, the language of negotiated international documents often reflects political compromise.

This illustrates an important feature of global governance: international norms are not simply imposed from above. They are negotiated among states and contested by civil society and other actors. The resulting agreements may represent important advances while also reflecting the limits of political consensus.

3.3.7 From Beijing to the SDGs: Reviewing Progress and Identifying Gaps

The Beijing Platform for Action established a continuing review process through which progress towards gender equality could be assessed. Governments and international organisations have conducted reviews at five-year intervals, commonly referred to as Beijing+5, Beijing+10, Beijing+15, Beijing+20, and Beijing+25.

These review processes have provided opportunities to examine progress, identify continuing challenges, and renew international commitments. They have also generated substantial data and analysis concerning women's education, health, political participation, economic opportunities, violence, and other dimensions of gender equality.

The overall findings of successive reviews have been mixed. Significant progress has occurred in several areas, including increased access to education for girls in many regions and reductions in maternal mortality in numerous countries. At the same time, persistent inequalities remain in economic participation, political representation, unpaid care work, violence against women, and access to reproductive healthcare.

The Beijing+25 review, conducted in 2020, also took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic exposed and intensified several existing gender inequalities. Women were disproportionately affected in many contexts by increased unpaid care responsibilities, employment losses, frontline care work, and risks of domestic violence.

The experience demonstrated that progress towards gender equality can be vulnerable to wider social, economic, health, and political crises. It also reinforced the importance of gender-responsive approaches to crisis management and recovery.

3.3.7.1 The Sustainable Development Goals and Gender Equality

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by the United Nations in September 2015. It established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets intended to guide global development efforts until 2030.

SDG 5 is specifically dedicated to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Its targets address

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discrimination, violence against women and girls, harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, unpaid care work, women's participation in leadership and decision-making, sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic rights, access to property and resources, and the use of enabling technologies.

An important feature of the 2030 Agenda is that gender equality is not confined to SDG 5. Gender dimensions are integrated across the entire framework. Poverty reduction under SDG 1, food security under SDG 2, health under SDG 3, education under SDG 4, water and sanitation under SDG 6, decent work under SDG 8, reduction of inequalities under SDG 10, and climate action under SDG 13 all have significant gender dimensions.

This integration represents a conceptual advance over the Millennium Development Goals, in which gender equality was addressed through a more limited set of targets. The SDGs recognise that gender inequality is connected to multiple dimensions of social and economic life.

However, the existence of global targets does not automatically ensure implementation. Progress depends on national policies, institutional capacity, financial resources, political commitment, reliable data, and mechanisms for accountability. The SDGs therefore illustrate both the possibilities and the limitations of global governance.

3.3.8 The Women, Peace and Security Agenda

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda represents one of the most important areas of global governance concerning gender equality, conflict, and peacebuilding. It is based on the recognition that armed conflict and political violence affect women and men differently and that women have important roles as peacebuilders, community leaders, negotiators, human rights defenders, and agents of reconstruction.

Historically, women were frequently represented primarily as victims of armed conflict. The WPS framework broadened this understanding by emphasising women's agency and participation. It argues that sustainable peace requires women's meaningful and equal participation in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, reconstruction, and political decision-making.

3.3.8.1 UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 was adopted unanimously on 31 October 2000. It was a landmark development because it was the first Security Council resolution specifically addressing the impact of armed conflict on women and recognising women's contributions to peace and security.

The resolution is commonly understood through four interconnected pillars:

- **Participation:** Women should participate equally in peace negotiations, post-conflict planning, governance, and peacebuilding, as well as in international peace and security institutions.
- **Prevention:** Conflict prevention should take gender perspectives into account, including attention to gender-based violence and other forms of gender inequality that may contribute to insecurity.
- **Protection:** Women and girls must be protected from violence and violations of their rights during armed conflict and post-conflict situations. Particular attention is given to sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence.

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- **Relief and Recovery:** Post-conflict reconstruction and recovery should address the specific needs of women and girls and include women in decisions concerning reconstruction, governance, and peacebuilding.

Resolution 1325 has subsequently been complemented by a series of additional Security Council resolutions, including Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467, and 2493. Together, these resolutions constitute an important normative framework for the WPS agenda.

Security Council Resolution 1820, adopted in 2008, was particularly significant in recognising the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war and emphasising the need to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence. Subsequent resolutions expanded the WPS framework to include accountability, women's participation, prevention, and broader peace and security concerns.

3.3.8.2 Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War

One of the important contributions of the WPS agenda has been the recognition that sexual violence in armed conflict cannot simply be treated as an incidental consequence of war. In many conflicts, sexual violence has been used deliberately to terrorise populations, destroy community cohesion, forcibly displace communities, punish perceived enemies, and exercise control over territory and populations.

The systematic sexual violence documented during the Bosnian War (1992–1995), the Rwandan genocide (1994), and conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, and other regions contributed to growing international recognition of conflict-related sexual violence.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in 1998, recognised rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, and other forms of sexual violence as crimes against humanity and war crimes under specified circumstances.

The 1998 judgment in the case of Jean-Paul Akayesu by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was particularly significant in international criminal law. The judgment recognised rape as an act that could constitute genocide when committed with the requisite genocidal intent. This represented an important development in the legal recognition of sexual violence during conflict.

The WPS framework has therefore contributed to changing international understandings of conflict-related sexual violence. Nevertheless, implementation remains difficult because accountability depends on national legal systems, international courts, political cooperation, evidence collection, survivor protection, and access to justice.

3.3.9 Feminist Foreign Policy: A New Paradigm in Global Governance?

In recent years, a growing number of countries have adopted policies described as 'feminist foreign policy' (FFP). Feminist foreign policy generally seeks to place gender equality and women's rights more explicitly within foreign policy decision-making. It may involve applying a gender perspective to diplomacy, development assistance, peace and security, trade, and international cooperation, as well as increasing women's representation in diplomatic institutions.

Sweden was the first country to formally adopt a feminist foreign policy, announced by Foreign Minister Margot Wallström in 2014. Other countries, including Canada, France, Mexico, Spain, and Chile, have

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subsequently developed foreign policy frameworks incorporating feminist principles or gender perspectives.

These approaches differ from one another. Sweden's framework was associated with the 'three Rs': rights, representation, and resources. Canada's approach has emphasised feminist international assistance and development policy. Mexico has described its approach as a foreign policy with a gender perspective integrated across diplomatic activities.

Feminist foreign policy has generated considerable academic and political debate. Supporters argue that explicitly incorporating gender into foreign policy can elevate women's rights within government decision-making, increase attention to gender inequality in international affairs, and create stronger mechanisms of accountability.

Critics, particularly including scholars and activists from the Global South, have raised concerns about the possibility of feminist foreign policy reproducing unequal global power relations. They have questioned whether the language of women's rights might sometimes be used to justify geopolitical agendas, military interventions, or conditionalities attached to international assistance. Other critiques focus on global economic structures, including trade, debt, labour relations, and intellectual property regimes, and argue that a genuinely feminist foreign policy must also address these structural dimensions.

The debate demonstrates that feminist foreign policy is not a single, universally agreed model. Its meaning depends on how gender equality, justice, security, economic relations, and international cooperation are understood and implemented in particular contexts.

3.3.10 Gender-Based Violence: A Global Governance Challenge

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers broadly to violence directed against an individual or group on the basis of gender. Violence against women is one of the most widespread forms of gender-based violence and constitutes a serious human rights concern.

The 1993 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines violence against women as gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women. It includes threats of such acts, coercion, and arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

Gender-based violence can take multiple forms, including intimate partner violence, sexual violence, domestic violence, trafficking, forced marriage, harmful practices, sexual harassment, and violence in conflict situations. It can occur within households, workplaces, educational institutions, public spaces, online environments, and political institutions.

According to the World Health Organization's global estimates published in 2021, approximately one in three women globally has experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or non-partner sexual violence during her lifetime. Intimate partner violence represents one of the most common forms of violence experienced by women.

The prevalence and consequences of violence are not distributed equally. Women and girls facing poverty, displacement, conflict, disability, discrimination, or other forms of marginalisation may experience particular vulnerabilities. An intersectional approach is therefore important for

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understanding the different forms and consequences of gender-based violence.

3.3.10.1 Global Governance Responses to Gender-Based Violence

The global governance response to gender-based violence has developed significantly since the early 1990s. The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action played an important role in recognising women's rights as human rights and bringing violence against women more centrally into the international human rights framework.

The 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women provided an important international definition of violence against women and called upon states to adopt comprehensive measures to prevent and respond to such violence.

The establishment of the mandate of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences in 1994 created an additional international mechanism for examining the causes and consequences of violence and reporting on state responses.

The Beijing Platform for Action identified violence against women as one of its twelve critical areas of concern. It called for comprehensive legislation, effective criminal justice responses, survivor support services, public awareness, research, and institutional mechanisms.

CEDAW has also played an important role in the development of international standards concerning gender-based violence. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19, adopted in 1992, clarified the relationship between gender discrimination and violence against women. General Recommendation No. 35, adopted in 2017, updated General Recommendation No. 19 and further elaborated state obligations concerning gender-based violence against women.

Despite these developments, major implementation challenges remain. Effective responses require not only laws but also accessible justice systems, trained police and judicial officials, healthcare services, shelters, psychosocial support, economic assistance, prevention programmes, and social transformation.

3.3.11 Reproductive Rights in Global Governance

Reproductive rights concern the ability of individuals to make informed and autonomous decisions regarding their reproductive lives. They include issues such as access to contraception, maternal healthcare, reproductive healthcare, information, and freedom from coercive reproductive practices. Abortion is also a major area of international and domestic political contestation.

Reproductive rights occupy a particularly contested position in global governance because they intersect with bodily autonomy, public health, religious beliefs, family structures, demographic policies, and political ideologies.

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994, represented a significant development in international population and reproductive health policy. Its Programme of Action, negotiated by 179 countries, shifted international policy away from a narrow emphasis on demographic targets towards a broader focus on reproductive health, rights, human development, and individual choice.

The ICPD framework emphasised the right of individuals and couples to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children. It also emphasised access to information, family planning methods, reproductive healthcare, and broader conditions necessary for women's empowerment and gender equality.

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The Cairo framework therefore represented a broader understanding of population policy. Instead of treating population growth primarily as a demographic problem, it placed greater emphasis on individual rights, health, education, gender equality, and development.

3.3.11.1 Global Backlash on Reproductive Rights

The international consensus surrounding reproductive rights has never been complete. Governments and political actors have held different positions on abortion, contraception, sexuality, and reproductive autonomy. Religious and cultural perspectives have also influenced international negotiations.

From the mid-2010s onwards, political contestation over reproductive rights became particularly visible in several countries. The June 2022 decision of the United States Supreme Court in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization overturned the constitutional precedent established by Roe v. Wade in 1973 concerning abortion rights in the United States. The decision generated extensive domestic and international debate about reproductive rights and their legal protection.

The United States has also used foreign assistance policies to influence reproductive health programmes internationally. The so-called Mexico City Policy, commonly referred to as the 'global gag rule', has been reinstated and rescinded by different US administrations. When in effect, it has imposed restrictions on certain foreign organisations receiving US assistance in relation to abortion-related activities.

More broadly, anti-gender movements have emerged or strengthened in several regions. These movements include different combinations of conservative religious organisations, nationalist political actors, and social conservative groups. They have challenged policies concerning gender equality, reproductive rights, sexuality, and LGBTQ+ rights.

Such movements have also participated in international policy forums. The debates demonstrate that global governance of reproductive rights is shaped not only by governments and international organisations but also by religious groups, feminist organisations, advocacy networks, medical organisations, and other civil society actors.

3.3.12 Transnational Feminist Networks and Global Civil Society

The global governance architecture for women's rights has been shaped not only by states and intergovernmental organisations but also by feminist civil society. Women's organisations, feminist NGOs, advocacy coalitions, social movements, researchers, lawyers, and activists have played important roles in bringing women's rights issues into international policy debates.

Transnational feminist networks (TFNs) connect organisations and activists across national borders. They enable the exchange of information, research, advocacy strategies, legal arguments, and political experiences. Such networks have been particularly important in areas where domestic political institutions have been resistant to gender equality reforms.

Feminist organisations have participated in United Nations conferences, submitted alternative or shadow reports to treaty-monitoring bodies, lobbied governments, developed research, organised international campaigns, and supported local movements. They have therefore contributed to the creation and interpretation of global gender norms.

Transnational networks can also help local movements access international institutions. A women's organisation operating within

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a restrictive domestic environment may use international human rights standards to strengthen its advocacy at the national level. Conversely, international organisations may learn from local feminist movements about forms of discrimination that are not adequately reflected in global policy frameworks.

However, transnational feminist networks are not free from internal inequalities. Differences in resources, language, geography, class, race, caste, and institutional access can shape whose voices receive international attention. Feminist scholars have therefore emphasised the importance of intersectionality and greater representation of Global South movements within international gender governance.

3.3.12.1 #MeToo and the Politics of Global Feminist Movements

The #MeToo movement, which became a major global mobilisation in October 2017 following extensive public revelations concerning sexual harassment and abuse in the entertainment industry, represents one of the most visible feminist movements of the digital era.

Through social media, millions of women and others affected by sexual harassment and sexual violence shared their experiences. The movement expanded public discussion of sexual harassment in workplaces, universities, media organisations, politics, and other institutions. It also raised questions about institutional accountability, workplace cultures, power relationships, and the responsibilities of employers and public institutions.

#MeToo had significant but uneven effects across countries and sectors. In the United States, a number of individuals in positions of influence faced professional consequences following allegations of sexual misconduct. In France, the movement was associated with the wider #BalanceTonPorc mobilisation. In India, the #MeToo India movement gained substantial public attention in 2018 and generated allegations involving individuals in media, politics, entertainment, academia, and other sectors.

The movement also demonstrated the importance of digital technologies in contemporary feminist mobilisation. Social media enabled individuals to bypass traditional gatekeepers and communicate directly with large audiences. At the same time, digital activism has limitations. Access to technology is unequal, online harassment can silence activists, and public attention may be concentrated on the experiences of relatively privileged women.

Critics have therefore argued that the visibility generated by #MeToo has not been distributed equally. The experiences of domestic workers, agricultural labourers, informal-sector workers, and women from marginalised communities may receive less media attention and may produce fewer institutional consequences.

The movement illustrates both the possibilities and limitations of contemporary transnational feminist activism. Digital platforms can rapidly transform public discourse, but sustained institutional change requires legal reform, organisational accountability, social transformation, and attention to structural inequalities.

3.3.13 From Global Norms to National Action: Implementation Challenges

A central challenge in global governance for women's rights is the translation of international normative commitments into concrete changes in national law, public policy, institutions, and everyday social practices. States may ratify international conventions, adopt global action plans,

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and commit themselves to SDG targets, yet implementation may remain incomplete.

This implementation gap is one of the most persistent challenges in the global gender equality architecture. The existence of international norms is important, but norms require institutions, resources, political commitment, public participation, and accountability mechanisms to become meaningful in people's everyday lives.

3.3.13.1 Why Implementation Gaps Persist

Implementation gaps between international commitments and national realities arise from several interacting factors.

- **Sovereignty and political will:** International commitments do not automatically implement themselves. States ratify conventions such as CEDAW and adopt global targets such as the SDGs, but implementation ultimately depends on national institutions and political decisions. Political will is influenced by domestic power relations, electoral considerations, social movements, administrative capacity, and competing policy priorities.
- **Resource constraints:** Many gender equality commitments require substantial public resources. Universal access to reproductive healthcare, comprehensive services for survivors of violence, social protection, childcare, and paid maternity and paternity leave require sustained investment. Countries with limited fiscal capacity may face difficulties in implementing such programmes without external financial and technical support.
- **Reservations and cultural debates:** States may ratify international conventions while entering reservations concerning particular provisions. Such reservations can limit the application of international standards. In addition, governments sometimes invoke cultural, religious, or social considerations when resisting particular international norms. This creates continuing debates concerning the relationship between universal human rights standards and cultural diversity.
- **Enforcement deficits:** International human rights institutions such as treaty-monitoring committees, the Universal Periodic Review process, and UN Special Rapporteurs perform important monitoring, reporting, and advocacy functions. However, they generally do not possess the same enforcement powers as domestic courts or national regulatory institutions. Their influence often depends on political pressure, public scrutiny, civil society advocacy, and the willingness of states to respond.
- **Backlash and counter-mobilisation:** Progress towards gender equality can generate political and social resistance. Changes in gender relations may challenge established distributions of power and resources. Conservative political groups, religious organisations, and other actors may mobilise against particular reforms. Gender equality policies can therefore become subjects of wider political conflict.

The implementation gap also demonstrates the importance of domestic institutions. International agreements become meaningful when they are incorporated into national legislation, supported by administrative institutions, implemented through public programmes, interpreted by courts, and monitored by civil society and citizens.

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India provides an important example of this interaction between global norms and domestic action. International commitments such as CEDAW can provide a normative framework for advocacy, but their practical significance depends on constitutional provisions, legislation, judicial decisions, government programmes, state-level implementation, local institutions, and social movements.

The relationship between global governance and national action is therefore neither purely top-down nor purely bottom-up. International norms can influence national policies, while national experiences and civil society movements can reshape international agendas. Women's empowerment emerges from this continuing interaction between global institutions, national governments, local communities, and feminist movements.

3.3.14 Concluding Observation

Women's empowerment has emerged as a central concern of contemporary global governance. The concept has developed from a focus on women's access to resources and opportunities towards a broader understanding of agency, participation, rights, and structural transformation. Naila Kabeer's framework of resources, agency, and achievements provides an important way of understanding empowerment as a process through which women gain the capacity to make meaningful choices and influence the conditions of their lives. At the same time, the distinction between integration and transformation reminds us that simply including women within existing institutions does not necessarily challenge the structures that reproduce gender inequality.

The evolution of global governance has created an extensive framework for advancing women's rights. CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Women, Peace and Security agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals, and institutions such as UN Women and the Commission on the Status of Women have contributed to the development of international norms and mechanisms for gender equality. However, the existence of international commitments does not automatically produce equality at the national or local level. Implementation continues to be shaped by political will, resources, institutions, social norms, sovereignty concerns, cultural debates, and organised resistance.

The unit has also demonstrated that global governance is not created by states and international organisations alone. Feminist movements, transnational feminist networks, civil society organisations, and digital movements such as #MeToo have played important roles in placing women's experiences and demands on the international agenda. The future of women's empowerment therefore depends not only on strengthening international institutions but also on ensuring meaningful participation, accountability, intersectionality, and implementation at national and local levels. Global governance for gender equality remains an evolving field in which international norms and local struggles continuously influence one another.

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Recap

- Women's empowerment is a multidimensional concept involving economic, social, political, and psychological dimensions.
- Empowerment is concerned not merely with providing resources but also with expanding women's ability to make meaningful choices and exercise agency.
- Naila Kabeer conceptualises empowerment through three interconnected dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements.
- Resources include material, human, and social resources that create the conditions necessary for exercising agency.
- Agency refers to the ability to define goals and act upon them through decision-making, negotiation, resistance, bargaining, and collective action.
- Achievements refer to the individual and collective outcomes produced through the exercise of agency.
- Transformative approaches to empowerment seek to challenge patriarchal structures, while integration-oriented approaches primarily seek to include women within existing institutions.
- CEDAW provides a comprehensive international legal framework for eliminating discrimination against women and addressing women's rights in political, economic, social, cultural, and family life.
- The Beijing Platform for Action established a comprehensive framework for gender equality and identified twelve critical areas of concern. It also strengthened the strategy of gender mainstreaming.
- The Women, Peace and Security agenda, beginning with Security Council Resolution 1325, recognises women as important participants in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction, rather than only as victims of conflict.
- UN Women, the Commission on the Status of Women, civil society organisations, and transnational feminist networks contribute to the development, implementation, monitoring, and advocacy of global gender norms.
- Despite extensive international commitments, significant implementation gaps remain because of political, institutional, financial, cultural, and social factors. The effectiveness of global governance ultimately depends on the interaction between international norms, national institutions, and women's movements.

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Objective Questions

1. What is the central idea of women's empowerment?
2. Which scholar conceptualised empowerment in terms of resources, agency, and achievements?
3. In which year was the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted?
4. Which international conference adopted the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995?
5. How many critical areas of concern are identified in the Beijing Platform for Action?
6. Which United Nations entity was established in 2010 to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women?
7. In which year was the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) established?
8. Which United Nations Security Council resolution formally established the Women, Peace and Security agenda?
9. Which of the following is not one of the four major pillars of the Women, Peace and Security agenda?
10. Which Sustainable Development Goal specifically focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls?
11. Which international conference held in Cairo in 1994 played an important role in establishing reproductive health and reproductive rights within the global development agenda?
12. What global movement, which gained worldwide prominence from 2017, drew attention to sexual harassment and sexual violence against women?

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Answers

1. Women's empowerment refers to the process of expanding women's ability to make meaningful choices, exercise agency, access resources, and influence decisions affecting their lives.

2. Naila Kabeer
3. 1979
4. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing
5. Twelve
6. UN Women
7. 1946
8. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000
9. Privatisation
10. Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5)
11. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)
12. The #MeToo movement

Assignments

1. Examine Naila Kabeer's framework of resources, agency, and achievements.
2. Distinguish between empowerment as transformation and empowerment as integration.
3. Explain the historical evolution of the global governance architecture for women's rights.
4. Discuss the significance of CEDAW in the international protection of women's rights.
5. Critically examine the concept of women's empowerment from the perspective of feminist development theory.
6. Discuss the major provisions of CEDAW and examine its significance for women's rights in India.
7. Analyse the Beijing Platform for Action and explain the significance of gender mainstreaming in contemporary global governance.
8. Examine the Women, Peace and Security agenda with special reference to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.

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BLOCK

Gender and Human Rights

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UNIT 1

Women's Rights as Human Rights

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the historical development of the idea that women's rights are an integral part of human rights
- explain the major concerns and achievements of the first, second, and third waves of feminism
- identify the major international human rights instruments and frameworks concerning women, including the UDHR, CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and SDG 5
- examine major feminist approaches to rights, including liberal feminism, radical feminism, postcolonial feminism, and intersectionality

Prerequisite

The history of human rights contains an important paradox. Human rights are generally described as universal rights belonging to all human beings. Yet, historically, many groups were excluded from the political community that was imagined as the universal rights-bearing subject. Women were one of the most significant groups affected by this contradiction.

The early language of rights, citizenship, liberty, and equality created an important intellectual foundation for later struggles for women's rights. However, women were frequently excluded from voting, education, property ownership, political participation, and independent legal status. Feminist thinkers and movements therefore began to ask a fundamental question: if rights belong to all human beings, why were women denied many of the rights associated with citizenship and personhood?

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This question gradually transformed both feminist politics and human rights discourse. Women's rights movements moved from demands for formal legal equality to broader demands concerning violence, sexuality, reproductive autonomy, economic justice, political representation, and freedom from discrimination. International institutions subsequently incorporated many of these concerns into global human rights standards.

The contemporary idea that women's rights are human rights can therefore be understood as the result of a long process of questioning the meaning of universality itself. It asks students to think beyond the simple question of whether women possess rights and consider another important question: what social, political, economic, cultural, and institutional conditions are necessary for women to enjoy those rights in practice?

Keywords

Enlightenment, feminism, suffrage, first-wave feminism, second-wave feminism, third-Wwave feminism, patriarchy, liberal feminism, radical feminism, postcolonial feminism, intersectionality, universal declaration of human rights, CEDAW, beijing platform for action, public/private divide, gender equality

Discussion

This unit examines the foundational claim that women's rights are inseparable from human rights. It traces the evolution of this idea from its early articulations in Enlightenment thought to contemporary international legal and policy frameworks. The unit introduces students to the landmark documents, key thinkers, feminist theories, and political struggles that have shaped the global women's rights movement. It also examines the development of women's rights within the international human rights framework and considers the constitutional and legislative measures adopted in India to promote gender equality.

4.1.1 Women and the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries proclaimed universal human reason as an important basis for rights, freedom, and political participation. Yet, paradoxically, women were systematically excluded from the supposedly universal political subject imagined by several influential thinkers of the period. Thinkers such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant developed influential ideas concerning reason, freedom, citizenship, and human nature, but these ideas were often articulated within social and political contexts that excluded women from full civic participation.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for instance, argued in Émile, ou De l'éducation (1762) that women's education and social roles should be oriented towards domesticity and their relationship with men. His conception of gender roles placed women primarily within the private sphere and assigned

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men a more prominent role in public and political life. Such arguments contributed to a broader intellectual tradition in which the supposedly universal human subject was implicitly understood as male. This gendered understanding of citizenship influenced liberal political thought for generations.

Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) was one of the earliest systematic feminist responses to this exclusion. Writing in the context of the French Revolution and debates surrounding the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, Wollstonecraft challenged the assumption that women were naturally inferior to men. She argued that reason was not a male monopoly and that women were equally capable of moral and rational development when provided with appropriate education.

Wollstonecraft particularly emphasised women's access to education, economic independence, moral autonomy, and civic participation. She argued that women could not be regarded as fully rational and independent human beings while their education and social position continued to prepare them primarily for dependence upon men. Her arguments became an important foundation for later feminist demands for equality and citizenship.

4.1.2 The First Wave: Suffrage and Legal Rights (1840s–1920s)

The first wave of feminism developed primarily around demands for legal and political equality, particularly women's right to vote. Although the term "first wave" was developed retrospectively, it is commonly used to describe feminist movements from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century that focused strongly on formal political and legal rights.

The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, held in New York, was a significant event in the history of the women's rights movement in the United States. The convention produced the Declaration of Sentiments, which was strongly influenced by the language and structure of the American Declaration of Independence. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was a principal author of the document. It declared that "all men and women are created equal" and identified a range of legal, political, educational, and social inequalities experienced by women. These included the denial of voting rights, restrictions on education, limited access to professions, and the legal subordination of married women.

The suffrage movement subsequently developed in different forms across Europe, North America, and other parts of the world. In Britain, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), founded by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1903, became associated with militant forms of political activism. Its members organised demonstrations, civil disobedience, hunger strikes, and other forms of protest to demand women's enfranchisement. In New Zealand, women gained the right to vote in parliamentary elections in 1893. The United Kingdom extended voting rights to some women in 1918 and achieved equal voting rights for women and men under the same age conditions in 1928. In the United States, the Nineteenth Amendment, ratified in 1920, prohibited the denial of voting rights on the basis of sex.

The first wave was not limited to suffrage. Feminists also campaigned for married women's property rights, access to higher education, professional employment, legal reforms concerning marriage, and improvements in women's social and economic status. The Married Women's Property Acts in Britain, particularly those of 1870 and 1882, represented important changes in the legal status of married women.

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In India, nineteenth-century social reformers and women activists addressed questions relating to women's education, child marriage, widowhood, caste, and social exclusion. Savitribai Phule played a pioneering role in women's education and social reform, while Pandita Ramabai challenged patriarchal social structures and advocated women's education and autonomy. Their work demonstrates that the history of women's rights cannot be understood only through European and North American experiences. Questions of gender were closely connected with caste, religion, colonialism, education, and social reform in India.

4.1.3 The Second Wave: Beyond the Vote (1960s–1980s)

The second wave of feminism emerged particularly strongly during the 1960s and continued through the 1970s and 1980s. It moved beyond formal political and legal equality to examine the social, cultural, economic, and institutional structures that reproduced women's subordination. Feminists increasingly argued that legal equality alone could not eliminate inequalities rooted in family structures, sexuality, employment, cultural representations, and gender norms.

Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique (1963) criticised the post-war ideal of the suburban housewife in the United States. Friedan argued that many women were experiencing dissatisfaction despite conforming to socially accepted ideals of marriage, motherhood, and domesticity. She described this dissatisfaction as "the problem that has no name." The book became influential in the development of second-wave feminist consciousness, particularly among sections of the American middle class.

Radical feminists went further by examining patriarchy as a system of power. Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (1970) analysed patriarchy as a political system embedded in institutions such as the family, religion, literature, and law. Shulamith Firestone's The Dialectic of Sex (1970) developed a radical feminist analysis of biological reproduction and women's subordination. Andrea Dworkin and Catharine A. MacKinnon developed influential feminist critiques of pornography and sexual exploitation, interpreting them in relation to broader structures of gender inequality.

The second wave also witnessed the growth of consciousness-raising groups. These groups encouraged women to discuss their personal experiences and identify connections between individual experiences and broader social structures. The idea that "the personal is political" became a significant theme of feminist activism. Experiences of domestic violence, unwanted pregnancy, sexual harassment, workplace discrimination, and unequal domestic responsibilities were increasingly understood not simply as private problems but as issues with political and structural dimensions.

The period also witnessed important legislative and judicial developments. In the United States, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 addressed forms of discrimination affecting women. The United Kingdom enacted the Equal Pay Act in 1970. The decision in Roe v. Wade (1973) recognised a constitutional protection for abortion under the United States Constitution at that time. However, the constitutional framework established by Roe was overturned by the United States Supreme Court in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization (2022), demonstrating that the legal status of reproductive rights can change significantly across time and political contexts.

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4.1.4 Third Wave and Contemporary Feminisms

Third-wave feminism emerged during the early 1990s, partly in response to perceived limitations and universalising tendencies within some forms of second-wave feminism. Scholars and activists such as Rebecca Walker, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins questioned the tendency to treat "women" as a homogeneous category. They emphasised that women's experiences are shaped by race, class, sexuality, disability, nationality, ethnicity, and other dimensions of social difference.

Rebecca Walker is widely associated with popularising the term "third wave" in her 1992 essay "Becoming the Third Wave." bell hooks criticised forms of feminism that failed to adequately address race and class, while Patricia Hill Collins developed an influential analysis of Black women's experiences through the concept of the "matrix of domination." These approaches contributed to a broader understanding of the diversity of women's experiences.

Queer theory, associated with scholars such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, further challenged fixed assumptions about gender and sexuality. Judith Butler's Gender Trouble (1990) argued that gender is not simply an expression of a pre-existing inner identity but is constituted through repeated and socially regulated performances. Butler's work questioned stable binary understandings of gender and contributed to debates concerning gender identity, sexuality, and the social construction of gender.

Contemporary feminisms have also increasingly incorporated perspectives from the Global South and postcolonial contexts. This has challenged the tendency to narrate the history of women's rights primarily from a Euro-American perspective. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, for example, has criticised forms of Western feminist scholarship that construct the "Third World woman" as a homogeneous, passive, and victimised subject. She argues instead for approaches that recognise women's agency, diversity, historical circumstances, and political struggles in postcolonial societies.

4.1.5 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948, was a major milestone in the development of international human rights norms. Its first article declares that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Article 2 establishes the principle of non-discrimination, including discrimination based on sex. Article 16 recognises equal rights of men and women in relation to marriage, during marriage, and at its dissolution.

The UDHR emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust. The destruction and mass atrocities of the period contributed to international efforts to establish common standards concerning human dignity and fundamental rights.

Women played an important role in the drafting and adoption of the Declaration. Eleanor Roosevelt, who chaired the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, was a major figure in the drafting process. Hansa Mehta of India also made an important contribution.

4.1.6 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979)

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against

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Women (CEDAW) is one of the principal international treaties concerning women's rights. It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 1979 and entered into force in 1981. It is often described as an international bill of rights for women. The United States is among the countries that have signed but not ratified CEDAW.

CEDAW defines discrimination against women broadly as any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on sex that has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying women's recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This definition is significant because it focuses not only on discriminatory intention but also on discriminatory effects.

The Convention requires states parties to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women. Its provisions address a wide range of areas, including political participation, nationality, education, employment, healthcare, economic and social life, and rural women. Article 5 addresses social and cultural patterns that reinforce gender stereotypes. Article 6 addresses trafficking and exploitation of prostitution. Article 7 concerns political and public life, Article 10 addresses education, Article 11 concerns employment, Article 12 addresses healthcare, and Article 14 focuses specifically on the situation of rural women. Article 16 addresses discrimination in marriage and family relations.

CEDAW therefore extends beyond the principle of formal equality. It requires states to take active measures to remove discriminatory practices and institutional arrangements. It also recognises that discrimination may occur in both public and private spheres.

CEDAW is monitored by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, commonly known as the CEDAW Committee. The Committee consists of independent experts elected by states parties. States parties periodically submit reports concerning their implementation of the Convention, after which the Committee issues concluding observations and recommendations.

The Optional Protocol to CEDAW, adopted in 1999, provides additional mechanisms for addressing violations. It establishes an individual communications procedure through which individuals or groups may submit complaints to the CEDAW Committee, subject to the conditions established by the Protocol. It also provides for an inquiry procedure concerning grave or systematic violations of women's rights by states parties that have accepted the relevant procedure.

4.1.7 The Beijing Platform for Action (1995)

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, produced the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It remains one of the most significant global policy frameworks for advancing women's rights and gender equality.

The Platform for Action identified twelve critical areas of concern: women and poverty; education and training of women; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and the media; women and the environment; and the girl child.

A major contribution of the Beijing framework was its insistence that women's rights are an integral part of human rights. The conference became particularly associated with Hillary Rodham Clinton's statement

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that "women's rights are human rights," which captured the central political message of the conference.

The Beijing framework also challenged the traditional distinction between the public and private spheres. Issues such as domestic violence, reproductive health, unpaid care work, and discrimination within families had historically been treated as private matters. Feminist movements and international institutions increasingly argued that these issues should be addressed within a human rights framework because private practices can have serious consequences for the enjoyment of fundamental rights.

4.1.8 Sustainable Development Goals and Women's Rights

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, includes Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5): "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." SDG 5 includes targets concerning the elimination of discrimination and violence against women and girls; the elimination of harmful practices such as child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; recognition and valuation of unpaid care and domestic work; women's participation in leadership and decision-making; universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in accordance with relevant international agreements; and reforms to discriminatory laws and policies.

The Sustainable Development Goals represent a broader approach than the earlier Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs included gender equality as one of their objectives, particularly through MDG 3, but critics argued that gender equality was sometimes treated primarily in instrumental terms, particularly in relation to development outcomes. The SDGs integrate gender equality across several goals while retaining a specific goal devoted to gender equality and women's empowerment.

4.1.9 Feminist Theories of Rights

Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism is rooted in the tradition of liberal political thought and emphasises the equal moral and rational capacities of women and men. Liberal feminists argue that women should enjoy equal civil, political, legal, educational, and economic rights. They generally focus on reforming existing institutions by removing discriminatory laws and practices and expanding women's access to education, employment, political participation, and public institutions.

Important figures associated with liberal feminist thought include Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Betty Friedan, and contemporary scholars such as Martha C. Nussbaum.

Martha C. Nussbaum's capabilities approach, developed in dialogue with the work of Amartya Sen, provides an influential framework for thinking about human dignity and substantive equality. Nussbaum identifies a range of central human capabilities, including life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; relations with other species; play; and control over one's political and material environment.

The capabilities approach shifts attention from the formal possession of rights to people's actual ability to exercise meaningful freedoms. Nussbaum argues that this framework can provide a stronger basis for addressing the conditions of disadvantaged groups, including women, because formal equality may have limited significance when social and economic structures prevent people from exercising their capabilities.

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Radical Feminism

Radical feminism identifies patriarchy, understood as a system of gendered power and domination, as a central structure underlying women's oppression. Radical feminists argue that formal legal equality may be insufficient because social institutions and cultural practices can continue to reproduce gender hierarchy even after discriminatory laws have been removed.

Kate Millett's analysis of patriarchy as a political system was particularly influential. Andrea Dworkin examined sexual exploitation and violence, while Catharine A. MacKinnon developed an influential feminist legal theory concerning sex discrimination, sexual harassment, pornography, and the social structure of gender inequality.

MacKinnon's subordination approach to equality argues that discrimination should be examined in relation to systems of dominance rather than simply through comparisons of how similarly situated individuals are treated. From this perspective, sexual harassment, rape, and other forms of sexual violence cannot be understood solely as isolated individual acts. They can also function within broader structures that reproduce gender hierarchy.

Radical feminism therefore expands the meaning of equality by drawing attention to power relations within intimate relationships, sexuality, family structures, and cultural institutions. At the same time, radical feminist arguments have generated debates within feminism concerning sexuality, agency, gender diversity, and the regulation of sexual expression.

Postcolonial and Third World Feminisms

Postcolonial feminist scholars have criticised both mainstream human rights discourse and some forms of Western feminism for their Eurocentric assumptions. They argue that women's experiences cannot be separated from histories of colonialism, imperialism, race, class, religion, and global economic inequality.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's influential essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984) criticised representations of the "Third World woman" as a homogeneous, passive, backward, and victimised subject. Mohanty argued that such representations can erase differences among women and reproduce colonial patterns of knowledge.

Postcolonial feminists therefore emphasise the importance of local histories, political contexts, cultural differences, and women's agency. They also question universalist frameworks when such frameworks assume that experiences arising from Western societies can automatically be applied to women elsewhere.

Scholars such as Obioma Nnaemeka, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Uma Narayan have made important contributions to postcolonial and transnational feminist scholarship. Their work demonstrates the importance of examining gender in relation to colonial histories, nationalism, development, migration, religion, caste, race, and other forms of social and political power.

Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her influential 1989 article, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex." Crenshaw developed the concept partly through an analysis of the legal experiences of Black women in the United States. She argued that legal frameworks addressing race discrimination and sex discrimination separately could fail to capture forms of discrimination experienced specifically by Black women.

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Intersectionality examines how different axes of social identity and power, including gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, nationality, and ethnicity, can intersect and shape people's experiences. It does not simply suggest that disadvantages should be added together. Instead, it draws attention to how different structures of power can interact and produce distinctive forms of inequality.

Intersectionality has significantly influenced feminist theory, human rights scholarship, law, and public policy. It challenges approaches that treat women as a homogeneous category and emphasises the importance of recognising differences among women.

International human rights institutions have increasingly incorporated intersectional perspectives into their analysis of discrimination. Such approaches are particularly relevant when examining situations in which gender inequality interacts with racial, ethnic, caste, disability, economic, religious, or other forms of marginalisation.

The Public/Private Divide and Women's Human Rights

One of the significant conceptual obstacles to the recognition of women's human rights has been the traditional distinction between the public and private spheres. Feminist scholars have referred to this as the "public/private divide." Traditional approaches to international human rights law often focused primarily on violations committed by states or public authorities. Violence occurring within families and other private settings was frequently treated as a domestic or private matter.

This distinction had important consequences for women. Violence committed by husbands, fathers, intimate partners, or other private actors could remain outside effective human rights scrutiny when states failed to recognise such violence as a matter of public concern.

Feminist legal scholars challenged this approach. Hilary Charlesworth, Christine Chinkin, and Shelley Wright, in their influential 1991 article "Feminist Approaches to International Law," examined the ways in which international law reflected gendered assumptions. Their work contributed to broader feminist critiques of international law and encouraged greater attention to the relationship between public institutions and private forms of power.

A major development was the increasing recognition of the principle of state due diligence. Under this approach, states may have human rights responsibilities not only when state officials directly commit violations but also when authorities fail to take reasonable measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute, punish, and provide remedies for certain abuses committed by private actors.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993, was an important development in this regard. It recognised violence against women as a human rights concern and identified violence occurring in the family, within the general community, and in other contexts.

The due diligence principle has subsequently become important in international human rights discussions concerning violence against women. It reflects a broader understanding of state responsibility in which the failure of public institutions to respond adequately to private violence can itself have human rights implications.

4.1.9 Women's Rights in India: Law, Constitution, and Practice

The Constitution of India provides an extensive constitutional framework for gender equality. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the

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laws. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on specified grounds, including sex. Article 15(3) expressly permits the State to make special provisions for women and children, providing a constitutional basis for certain affirmative and protective measures.

Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. Article 51A(e), included among the Fundamental Duties, calls upon citizens to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

The Directive Principles of State Policy also contain provisions relevant to gender equality. Article 39(a) directs the State to secure adequate means of livelihood for men and women equally. Article 39(d) refers to equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Article 42 directs the State to make provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

Together, these constitutional provisions establish a framework in which gender equality involves both the prohibition of discrimination and the adoption of measures aimed at improving substantive equality.

4.1.10 Landmark Legislation

India has enacted a range of laws addressing different dimensions of women's rights since independence. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, introduced important reforms relating to marriage under Hindu personal law. The Hindu Succession Act, 1956, significantly changed the law of succession, and its 2005 amendment strengthened daughters' equal rights in coparcenary property.

The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, sought to prohibit the giving and taking of dowry. The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, subsequently amended in 2017, provides statutory maternity benefits subject to its applicable conditions. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, provides civil-law remedies and protections in cases of domestic violence.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, established a statutory framework for addressing sexual harassment at the workplace. It followed the Supreme Court's Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan judgment of 1997, in which the Court laid down guidelines for preventing and addressing workplace sexual harassment in the absence of specific legislation.

India has also enacted legislation to address sex selection. The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994, regulates the use of prenatal diagnostic techniques and prohibits sex selection for the purpose of preventing sex-selective practices.

Despite this extensive legislative and constitutional framework, significant gaps can remain between formal legal rights and their practical realisation. Dowry-related violence, domestic violence, workplace discrimination, unequal access to resources, and barriers to justice continue to be areas of concern. Women's ability to access legal remedies can also be affected by poverty, social stigma, lack of awareness, inadequate legal assistance, institutional barriers, and delays in the justice system.

The Indian experience therefore demonstrates that the existence of legal rights is an important foundation but does not by itself guarantee substantive equality. Effective implementation, institutional accountability, social transformation, access to justice, and awareness of rights are also necessary for the meaningful realisation of women's human rights.

4.1.11 Concluding Observation

Women's rights have developed through a long historical struggle against exclusion

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from education, citizenship, political participation, property ownership, employment, and other spheres of social and public life. From Mary Wollstonecraft's critique of women's exclusion during the Enlightenment to the struggles for suffrage, legal equality, reproductive rights, freedom from violence, and political participation, feminist movements have expanded the meaning of equality and human rights. The development of liberal, radical, postcolonial, and intersectional feminist perspectives has further demonstrated that women do not experience inequality in identical ways and that gender must be understood in relation to other structures of power.

The recognition of women's rights within the international human rights framework has been strengthened through instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals. These frameworks have contributed to a broader understanding of state responsibility and have challenged the traditional separation between public and private forms of discrimination and violence. The Indian constitutional and legislative framework similarly establishes important guarantees of equality and protection. However, the continuing gap between formal rights and their actual enjoyment demonstrates that legal recognition must be accompanied by effective implementation, institutional accountability, social transformation, and access to justice. The idea that women's rights are human rights therefore remains both a legal principle and an ongoing political and social project.

Recap

- Enlightenment ideas of reason, liberty, and universal rights provided an important intellectual foundation for modern rights discourse, but women were often excluded from the political subject imagined by major Enlightenment thinkers.
- Mary Wollstonecraft challenged the intellectual and social exclusion of women and argued for women's rational, moral, educational, and civic equality.
- First-wave feminism focused strongly on suffrage, legal equality, property rights, education, and access to professions.
- Second-wave feminism expanded the meaning of equality by examining patriarchy, sexuality, family relations, workplace discrimination, reproductive rights, and violence against women.
- Third-wave and contemporary feminisms questioned the tendency to treat women as a homogeneous category and emphasised differences based on race, class, sexuality, disability, nationality, and other factors.
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights established a universal framework of human dignity and equality and explicitly prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex.

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- CEDAW provides a comprehensive international framework for eliminating discrimination against women and addresses political, social, economic, cultural, educational, health, employment, and family-related rights. UN Women identifies CEDAW as a cornerstone of the international framework for women's rights.
- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995, established twelve critical areas of concern and provided a comprehensive framework for advancing women's rights and gender equality.
- Liberal, radical, postcolonial, and intersectional feminisms provide different ways of understanding the relationship between rights, equality, power, and oppression.
- Intersectionality highlights the ways in which gender interacts with race, class, caste, sexuality, disability, nationality, and other structures of power.
- Feminist critiques of the public/private divide expanded the understanding of human rights by drawing attention to violence and discrimination occurring within families and other private settings.
- The Indian Constitution and legislation provide important guarantees for women's equality, but the effective realisation of these rights depends on implementation, institutional mechanisms, social transformation, and access to justice. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39, and 42 are among the important constitutional provisions concerning gender equality and women's rights.

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Objective Questions

1. Who wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*?
2. In which year was *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* published?
3. Which event of 1848 became an important landmark in the history of the women's suffrage movement in the United States?
4. Who was one of the principal authors of the Declaration of Sentiments?
5. Which country became the first self-governing country to grant women the right to vote in national elections?
6. In which year was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted?
7. Which Indian woman played an important role in advocating gender-inclusive language in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

8. What does CEDAW stand for?
9. In which year was CEDAW adopted by the United Nations General Assembly?
10. Which international conference produced the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action?
11. How many critical areas of concern were identified by the Beijing Platform for Action?
12. What is SDG 5 concerned with?
13. Who is associated with the concept of intersectionality?
14. In which year did Kimberlé Crenshaw introduce the concept of intersectionality in her influential legal scholarship?
15. Which feminist scholar wrote *Sexual Politics*?
16. Who wrote *The Feminine Mystique*?
17. Which feminist theory focuses strongly on patriarchy as a fundamental structure of women's oppression?
18. Who wrote *Gender Trouble*?
19. Which concept refers to the traditional distinction between state/public action and private conduct in discussions of human rights?
20. Which principle requires states to take reasonable measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and remedy certain violations committed by private actors?

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Answers

1. Mary Wollstonecraft
2. 1972
3. The Seneca Falls Convention
4. Elizabeth Cady Stanton
5. New Zealand
6. 1948
7. Hansa Mehta

8. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
9. 1979
10. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing
11. Twelve
12. Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls
13. Kimberlé Crenshaw
14. 1989
15. Kate Millett
16. Betty Friedan
17. Radical feminism
18. Judith Butler
19. The public/private divide
20. The due diligence principle

Assignments

1. Explain the historical foundations of women's rights as human rights, with particular reference to the Enlightenment and the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft.
2. Examine the major characteristics and achievements of the first and second waves of feminism.
3. Discuss the contribution of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and CEDAW to the development of international standards concerning women's rights.
4. Analyse the major feminist theories of rights, with particular reference to liberal, radical, postcolonial, and intersectional feminism.
5. Explain the significance of the public/private divide in the protection of women's human rights.
6. Examine the constitutional and legislative framework for women's rights in India and discuss the major challenges in translating legal rights into substantive equality.

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UNIT 2

Gender-Based Violence and Trafficking

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the concept and major forms of gender-based violence
- discuss the international legal framework for addressing violence against women
- explain the significance of CEDAW General Recommendations 19 and 35
- examine the importance of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 1993
- define human trafficking and explain its gendered dimensions
- examine the major causes and consequences of human trafficking
- explain the due-diligence obligations of states in preventing and responding to gender-based violence
- analyse the role of civil society organisations and social movements in combating GBV and trafficking

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Prerequisite

For a long time, violence occurring within families and intimate relationships was often treated as a private or domestic matter. Feminist movements challenged this understanding by demonstrating that violence against women is connected to wider structures of power, inequality, and discrimination. This transformation gradually influenced international human rights law, national legislation, and public policy.

Consider the following question as you study this unit: How did violence against women move from being treated largely as a private matter to becoming a recognised issue of international human rights and global governance?

This question provides a thread connecting the different themes of the unit. The discussion moves from theories of patriarchy and intersectionality to international legal frameworks, domestic violence, sexual violence, conflict-related violence, human trafficking, and the role of states and civil society.

Keywords

Patriarchy, intimate partner violence, coercive control, sexual violence, femicide, CEDAW, General Recommendation 19, Istanbul Convention, domestic violence, Nirbhaya case, Women, Peace and Security, Resolution 1325, conflict-related sexual violence, human trafficking, Palermo Protocol, exploitation, civil society, #MeToo

Discussion

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world, affecting an estimated one in three women globally. This unit provides a comprehensive examination of the forms, causes, and consequences of gender-based violence; the international and national legal frameworks addressing it; and the specific issue of human trafficking, with particular attention to its gendered dimensions. Students will engage with both theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence.

4.2.1 Defining Gender-Based Violence

4.2.1.1 Conceptual Clarity

The term 'gender-based violence' refers to violence directed at individuals or groups on the basis of their gender or violence that has a disproportionate impact on persons of a particular gender. Although GBV affects people of all genders, women and girls bear by far the greatest burden. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

The extension of the definition to the private sphere was a major advance over earlier approaches in international law. It recognises that violence against women does not occur only in public spaces or during armed conflict but can also occur within families and intimate relationships. The definition encompasses domestic violence, marital rape, honour crimes, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, sexual harassment, trafficking, forced prostitution, and violence in conflict situations.

4.2.1.2 Forms of Gender-Based Violence

GBV takes many forms. These forms can be classified according to the nature of the harm, the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, and the setting in which the violence occurs.

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- Physical violence includes beating, slapping, kicking, burning, and acid attacks.
- Sexual violence includes rape, sexual assault, forced prostitution, and sexual harassment.
- Psychological violence includes emotional abuse, coercive control, threats, intimidation, and social isolation.
- Economic violence includes financial control, denial of access to economic resources, restrictions on employment, and deliberate interference with a person's economic independence.
- Femicide refers to the killing of women because they are women. It may include forms such as honour killings and dowry-related deaths.
- Harmful traditional practices include female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, bride burning, and forced marriage.
- Conflict-related sexual violence includes rape and other forms of sexual violence used as weapons or tactics during armed conflict.
- Cyber violence includes online harassment, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, cyberstalking, threats, and other forms of technology-facilitated abuse.

4.2.2 Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding GBV

4.2.2.1 Patriarchy and Structural Analysis

Feminist scholars identify patriarchy, understood as the systematic organisation of society in ways that privilege men and subordinate women, as a major structural cause of gender-based violence. From this perspective, violence is not simply an isolated or individual aberration but can function as a mechanism through which patriarchal power and control are enforced and reproduced. Domestic violence, rape, and sexual harassment can therefore be understood not merely as individual acts of cruelty but also as practices that reinforce gender hierarchies and restrict women's autonomy.

Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy identifies six major patriarchal structures: paid work, household production, culture, sexuality, violence, and the state. Each structure can be analysed in terms of its role in maintaining gender inequalities and creating conditions in which violence against women can occur. Walby distinguishes between private patriarchy, which operates primarily within the family and was characteristic of nineteenth-century Western societies, and public patriarchy, which operates through wider institutions such as the labour market and the state.

4.2.2.2 Intersectional Approaches to GBV

Intersectionality provides an important framework for understanding how gender-based violence is shaped by and intersects with other forms of inequality. Women who experience poverty, caste or ethnic marginalisation, disability, displacement, or discrimination based on sexual orientation may face heightened risks of violence and greater barriers to accessing justice. Intersectional analysis therefore avoids treating women as a homogeneous category and draws attention to the different ways in which multiple forms of disadvantage interact.

In the Indian context, Dalit women may experience forms of caste- and gender-based

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violence in which sexual violence can also function as a mechanism of caste domination. Their experiences demonstrate how gender cannot always be understood separately from caste, class, ethnicity, and other structures of inequality.

The 2012 gang-rape case, widely known as the Nirbhaya case, and the subsequent legislative reforms also highlighted questions concerning vulnerability, access to justice, and the treatment of survivors within legal institutions. Scholars such as Vrinda Grover, Flavia Agnes, and Pratiksha Baxi have examined how legal and social processes can re-victimise survivors through questioning about their sexual history, character, behaviour, or clothing.

4.2.2.3 Psychological and Sociological Explanations

Beyond structural explanations, psychologists and sociologists have identified individual, relational, community, and societal factors associated with GBV. Social learning theory, associated with Albert Bandura, suggests that violent behaviour can be learned through observation and reinforced when social environments tolerate or reward aggression. Attachment theory identifies disrupted or insecure early attachment as one possible risk factor in abusive relationships, although such explanations must be understood within wider social and structural contexts.

Ecological models provide a broader framework by integrating multiple levels of explanation. The work of Urie Bronfenbrenner and the ecological model of GBV developed by Lori Heise examine individual, relational, community, and societal factors together. Such approaches recognise that violence may result from the interaction of personal experiences, family relationships, community conditions, and wider social structures.

Research on social norms has also demonstrated that GBV can be sustained by norms that condone male authority over women, justify violence as a form of discipline, stigmatise survivors, or discourage reporting. This research has informed contemporary GBV prevention programmes that seek to transform harmful social norms through community education, awareness programmes, and the involvement of men and boys in gender-equality initiatives.

4.2.3 International Legal Framework on GBV

4.2.3.1 CEDAW and General Recommendation 19 (1992) and General Recommendation 35 (2017)

Although the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, does not explicitly use the term violence against women in its original text, General Recommendation No. 19, adopted by the CEDAW Committee in 1992, clarified that gender-based violence constitutes a form of discrimination against women within the scope of CEDAW.

General Recommendation No. 19 recognised that states have responsibilities to prevent, investigate, and punish acts of violence against women, including violence committed by private individuals, and to provide appropriate remedies to survivors.

General Recommendation No. 35, adopted in 2017, updated General Recommendation No. 19 and provided a more comprehensive interpretation of states' obligations concerning gender-based violence against women. It reaffirmed that GBV is rooted in gender-related factors, including discriminatory social norms and ideologies that construct men as entitled to control women. It called upon states to address the structural causes of violence through comprehensive

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measures relating to prevention, protection, prosecution, punishment, and remedies.

4.2.3.2 The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993)

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly through Resolution 48/104 in 1993. It was the first international instrument specifically devoted to violence against women. The Declaration provides a comprehensive definition of violence against women, identifies different forms of violence occurring in both public and private life, and articulates responsibilities of states in addressing such violence through a due-diligence approach.

The Declaration contributed to the establishment of the mandate of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences in 1994. The position has been held by prominent experts and practitioners, including Radhika Coomaraswamy (1994–2003), Yakin Ertürk (2003–2009), Rashida Manjoo (2009–2015), Dubravka Šimonović (2015–2021), and Reem Alsalem (since 2021).

4.2.3.3 The Council of Europe Istanbul Convention (2011)

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, commonly known as the Istanbul Convention, is a major regional human rights treaty addressing violence against women and domestic violence. It covers domestic violence, stalking, sexual harassment, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, forced abortion, and forced sterilisation.

The Convention is notable for explicitly recognising violence against women as a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men. It establishes obligations for states concerning prevention, protection, prosecution, integrated policies, and monitoring.

The Convention also established the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) as a monitoring mechanism. Its framework has influenced legal and policy developments in several European states and has also served as a reference point in discussions on combating violence against women in other regions.

4.2.4 Domestic Violence

4.2.4.1 Understanding Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to physical, sexual, or psychological violence perpetrated by a current or former spouse or intimate partner. It is one of the most common forms of violence against women globally. The World Health Organization's 2021 estimates reported that approximately 27 per cent of ever-partnered women aged 15–49 had experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner during their lifetime.

Evan Stark's concept of 'coercive control' has significantly influenced contemporary understandings of domestic violence. Stark argues that domestic abuse should not be understood only in terms of individual incidents of physical violence. Instead, it may involve a continuing pattern of behaviour through which an abusive partner restricts a woman's liberty and exercises control over her everyday life.

Coercive control may involve surveillance, isolation, economic deprivation, threats, intimidation, restrictions on social relationships, and systematic degradation of the victim's identity and autonomy.

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Several jurisdictions, including England and Wales and Scotland, have introduced legal provisions addressing coercive or controlling behaviour.

4.2.4.2 The Indian Legal Response: Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

India's Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005, was a significant piece of civil legislation addressing domestic violence within the private sphere. The Act recognises different forms of domestic abuse, including physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and economic abuse.

The Act provides several civil remedies, including protection orders, residence orders, monetary relief, and custody orders. These remedies can be sought independently of criminal prosecution. The legislation therefore recognises domestic violence as a form of abuse that requires protection and remedial measures rather than relying exclusively on criminal punishment.

The PWDVA also introduced the concept of the 'shared household', affirming a woman's right to reside in the shared household in accordance with the provisions of the law, irrespective of ownership arrangements. Protection Officers appointed under the Act assist survivors in accessing legal and institutional remedies.

Despite the importance of the legislation, its implementation has faced several challenges. These include inadequate institutional resources, insufficient numbers of Protection Officers in some areas, limited availability of shelter facilities, lack of awareness among survivors, and delays in judicial proceedings.

4.2.5 Sexual Violence

4.2.5.1 Rape as a Crime of Power

Feminist scholars have challenged the traditional understanding of rape as primarily a crime of sexual desire or passion. Susan Brownmiller's influential book Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape (1975) reframed rape as an act of violence, power, and control. Brownmiller argued that rape contributes to a wider climate of fear and intimidation experienced by women.

Her argument that 'all men benefit from rape' generated considerable debate and criticism, but her work contributed significantly to feminist discussions about rape as a social and political issue rather than simply an individual criminal act.

Contemporary feminist legal scholarship on rape has focused extensively on questions of consent, including its definition, communication, proof, and relationship to wider social attitudes towards sexual violence. Feminist scholars have also criticised legal and social practices that place the burden of scrutiny on survivors. Issues such as the 'reasonable woman' standard, corroboration requirements, the use of survivors' sexual history as evidence, and invasive medical examination practices have therefore received sustained attention.

The Indian legal context has also witnessed important changes in relation to the treatment of survivors. The use of the so-called two-finger test in sexual assault examinations has been rejected by the Supreme Court of India, reflecting the growing emphasis on dignity, informed consent, and scientific standards in the treatment of survivors.

4.2.5.2 Post-Nirbhaya Legal Reforms in India

The gang rape and murder of a 23-year-old physiotherapy student in New Delhi on

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16 December 2012, widely known as the Nirbhaya case, generated large-scale public protests across India and led to renewed debate on sexual violence and criminal law.

The Justice Verma Committee, chaired by former Chief Justice of India J. S. Verma and including Justice Leila Seth and senior advocate Gopal Subramaniam, was constituted to examine existing laws relating to sexual violence and recommend legal reforms.

The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 introduced several significant changes to India's criminal law framework. It expanded the legal definition of rape and introduced or strengthened offences relating to stalking, voyeurism, and acid attacks. It also increased penalties for several offences relating to sexual violence. The legislation followed extensive public debate and the recommendations of the Justice Verma Committee, although not all recommendations of the Committee were incorporated into the final legislation.

The reforms represented an important stage in the development of India's legal response to sexual violence. They also contributed to wider discussions concerning police accountability, judicial procedures, survivor support, institutional reform, and the need for broader changes in social attitudes towards gender and sexual violence.

4.2.6 Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

4.2.6.1 Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War

Sexual violence during armed conflict includes rape, gang rape, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, sexual slavery, and other forms of sexual abuse. Such violence has been documented in numerous conflicts during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Examples include the sexual slavery system associated with Imperial Japan, mass sexual violence during the conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda in the 1990s, and the enslavement and sexual violence perpetrated against Yazidi women and girls by the Islamic State.

Sexual violence during conflict can be used to terrorise civilian populations, destroy social relationships, displace communities, enforce ethnic or political domination, and undermine the social fabric of targeted groups. Its consequences may continue long after the end of armed conflict.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in 1998, represented an important development in the international criminalisation of conflict-related sexual violence. It recognises rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, and other forms of sexual violence as crimes against humanity and, under specified circumstances, as war crimes.

The Rome Statute also recognises that certain acts of sexual violence may constitute acts of genocide when committed with the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.

4.2.6.2 UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, was a landmark development in the Women, Peace and Security agenda. It recognised the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and girls and affirmed the importance of women's full and equal participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction.

Resolution 1325 called upon states and other actors to incorporate gender perspectives into peace negotiations, peacekeeping operations, humanitarian

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responses, and post-conflict reconstruction. It also highlighted the need to protect women and girls from gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict.

Resolution 1325 has been followed by a series of subsequent Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 1820 (2008), which recognised sexual violence as a tactic of war; Resolution 1888 (2009), concerning the international response to conflict-related sexual violence; Resolution 1889 (2009), which strengthened attention to women's participation in post-conflict peacebuilding; and Resolution 2122 (2013), which reinforced women's participation in peace and security processes.

Together, these resolutions form an important part of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, which seeks to integrate gender perspectives into international peace and security policies and practices.

4.2.7 Human Trafficking: Definition, Scale, and Gendered Dimensions

4.2.7.1 Defining Trafficking

The Palermo Protocol, formally known as the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Adopted in 2000, it provides the internationally recognised definition of trafficking in persons.

Trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons through means such as the threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to obtain control over another person for the purpose of exploitation.

Exploitation includes, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, and the removal of organs.

The definition of trafficking therefore contains three major elements: the act, the means, and the purpose. The act may involve recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt. The means may include coercion, deception, abuse of power, or exploitation of vulnerability. The purpose is exploitation.

Where any of the specified coercive or deceptive means are used, the consent of the trafficked person does not prevent the conduct from being recognised as trafficking. In the case of children under the age of 18, the use of such means does not need to be established when the act is carried out for the purpose of exploitation.

4.2.7.2 Global Scale and Gendered Patterns

Human trafficking is a major transnational human rights and criminal justice issue. Estimates of the economic profits associated with trafficking vary, but trafficking generates substantial illicit profits through forms of exploitation including forced labour and sexual exploitation.

The International Labour Organization has also estimated the scale of modern slavery, including forced labour and forced marriage. These figures demonstrate that exploitation occurs across multiple sectors and social contexts.

Trafficking is profoundly gendered. Women and girls constitute a significant proportion of detected trafficking victims globally, particularly in cases involving sexual exploitation. According to UNODC's Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020,

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women and girls constituted approximately 71 per cent of detected trafficking victims globally. Sexual exploitation represented a major form of detected trafficking, with women and girls disproportionately affected.

However, trafficking is not limited to sexual exploitation. Forced labour, domestic servitude, forced begging, and other forms of exploitation also affect women, men, and children.

4.2.7.3 Root Causes

Human trafficking is driven by a complex interaction of supply-side and demand-side factors. On the supply side, poverty, gender inequality, discrimination, lack of education, limited employment opportunities, armed conflict, forced displacement, and institutional corruption can create conditions that increase vulnerability to trafficking.

On the demand side, the demand for commercial sexual services, inexpensive domestic labour, and cheap goods and services can create economic incentives for exploitation.

Feminist scholars and activists have debated the relationship between trafficking and sex work. Abolitionist feminists and organisations such as the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) argue that prostitution is inherently exploitative and that the legalisation or normalisation of sex work may contribute to increased demand and trafficking.

Sex worker rights advocates, including organisations such as the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP), distinguish consensual adult sex work from trafficking and argue that criminalisation can increase the vulnerability of sex workers by pushing them into informal and less protected environments.

These debates demonstrate that trafficking policy involves complex questions concerning exploitation, consent, labour rights, gender inequality, criminalisation, and the protection of vulnerable persons.

4.2.7.4 Human Trafficking in India

India is simultaneously a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (ITPA), 1956, as amended, has been an important component of India's legal framework concerning commercial sexual exploitation.

The law has also been criticised by scholars and human rights organisations for its approach to sex work and for the possibility that enforcement practices may result in the criminalisation or marginalisation of sex workers rather than adequately protecting persons who have been trafficked.

The Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018, sought to create a more comprehensive framework for addressing trafficking. It proposed measures relating to the prevention of trafficking, identification and protection of victims, rehabilitation, Anti-Trafficking Units, rehabilitation funds, and designated courts. However, the Bill did not become law.

Trafficking in India is associated with multiple structural factors, including poverty, caste discrimination, gender inequality, internal migration, displacement, and demand for inexpensive domestic labour and commercial sexual services. Certain groups may face heightened vulnerability because of social and economic marginalisation, including children, migrant workers, persons from disadvantaged communities, and women and girls in situations of poverty.

The Palermo Protocol framework emphasises the importance of a victim-centred and gender-sensitive approach that prioritises the identification, protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration of trafficking survivors.

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4.2.8 State Responses and Civil Society

4.2.8.1 The Due Diligence Standard

As discussed in Unit I, states have obligations under international human rights law not only to refrain from committing gender-based violence but also to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and provide remedies for GBV committed by private actors.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights' decision in González et al. v. Mexico, commonly known as the 'Cotton Field' case (2009), is an important application of the due-diligence principle. The case concerned the disappearance and killing of women in Ciudad Juárez. The Court examined Mexico's responsibility in relation to failures in prevention, investigation, and protection.

The due-diligence standard therefore recognises that states may have international human rights responsibilities when they fail to take reasonable measures to prevent or respond effectively to violence against women.

4.2.8.2 The Role of Civil Society

Civil society organisations have played an important role in documenting gender-based violence, advocating legal and policy reform, providing support services to survivors, creating public awareness, and holding governments and institutions accountable.

In India, organisations such as Jagori, the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), Sakhi, Majlis, and the Lawyers Collective have contributed to work relating to women's rights, legal reform, gender-based violence, and survivor support. Internationally, organisations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Center for Reproductive Rights, and the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) have undertaken research, advocacy, and policy engagement.

The #MeToo movement, which gained global visibility in 2017 following public revelations concerning sexual harassment and abuse in the entertainment industry, demonstrated the ability of social media to amplify survivors' experiences and generate public debate about sexual violence and workplace harassment.

In India, the #MeToo movement gained significant momentum in 2018 and brought allegations of sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour in sectors including journalism, academia, film, and politics into public discussion. The movement also generated debates about institutional accountability, due process, workplace procedures, and the difficulties faced by survivors in reporting harassment.

4.2.9 Concluding Observation

Gender-based violence is not simply an individual or private problem. It is a complex social, political, legal, and human rights issue shaped by unequal gender relations, economic inequalities, social norms, institutional practices, and multiple forms of discrimination. Understanding GBV therefore requires attention to both individual experiences and the wider structures within which violence occurs. Feminist approaches have been particularly important in challenging the traditional separation between the public and private spheres and in demonstrating that violence within households and intimate relationships can also constitute a matter of public concern and human rights.

The international legal framework has developed considerably through instruments such as CEDAW, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Istanbul Convention, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda. National legislation, including India's Protection of

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Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, has further expanded legal responses to gender-based violence. At the same time, human trafficking demonstrates how gender inequality, poverty, migration, exploitation, and organised crime can intersect. Effective responses therefore require not only laws and criminal sanctions but also prevention, survivor-centred services, economic opportunities, social transformation, and accountable institutions.

Recap

- Gender-based violence refers to violence directed against individuals because of their gender or violence that disproportionately affects persons of a particular gender.
- GBV includes physical, sexual, psychological, economic, technological, and conflict-related forms of violence.
- Feminist approaches understand patriarchy as an important structural factor in the production and reproduction of gender-based violence.
- Intersectionality explains how gender interacts with caste, class, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, and other forms of inequality.
- Psychological and sociological approaches examine individual, relational, community, and social factors associated with GBV.
- CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19 recognised gender-based violence as a form of discrimination against women.
- General Recommendation No. 35 updated and strengthened the interpretation of CEDAW in relation to gender-based violence.
- The 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women was the first international instrument specifically devoted to violence against women.
- India's Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, provides civil remedies against different forms of domestic abuse.
- Sexual violence during armed conflict can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, and, under specific circumstances, an act of genocide.
- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 established an important framework for women's participation and protection under the Women, Peace and Security agenda.
- The Palermo Protocol defines trafficking through the elements of act, means, and purpose of exploitation.

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- Human trafficking is shaped by poverty, inequality, discrimination, conflict, migration, vulnerability, and demand for exploitative labour and services.
- The Indian response to trafficking involves legal, institutional, and rehabilitation measures, although significant implementation challenges remain.
- The due-diligence standard requires states to take reasonable measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and provide remedies for gender-based violence.
- Civil society organisations and social movements play important roles in documentation, advocacy, legal reform, survivor support, and public awareness.

Objective Questions

1. What does the term gender-based violence primarily refer to?
2. Which feminist scholar developed the theory of patriarchal structures involving paid work, household production, culture, sexuality, violence, and the state?
3. Which CEDAW General Recommendation specifically recognised gender-based violence as a form of discrimination against women?
4. In which year was the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women adopted?
5. What does IPV stand for?
6. Which Indian legislation specifically addresses domestic violence against women and provides civil remedies?
7. Which international instrument defines trafficking in persons and was adopted in 2000?
8. What are the three basic elements of human trafficking under the Palermo Protocol?
9. Which UN Security Council Resolution is associated with the Women, Peace and Security agenda?
10. Which international treaty recognises certain forms of sexual violence as war crimes and crimes against humanity?

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11. What is the central idea of the due-diligence standard in relation to gender-based violence?

12. Which movement gained global visibility through social media in 2017 by drawing attention to sexual harassment and sexual abuse?

Answers

1. Gender-based violence refers to violence directed against individuals or groups on the basis of gender or violence that disproportionately affects persons of a particular gender.
2. Sylvia Walby
3. General Recommendation No. 19, adopted in 1992
4. 1993
5. Intimate Partner Violence
6. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
7. The Palermo Protocol, formally known as the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.
8. The act, the means, and the purpose of exploitation
9. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000
10. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in 1998
11. It requires states to take reasonable measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and provide remedies for gender-based violence, including violence committed by private actors.
12. The #MeToo movement

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Assignments

1. Explain the concept of gender-based violence and identify its major forms.
2. Explain the relationship between patriarchy and gender-based violence.

3. What is intersectionality? Explain its relevance to the study of GBV.
4. Discuss the significance of CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19.
5. Explain the concept of coercive control in intimate partner violence.
6. What is human trafficking? Explain its three basic elements.
7. Examine the major theoretical approaches to understanding gender-based violence.
8. Examine conflict-related sexual violence and discuss the significance of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.
9. Explain the concept of human trafficking and analyse its gendered dimensions and root causes.
10. Discuss the role of states, civil society organisations, and social movements in preventing and responding to gender-based violence and trafficking.

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UNIT 3

Reproductive Rights and Health

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the meaning and scope of reproductive rights
- relate reproductive rights to established human rights such as the rights to health, life, privacy, equality, and dignity
- describe the historical development of reproductive rights activism
- explain the significance of the ICPD Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action
- examine the role of CEDAW in promoting women's reproductive health and equality
- explain bodily autonomy as a philosophical foundation of reproductive rights
- discuss major ethical and legal perspectives on abortion

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Prerequisite

Reproductive rights begin with a deceptively simple question: Who should have the authority to make decisions about reproduction? At first glance, reproduction may appear to be a private matter concerning individuals and families. However, reproduction has always been influenced by laws, religious institutions, medical systems, social norms, economic conditions, and state policies.

Governments regulate marriage, contraception, abortion, adoption, assisted reproduction, surrogacy, and prenatal medical practices. At different moments in history, states have encouraged people to have more children, discouraged them from having children, promoted particular forms of family life, or attempted to control the reproduction of particular populations. These developments demonstrate

that reproduction is not merely a private biological process. It is also a social and political issue.

The history of reproductive rights can therefore be understood as a continuing struggle over autonomy and power. The central question is not simply whether abortion or contraception should be legal. It is also whether people have the knowledge, resources, healthcare, security, and freedom necessary to make reproductive decisions without coercion.

This leads to a broader question of reproductive justice: Is a reproductive choice genuinely free when social and economic conditions make meaningful choice difficult? This question connects reproductive rights with poverty, caste, class, disability, gender inequality, healthcare access, and social justice.

Keywords

Bodily autonomy, reproductive self-determination, sexual and reproductive health and rights, abortion, contraception, maternal mortality, maternal morbidity, reproductive justice, reproductive coercion, forced sterilisation, CEDAW, ICPD, beijing platform for action, medical termination of pregnancy act, intersectionality, informed consent, sexual health, gender equality

Discussion

Reproductive rights—including the right to decide whether, when, and with whom to have children; the right to access reproductive health information and services; and the right to bodily autonomy—lie at the intersection of gender equality, health, and human rights. Reproductive rights concern both individual autonomy and the social, economic, and institutional conditions necessary for people to exercise meaningful choices about reproduction.

This unit examines the legal, philosophical, and social foundations of reproductive rights. It traces the historical development of reproductive rights activism and examines key international and national frameworks, including the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The unit also critically examines continuing debates surrounding abortion, contraception, maternal health, reproductive coercion, and assisted reproductive technologies. Particular attention is given to India, including the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, the constitutional dimensions of reproductive autonomy, maternal health, and the reproductive justice framework.

4.3.1 Foundational Concepts

4.3.1.1 Defining Reproductive Rights

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population

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and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994, provides one of the most influential international formulations of reproductive rights. It explains reproductive rights in terms of the ability of individuals and couples to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children and to have the information and means necessary to do so. It also links reproductive rights with the highest attainable standard of sexual and reproductive health and with the right to make reproductive decisions free from discrimination, coercion, and violence.

This understanding encompasses several interconnected dimensions of rights. First, reproductive self-determination refers to the ability to decide whether and when to reproduce. Second, reproductive health concerns access to appropriate, available, accessible, and quality health services. Third, equality requires that reproductive decisions be made without discrimination, coercion, or violence. Reproductive rights therefore cannot be understood solely as access to particular medical services. They also involve autonomy, information, dignity, equality, and freedom from coercion.

Reproductive rights are closely connected to other human rights. The right to health, the right to privacy, the right to equality and non-discrimination, the right to life, and the right to freedom from violence and degrading treatment can all become relevant to reproductive decision-making. Consequently, reproductive rights occupy an important position within contemporary human rights discourse.

4.3.1.2 Reproductive Rights as Human Rights

Reproductive rights are grounded in a cluster of established human rights. The right to life is relevant to reproductive health because unsafe abortion, preventable maternal mortality, and inadequate maternal healthcare can result in avoidable deaths. The right to health, recognised in Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), encompasses important dimensions of sexual and reproductive health.

The right to privacy is also relevant to reproductive decision-making. Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) protects individuals against arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family, and related matters. Reproductive decisions can therefore raise important questions concerning the appropriate limits of state interference in personal and family life.

The principle of non-discrimination is another important foundation of reproductive rights. CEDAW requires states to eliminate discrimination against women in healthcare and other areas of social life. Reproductive healthcare must therefore be accessible without discrimination based on gender, marital status, disability, caste, class, ethnicity, religion, or other prohibited or unjustified grounds.

International human rights bodies have also addressed coercive reproductive practices such as forced sterilisation and forced abortion. Such practices may violate rights to bodily integrity, dignity, health, equality, privacy, and freedom from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Reproductive rights therefore involve not only access to services but also protection from unwanted medical interventions and reproductive coercion.

4.3.1.3 Bodily Autonomy and Self-Determination

At the philosophical centre of reproductive rights lies the principle of bodily autonomy. Bodily autonomy refers to the ability of individuals to make decisions concerning their own bodies without unjustified coercion or interference. In reproductive contexts, bodily

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autonomy includes decisions concerning pregnancy, contraception, childbirth, sterilisation, and other reproductive healthcare.

Feminist philosophers have developed influential arguments concerning bodily autonomy and reproduction. Judith Jarvis Thomson's "A Defense of Abortion" (1971) presents a well-known thought experiment concerning the relationship between a foetus's possible right to life and a pregnant person's right to bodily autonomy. Thomson argues that even if a foetus is granted a right to life, it does not necessarily follow that another person can be compelled to use their body to sustain that life without consent.

Thomson's argument does not resolve the moral debate surrounding abortion. Rather, it shifts attention towards the question of whether a person can be morally or legally compelled to provide bodily support to another being. The argument has therefore become an important part of philosophical discussions concerning bodily autonomy and abortion.

Susan Sherwin's feminist bioethics approach expands the discussion by locating individual reproductive decisions within wider structures of social power. From this perspective, reproductive autonomy cannot be reduced to the formal absence of state interference. Genuine autonomy may also require education, economic security, access to healthcare, freedom from violence, and the ability to make decisions without social or institutional coercion.

Thus, bodily autonomy has both an individual and a structural dimension. Individuals require freedom to make reproductive decisions, but they also require social conditions that make meaningful decision-making possible.

4.3.2 Historical Development of Reproductive Rights

4.3.2.1 Early Contraceptive Activism

The modern reproductive rights movement developed partly from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century campaigns for access to contraception and reproductive information. Activists such as Margaret Sanger in the United States and Marie Stopes in Britain played prominent roles in promoting birth control and challenging legal restrictions on contraceptive information and services.

Margaret Sanger established birth control clinics and advocated wider access to contraception. Her activism was influenced by concerns about women's health, unwanted pregnancies, and women's autonomy. However, her legacy is complex because some of her writings and organisational activities were connected with eugenic ideas and population-control thinking. Contemporary scholarship therefore examines her work critically, recognising both her contribution to the birth control movement and the problematic aspects of her engagement with eugenics.

Marie Stopes similarly advocated birth control and established clinics in Britain. Her work contributed to the development of organised contraceptive services and public discussion of reproductive health.

The history of early contraceptive activism demonstrates that reproductive rights have not always developed exclusively from a human rights framework. Reproductive policies have also been influenced by population control, public health, colonial administration, eugenics, nationalism, and economic concerns. This history is important because it highlights the distinction between voluntary reproductive choice and policies that seek to control the reproduction of particular populations.

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In India, reproductive and population debates developed within a complex colonial and postcolonial context. Concerns about maternal health and family welfare existed alongside demographic concerns about population growth. After independence, family planning became an important component of state policy. The Family Planning Association of India, established in 1949, contributed to the promotion of family planning and reproductive health.

The Indian experience illustrates the importance of examining reproductive policies through both health and rights perspectives. A programme designed to improve access to contraception can promote autonomy when participation is voluntary and informed. However, reproductive policies can become coercive when individuals are pressured or denied meaningful choice.

4.3.2.2 The Cairo Programme of Action (1994): A Paradigm Shift

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994, represented a major shift in international approaches to population and reproduction. Earlier population policies often focused strongly on demographic targets and population growth. The ICPD Programme of Action moved towards a rights-based framework that placed human dignity, individual choice, women's empowerment, reproductive health, and development at the centre of population policy.

The Programme of Action was adopted by 179 governments. It rejected coercive population-control approaches and emphasised voluntary decision-making, access to reproductive health information and services, education, and gender equality.

The Cairo consensus connected population, development, gender equality, and reproductive health. However, the negotiations were politically contested. Abortion was one of the most controversial issues. The final Programme of Action did not establish abortion as a method of family planning and stated that abortion should not be promoted as such. At the same time, it called upon governments to address unsafe abortion as a major public health concern and, where abortion is not against the law, to ensure that services are provided safely.

The ICPD framework therefore represents both a significant development and a negotiated international consensus containing important limitations. It established reproductive health and reproductive decision-making as central development concerns while leaving substantial areas of disagreement, particularly concerning abortion, to national and subsequent international debates.

The subsequent reviews of the ICPD Programme of Action reaffirmed many of its central principles and expanded attention to issues including adolescent sexual and reproductive health and the rights and needs of marginalised populations.

4.3.2.3 The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and Reproductive Rights

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, reaffirmed many of the reproductive health commitments associated with the Cairo process. It placed reproductive rights within a broader framework of women's human rights and gender equality.

The Beijing Platform recognised that women's ability to exercise reproductive rights is closely connected with their health, dignity, equality, and bodily integrity. It called for equal rights of women and men in matters relating to sexuality and reproduction, including respect for the integrity of the person.

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The Platform also recognised the health consequences of unsafe abortion. It called upon governments to consider reviewing laws containing punitive measures against women who have undergone illegal abortions, while recognising that abortion-related policies remained subject to national legal frameworks.

The Beijing framework therefore strengthened the connection between reproductive health and women's human rights. It also contributed to a broader understanding in which reproductive decision-making was linked to women's participation in social, economic, political, and public life.

4.3.3 International Legal Framework on Reproductive Rights

4.3.3.1 CEDAW and Reproductive Rights

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an important international framework for reproductive rights. Article 12 requires states parties to eliminate discrimination against women in healthcare and specifically refers to access to healthcare services, including those related to family planning.

The CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No. 24 on Women and Health (1999) elaborates the obligations of states concerning women's healthcare. It addresses reproductive health, maternal mortality, access to healthcare services, and discriminatory practices.

The CEDAW framework also requires attention to the social conditions that affect women's reproductive health. Discrimination in healthcare may result not only from explicit exclusion but also from laws, policies, institutional practices, social norms, or inadequate services that disproportionately affect women.

The CEDAW Committee has addressed restrictive abortion laws in its concluding observations to states. Its recommendations have frequently concerned the need to reduce preventable maternal mortality, ensure access to reproductive healthcare, and review laws and policies that create discriminatory or harmful consequences for women.

However, the international legal status of abortion remains contested. CEDAW does not contain an explicit general right to abortion. Its interpretation and application have developed through the work of the CEDAW Committee and other human rights bodies. It is therefore important to distinguish between the text of the Convention itself and subsequent interpretations and recommendations by treaty-monitoring bodies.

4.3.3.2 The Right to Health in International Law

Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), adopted in 1966, recognises "the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health."

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights elaborated this right in General Comment No. 14 (2000). The Committee identified four important elements of healthcare and health-related facilities and services: availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality. These elements are often referred to as the AAAQ framework.

Applied to reproductive healthcare, availability requires that appropriate reproductive health facilities, goods, and services exist. Accessibility requires that such services can be reached and used without unjustified barriers, including financial,

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geographic, informational, or discriminatory barriers. Acceptability requires that healthcare respect medical ethics, culture, gender, and other relevant dimensions of dignity. Quality requires that services be scientifically and medically appropriate.

The right to health therefore involves both negative and positive obligations. States must refrain from unjustified interference with reproductive decision-making while also taking measures to ensure access to appropriate healthcare services.

These obligations may include maternal healthcare, contraception, information and education, prevention and treatment of reproductive health conditions, and other services necessary for the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health.

4.3.3.3 Forced Sterilisation and Reproductive Coercion as Human Rights Violations

The history of reproductive rights includes not only struggles for access to contraception and abortion but also resistance to coercive reproductive control. Forced sterilisation is a particularly serious example. It involves sterilisation performed without free and informed consent and can violate rights to bodily integrity, privacy, health, family life, dignity, and equality.

Historically, coercive sterilisation policies have disproportionately affected marginalised populations, including racial and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and economically disadvantaged communities. In several countries, sterilisation was influenced by eugenic ideologies that sought to control the reproduction of populations considered undesirable.

India also has a significant history of coercive reproductive policies. During the Emergency period of 1975–1977, mass sterilisation campaigns were implemented on a large scale. Men were disproportionately targeted during the early stages, although women also experienced sterilisation and reproductive coercion. The campaigns generated significant public controversy because of coercion, inadequate consent, and the use of administrative pressure and incentives.

In subsequent decades, concerns have continued regarding sterilisation practices, particularly when women undergo procedures without fully informed consent or under conditions of inadequate medical care.

Reproductive coercion may also include forced abortion, denial of contraception, contraceptive coercion, forced pregnancy, or pressure to reproduce. These practices demonstrate that reproductive freedom involves both the freedom to make reproductive choices and protection from coercive reproductive control.

4.3.4 Abortion: Legal, Ethical, and Human Rights Debates

4.3.4.1 The Moral Philosophy of Abortion

Few issues in bioethics and political philosophy are as contested as abortion. The debate concerns questions about the moral status of the foetus, bodily autonomy, personhood, state authority, gender equality, religious belief, and the limits of law.

One broad position, commonly described as "pro-life" or anti-abortion, holds that human life begins at conception or at an early stage of pregnancy and that the foetus possesses a significant moral or legal claim to life. Some religious and secular arguments maintain that this claim may justify substantial restrictions on abortion.

A contrasting position, commonly described as "pro-choice," places particular

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emphasis on the pregnant person's bodily autonomy and reproductive self-determination. From this perspective, the state should not ordinarily compel a person to continue a pregnancy against their will. Feminist arguments also emphasise that pregnancy imposes distinctive physical and social burdens and that compulsory pregnancy can affect women's equality and participation in society.

A third approach may be described as gradualist. It holds that the moral status of the foetus develops during pregnancy and that the ethical and legal considerations surrounding abortion may therefore change according to the stage of pregnancy. Some legal systems reflect forms of this approach by permitting abortion during an early period while introducing additional conditions at later stages.

These positions are not internally uniform. Religious traditions, feminist thinkers, philosophers, medical professionals, and political movements have developed diverse arguments within and across these broad categories.

4.3.4.2 The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, India (1971, Amended 2021)

India's Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971, created a legal framework for the termination of certain pregnancies under specified conditions. The original legislation was enacted within a broader context that included concerns about maternal health, unsafe abortion, and population policy.

The MTP Act originally permitted termination of pregnancy under specified circumstances and subject to prescribed gestational limits and medical requirements. The legal framework was subsequently amended in 2021.

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, 2021, expanded access in several respects. It increased the upper gestational limit from 20 to 24 weeks for specified categories of women, including survivors of rape, minors, women with certain disabilities, and women whose marital status changed during the pregnancy. The amendment also introduced provisions concerning substantial foetal abnormalities, subject to the requirements of a Medical Board.

The 2021 amendment expanded the law's coverage in relation to contraceptive failure by replacing the earlier reference to a "married woman or her husband" with "woman or her partner." This represented a significant change in the statutory language by recognising that contraceptive failure and reproductive decision-making cannot be limited exclusively to married couples.

The amendment did not create an unrestricted right to abortion on request at all stages of pregnancy. Access remains subject to the conditions and procedures established by the legislation.

The Supreme Court of India addressed reproductive autonomy in *X v. Principal Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Department, Government of NCT of Delhi* (2022). The Court emphasised reproductive autonomy and held that unmarried women could not be excluded from the benefits of the MTP framework merely because of their marital status. The judgment also recognised reproductive choice as connected with personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The Indian legal framework therefore illustrates the relationship between statutory regulation, constitutional rights, medical standards, and reproductive autonomy.

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4.3.4.3 Unsafe Abortion as a Public Health and Human Rights Concern

Unsafe abortion remains an important global public health concern. The World Health Organization has estimated that a substantial proportion of abortions globally are unsafe and that complications from unsafe abortion contribute significantly to preventable maternal morbidity and mortality.

Unsafe abortion is more common where access to safe and legal abortion services is restricted or where healthcare systems fail to provide appropriate information and services. Women experiencing poverty, geographic isolation, social stigma, discrimination, or lack of information may face particularly serious barriers.

From a human rights perspective, unsafe abortion can raise concerns relating to the rights to life, health, equality, privacy, dignity, and freedom from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 36 on the right to life calls upon states to ensure that women and girls are not compelled to resort to unsafe abortions and addresses the relationship between restrictive abortion laws and risks to life and health.

The human rights debate concerning abortion therefore extends beyond the question of whether abortion should be legally permitted. It also concerns whether individuals have meaningful access to safe healthcare, accurate information, non-discriminatory services, and appropriate post-abortion care.

4.3.5 Maternal Health and Mortality as Human Rights Issues

4.3.5.1 The Scale of Preventable Maternal Mortality

Maternal mortality refers to deaths occurring during pregnancy, childbirth, or within a specified period after the end of pregnancy from causes related to or aggravated by pregnancy or its management. Maternal mortality remains a major global health and human rights concern.

According to international estimates, approximately 287,000 women died from maternal causes in 2020. A very large majority of these deaths occurred in low- and lower-middle-income countries. Major direct causes include severe bleeding, infections, hypertensive disorders such as pre-eclampsia and eclampsia, complications from unsafe abortion, and obstructed labour.

Many maternal deaths are preventable through timely access to quality healthcare, skilled birth attendance, emergency obstetric services, antenatal and postnatal care, contraception, safe abortion where legally available, and treatment of pregnancy-related complications.

Large inequalities in maternal mortality also raise questions of social justice. A woman's risk of maternal death can be strongly influenced by income, geographic location, education, caste, ethnicity, disability, age, and access to healthcare. Maternal mortality is therefore not only a medical issue but also a question of equality, dignity, and access to essential health services.

4.3.5.2 Maternal Mortality in India

India has achieved a substantial decline in maternal mortality over the past several decades. The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR), which measures maternal deaths

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per 100,000 live births, declined substantially between the early 2000s and the late 2010s.

However, national averages can conceal significant regional and social disparities. Differences between states, rural and urban areas, socioeconomic groups, and marginalised communities continue to influence maternal health outcomes.

Kerala has historically recorded a comparatively low MMR within India, reflecting factors such as high levels of female literacy, relatively strong healthcare infrastructure, and high rates of institutional healthcare utilisation. Other states have recorded substantially higher maternal mortality. Such variations demonstrate that maternal health outcomes are influenced by the broader social determinants of health as well as the availability of medical facilities.

Government programmes such as Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), launched in 2005, sought to promote institutional deliveries through financial incentives, particularly among women from economically disadvantaged households. Such programmes have contributed to increased institutional delivery.

However, institutional delivery alone does not guarantee quality maternal care. The quality of healthcare facilities, availability of trained personnel, emergency obstetric services, respectful treatment, timely referral, and access to medicines and equipment are also essential.

4.3.5.3 Obstetric Violence and Disrespectful Maternity Care

The concept of obstetric violence is used in some feminist and human rights literature to describe abusive, disrespectful, coercive, or medically unjustified treatment experienced during pregnancy, childbirth, or reproductive healthcare. It can include physical or verbal abuse, unnecessary medical interventions, procedures performed without informed consent, denial of information, discrimination, and other forms of disrespectful care.

The World Health Organization has highlighted the problem of disrespect and abuse during facility-based childbirth and has called for respectful maternity care. Respectful care includes dignity, privacy, informed consent, confidentiality, freedom from discrimination, and appropriate communication.

The experience of disrespectful maternity care can be shaped by intersecting inequalities. Women from marginalised caste, tribal, economically disadvantaged, migrant, or otherwise vulnerable communities may experience additional barriers to respectful and quality healthcare.

The concept therefore connects maternal health with bodily autonomy, informed consent, dignity, and equality. Quality maternal healthcare is not simply a matter of providing medical facilities; it also requires respect for the person receiving care.

4.3.6 Reproductive Justice: An Intersectional Framework

4.3.6.1 The Reproductive Justice Framework

The reproductive justice framework emerged from the activism of Black women in the United States during the 1990s. Activists and organisations associated with the movement argued that mainstream reproductive rights advocacy sometimes focused too narrowly on abortion and contraception.

The reproductive justice approach broadened the question by asking whether people have the social, economic, and political conditions necessary to make meaningful reproductive choices. It emphasises three interconnected dimensions: the right to have

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children, the right not to have children, and the right to raise and parent children in safe and supportive environments.

SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective became an important organisational centre for the reproductive justice movement. The framework links reproductive autonomy with structural inequalities such as racism, poverty, economic inequality, disability discrimination, incarceration, migration, and state control.

Reproductive justice therefore differs from a narrow understanding of reproductive rights. A rights-based approach may ask whether an individual has a legally recognised right to abortion or contraception. A reproductive justice approach additionally asks whether that individual has the economic resources, healthcare access, social support, freedom from violence, and political conditions necessary to exercise meaningful choice.

4.3.6.2 Reproductive Justice in the Indian Context

In India, reproductive justice can be understood through a range of interconnected concerns. These include the right to survive pregnancy and childbirth, access to safe abortion and contraception, protection from coercive sterilisation, freedom from sex-selective practices, access to reproductive healthcare without caste or religious discrimination, and the ability to raise children without discrimination or deprivation.

The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994, as amended in 2003, prohibits sex selection and regulates prenatal diagnostic techniques. The legislation seeks to address the misuse of reproductive technologies for sex selection and the social problem of son preference.

India's experience demonstrates the complex relationship between reproductive choice and social inequality. The problem of sex selection cannot be understood simply as a question of individual medical choice. It is also connected with patriarchal inheritance practices, gender discrimination, son preference, dowry, social security, and unequal valuation of girls and women.

At the same time, reproductive justice requires attention to the opposite problem: ensuring that women are not denied reproductive choices through coercion or discrimination. Thus, a reproductive justice approach seeks to protect both the freedom to reproduce and the freedom not to reproduce.

4.3.7 Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

4.3.7.1 The Concept of SRHR

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is a broad framework encompassing sexual health, reproductive health, bodily autonomy, access to healthcare and information, and protection from discrimination and violence.

The World Health Organization defines sexual health as a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality rather than merely the absence of disease or dysfunction. This definition highlights the positive dimension of sexual health and the importance of dignity, safety, information, and relationships.

SRHR includes access to contraception, maternal healthcare, prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, information and education, reproductive healthcare, protection from sexual violence, and the ability to make decisions concerning sexuality and reproduction free from coercion.

The concept is also relevant to LGBTQ+ persons. Historically, reproductive health

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policies often assumed heterosexual relationships and reproductive intentions. A broader SRHR framework recognises that people have diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, relationships, and family structures.

The Yogyakarta Principles, adopted in 2006 and supplemented by additional principles in 2017, articulate the application of international human rights standards to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics. Although the Yogyakarta Principles are not themselves a binding international treaty, they have influenced discussions concerning the application of existing human rights norms to sexuality and gender identity.

4.3.7.2 Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights

Adolescents have distinctive sexual and reproductive health needs. The World Health Organization generally defines adolescents as persons between 10 and 19 years of age.

Adolescents may face significant barriers to reproductive healthcare. These include lack of accurate information, social stigma, restrictions based on age, requirements for parental consent, fear of discrimination, lack of confidentiality, early marriage, gender-based violence, and limited access to youth-friendly health services.

Child marriage is particularly important in the Indian context. Early marriage can limit girls' educational opportunities, reduce their ability to make independent decisions, and increase risks associated with early pregnancy.

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, establishes the minimum legal age of marriage as 18 for women and 21 for men. The legal framework has been accompanied by continuing policy debates concerning whether changes to the minimum age can effectively address child marriage without simultaneously addressing poverty, education, gender inequality, social norms, and family pressures.

The issue demonstrates an important principle of reproductive justice: legal prohibition alone may not be sufficient to secure meaningful reproductive autonomy. Social and economic conditions also influence the capacity of adolescents to make informed decisions concerning their lives and health.

4.3.8 Concluding Note

Reproductive rights occupy a complex position at the intersection of human rights, gender equality, health, law, ethics, and social justice. They concern not only the freedom to make decisions about reproduction but also the conditions required to exercise those decisions meaningfully. Bodily autonomy, access to information, healthcare, contraception, safe abortion where legally available, maternal healthcare, and freedom from coercion are therefore interconnected dimensions of reproductive freedom.

The development of reproductive rights demonstrates a movement from population-centred approaches towards a stronger emphasis on human dignity, individual autonomy, health, and gender equality. International frameworks such as the ICPD Programme of Action, the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW, and the right to health under the ICESCR have contributed to this transformation. At the same time, abortion, reproductive technologies, contraception, adolescent sexuality, and reproductive autonomy remain subjects of significant legal, ethical, cultural, and political disagreement.

The reproductive justice framework further expands the analysis by drawing attention to structural inequality. It asks not only whether a formal right exists but whether individuals actually possess the resources and social conditions necessary

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to exercise that right. In India, this perspective is particularly relevant to questions of caste, class, gender, rural–urban inequality, maternal health, sex selection, sterilisation, and access to reproductive healthcare. The study of reproductive rights therefore requires attention to both formal legal recognition and the social realities that determine whether reproductive autonomy can be exercised in practice.

Recap

- Reproductive rights concern the ability of individuals to make voluntary and informed decisions about reproduction.
- Reproductive rights are closely connected with the rights to health, life, privacy, equality, dignity, and freedom from violence and coercion.
- Bodily autonomy is an important philosophical foundation of reproductive self-determination.
- Early contraceptive activism contributed to the development of modern reproductive rights movements, but its history also includes population-control and eugenic dimensions.
- The 1994 ICPD Programme of Action represented a major shift towards a rights-based approach to population and reproductive health.
- The Beijing Platform for Action strengthened the recognition of women's reproductive health and rights within the broader human rights framework.
- CEDAW addresses women's access to healthcare, including family planning, and has been important in developing international standards concerning reproductive health.
- The right to health under the ICESCR requires attention to the availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality of healthcare services.
- Forced sterilisation and other forms of reproductive coercion violate fundamental principles of bodily autonomy and informed consent.
- Abortion involves complex ethical, legal, philosophical, religious, medical, and human rights debates.
- India's Medical Termination of Pregnancy framework has undergone significant changes, particularly through the 2021 amendment and subsequent judicial interpretation.
- Maternal mortality is both a public health problem and a human rights concern because many maternal deaths are preventable through accessible and quality healthcare.

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- Respectful maternity care requires dignity, privacy, informed consent, confidentiality, and freedom from discrimination.
- Reproductive justice expands reproductive rights by examining the social and economic conditions necessary for meaningful reproductive choice.
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights encompass a broad range of health, autonomy, equality, and information rights.
- Adolescents and marginalised groups often face additional barriers to reproductive healthcare.
- In India, reproductive justice must be examined in relation to caste, class, gender, rural–urban inequalities, son preference, maternal health, and access to healthcare.

Objective Questions

1. Which international conference adopted the Programme of Action that significantly advanced the rights-based approach to reproductive health?
2. In which year was the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo?
3. What is meant by reproductive self-determination?
4. Which principle refers to an individual's authority to make decisions concerning their own body?
5. Who wrote "A Defense of Abortion"?
6. In which year was Judith Jarvis Thomson's "A Defense of Abortion" published?
7. Which international treaty addresses discrimination against women, including discrimination in healthcare?
8. Which article of CEDAW specifically addresses discrimination against women in healthcare?
9. What does ICESCR stand for?
10. Which article of the ICESCR recognises the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health?
11. What are the four elements commonly associated with the AAAQ framework?
12. What does CEDAW stand for?

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13. Which international conference adopted the Beijing Platform for Action?
14. In which year was the Beijing Platform for Action adopted?
15. Who is associated with the philosophical argument concerning bodily autonomy in “A Defense of Abortion”?
16. What is reproductive coercion?
17. What is forced sterilisation?
18. Which Indian legislation regulates the termination of pregnancy?
19. In which year was the original Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act enacted in India?
20. In which year was the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act significantly amended?
21. Which Supreme Court of India case addressed reproductive autonomy and the application of the MTP framework to unmarried women?
22. Which Article of the Indian Constitution protects life and personal liberty?
23. What is maternal mortality?
24. Name one major direct cause of maternal mortality.
25. What is meant by respectful maternity care?
26. What is reproductive justice?
27. Which organisation became an important institutional centre of the reproductive justice movement in the United States?
28. What are the three central reproductive justice claims concerning having and raising children?
29. What does SRHR stand for?
30. Which organisation provides the widely used definition of sexual health as a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality?
31. Who are adolescents according to the commonly used WHO age definition?
32. Which Indian legislation prohibits sex selection and regulates prenatal diagnostic techniques?
33. What does the AAAQ framework stand for?
34. What is the central concern of reproductive justice?
35. Why is maternal mortality considered a human rights concern?

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Answers

1. International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).
2. 1994
3. The right to make voluntary and informed decisions concerning whether, when, and how to reproduce.
4. Bodily autonomy
5. Judith Jarvis Thomson
6. 1971
7. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
8. Article 12
9. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
10. Article 12
11. Availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality
12. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
13. The Fourth World Conference on Women
14. 1995
15. Judith Jarvis Thomson
16. Conduct that interferes with or controls a person's reproductive decisions through pressure, threats, manipulation, or other forms of coercion.
17. Sterilisation performed without the person's free and informed consent.
18. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, as amended.
19. 1971
20. 2021
21. *X v. Principal Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Department, Government of NCT of Delhi* (2022).
22. Article 21

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23. The death of a woman during pregnancy, childbirth, or within the specified post-pregnancy period from causes related to or aggravated by pregnancy or its management.

24. Severe bleeding, infection, hypertensive disorders, complications from unsafe abortion, or obstructed labour.

25. Maternity care that respects dignity, privacy, informed consent, confidentiality, and freedom from discrimination and abuse.

26. An intersectional framework that links reproductive autonomy with the social, economic, political, and structural conditions necessary for meaningful reproductive choice.

27. SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective.

28. The right to have children, the right not to have children, and the right to raise and parent children in safe and supportive environments.

29. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

30. World Health Organization (WHO).

31. Persons between 10 and 19 years of age.

32. The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994.

33. Availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality.

34. Ensuring that people have the social, economic, political, and healthcare conditions necessary to exercise meaningful reproductive choices.

35. Because many maternal deaths are preventable and are connected with unequal access to healthcare, discrimination, inadequate health services, and failures to protect women's rights to life and health.

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Assignments

1. Define reproductive rights and explain their relationship with human rights.

2. Examine bodily autonomy as a philosophical foundation of reproductive rights.

3. Trace the historical development of reproductive rights from early contraceptive activism to the ICPD Programme of Action.

4. Analyse the role of CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action in the development of international reproductive rights norms.
5. Examine the major ethical and legal arguments surrounding abortion.
6. Explain the reproductive justice framework and discuss its relevance to the Indian context.
7. Discuss forced sterilisation and reproductive coercion as violations of bodily autonomy and human rights.
8. Examine the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights for adolescents and marginalised communities.

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BLOCK

Gender and Global Governance

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UNIT 1

Gender and International Organizations

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the major feminist perspectives that have shaped the study of gender in International Relations
- analyse the historical development of gender equality norms and institutional mechanisms within the United Nations system
- explain the concept and practice of gender mainstreaming in international organizations
- discuss the significance of CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, UNSCR 1325, and SDG 5 in advancing gender equality
- compare the approaches to gender governance adopted by major regional international organizations
- examine decolonial and intersectional critiques of mainstream approaches to gender governance

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Prerequisite

The development of international gender governance can be understood as a movement from recognition to institutionalisation and then towards transformation. International organizations first recognised gender equality as a human rights concern. They then created institutions, conventions, policies, and programmes to promote equality. Contemporary feminist scholarship now asks a deeper question: Are these institutions merely responding to gender inequality, or are they capable of transforming the structures that produce it? This question connects the major themes of the unit—from feminist IR theory and CEDAW to gender mainstreaming, UNSCR 1325, regional organizations, civil society, and decolonial feminism.

Keywords

Gender mainstreaming, united nations , sustainable development goal, women, peace and security, intersectionality, decolonial feminism, gender equality, regional organizations, SAARC, african union, european union, feminist advocacy, gender governance

Discussion

5.1.1 Introduction

Gender equality has become an important concern in contemporary world politics. International organizations have gradually moved from giving limited attention to women's political and social status to incorporating gender equality into their normative, institutional, and development agendas. This transformation has been influenced by feminist movements, women's organizations, changing understandings of human rights, and the efforts of states and international institutions.

For students of Political Science, understanding the relationship between gender and international organizations is important for studying global governance. International organizations are not completely neutral institutions. They are shaped by the interests of their member states, institutional structures, political negotiations, and civil society interventions. Gender therefore provides an important analytical perspective for examining who participates in decision-making, whose security is protected, whose labour is valued, and whose rights are recognised in international politics.

This unit examines the relationship between gender and international organizations. It then examines the development of the United Nations gender architecture, including the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women, CEDAW, and the Beijing Platform for Action. The unit also discusses gender mainstreaming, the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and SDG 5. It further considers gender governance within regional organizations such as the European Union, SAARC, and the African Union. Finally, it introduces decolonial and intersectional critiques of international gender governance and examines the role of civil society and transnational feminist networks.

5.1.2 Conceptualizing Gender in International Relations

5.1.2.1 Feminist Critiques of International Relations Theory

International Relations (IR) developed as an academic discipline in the aftermath of the First World War. Its major theoretical approaches, including Realism, Liberalism, and Marxism, traditionally focused on states, power, security, institutions, and class relations. Gender relations and women's experiences were often given limited attention.

Feminist scholarship challenged this gender-blind approach. J. Ann Tickner's influential work *Gender in International Relations* (1992) questioned the assumptions underlying mainstream IR theory. Tickner argued that concepts such as rationality, autonomy, power, security, and national interest were often constructed around masculine assumptions. Feminist IR therefore

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seeks to examine how gender shapes international politics and how international institutions themselves reproduce gendered forms of power.

Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989) also made an important contribution to feminist International Relations. Enloe asked the question, "Where are the women?" and examined the often invisible roles of women in international political and economic processes. Her analysis demonstrated that international politics depends upon the labour and experiences of women in areas such as military bases, tourism, agriculture, migration, and diplomacy.

Feminist IR is not a single theoretical perspective. It includes liberal, radical, socialist, postcolonial, poststructuralist, and intersectional approaches. Liberal feminists generally focus on equal participation and access to existing institutions. Socialist feminists connect gender inequality with class and economic structures. Poststructuralist feminists examine how language and discourse construct gendered identities and power relations. Postcolonial and decolonial feminists question Eurocentric assumptions and emphasise the experiences of women in the Global South.

5.1.2.2 Gender as an Analytical Category

Joan Wallach Scott's influential article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (1986) defined gender as a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes and as a primary way of signifying relationships of power. This approach moved the understanding of gender beyond biological differences and encouraged scholars to examine gender as a social and political relationship.

When applied to international organizations, gender as an analytical category raises several questions. How do international organizations understand gender equality? Do they treat gender as a separate women's issue or as a broader issue concerning social relations and power? Do their policies address structural inequalities or only their visible consequences? Do men, masculinities, and diverse gender identities receive attention in institutional policies?

Gender also intersects with other forms of social inequality. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality explains how different forms of inequality can interact to produce distinctive experiences of marginalisation. Gender may intersect with caste, class, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexuality, and other social categories.

For international organizations, an intersectional approach means recognising that women do not form a homogeneous group. The experiences of a rural woman, a migrant woman, a Dalit woman, a woman with a disability, or an indigenous woman may differ significantly because of the interaction of gender with other structures of inequality.

5.1.3 The United Nations and Gender Equality

5.1.3.1 Historical Evolution of UN Gender Architecture

The United Nations was established in 1945 with a commitment to human rights and equality. The UN Charter recognised the equal rights of men and women, while the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) affirmed that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), established in 1946, became the first major international body dedicated specifically to promoting women's rights

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and gender equality. It contributed to the development of international standards relating to women's political participation, nationality, and other rights.

The 1970s marked an important turning point. The UN Decade for Women (1976–1985) increased international attention to women's rights and produced three major World Conferences on Women: Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, and Nairobi in 1985.

The Mexico City Conference produced the World Plan of Action, while the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women recognised that gender equality required changes in social, economic, and political structures. These conferences also created opportunities for women's organizations and civil society groups to participate in international debates.

5.1.3.2 UN Women

UN Women was established in 2010 through the merger of four previously separate UN bodies dealing with women's issues: the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

UN Women's major functions include supporting international standards on gender equality, assisting member states in implementing gender-related commitments, coordinating gender equality work across the UN system, and supporting programmes at the country level.

UN Women works on issues including women's political participation, economic empowerment, ending violence against women, women's participation in peace and security, gender-responsive policies, and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The creation of UN Women represented an effort to strengthen institutional coordination within the UN system. However, feminist scholars have also pointed to the continuing challenge of providing adequate resources and political support for gender equality work.

5.1.3.3 CEDAW: The International Bill of Rights for Women

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 1979 and entered into force in 1981. It is often described as the international bill of rights for women.

CEDAW defines discrimination against women and requires states to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination in political, economic, social, cultural, civil, and other fields. It addresses political participation, nationality, education, employment, health, economic opportunities, and equality before the law.

An important feature of CEDAW is its attention to social and cultural patterns. States are required to take measures to modify social and cultural patterns that reinforce gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices.

CEDAW therefore goes beyond formal legal equality. It also addresses the social structures and practices that can prevent women from exercising their rights in practice.

The CEDAW Committee monitors implementation by examining reports submitted by states parties and issuing concluding observations and General Recommendations. The Optional Protocol to

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CEDAW, adopted in 1999, provides additional mechanisms through which individuals and groups may bring certain complaints before the Committee after relevant domestic remedies have been exhausted, subject to the applicable procedures.

5.1.4 Gender Mainstreaming in International Organizations

5.1.4.1 Origins and Meaning of Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming became an important international policy strategy during the 1980s and was formally strengthened through the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995.

The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defined gender mainstreaming in 1997 as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of planned actions, including legislation, policies, and programmes. It requires gender concerns and experiences to be incorporated into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies.

Gender mainstreaming is closely connected with the distinction between formal equality and substantive equality. Formal equality involves treating people equally before the law, while substantive equality recognises that people may begin from unequal social and economic positions. Achieving substantive equality may therefore require measures that address existing structural disadvantages.

5.1.4.2 Institutionalising Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming sought to move gender equality beyond specialised women's programmes. Under this approach, gender analysis should be incorporated into different departments, programmes, policies, budgets, and development activities.

International organizations have therefore introduced gender analysis tools, gender-responsive budgeting, gender action plans, and sex-disaggregated data systems.

The World Bank and other international development institutions incorporated gender analysis into development and poverty-reduction programmes. Such approaches sometimes presented gender equality as both a human rights concern and an important factor in economic development.

This has generated debate within feminist scholarship. Some scholars argue that the economic benefits of gender equality can help generate political support for gender policies. Others argue that treating women primarily as contributors to economic growth can weaken the rights-based and transformative dimensions of gender equality.

5.1.4.3 Critiques and Limitations

Gender mainstreaming has also been criticised for becoming overly bureaucratic and technical. Judith Squires and Sylvia Walby have argued that a strategy with transformative potential can lose its political character when it becomes a routine administrative procedure.

Mieke Verloo's research also demonstrated that gender mainstreaming can be interpreted differently across institutional and national contexts. In some cases, gender mainstreaming may produce limited changes because gender advisers and equality units lack sufficient institutional authority.

Another criticism concerns the possibility that gender mainstreaming may be incorporated into development policies without addressing deeper structures of economic and political inequality. Feminist scholars have therefore emphasised that mainstreaming should not become a substitute for political transformation.

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Effective gender mainstreaming requires political commitment, institutional resources, gender-sensitive data, accountability mechanisms, and the participation of affected communities.

5.1.5 Beijing Platform for Action and the SDG Gender Framework

5.1.5.1 The Beijing Conference and Its Legacy

The Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) adopted at the conference became a major international framework for advancing women's rights and gender equality.

The Platform for Action identified twelve critical areas of concern: women and poverty; education and training; health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and the media; women and the environment; and the girl child.

The Beijing Platform was significant because it connected women's rights with human rights and called for action across political, economic, social, and cultural fields. It also strengthened gender mainstreaming as an international strategy.

Subsequent reviews, including Beijing+5, Beijing+10, Beijing+15, Beijing+20, and Beijing+25, examined progress in implementing the Platform. These reviews have shown that progress has been uneven. Improvements have occurred in areas such as women's education and political participation in some countries, while significant inequalities continue in economic participation, political representation, unpaid care work, and violence against women.

5.1.5.2 SDG 5 and the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals. SDG 5 specifically focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

SDG 5 includes targets relating to discrimination, violence against women and girls, harmful practices, unpaid care work, women's participation in decision-making, sexual and reproductive health and rights, equal access to economic resources, technology, and gender-responsive policies.

Gender equality is also integrated into other SDGs. Issues such as poverty, health, education, decent work, inequality, climate change, and peace have important gender dimensions.

Feminist scholars and organizations have nevertheless argued that achieving SDG 5 requires attention to wider structural issues, including care work, economic inequality, access to resources, taxation, social protection, and political participation. A narrow focus on measurable targets may fail to capture the deeper structural dimensions of gender inequality.

5.1.6 Gender, Security, and International Organizations: UNSCR 1325

5.1.6.1 Women, Peace and Security Agenda

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) was adopted on 31 October 2000. It was a landmark resolution on women, peace, and security. It recognised the gendered impact of armed conflict and emphasised women's participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction.

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The resolution called for increased participation of women in decision-making, greater attention to gender perspectives in peacekeeping and peace processes, and stronger protection of women and girls from gender-based violence during armed conflict.

The resolution emerged from sustained advocacy by feminist civil society organisations, including the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security.

UNSCR 1325 was followed by a series of additional Security Council resolutions addressing different aspects of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Resolution 1820 (2008), for example, specifically addressed sexual violence in armed conflict. Other resolutions have addressed women's participation, accountability for sexual violence, and the integration of gender perspectives into peace and security policies.

5.1.6.2 Implementation Challenges

Despite the importance of UNSCR 1325, implementation has remained uneven. Women continue to face barriers to participation in formal peace negotiations, mediation, security institutions, and post-conflict decision-making.

National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security have been developed by many countries, but their content, resources, implementation, and monitoring mechanisms vary considerably.

Feminist scholars have also raised concerns about approaches that treat women primarily as victims who need protection rather than as political actors with agency. Others argue that simply adding women to existing security institutions may not be sufficient to transform the gendered structures of international security.

The WPS agenda therefore involves both increasing women's participation and examining the structures of power that shape conflict, security, peacebuilding, and political decision-making.

5.1.7 Regional International Organizations and Gender Governance

5.1.7.1 The European Union's Gender Equality Framework

The European Union (EU) has developed an extensive institutional framework for gender equality. Gender equality is recognised in EU treaties and fundamental rights instruments. EU policies address areas including equal treatment in employment, equal pay, social protection, political participation, and gender-based discrimination.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), established in 2006 and headquartered in Vilnius, provides research, data, and technical support for gender equality policies within the EU.

The EU has also adopted gender mainstreaming as an approach to integrating gender considerations into its policies and programmes. Its external policies and development cooperation programmes have increasingly incorporated gender equality objectives.

At the same time, the existence of extensive legal and institutional mechanisms does not automatically eliminate gender inequalities. Differences remain in areas such as employment, political representation, care responsibilities, and economic participation.

5.1.7.2 SAARC and Gender Issues in South Asia

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established in 1985. It has addressed women's development

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and gender issues through regional declarations, committees, and programmes.

However, SAARC's capacity for regional policy implementation has been constrained by its consensus-based institutional structure, limited resources, and political tensions among member states.

South Asia continues to face major gender-related challenges, including gender-based violence, child marriage, unequal access to education and health, economic inequality, and women's underrepresentation in many areas of public life.

At the same time, South Asian countries have produced significant feminist scholarship and women's movements that challenge both national and international forms of gender inequality. These movements demonstrate the importance of considering regional historical and social contexts rather than applying a single model of gender equality.

5.1.7.3 African Union and Gender

The African Union (AU), established in 2002, has incorporated gender equality into its institutional and development frameworks. The AU Gender Policy and AU Gender Strategy provide policy frameworks for advancing gender equality.

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, commonly known as the Maputo Protocol, was adopted in 2003. It addresses women's rights in areas including political participation, health, protection from violence, and reproductive rights.

The Maputo Protocol is significant because it addresses issues that are not explicitly or comprehensively covered in some other international women's rights instruments. Its implementation, however, varies across member states.

The African Union therefore provides an important example of how regional organizations can develop gender governance frameworks that respond to specific regional contexts.

5.1.8 Non-Governmental Organizations and Global Gender Advocacy

Non-governmental organizations and women's movements have played an important role in shaping international gender governance. Feminist organizations have participated in international conferences, lobbied governments, contributed to treaty negotiations, monitored implementation, and challenged international organizations to strengthen their commitments.

The 1975 Mexico City Conference and the 1995 Beijing Conference provided important spaces for civil society participation. The large-scale participation of women's organizations helped create transnational networks and facilitated the exchange of feminist ideas across regions.

Organizations such as Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), and International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW Asia Pacific) have contributed to debates on development, economic policy, environmental issues, and women's rights.

Civil society organizations also participate in CEDAW reporting processes and provide alternative or 'shadow' reports that draw attention to issues that may not receive sufficient attention in government reports.

However, the relationship between international organizations and NGOs is not always free from tension. Civil society participation can sometimes become highly institutionalised, limiting the political

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character of activism. Sonia Alvarez's concept of 'NGO-ization' highlights concerns that dependence on donor funding and project-based approaches can transform political movements into technical service providers.

The challenge is therefore to maintain meaningful participation while ensuring that feminist organizations retain their independence and capacity to question existing power structures.

5.1.9 Critical Perspectives: Decolonial and Intersectional Approaches

5.1.9.1 Decolonial Critiques

Decolonial feminist scholars have questioned the assumption that Western liberal approaches to gender equality can automatically function as universal models.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's influential essay "Under Western Eyes" (1988) criticised representations of women in the Global South as a single, homogeneous group of passive victims. She argued that such representations can reproduce colonial forms of knowledge and power.

Decolonial approaches therefore ask whose knowledge is recognised in international institutions, who participates in decision-making, and whose experiences are treated as representative.

This perspective also draws attention to structural issues such as colonial histories, global economic inequalities, international trade, debt, and the unequal distribution of resources. It argues that gender equality cannot be separated from these wider structures.

5.1.9.2 Intersectional Critiques

Intersectional feminism challenges the tendency to treat women as a homogeneous category. Women experience gender inequality differently depending on their caste, class, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, religion, nationality, and other social positions.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's work demonstrated how different forms of discrimination can intersect and create distinctive experiences of marginalisation. Later scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge further developed intersectionality as a framework for analysing power and inequality.

Intersectional approaches are particularly important for international organizations because policies designed for 'women' as a single category may fail to address the specific needs of marginalised groups.

5.1.9.3 Towards Transformative Gender Governance

Decolonial and intersectional perspectives do not necessarily reject international gender governance. Instead, they call for its transformation.

A more inclusive approach would recognise diverse experiences of gender inequality, include marginalised groups in decision-making, recognise different forms of knowledge, and address structural economic and political inequalities.

The central question is therefore not only whether international organizations have gender policies, but also whether those policies challenge the structures of power that reproduce inequality.

5.1.10 Concluding Observation

This unit examined the relationship between gender and international organizations. Feminist approaches to International Relations challenged the gender-blind assumptions of mainstream theories and demonstrated how gender shapes security, political economy, diplomacy, and global governance. The contributions of J. Ann

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Tickner and Cynthia Enloe were particularly important in establishing gender as a significant analytical category in IR.

The unit then examined the development of the United Nations gender architecture, from the establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women to the creation of UN Women. CEDAW was discussed as a major international human rights instrument addressing discrimination against women, while the Beijing Platform for Action was examined as a comprehensive framework for advancing women's rights and gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming was analysed as a strategy for incorporating gender perspectives into policies and institutions. At the same time, feminist critiques highlighted the risks of bureaucratisation, depoliticisation, and inadequate institutional commitment.

The unit also examined the Women, Peace and Security agenda, particularly UNSCR 1325, and discussed the continuing challenges associated with women's participation in peace and security processes. The approaches of the European Union, SAARC, and African Union demonstrated that regional gender governance varies according to institutional capacity and political context.

Finally, the unit considered the role of NGOs and feminist movements and introduced decolonial and intersectional critiques. These perspectives emphasise that effective gender governance must recognise diversity, include marginalised voices, and address the structural sources of gender inequality.

Recap

- Feminist International Relations challenges the gender-blind assumptions of traditional IR theories.
- J. Ann Tickner and Cynthia Enloe made major contributions to feminist approaches to International Relations.
- Gender is a social and political relationship connected to power rather than simply a biological category.
- Intersectionality explains how gender interacts with caste, class, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, and other forms of inequality.
- The Commission on the Status of Women was established by the United Nations in 1946.
- UN Women was established in 2010 to strengthen the UN system's work on gender equality and women's empowerment.
- CEDAW, adopted in 1979, is a major international treaty addressing discrimination against women.
- The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted in 1995, identified twelve critical areas of concern and strengthened gender mainstreaming.

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- Gender mainstreaming seeks to incorporate gender perspectives into policies, programmes, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.
- SDG 5 focuses specifically on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.
- UNSCR 1325 established an important international framework for the Women, Peace and Security agenda.
- Regional organizations such as the EU, SAARC, and African Union have developed different approaches to gender governance.
- NGOs and feminist movements have played an important role in shaping international gender norms and holding institutions accountable.
- Decolonial and intersectional feminists challenge Eurocentrism, gender essentialism, and the exclusion of marginalised voices from international policymaking.

Objective Questions

1. Which scholar is associated with the feminist critique of mainstream International Relations in *Gender in International Relations*?
2. Which feminist scholar asked the question "Where are the women?" in analysing international politics?
3. In which year was the Commission on the Status of Women established?
4. In which year was CEDAW adopted by the United Nations General Assembly?
5. Which UN institution was established in 2010 to promote gender equality and women's empowerment?
6. Which international framework adopted in 1995 identified twelve critical areas of concern for women's advancement?
7. What is the main purpose of gender mainstreaming?
8. Which Sustainable Development Goal specifically focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls?
9. In which year was UN Security Council Resolution 1325 adopted?
10. Which regional organization has established the European Institute for Gender Equality?

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11. What is the common name of the African regional protocol dealing specifically with women's rights?

12. Which concept explains how gender intersects with caste, class, race, ethnicity, disability, and other forms of inequality?

Answers

1. J. Ann Tickner
2. Cynthia Enloe
3. 1946
4. 1979
5. UN Women
6. The Beijing Platform for Action
7. To integrate gender perspectives into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes.
8. SDG 5
9. 2000
10. The European Union
11. The Maputo Protocol
12. Intersectionality

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Assignments

1. Explain the contribution of feminist approaches to International Relations.
2. What is meant by gender as an analytical category?
3. Explain the significance of CEDAW.
4. What is gender mainstreaming?
5. Discuss gender mainstreaming as a strategy of international gender governance and examine its major limitations.

6. Analyse the significance of the Beijing Platform for Action and SDG 5 in advancing global gender equality.
7. Examine the Women, Peace and Security agenda and discuss the challenges associated with implementing UNSCR 1325.
8. Compare the approaches of the European Union, SAARC, and African Union to gender governance.
9. Discuss the role of NGOs and feminist movements in shaping international gender norms.
10. Examine the major decolonial and intersectional critiques of mainstream international gender governance.

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UNIT 2

Gender and Global Environmental Governance

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the major approaches to ecofeminist theory and their relevance to gender and environmental issues
- trace the development of gender concerns in global environmental governance from the Stockholm Conference of 1972 to the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
- analyse the gendered dimensions of climate change, environmental vulnerability, adaptation, and resource governance
- examine gender provisions in major international environmental frameworks, including the UNFCCC and Convention on Biological Diversity
- explain the contributions of feminist political ecology, indigenous feminism, and climate justice to gender-just environmental governance

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Prerequisite

Environmental problems such as climate change, water scarcity, deforestation and biodiversity loss affect everyone, but they do not affect everyone in the same way. Consider a simple question: when a village faces water scarcity, who usually spends more time collecting water? When forests are degraded, whose daily work and livelihood may be affected first? When climate-related disasters occur, who gets access to information, resources and decision-making spaces?

These questions show that environmental issues are also questions of gender, power, resources and social justice. Women, men and gender-diverse groups may experience environmental change differently because of differences in work, property rights, access to resources, social responsibilities and political participation. At the same time, women should not be treated as a single or uniformly vulnerable

group. Class, caste, ethnicity, indigeneity, age, disability and location can shape environmental experiences in different ways.

This unit begins with these questions and introduces the idea that environmental governance is not gender-neutral. It explores how feminist and ecofeminist perspectives have challenged conventional approaches to environmental politics and how gender has gradually entered global environmental institutions and agreements. The unit also examines climate change, biodiversity, water governance, indigenous women's participation, feminist political ecology, just transition and climate justice.

Keywords

Ecofeminism, feminist political ecology, gender mainstreaming, climate justice, environmental governance, gender and climate change, biodiversity, environmental entitlements, indigenous feminism, just transition

Discussion

5.2.1 Introduction

Global environmental problems such as climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, water scarcity, land degradation, and pollution do not affect all people in the same way. Gender relations influence people's access to natural resources, exposure to environmental risks, participation in decision-making, and capacity to respond to environmental change. These differences are also shaped by class, caste, race, ethnicity, indigeneity, age, disability, and geographical location.

For a long time, however, environmental governance was largely gender-blind. Women were often represented as vulnerable victims or as users of natural resources rather than as political actors and knowledge producers. Feminist approaches challenged this understanding by showing that environmental problems are closely connected with social relations and inequalities.

This unit examines the relationship between gender and global environmental governance. It begins with ecofeminism and its different strands. It then traces the emergence of gender concerns in global environmental institutions and agreements. The unit examines gender and climate change, biodiversity, water governance, and feminist political ecology. It concludes by considering indigenous women's perspectives, green transitions, decolonial ecofeminism, and climate justice.

5.2.2 Ecofeminism: Theoretical Foundations

5.2.2.1 Classical Ecofeminism

The term *ecofeminism* was coined by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in her 1974 work *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (*Feminism or Death*). Ecofeminism broadly argues that the domination of women and the exploitation of nature are connected to systems of power and hierarchy.

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Classical or cultural ecofeminists such as Susan Griffin, Mary Daly, and Charlene Spretnak emphasised the cultural association between women and nature. They argued that patriarchal societies have historically devalued both women and the natural world by associating them with the body, emotion, reproduction, and nature.

However, this approach was criticised for potentially treating women as naturally closer to nature. Such an argument can reinforce rather than challenge traditional gender stereotypes.

Karen J. Warren developed an influential philosophical approach to ecofeminism through the concept of the logic of domination. She argued that systems of domination often operate through hierarchical oppositions in which one group is constructed as superior and another as inferior. Women and nature have historically been placed on the subordinate side of such hierarchies. Warren therefore emphasised challenging domination rather than assuming that women possess an inherently closer relationship with nature.

5.2.2.2 Social and Socialist Ecofeminism

Social ecofeminism, associated with Janet Biehl and Murray Bookchin's social ecology, links environmental destruction to broader systems of social hierarchy. It argues that ecological problems cannot be separated from unequal social and political structures.

Socialist ecofeminists such as Mary Mellor and Ariel Salleh connect environmental exploitation with capitalist production. They argue that capitalism depends not only on natural resources but also on forms of unpaid labour, particularly women's domestic and care work. Both nature and women's labour can therefore be treated as resources available for exploitation.

This perspective has influenced feminist economics and debates on the care economy, sustainability, and the relationship between productive and reproductive labour.

5.2.2.3 Critiques and New Developments

Ecofeminism has been criticised by postcolonial, anti-racist, and materialist feminists for treating women as a single and homogeneous category.

Bina Agarwal's critique is particularly important in the Indian context. She argued that rural women's relationship with forests, land, and water is shaped by material conditions such as poverty, caste, class, property rights, and livelihood needs. Women's interaction with nature should therefore not automatically be understood as a special spiritual relationship with nature.

Agarwal proposed feminist environmentalism, which focuses on the material conditions of women's environmental lives and their access to natural resources. This approach contributed to the development of feminist political ecology.

More recent decolonial and indigenous ecofeminist approaches question the Eurocentric assumptions of some environmental theories. They emphasise indigenous ecological knowledge, territorial rights, community relationships with nature, and the effects of colonialism and extractive development.

5.2.3 Gender in Global Environmental Governance

5.2.3.1 From Stockholm to Rio

The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held at Stockholm in 1972, is considered a major starting point of modern global environmental governance. It resulted in the Stockholm Declaration and

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contributed to the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Gender, however, received little attention at Stockholm. Women were largely absent from discussions of environmental decision-making and were not adequately recognised as political actors.

The 1987 Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, gave greater attention to women's role in sustainable development. It recognised women's importance in managing household and community resources. However, feminist scholars also criticised the tendency to present women primarily as environmental managers without adequately addressing the inequalities that restricted their choices and power.

The 1992 Rio Earth Summit marked a major development. Agenda 21 included Chapter 24, "Global Action for Women towards Sustainable and Equitable Development." It called for women's participation in environmental decision-making and greater access to education, training, resources, and environmental institutions.

The Rio process therefore helped move gender from the margins of environmental discussions towards a more recognised component of sustainable development.

5.2.3.2 Gender Mainstreaming in Environmental Governance

The World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002, reaffirmed the importance of gender equality and called for gender perspectives to be integrated into sustainable development policies.

UNEP subsequently developed gender-mainstreaming initiatives covering climate change, biodiversity, chemicals and waste, ecosystem management, and environmental governance.

Gender mainstreaming means integrating gender analysis into policies rather than treating women as a separate or additional category. Feminist scholars have nevertheless pointed out that mainstreaming can become merely symbolic if institutions do not change their decision-making structures, resource allocation, and accountability mechanisms.

5.2.4 Gender and Climate Change Governance

5.2.4.1 UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted in 1992 and entered into force in 1994. Although the original Convention contained limited attention to gender, gender concerns gradually became more visible through subsequent decisions.

The Cancun Adaptation Framework (2010) called for gender considerations in adaptation planning. Subsequent UNFCCC decisions promoted women's participation and gender balance in climate institutions.

The Paris Agreement of 2015 strengthened this approach. Its preamble recognises gender equality and women's empowerment among the considerations relevant to climate action. Article 7 also states that adaptation should follow a participatory and gender-responsive approach.

Thus, gender is no longer completely outside the formal framework of international climate governance. However, the implementation of gender commitments varies considerably across countries and institutions.

5.2.4.2 Lima Work Programme on Gender

The Lima Work Programme on Gender and the related UNFCCC Gender Action Plan

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seek to improve women's participation and integrate gender perspectives into climate policies.

Gender considerations can be incorporated into:

- Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs);
- National Adaptation Plans (NAPs);
- climate finance;
- capacity building;
- technology development; and
- climate decision-making institutions.

A major challenge is the gap between formal recognition and implementation. A climate policy may mention gender equality without identifying specific beneficiaries, measurable objectives, institutional responsibilities, or financial resources. Gender-responsive climate governance therefore requires more than simply including the word "gender" in policy documents.

5.2.4.3 Climate Vulnerability and Intersectionality

Climate change can affect women and men differently because of differences in access to income, land, information, mobility, health services, and political power. Women in poor rural communities, for example, may depend heavily on forests, agriculture, and water resources for household livelihoods.

Research on climate-related disasters has also shown that gender differences in vulnerability are shaped by social institutions. During floods, cyclones, and other disasters, responsibilities for children and older persons, restrictions on mobility, unequal access to information, and limited control over resources may increase women's risks.

However, women should not be treated as a universally vulnerable category. Class, caste, ethnicity, disability, age, occupation, and location create significant differences among women. A middle-class urban woman, a landless agricultural worker, an indigenous woman, and a domestic worker may experience climate change in very different ways.

The intersectional approach therefore asks not simply whether women are vulnerable, but which women are vulnerable, why, and under what social and political conditions.

5.2.5 Gender and Biodiversity Governance

5.2.5.1 Convention on Biological Diversity

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was adopted in 1992. Its three major objectives are the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of its components, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.

Gender has gradually become more important within CBD governance. The CBD's gender-related initiatives recognise that women often possess important knowledge concerning seeds, food systems, forests, medicinal plants, water, and local ecosystems.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted in 2022, strengthened attention to participation, rights, and gender equality. Target 22 calls for inclusive participation and access to justice, with particular attention to women and girls, indigenous peoples and local communities, children and youth, and persons with disabilities.

The framework therefore recognises that biodiversity governance requires not only conservation measures but also participation, rights, and social inclusion.

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5.2.5.2 Women's Environmental Knowledge

Women's everyday responsibilities in agriculture, food collection, seed preservation, water management, and household resource use can provide important ecological knowledge. Such knowledge may contribute to biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation.

Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive* (1988) highlighted the role of Indian rural women in conserving biodiversity and challenged development models that displaced local communities and transformed ecological systems.

However, Bina Agarwal and other scholars have cautioned against romanticising women's relationship with nature. Women's environmental knowledge is shaped by social and economic circumstances. Recognising such knowledge therefore also requires addressing women's unequal access to land, resources, technology, and decision-making.

5.2.5.3 Land, Forests, and Gender

Land ownership and control are central to gender and environmental governance. Women may contribute substantially to agricultural production while having limited ownership or decision-making rights over land.

Bina Agarwal's research on community forestry in South Asia demonstrated that women's formal participation does not necessarily produce meaningful participation. Women may attend committees but remain unable to speak, influence decisions, or occupy leadership positions.

This illustrates the difference between formal inclusion and substantive participation. Effective environmental governance requires not merely women's presence but also their capacity to influence decisions.

5.2.6 Gender and Water Governance

5.2.6.1 Women and Water Insecurity

Water insecurity has significant gender implications. In many communities, women and girls are primarily responsible for collecting water for household use. When water sources become distant or unreliable, the time and labour required for water collection increase.

This can affect women's opportunities for education, paid employment, political participation, and rest. Climate change can intensify these problems through droughts, changing rainfall patterns, floods, and saltwater intrusion.

The gendered effects of water insecurity are particularly important in rural and low-income communities where households have limited access to piped water and sanitation.

5.2.6.2 Gender and Integrated Water Resources Management

Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) seeks to coordinate the management of water, land, and related resources while considering social and environmental sustainability. The Dublin Principles of 1992 also recognised women's central role in water management.

Feminist researchers have criticised the limited understanding of participation in some water governance programmes. Simply including women in water committees does not guarantee decision-making power. Property rights, social norms, economic inequality, caste, and lack of time can restrict meaningful participation.

Gender-responsive water governance therefore requires attention to both access to water and power over water decisions.

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5.2.7 Feminist Political Ecology

5.2.7.1 Meaning and Major Concepts

Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) developed during the 1990s at the intersection of political ecology, feminist geography, and feminist political economy. A major early contribution was the edited volume by Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayter, and Esther Wangari, *Feminist Political Ecology: Global Issues and Local Experiences* (1996).

FPE examines how gender, class, caste, race, ethnicity, and other social relations shape access to natural resources and exposure to environmental risks.

Three ideas are particularly important.

First, environmental resources are distributed through social and political power. Formal rights do not always translate into effective access.

Second, situated knowledge recognises that environmental knowledge is produced from particular social positions. Women, men, farmers, indigenous communities, and resource-dependent workers may therefore possess different forms of ecological knowledge.

Third, FPE examines the politics of scale. Local environmental problems are often connected to national and global processes such as markets, development policies, international finance, and climate governance.

The concept of environmental entitlements, developed by Melissa Leach, Robin Mearns, and Ian Scoones, further emphasises the difference between formal rights and people's actual ability to benefit from natural resources.

5.2.7.2 Applications of Feminist Political Ecology

FPE has been applied to forests, agriculture, water, fisheries, land, and climate adaptation.

Research on community forestry shows that women's participation can contribute to better resource management, but only when participation is meaningful. Similarly, research on agricultural biodiversity demonstrates the importance of women's knowledge of seeds and crop varieties.

In fisheries, women frequently play major roles in processing, marketing, and trade even though official fisheries governance may focus primarily on male fishers. FPE therefore makes visible forms of environmental labour that conventional environmental governance often ignores.

5.2.8 Indigenous Women and Environmental Governance

Indigenous women occupy an important position in environmental governance because of their knowledge of local ecosystems and their relationship with indigenous territories. At the same time, they can face discrimination based on both gender and indigeneity.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted in 2007, recognises indigenous peoples' rights to lands, territories, resources, culture, and participation. It also recognises the equal rights of indigenous women.

Indigenous women's organisations have nevertheless argued that indigenous women require specific attention because general indigenous-rights frameworks may not adequately address gender-based discrimination and violence.

The work of scholars and activists such as Winona LaDuke and indigenous feminist thinkers has highlighted the connection between environmental protection, territorial rights, cultural survival, and women's rights.

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5.2.9 Green Economy, Just Transition, and Gender

The green economy seeks to promote low-carbon, resource-efficient, and environmentally sustainable economic development. It includes renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, energy efficiency, green transport, and other sectors.

A gender-sensitive green transition can create opportunities for women through clean energy access, new employment, reduced household energy burdens, and support for women's enterprises.

At the same time, green industries may reproduce existing gender inequalities if women remain concentrated in low-paid or informal work. Some emerging industries, such as renewable energy technology and electric-vehicle manufacturing, remain highly male dominated.

The extraction of minerals needed for green technologies can also create social and environmental costs for local and indigenous communities. A just transition therefore requires attention not only to reducing carbon emissions but also to employment, social protection, resource rights, gender equality, and community participation.

5.2.10 Decolonial Ecofeminism and Climate Justice

Decolonial ecofeminism questions environmental governance approaches that treat ecological problems primarily as technical or managerial issues. It argues that contemporary environmental crises are connected to colonial histories, unequal economic systems, resource extraction, and global inequalities.

Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, in *Ecofeminism* (1993), criticised economic systems that prioritise capital accumulation over the reproduction of life. They emphasised subsistence production, local knowledge, community resources, and ecological sustainability.

Contemporary decolonial and indigenous feminist approaches further question the assumption that Western scientific knowledge should dominate environmental decision-making. They emphasise indigenous knowledge, territorial rights, community control, and alternative relationships between humans and nature.

The climate justice perspective similarly argues that climate change cannot be separated from questions of historical responsibility and social inequality. Communities that have contributed relatively little to global emissions may experience severe environmental consequences. Climate justice therefore connects environmental sustainability with questions of equity, rights, participation, and accountability.

A gender-just transition requires policies that address both ecological sustainability and social reproduction. Investment in care infrastructure, renewable energy, decent employment, ecological restoration, and democratic participation can form part of such an approach.

5.2.11 Concluding Observation

This unit examined the relationship between gender and global environmental governance. Ecofeminism established an important theoretical connection between the domination of women and the exploitation of nature. Its different strands, including cultural, social, socialist, and decolonial approaches, have generated important debates about gender, power, capitalism, and environmental sustainability.

The unit also traced the growing recognition of gender in global environmental governance. From the limited attention given to women at Stockholm in 1972,

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international environmental institutions gradually incorporated gender through Agenda 21, the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Feminist political ecology provided a framework for understanding how gender intersects with class, caste, race, ethnicity, and indigeneity in environmental resource access and vulnerability. Examples from forests, water, agriculture, biodiversity, and climate change demonstrate that women's environmental experiences are diverse and shaped by social and political structures.

Finally, decolonial ecofeminism, indigenous feminism, and climate justice challenge approaches that treat environmental problems only as technical questions. They emphasise rights, participation, local knowledge, historical responsibility, and social justice. Gender-just environmental governance therefore requires not only including women in existing institutions but also addressing the structures that produce environmental and social inequality.

Recap

- Ecofeminism examines the relationship between the domination of women and the exploitation of nature.
- Françoise d'Eaubonne introduced the term ecofeminism in 1974, while later scholars developed cultural, social, socialist, and other approaches.
- Karen J. Warren explained ecofeminist domination through the concept of the logic of domination, which connects hierarchical thinking with the exploitation of women and nature.
- Bina Agarwal's feminist environmentalism emphasises the material conditions of women's relationship with land, forests, water, and other natural resources.
- Gender gradually entered global environmental governance, particularly through the developments from Stockholm (1972) to Rio (1992) and subsequent international environmental processes.
- Agenda 21, Chapter 24 recognised women's participation and empowerment as important for sustainable and equitable development.
- Gender concerns have increasingly been incorporated into climate governance, particularly through the UNFCCC, the Cancun Adaptation Framework, the Lima Work Programme on Gender, and the Paris Agreement.
- Gender-responsive climate action recognises that climate vulnerability and adaptive capacity are shaped by gender as well as class, caste, race, ethnicity, age, disability, and geographical location.

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- The Convention on Biological Diversity and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework recognise the importance of women's participation, indigenous knowledge, and inclusive biodiversity governance.
- Feminist Political Ecology examines how gender and other social relations shape access to natural resources, environmental knowledge, vulnerability, and decision-making.
- Gender is important in water governance because women and girls often carry a disproportionate responsibility for household water collection and management, while their participation in formal water institutions may remain limited.
- Indigenous feminism, decolonial ecofeminism, climate justice, and just transition approaches broaden environmental governance by connecting ecological sustainability with rights, social equality, historical responsibility, indigenous knowledge, and meaningful participation.

Objective Questions

1. Who coined the term ecofeminism?
2. What is meant by the "logic of domination" in ecofeminist theory?
3. Who developed the concept of feminist environmentalism in the context of India?
4. What was the significance of Chapter 24 of Agenda 21?
5. What is the UNFCCC?
6. What is meant by gender-responsive climate action?
7. What is the significance of Target 22 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework?
8. What is Feminist Political Ecology?
9. What is meant by situated knowledge?
10. What is Integrated Water Resources Management?
11. What is meant by climate justice?
12. What is a just transition?

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Answers

1. Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term ecofeminism in 1974.
2. The "logic of domination" refers to hierarchical systems of thought that construct one group as superior and another as inferior, legitimising domination and exploitation.
3. Bina Agarwal developed the concept of feminist environmentalism, focusing on the material conditions of women's relationships with natural resources.
4. Chapter 24 recognised women's participation and empowerment as important components of sustainable and equitable development.
5. The UNFCCC is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, adopted in 1992 to provide the basic international framework for addressing climate change.
6. Gender-responsive climate action considers the different needs, vulnerabilities, knowledge, and participation of women and men in climate policies and programmes.
7. Target 22 promotes inclusive participation and access to justice in biodiversity governance, with particular attention to women and girls, indigenous peoples and local communities, children and youth, and persons with disabilities.
8. Feminist Political Ecology is an approach that examines how gender and other social relations shape access to natural resources, environmental risks, knowledge, and decision-making.
9. Situated knowledge refers to knowledge produced from particular social, cultural, economic, and geographical positions.
10. Integrated Water Resources Management is an approach that promotes coordinated management of water, land, and related resources while considering social and ecological sustainability.
11. Climate justice connects climate change with questions of equity, rights, responsibility, participation, and unequal distribution of environmental burdens.
12. A just transition is a transition towards environmentally sustainable economic systems that also addresses employment, social protection, equality, and the rights of affected communities.

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Assignments

1. Explain the major theoretical approaches to ecofeminism.
2. Examine the evolution of gender concerns in global environmental governance from Stockholm to the Paris Agreement.
3. Discuss the contribution of feminist political ecology to the study of gender and natural resources.
4. Analyse the gender dimensions of climate change with suitable examples.
5. Examine the role of women in biodiversity and water governance.
6. Discuss the contribution of decolonial ecofeminism and climate justice to gender-just environmental governance.

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UNIT 3

Gender and Global Labor Governance

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the concepts of social reproduction, care work, informal labour and feminization of labour from a feminist political economy perspective
- trace the evolution of the International Labour Organization's approach to gender equality and identify its major conventions relating to women's labour rights
- analyse the gendered dimensions of global supply chains, export-oriented production and corporate labour standards
- explain global care chains and examine the rights and vulnerabilities of migrant domestic workers
- examine the gender pay gap, occupational segregation, workplace violence and emerging challenges associated with automation and the future of work

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Prerequisite

What do we usually understand by "work"? Most people think of a job for which a person receives a salary or wage. But who cooks food, cares for children and older persons, cleans the house, and supports family members when this work is unpaid? Why are women and men often concentrated in different occupations? Why do some workers receive lower wages or have less protection even when they perform essential work?

These questions help us understand the gendered nature of labour. Women's work is found not only in factories, offices and farms but also in households, care services, domestic work and the informal economy. Globalization has created new employment opportunities for women, but it has also produced new forms of insecure and poorly protected work.

This unit explores these issues through feminist political economy and global labour governance. It examines how international labour institutions, global supply chains, migration, trade, care work and technological change shape women's experiences of work. The central question is simple but important: How can global labour systems recognize, value and protect all forms of work, including the work traditionally performed by women?

Keywords

Feminist political economy, social reproduction, care work, informal economy, feminization of labour, decent work, global supply chains, export processing zones, global care chains, migrant domestic workers, gender pay gap, occupational segregation, gender-based violence, trade unions, future of work

Discussion

5.3.1 Introduction

Labour is a central part of economic and social life, but it is deeply shaped by gender. Women and men often work in different occupations, receive different levels of income, and have unequal access to secure employment, social protection and decision-making. These differences are influenced by social institutions, economic structures, family responsibilities and cultural expectations.

Feminist approaches argue that labour markets cannot be understood only through paid employment. Unpaid domestic and care work makes paid employment and economic production possible, yet it is often excluded from conventional measures of economic activity. Women are also disproportionately represented in informal, domestic and low-paid employment.

Global labour governance refers to the international rules, institutions and practices that influence employment and working conditions. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the principal international institution concerned with labour standards. Trade agreements, global supply chains, corporate social responsibility initiatives and migration regimes also influence labour conditions.

This unit examines these issues through the perspective of feminist political economy. It discusses the ILO and gender equality, informal and care work, global supply chains, migrant domestic labour, trade and labour standards, the gender pay gap, workplace violence, labour movements and the changing world of work.

5.3.2 Feminist Political Economy and Gendered Labour

5.3.2.1 Understanding Feminist Political Economy

Feminist political economy examines how economic structures and gender relations influence one another. Conventional economic approaches have often treated labour primarily as paid employment exchanged

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in markets. Feminist scholars argue that this approach overlooks unpaid domestic and care work that supports households and the wider economy.

Heidi Hartmann's 1979 essay, *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, examined the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy. Hartmann argued that women's position in the labour market cannot be explained by class relations alone. Family structures, employment institutions and social expectations also influence women's economic position.

Later feminist scholars developed more integrated approaches that examined how gender, class, race, caste and other social relations shape economic opportunities. Feminist political economy therefore draws attention to both paid and unpaid labour and to the institutions that determine who performs particular kinds of work.

5.3.2.2 Formal and Informal Labour

The formal economy includes employment relationships that are generally recognized and regulated through labour law, taxation, social security and other institutions. The informal economy includes a wide range of activities such as street vending, domestic work, home-based production, casual labour and certain forms of self-employment that often fall outside effective labour protection.

Women are heavily represented in informal employment in many parts of the Global South. Informal workers may lack minimum wage protection, social security, occupational safety, paid leave and effective opportunities for collective bargaining. The gendered nature of informality is important because informal work often combines paid economic activity with unpaid household responsibilities. Women may therefore experience insecurity both as workers and as primary providers of unpaid care.

5.3.2.3 Social Reproduction and Care Work

Social reproduction refers to the activities required to maintain human life and reproduce society across generations. It includes childcare, household work, caring for older persons, maintaining households and supporting the physical and emotional well-being of family members.

Silvia Federici has argued that the historical organization of domestic labour as women's responsibility contributed to the undervaluation of women's work. Nancy Folbre has similarly highlighted the economic importance of care work and the disadvantages experienced by those who provide care.

Care work may be unpaid within households or paid in occupations such as nursing, childcare, domestic service and elderly care. In both cases, it is frequently undervalued despite its importance to society and the economy. A feminist approach therefore asks not only how many people have paid jobs, but also who performs care work, who benefits from it, and who bears its costs.

5.3.3 The International Labour Organization and Gender Equality

5.3.3.1 Evolution of ILO Gender Policies

The International Labour Organization was established in 1919 and operates through a tripartite structure involving governments, employers and workers. It develops international labour standards and promotes decent work and social dialogue.

The ILO's early approach to women's employment was largely protective. Some early labour standards sought to restrict women's employment in particular industries

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or during certain periods. Although such measures were intended to protect women, feminist scholars have pointed out that they could also reinforce assumptions that women were primarily wives and mothers and could restrict their access to particular occupations.

The approach gradually shifted towards equality and non-discrimination. Two important conventions were the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (C100) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (C111). C100 established the principle of equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value, while C111 addressed discrimination in employment and occupation.

5.3.3.2 Major ILO Conventions on Gender and Labour

Several ILO instruments are particularly relevant to gender equality.

The Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (C156) recognizes the need to address the employment difficulties experienced by workers with family responsibilities.

The Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (C183) establishes standards relating to maternity leave, maternity benefits, health protection and protection against dismissal because of maternity.

The Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (C189) recognizes domestic workers as workers entitled to fundamental labour protections. The Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (C190) addresses violence and harassment in the world of work and recognizes gender-based violence and harassment as serious labour rights concerns. Together, these instruments demonstrate the movement of international labour governance from a narrow focus on protecting women towards a broader emphasis on equality, rights, dignity and decent work.

5.3.3.3 Decent Work and Gender Equality

The ILO's Decent Work Agenda, introduced in 1999, emphasizes productive employment, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue. Gender equality is an important cross-cutting concern within this framework.

From a feminist perspective, however, decent work cannot be limited to formal employment. Large numbers of women work in informal, domestic, temporary and other forms of employment that may not provide adequate social protection.

Feminist political economy therefore calls for labour governance that recognizes the relationship between paid employment, unpaid care work and social reproduction.

5.3.4 Global Supply Chains and Women Workers

5.3.4.1 Feminization of Export Labour

Globalization has expanded women's participation in export-oriented manufacturing and services. Women have become an important workforce in sectors such as garments, electronics, agriculture and certain service industries. Naila Kabeer's research on women garment workers in Bangladesh demonstrated that factory employment could provide women with income, greater economic independence and new forms of social mobility. At the same time, many women workers experience low wages, insecure employment, long working hours and unsafe conditions.

Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson challenged the idea that women are naturally suited to low-paid export work because of their supposed "nimble fingers." They argued that employers' preference for women is connected to social structures that make women workers more likely to accept low

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wages and insecure employment. Thus, women's participation in global production can simultaneously create opportunities and reproduce inequalities.

5.3.4.2 Export Processing Zones

Export Processing Zones (EPZs), also known as special economic or free trade zones in different contexts, are areas designed to attract investment and promote export production. Women form a substantial part of the workforce in many labour-intensive industries located in such zones.

Employment in EPZs can provide access to wages and formal employment. However, workers may also face long working hours, insecure contracts, restrictions on unionization, inadequate safety standards and gender-based discrimination. The gender dimension of EPZ employment is therefore linked to the broader question of how global competition affects labour standards.

5.3.4.3 Corporate Social Responsibility and Supply Chains

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes have become an important mechanism for addressing labour conditions in global supply chains. Companies may use codes of conduct, workplace audits and supplier standards to regulate labour practices. However, social audits may fail to identify problems such as sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination, excessive workloads and restrictions on worker organization. Informal and home-based workers may also remain outside these systems. Feminist labour scholars therefore argue that voluntary CSR mechanisms should not replace effective labour regulation, worker organization and legally enforceable rights.

5.3.5 Domestic Work, Migration and Global Care Chains

5.3.5.1 Domestic Work and ILO Convention C189

Domestic work includes cooking, cleaning, childcare, elderly care and other household services. It has historically been undervalued because it is associated with women's unpaid household responsibilities.

The ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (C189) represents an important development in international labour governance. It recognizes domestic workers as workers entitled to fundamental labour protections, including appropriate working conditions, rest, social protection and protection from abuse and violence.

Implementation remains challenging because domestic work takes place in private households, where labour inspection can be difficult. Migrant domestic workers may face additional vulnerabilities related to migration status, language, isolation and dependence on employers.

5.3.5.2 Global Care Chains

The concept of global care chains, associated particularly with Arlie Hochschild, describes the transnational movement of care labour between households and countries. For example, a woman from a lower-income country may migrate to a wealthier country to work as a domestic worker or caregiver. Her migration may enable her employer to participate more fully in paid employment, while care for her own children may be transferred to relatives or other caregivers in her country of origin.

Rhacel Parreñas's research on Filipina migrant domestic workers demonstrated how migration can generate economic opportunities while also creating emotional and social costs for migrant workers and

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their families. Global care chains therefore connect migration, gender, class and the unequal distribution of care across countries.

5.3.5.3 Rights and Vulnerabilities of Migrant Domestic Workers

Migrant domestic workers may face multiple forms of vulnerability. These include low wages, long working hours, social isolation, restrictions on movement, lack of access to legal remedies and gender-based violence.

Migration regulations can sometimes increase these vulnerabilities when workers' residence status is closely connected to a particular employer. Systems of employer sponsorship in some countries have been criticized by labour and human rights organizations for creating unequal power relationships.

At the same time, migrant women should not be viewed only as victims. Migration can also provide income, employment and greater economic opportunities. A gender-sensitive approach should therefore recognize both vulnerability and agency.

5.3.6 Gender, Trade and Labour Standards

5.3.6.1 Trade and Women's Employment

International trade can have both positive and negative effects on women's employment. Export-oriented production can create new jobs for women, particularly in manufacturing and services. At the same time, import competition can affect sectors in which women are employed, while changes in agricultural markets can influence women's livelihoods.

The effects of trade are therefore shaped by the structure of national economies, labour markets and social protection systems. Trade agreements increasingly contain provisions relating to labour standards and gender equality. These provisions differ considerably in their scope and enforceability.

5.3.6.2 Gender and the WTO

The World Trade Organization (WTO), established in 1995, is the principal multilateral institution governing international trade. For much of its history, gender was not central to WTO policy discussions. In 2017, WTO members adopted the Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment, which recognized the importance of women's participation in international trade. Feminist economists have nevertheless argued that trade policy should consider its effects on public services, agriculture, care work and informal employment. Gender-neutral trade rules may produce different effects for women and men because they enter markets with unequal resources and responsibilities.

5.3.7 Gender Pay Gap and Occupational Segregation

5.3.7.1 Gender Pay Gap

The gender pay gap refers to the difference between the average earnings of women and men. It may be measured using hourly, monthly or annual earnings.

The gap is influenced by several factors, including occupational segregation, differences in working hours, career interruptions, unpaid care responsibilities, discrimination and unequal access to senior positions.

It is important to distinguish the raw pay gap from adjusted comparisons that account for factors such as occupation, education and experience. A raw pay gap describes an overall difference in earnings but does not by itself explain its causes.

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5.3.7.2 Occupational Segregation

Occupational segregation refers to the concentration of women and men in different occupations. Horizontal segregation occurs when women and men are concentrated in different types of work. For example, women may be overrepresented in teaching, nursing and care work, while men may be more represented in construction and certain technical occupations.

Vertical segregation refers to unequal representation at different levels within the same occupation or organization. Women may be present in large numbers in an occupation but remain underrepresented in senior and decision-making positions. Paula England's work on the devaluation of women's work shows how occupations associated with women may receive lower economic and social value.

5.3.7.3 International Responses

The ILO's C100 and C111 provide important international standards against unequal remuneration and employment discrimination. Other approaches include pay transparency, anti-discrimination legislation, parental leave, affordable childcare and measures to support women's participation in decision-making positions. Reducing the gender pay gap therefore requires attention not only to equal pay for equal work but also to the wider organization of work and care.

5.3.8 Gender-Based Violence and Harassment at Work

5.3.8.1 ILO Convention C190

The Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (C190) is a major international instrument addressing violence and harassment in the world of work.

It recognizes violence and harassment as a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices that can cause physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm. The convention also specifically addresses gender-based violence and harassment.

An important feature of C190 is its broad understanding of the "world of work." Protection is not restricted to a conventional workplace but can include work-related communication, travel and other work-related situations.

5.3.9 Feminist Perspectives on Trade Unions and Labour Movements

Trade unions have played an important role in securing wages, social protection and labour rights. They have also supported campaigns for equal pay, maternity protection and workplace rights.

However, trade unions have historically been male-dominated in many contexts. Women's concerns, particularly those relating to care work, sexual harassment, informal employment and precarious work, have not always received sufficient attention.

Feminist labour organizing has contributed to changes within the labour movement. Organizations such as the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India demonstrate how women in informal employment can organize around wages, social security, working conditions and political representation.

Domestic workers' organizations have also played an important role in the campaign for international recognition of domestic work. Such organizations demonstrate that labour rights can be advanced through forms of collective organization that extend beyond traditional industrial trade unions.

5.3.10 Concluding Observation

This unit examined the relationship between gender and global labour governance.

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Feminist political economy challenges the narrow understanding of labour as paid market activity and highlights the importance of social reproduction, unpaid care work and informal employment. These perspectives demonstrate that labour markets are shaped by gender relations as well as economic structures.

The unit examined the changing role of the ILO in promoting gender equality, from early protective measures to contemporary standards on equal remuneration, non-discrimination, maternity protection, domestic work and violence and harassment. It also explored the gendered nature of global supply chains, export processing zones and corporate social responsibility.

The discussion of domestic work and global care chains showed how migration transfers care labour across borders and creates both opportunities and vulnerabilities for migrant women. The gender pay gap, occupational segregation and workplace violence were examined as continuing structural concerns. The unit concluded by considering trade unions, informal worker organization, automation, platform work and the future of work from a feminist perspective.

Recap

- Feminist political economy examines the relationship between gender, labour and economic structures.
- Labour includes both paid employment and unpaid activities such as domestic and care work.
- Social reproduction refers to the work required to maintain households, care for people and reproduce society.
- Women are disproportionately represented in many forms of informal and insecure employment.
- The ILO has gradually moved from protective approaches towards equality, non-discrimination and decent work.
- ILO Conventions C100 and C111 provide important international standards on equal remuneration and discrimination.
- C189 recognizes domestic workers as workers entitled to fundamental labour protections.
- Global supply chains have created employment opportunities for women but may also expose them to low wages, insecurity and poor working conditions.
- Global care chains connect migrant women's care work with households and economies across national borders.
- The gender pay gap and occupational segregation reflect wider inequalities in labour markets and the organization of care.

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- ILO Convention C190 recognizes violence and harassment as important concerns within the world of work.
- A gender-sensitive approach to the future of work requires attention to technology, social protection, decent work and the recognition and redistribution of care work.

Objective Questions

1. What is meant by feminist political economy?
2. What is social reproduction?
3. What is meant by informal employment?
4. Who wrote *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*?
5. What is the main principle of ILO Convention C100?
6. What does ILO Convention C189 deal with?
7. What is meant by a global care chain?
8. What is horizontal occupational segregation?
9. What is the gender pay gap?
10. What is the purpose of ILO Convention C190?
11. What is an Export Processing Zone?
12. Name one organization that has organized women workers in the informal economy in India.

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Answers

1. Feminist political economy studies how gender relations interact with economic structures, labour markets and systems of production and reproduction.
2. Social reproduction refers to the activities required to maintain human life and reproduce society, including care, household work and the upbringing of children.

3. Informal employment refers to work that operates outside, or is inadequately covered by, formal systems of labour regulation and social protection.
4. Heidi Hartmann
5. C100 establishes the principle of equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value.
6. C189 deals with the rights and working conditions of domestic workers.
7. A global care chain refers to transnational networks through which paid and unpaid care work is transferred between households and countries.
8. Horizontal occupational segregation refers to the concentration of women and men in different occupations or sectors.
9. The gender pay gap is the difference between the average earnings of women and men.
10. C190 establishes international standards addressing violence and harassment in the world of work.
11. An Export Processing Zone is a designated area where governments provide special conditions and incentives to promote export-oriented production.
12. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA).

Assignments

1. Explain the contribution of feminist political economy to the study of global labour.
2. Examine the evolution of the ILO's approach to gender equality with reference to C100, C111, C189 and C190.
3. Discuss the opportunities and challenges experienced by women workers in global supply chains.
4. Explain the concept of global care chains and examine the position of migrant domestic workers.
5. Analyse the gender pay gap and occupational segregation as structural features of labour markets.
6. Discuss the gendered implications of automation, platform work and the future of work.

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BLOCK 6

Contemporary Issues in Gender and International Relations

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UNIT 1

Gender and Migration

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- understand how gender shapes the experience of migration in different historical and contemporary contexts
- critically analyse the feminisation of migration and its implications for international relations
- examine the intersection of gender, labour, and migration through feminist political economy frameworks
- evaluate policy responses to migration from a gendered perspective
- engage with key scholars and texts in the field of gender and migration studies
- apply concepts such as care chains, trafficking, reproductive labour, and transnational motherhood to real-world cases

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Prerequisite

Migration is often discussed in terms of people crossing borders in search of employment, safety, education, or better opportunities. But think about the people who make everyday life possible in societies shaped by migration. Who looks after children when parents work long hours? Who cares for elderly people? Who cleans homes, works in hospitals, provides domestic services, or supports families across national borders? Increasingly, many of these forms of labour are performed by migrant women.

A woman who migrates from the Philippines to the Gulf as a domestic worker, an Indian nurse working abroad, a refugee mother displaced by conflict, and a highly skilled woman migrating for professional employment may all cross international borders, but their experiences can be very different. Gender influences the reasons

people migrate, the opportunities available to them, the work they perform, the risks they encounter, and the rights they can access.

This raises an important question: Does migration affect women and men in the same way? A gender perspective shows that it does not. Gender interacts with class, race, nationality, caste, religion, age, and other forms of social difference to shape migration experiences. This unit therefore examines migration not simply as the movement of people across territories, but as a social, economic, political, and gendered process. Contemporary international evidence similarly shows that gender influences the reasons for migration, migration journeys, employment, access to services, and experiences of discrimination and violence.

Keywords

Feminisation of migration, global care economy, care chains, care drain, migrant domestic workers, trafficking, forced migration, gender-based violence, transnational motherhood, remittances, feminist political economy, migration governance, intersectionality, post-colonial feminism, reproductive labour, migrant women's rights, kafala system, women, peace and security

Discussion

6.1.1 Why Gender Matters in Migration Studies

Migration is one of the defining features of the contemporary world. Millions of people cross international borders each year in search of employment, safety, education, family reunion, or escape from political persecution. According to the latest United Nations estimates, the number of international migrants reached approximately 304 million in 2024. Women and girls constituted just under half of this global migrant population, at around 48 per cent. Migration shapes economies, cultures, political systems, and international relations in profound ways. Yet for much of the twentieth century, dominant frameworks in migration studies and international relations (IR) treated migration as an essentially gender-neutral phenomenon or assumed male migrants as the normative subject.

Feminist scholars challenged this assumption beginning in the 1970s and 1980s. They pointed out that women have always been significant actors in migration—as economic migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, domestic workers, care workers, and participants in transnational social networks. The invisibility of women in migration research was not simply a neutral omission but reflected broader androcentric biases in social science. When women appeared in migration research, they were often depicted as passive dependants accompanying male breadwinners rather than as agents making their own decisions about mobility.

The field has transformed considerably since then. Today, gender is recognised

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as a crucial analytical lens in migration studies. This unit introduces students to that transformation and its key theoretical contributions. It explores how gender intersects with other axes of difference, including class, race, nationality, and caste, to shape migratory experiences. It also examines specific forms of gendered migration, from domestic and care work migration to trafficking and forced displacement, and considers what a genuinely gender-responsive approach to migration policy might involve.

Migration studies as a field emerged from sociology, demography, economics, geography, and related disciplines. Early approaches focused on aggregate questions: How many people move? Where do they go? What are the economic effects? The famous push-pull model, associated with Everett Lee (1966), explained migration as the result of "push" factors at the place of origin, such as poverty, unemployment, or conflict, and "pull" factors at the destination, such as better wages, employment opportunities, and safety. While useful at a macro level, this model tended to treat migrants as relatively homogeneous economic actors and paid limited attention to how gender, race, class, and social structures mediated individual decisions.

The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM), developed during the 1980s and 1990s, shifted attention from the individual to the household as an important unit of analysis. Scholars such as Oded Stark and David Bloom argued that households may send migrants abroad as a strategy for diversifying income and managing economic risks. While this approach improved upon purely individual models, feminist scholars pointed out that it could still overlook power relations within households. Decisions about who migrates, under what conditions, and who benefits from migration are often influenced by gender hierarchies and unequal access to resources and decision-making.

A gender perspective therefore does more than add women to existing migration theories. It asks how gender relations themselves shape migration processes. It examines who is expected to migrate, who is expected to stay behind, what kinds of work migrants perform, how care responsibilities are distributed, and how states and labour markets regulate different categories of migrants. Contemporary UN Women and ILO materials similarly emphasise that gender influences migration decisions, employment opportunities, working conditions, and exposure to exploitation and violence.

6.1.2 The Feminisation of Migration: Patterns and Processes

One of the important developments in contemporary migration has been the increasing visibility and participation of women in international migration, particularly as independent workers and primary or joint income earners rather than simply as dependants. This development is commonly described as the "feminisation of migration." The term should not be understood to mean that women constitute a majority of international migrants worldwide. Women and girls accounted for about 48 per cent of international migrants in 2024. Rather, feminisation refers especially to the growing importance of women as autonomous participants in migration and to the expansion of gendered forms of labour migration.

The feminisation of migration is therefore not simply a matter of increasing numbers. It reflects structural changes in the global economy and in gender relations in both sending and receiving societies. At the global level, economic restructuring and neoliberal globalisation have generated new demands for feminised labour, particularly in domestic work, caregiving, health care, hospitality,

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and certain service sectors. At the same time, economic insecurity, unemployment, unequal access to resources, and inadequate social protection in many countries have encouraged women to enter paid employment and, in some cases, to migrate as a strategy for supporting themselves and their families.

The Philippines provides one of the most studied examples of feminised labour migration. Since the 1970s, the Philippine state has promoted overseas employment as an important part of its economic strategy. Filipino women have migrated to destinations including Gulf countries, Hong Kong, Singapore, Europe, and North America, working in domestic service, nursing, caregiving, and other sectors. Robyn Magalit Rodriguez (2010) examines how the Philippine state became involved in organising and facilitating overseas labour migration, describing this process through the idea of a "labour brokerage state."

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman—have been important destinations for migrant domestic workers, most of whom are women. In several GCC countries, migrant workers have historically been governed through sponsorship arrangements commonly associated with the kafala system. Such arrangements have been criticised for creating vulnerabilities when workers' legal status and ability to change employment are closely connected to their employment relationships. Domestic workers may also experience exclusion or limited coverage under national labour laws, although reforms have occurred in several countries. Feminist researchers and labour organisations have documented risks including excessive recruitment fees, contract substitution, isolation, restrictions on mobility, non-payment of wages, exploitation, and abuse. The ILO continues to identify migrant domestic workers as a group facing particular vulnerabilities because of precarious recruitment, limited labour-law coverage or enforcement, and social isolation.

6.1.2.1 Push and Pull Factors in Feminised Migration

Feminist scholars have refined the conventional push-pull model by drawing attention to gendered dynamics. On the "push" side, women's migration may be influenced not only by poverty and unemployment but also by gender-specific conditions such as domestic violence, restricted mobility, unequal access to education and employment, gender wage gaps, discriminatory social norms, and limited reproductive autonomy. In some circumstances, migration can provide women with opportunities for economic independence and greater social autonomy.

At the same time, migration decisions are rarely determined by a single factor. Family responsibilities, household strategies, labour-market conditions, social networks, migration policies, recruitment practices, and expectations concerning gender roles can operate together. Women may therefore migrate because of economic necessity, personal aspirations, family obligations, or a combination of these factors.

On the "pull" side, demand for feminised labour in wealthier societies is particularly important. The increased participation of women in paid employment, population ageing, changing family structures, and the expansion of private care services have generated demand for childcare, elder care, domestic cleaning, nursing, and other forms of reproductive labour. Where public care infrastructure is inadequate or expensive, migrant women may fill these gaps. The ILO notes that growing household demand for domestic services has been an important factor in the feminisation of international labour migration.

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This creates a complex relationship between gender equality and global labour markets. Greater employment opportunities for women in destination countries can coexist with the transfer of care responsibilities to migrant women. A feminist analysis therefore asks whether the unequal distribution of care has simply been transferred across borders rather than fundamentally transformed.

6.1.2.2 The Global Care Economy

The concept of the "global care economy" refers to the transnational organisation of care work—the work of looking after children, older persons, persons with illnesses or disabilities, and households—through migration and global labour markets. Feminist political economists have shown that care work, despite being essential for social reproduction, has historically been undervalued because it is associated with women and with the private sphere of the household.

When care work is commodified and performed by migrant women, it remains shaped by gendered expectations and may also become racialised and nationalised. Migrant women are often concentrated in occupations that are socially associated with women's traditional domestic responsibilities. The ILO identifies domestic and care work as major areas in which migrant women are concentrated and notes the particular vulnerabilities they may face in these sectors.

The global care economy operates through what Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2001) describes as a "transfer of caretaking" from poorer countries to wealthier ones. For example, Filipino domestic workers may care for children or older people in households in Europe, North America, or Asia while their own children in the Philippines are cared for by grandparents, relatives, or other paid workers. Such arrangements have contributed to the development of the concept of "care drain," which refers to the loss or redistribution of care resources in migrant-sending societies as a result of large-scale migration of care workers.

Arlie Russell Hochschild's concept of "global care chains" further explains how care responsibilities can be linked across households and countries. A chain may connect a migrant domestic worker, the family employing her in a destination country, and the family members or other carers who provide care for her own children in the country of origin. These chains demonstrate how apparently private activities within households are connected to global labour markets and international inequalities.

The global care economy therefore reveals an important paradox. Migration can provide women with employment and income while simultaneously reproducing gendered inequalities in the distribution of care. A feminist approach seeks to understand both dimensions rather than treating migrant women exclusively as either victims or beneficiaries of migration.

6.1.3 Trafficking, Forced Migration, and Gender-Based Violence

Among the most serious dimensions of gendered migration are human trafficking, forced migration, and gender-based violence. Trafficking in persons is defined in the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol, adopted in 2000, through acts such as recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons using specified means such as force, coercion, or deception for the purpose of exploitation. The definition covers different forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation and forced labour. UNODC's Global Report on Trafficking in Persons examines trafficking patterns, forms of exploitation, and responses across countries and regions.

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Women and girls are significantly affected by trafficking, particularly trafficking for sexual exploitation and certain forms of forced labour. However, trafficking should not be understood exclusively as a "women's issue." Men and boys can also be trafficked, and the forms of exploitation vary across contexts. A gender-sensitive approach examines why women and men may experience different risks and how gender inequality interacts with poverty, migration status, labour-market conditions, and other structural factors.

It is important to approach the relationship between trafficking, sex work, and migration with analytical care. Feminist scholars have debated whether and how sex work should be distinguished from trafficking and exploitation. Some feminist organisations argue that prostitution is inherently exploitative and support abolitionist approaches. Other organisations emphasise the rights, agency, and labour conditions of sex workers and argue that conflating consensual sex work with trafficking can produce policies that harm sex workers, including migrant sex workers. These debates demonstrate that feminist approaches to migration are internally diverse.

Beyond trafficking, gender-based violence can occur throughout migration processes. Women and girls may face domestic violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, sexual violence, harassment, exploitation, and other forms of gender-based violence. These risks may occur in countries of origin, during journeys, in transit, at borders, in workplaces, and in destination communities. UN Women notes that migrant women and girls can face heightened risks of trafficking, forced labour, exploitation, and gender-based violence, particularly when they lack safe and regular migration pathways.

The international refugee regime, established through the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, does not explicitly list "gender" as an independent ground for refugee status. The Convention recognises persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. Gender-related claims have therefore often been considered through the category of "particular social group" or through other applicable grounds. UNHCR has developed guidelines addressing gender-related persecution, helping states interpret refugee law in ways that take gender into account.

Feminist legal scholars have argued that gender-based persecution should receive stronger recognition in refugee and asylum systems. Several countries have developed approaches that recognise claims involving gender-related harms such as domestic violence or female genital mutilation, but recognition and interpretation vary across jurisdictions. This illustrates the continuing importance of gender-sensitive approaches to international protection.

6.1.3.1 Women in Conflict-Driven Displacement

Armed conflict is a major driver of forced migration and displacement, and women and girls can experience conflict in distinctly gendered ways. Sexual violence, including rape, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, and other forms of sexual violence, has been documented in numerous conflicts. Women may also experience loss of livelihoods, separation from family members, displacement, and increased care responsibilities.

Women and girls who flee sexual violence may face secondary victimisation because of stigma associated with sexual violence in some communities. They may also encounter difficulties accessing health care, psychosocial support, legal assistance, and livelihood opportunities.

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In refugee camps and displacement settings, women and girls may face continued risks of sexual and gender-based violence. Inadequate lighting, insufficient sanitation facilities, overcrowding, lack of privacy, and insecure access to water and food can increase vulnerability. Humanitarian organisations have increasingly incorporated gender-responsive approaches to address such risks.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, marked an important milestone in the Women, Peace and Security agenda. It recognised the gendered effects of armed conflict and called for greater participation of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and peace processes. However, implementation has varied considerably across contexts. The resolution is therefore important not only for recognising women's vulnerability during conflict but also for recognising women as political actors and peacebuilders.

6.1.4 Transnational Motherhood and Family Life

When women migrate while leaving children behind, they may participate in what sociologists Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila (1997) famously termed "transnational motherhood." The concept captures the ways in which migrant mothers maintain emotional relationships, provide economic support, and perform maternal responsibilities across national borders.

Transnational motherhood challenges conventional assumptions that motherhood requires continuous physical co-presence. Migrant mothers may maintain family relationships through remittances, telephone calls, video communication, social media, gifts, and return visits. Financial provision can become an important expression of maternal responsibility when physical presence is difficult or impossible.

Research by Rhacel Salazar Parreñas and others has shown that migrant mothers frequently use remittances to pay for children's education, health care, food, housing, and other household needs. In this context, economic provision becomes closely connected to ideas of care and maternal responsibility.

The consequences for children left behind are complex. Some research suggests that remittances can improve children's educational and economic opportunities and strengthen household security. Other research identifies possible emotional and social costs, including feelings of separation, changes in caregiving relationships, and difficulties associated with prolonged periods of physical absence. The effects therefore vary according to family circumstances, children's age, caregiving arrangements, communication patterns, and the duration of migration.

The gendered dimension is particularly significant. When fathers migrate and leave children behind, migration is often interpreted primarily through the language of economic provision. When mothers migrate, they may face stronger moral expectations concerning physical presence and caregiving. This difference reflects persistent gender norms in which women are associated with care and men with breadwinning.

Feminist scholars have also examined transnational fatherhood. Men who migrate may continue to construct their identities around economic provision even when they are geographically separated from their families. Examining both motherhood and fatherhood helps reveal how migration can challenge traditional gender roles while simultaneously reproducing some of them.

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6.1.5 Rights Frameworks for Migrant Women

The international human rights framework provides important tools for protecting migrant women's rights, although implementation remains uneven. Key international instruments relevant to migrant women include the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol; the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979); and the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers (2011).

The ICRMW is one of the most comprehensive international instruments addressing the rights of migrant workers and members of their families. It establishes a framework for protecting a range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. However, its ratification has been limited, particularly among major migrant-destination countries. This illustrates a broader problem in international migration governance: international standards may exist without universal state participation.

ILO Convention No. 189 on Domestic Workers was adopted in 2011 and recognises the need for domestic workers to enjoy decent working conditions and fundamental labour rights. It is particularly important for migrant women because domestic work remains a major area of female migrant employment. The ILO continues to emphasise the vulnerabilities faced by migrant domestic workers, including recruitment-related abuses, isolation, inadequate labour protection, and restrictions on freedom of movement and association.

CEDAW provides a broader gender-equality framework. Although it is not specifically a migration convention, its provisions concerning discrimination, employment, equality, and women's rights are relevant to migrant women. Gender-responsive migration governance therefore requires coordination between migration policy, labour policy, anti-discrimination law, and gender-equality frameworks.

Civil society organisations, migrant-led organisations, feminist NGOs, and trade unions have also played important roles in advocating for migrant women's rights. Organisations such as Migrant Forum in Asia, the International Domestic Workers Federation, and Kalayaan in the United Kingdom have engaged in advocacy, community organising, legal support, and documentation of abuses.

Feminist scholars have emphasised the importance of centring migrant women's own voices and organisations in these advocacy efforts. Migrant women should not be represented only as vulnerable victims requiring protection. They are also workers, community members, rights holders, organisers, and political actors. A rights-based approach therefore combines protection from exploitation and violence with recognition of agency, dignity, participation, and equality.

6.1.6 Concluding Observation

Gender is central to understanding contemporary migration because migration is not experienced in the same way by all people. Women's migration has become an important part of global labour mobility, particularly in domestic work, care work, health care, and other service sectors. At the same time, women migrants may experience specific forms of exploitation, discrimination, trafficking, gender-based violence, and unequal access to rights. Concepts such as feminisation of migration, global care chains, care

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drain, transnational motherhood, and remittances help reveal the connections between global labour markets and gender relations.

A feminist approach moves beyond viewing migrant women simply as vulnerable victims. It recognises their agency, aspirations, economic contributions, and capacity to negotiate social and political structures. Feminist political economy, postcolonial feminism, and intersectionality demonstrate that gender operates together with class, race, nationality, caste, religion, age, sexuality, and migration status.

The study of gender and migration connects international processes with everyday experiences of work, family, care, and survival. It raises important questions about the responsibilities of states, international organisations, employers, recruitment agencies, and societies. A gender-responsive approach to migration requires not only protection from exploitation and violence but also recognition of migrant women's rights, labour, agency, participation, and voices.

Recap

- Migration is a major global process shaped by economic, political, social, environmental, and security factors.
- Traditional migration theories often treated migrants as gender-neutral actors and paid insufficient attention to women's experiences.
- Feminist scholarship demonstrated that gender is an important structure shaping migration decisions, opportunities, risks, and outcomes.
- The feminisation of migration refers particularly to the increasing importance of women as independent participants in international labour migration.
- Gender-specific factors influencing migration may include domestic violence, restricted mobility, unequal employment opportunities, gender discrimination, and limited access to resources.
- Demand for domestic and care labour in destination countries has contributed significantly to women's international labour migration.
- The global care economy demonstrates how care work is organised across national borders.
- Care chains and care drain show how the migration of care workers can redistribute caregiving responsibilities between countries and households.
- Trafficking and gender-based violence are important dimensions of gendered migration, but trafficking should not automatically be equated with all forms of sex work or irregular migration.
- Women and girls may experience conflict-driven displacement and refugee situations in gender-specific ways.

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- Transnational motherhood demonstrates how migrant mothers maintain family relationships and provide care across geographical borders.
- Remittances can contribute to household welfare and development but cannot substitute for structural social and economic policies.
- Feminist political economy examines how migration governance distributes labour, rights, risks, and benefits through gendered structures of power.
- Feminist IR challenges state-centric approaches by bringing gender, care, labour, and migrant women's experiences into the study of international politics.
- Postcolonial feminism challenges the representation of women from the Global South as a homogeneous category of passive victims.
- Intersectionality demonstrates that migration experiences are shaped by the interaction of gender with class, race, nationality, caste, religion, age, sexuality, and migration status.

Objective Questions

1. What is meant by the feminisation of migration?
2. Who developed the push-pull model of migration?
3. What is the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM)?
4. Who introduced the concept of the "labour brokerage state" in the context of Philippine overseas labour migration?
5. What is meant by the global care economy?
6. What is meant by "care drain"?
7. Who developed the concept of "global care chains"?
8. What is the difference between trafficking and migration?
9. What is meant by transnational motherhood?
10. Name any two international instruments that provide protection relevant to the rights of migrant women.
11. What is the significance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 for women affected by conflict and displacement?
12. Why is an intersectional approach important in the study of gender and migration?

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Answers

1. Feminisation of migration refers to the increasing visibility and participation of women as autonomous participants in migration, particularly as independent workers and primary or joint income earners rather than merely as dependants. It also refers to the expansion of gendered forms of labour migration.

2. The push-pull model of migration is associated with Everett Lee. It explains migration in terms of "push" factors at the place of origin and "pull" factors at the destination.

3. The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) is an approach that shifts attention from the individual migrant to the household as an important unit of analysis. It explains migration as a household strategy for diversifying income and managing economic risks.

4. Robyn Magalit Rodriguez introduced the idea of the "labour brokerage state" while examining the role of the Philippine state in organising and facilitating overseas labour migration.

5. The global care economy refers to the transnational organisation of care work, including childcare, elder care, care for persons with illnesses or disabilities, and household work, through migration and global labour markets.

6. Care drain refers to the loss or redistribution of care resources in migrant-sending societies as a result of the large-scale migration of care workers. It is associated with situations in which migrant women provide care in destination countries while their own children or families are cared for by relatives or other workers.

7. The concept of "global care chains" was developed by Arlie Russell Hochschild. It explains how care responsibilities can become connected across households and countries through migration.

8. Migration refers broadly to the movement of people from one place to another, whereas trafficking involves acts such as recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons through specified means such as force, coercion, or deception for the purpose of exploitation.

9. Transnational motherhood refers to the ways in which migrant mothers maintain emotional relationships, provide economic support, and perform maternal responsibilities across national borders while separated from their children.

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10. Any two relevant international instruments are the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and ILO Convention No. 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers.

11. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, recognised the gendered effects of armed conflict and called for greater participation of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and peace processes. It also recognises women as political actors and peacebuilders.

12. An intersectional approach is important because gender does not operate in isolation. Migration experiences are also shaped by class, race, nationality, caste, religion, age, sexuality, and migration status. Intersectionality therefore helps explain the different forms of vulnerability, discrimination, agency, and opportunity experienced by migrants.

Assignments

1. Explain why gender is an important analytical category in the study of international migration.
2. Critically examine the concept of the feminisation of migration with suitable examples.
3. Discuss the global care economy and explain how international migration contributes to the transnational organisation of care work.
4. Examine the relationship between trafficking, forced migration, and gender-based violence.
5. Analyse the concept of transnational motherhood and discuss its implications for migrant families.
6. Discuss the contribution of feminist political economy, postcolonial feminism, and intersectionality to the study of gender and migration.

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UNIT 2 Gender and Intersectionality

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- define intersectionality and explain its origins in Black feminist thought and Critical Race Theory
- understand how gender intersects with race, class, caste, sexuality, religion, disability, nationality, and other forms of social difference
- explain the contributions of Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and other important scholars
- apply an intersectional framework to international relations, conflict, development, and global governance
- examine the relevance of intersectionality to caste and gender relations in the South Asian context
- critically examine the strengths, limitations, and institutional uses of intersectional analysis

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Prerequisite

Imagine two women living in the same country. Both are women, but their experiences of education, employment, political participation, violence, health care, and social mobility may be very different. One may belong to a wealthy urban family, while the other may belong to a poor rural household. One may belong to a socially dominant caste, while the other may belong to a historically marginalised caste. One may be a citizen with secure legal status, while another may be a migrant or refugee. Their experiences cannot be understood by looking at gender alone.

The same question can be asked at the international level. A woman living in a conflict-affected region may experience war differently depending on her

nationality, ethnicity, religion, class, disability, or sexual identity. Similarly, policies introduced in the name of "women" may benefit some groups of women while failing to address the experiences of others.

This raises an important question: Can all women be understood as having the same experience of gender inequality?

Feminist scholars have argued that the answer is no. Gender operates together with other systems of power and social difference. Race, class, caste, sexuality, nationality, religion, disability, and age can interact with gender to shape people's experiences of privilege and disadvantage. This way of understanding social inequality is known as intersectionality. The concept emerged from Black feminist thought and Critical Race Theory in the United States and has subsequently been developed across different academic and political contexts. Intersectionality therefore encourages us to look beyond a single category of identity. It asks how different structures of power interact and how these interactions shape people's lives. In International Relations, this approach helps us understand why war, migration, development, global governance, economic policies, and international institutions can affect different groups of women and men in very different ways.

Keywords

Black feminism, critical race theory, kimberlé crenshaw, matrix of domination, structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, representational intersectionality, postcolonial feminism, coloniality of gender, dalit feminism, brahmanical patriarchy, standpoint theory, marginalisation, global governance

Discussion

Intersectionality is one of the most influential concepts in contemporary feminist scholarship. It emerged from Black feminist struggles against approaches that treated women as a single and homogeneous category. Black feminist thinkers argued that gender could not be separated from race, class, and other structures of inequality.

Kimberlé Crenshaw formally introduced the term "intersectionality" in her influential legal scholarship. However, the intellectual foundations of intersectionality can be traced to a much longer tradition of Black feminist thought, including the writings and activism of Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, the Combahee River Collective, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks.

The concept has subsequently travelled across disciplines and geographical contexts. Patricia Hill Collins developed the idea of a "matrix of domination," while postcolonial feminists such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Maria Lugones extended intersectional analysis to colonialism, imperialism, and global inequality.

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In South Asia, scholars have used intersectional approaches to analyse caste and gender. The writings of B. R. Ambedkar, Uma Chakravarti, Sharmila Rege, and others demonstrate how caste, gender, class, sexuality, and social power can be interconnected.

In International Relations, intersectionality helps explain the differentiated effects of war, conflict, migration, development, global governance, and economic policies. It also raises important questions about representation: Whose experiences are included when international institutions speak about "women," "refugees," "migrants," or "victims"?

6.2.1 The Concept of Intersectionality

The central idea of intersectionality is that gender does not operate in isolation. Gender interacts with other dimensions of social difference and inequality, including race, class, caste, sexuality, religion, nationality, disability, and age.

A person may therefore experience several forms of privilege or disadvantage at the same time. These forms of inequality cannot always be understood simply by adding them together. They can interact and produce particular social experiences.

For example, the experiences of a wealthy professional woman and a poor migrant woman cannot be explained by gender alone. Their class position, nationality, migration status, occupation, and access to political and economic resources may shape their experiences differently.

Intersectionality challenged approaches that treated "women" as a single and universal category. Some forms of mainstream feminism were criticised for giving greater attention to the experiences of white, middle-class women while presenting these experiences as representative of all women.

The concept was formally developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her influential works on race and gender discrimination. However, intersectional thinking has deeper intellectual roots in Black feminist scholarship and activism.

6.2.2 Intellectual Genealogy: From Black Feminism to Intersectionality

6.2.2.1 Sojourner Truth and the Question of "Ain't I a Woman?"

Sojourner Truth, a formerly enslaved African American woman, abolitionist, and women's rights activist, is an important figure in the history of Black feminist thought.

Her famous 1851 speech at a women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, challenged the idea that all women shared the same social experience. Truth questioned claims that women were naturally weak and required protection by pointing to the physical labour and violence experienced by Black women under slavery.

Her intervention demonstrated an important problem: the category "woman" could conceal significant differences based on race and social position. Truth's contribution can therefore be understood as an early challenge to the assumption that gender can be analysed separately from racial and social inequality.

6.2.2.2 Anna Julia Cooper and the Voice of Black Women

Anna Julia Cooper was an African American educator, writer, and intellectual whose work contributed to the development of Black feminist thought. In A Voice from the South (1892), Cooper emphasised the distinctive experiences and perspectives of

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Black women. She argued that Black women's experiences were essential for understanding both racial and gender inequality.

Cooper's work anticipated an important principle of intersectionality: social groups that experience multiple forms of marginalisation can provide perspectives that are overlooked by dominant political and intellectual institutions.

6.2.2.3 Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks

Black feminist scholarship expanded significantly during the twentieth century. Angela Davis, in Women, Race and Class (1981), examined the connections among racism, sexism, class inequality, slavery, labour, and political movements. Her work demonstrated that the experiences of Black women could not be adequately understood through gender alone.

Audre Lorde examined the significance of difference and identity in feminist politics. In Sister Outsider (1984), she argued that differences such as race, gender, sexuality, and class should not simply be suppressed in the name of unity. Instead, feminist politics should recognise and engage with these differences.

Bell hooks offered an influential critique of the racial and class limitations of mainstream feminism. In Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism (1981) and Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (1984), she argued that feminism needed to address the experiences of Black, working-class, and poor women rather than treating the interests of white middle-class women as universal.

Together, these contributions helped establish the intellectual and political foundations from which intersectionality developed.

6.2.3 Kimberlé Crenshaw and the Theorisation of Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw gave the concept of intersectionality its name and developed an influential theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between race and gender.

In her 1989 article, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," Crenshaw examined the difficulties faced by Black women within US anti-discrimination law. She demonstrated that legal categories based separately on race and gender could fail to recognise discrimination experienced specifically by Black women.

Her well-known "intersection" metaphor explains this problem. At a road intersection, traffic can arrive from several directions. Similarly, discrimination can operate through multiple directions at the same time. A Black woman may experience discrimination in ways that cannot be fully explained either as racial discrimination against Black people or as gender discrimination against women.

In "Mapping the Margins" (1991), Crenshaw extended the analysis to violence against women of colour. She showed how women of colour could be marginalised both within feminist movements and within anti-racist movements. Crenshaw identified three dimensions of intersectionality:

Structural intersectionality refers to the ways in which different structures of inequality interact to shape people's material conditions.

Political intersectionality refers to situations in which political movements or policy agendas focused on one form of inequality may overlook or disadvantage people experiencing multiple forms of inequality.

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Representational intersectionality concerns the ways in which cultural representations of race and gender combine to produce stereotypes and forms of marginalisation.

Crenshaw's work demonstrates that intersectionality is not simply about having multiple identities. It is fundamentally concerned with the interaction of structures of power.

6.2.4 Patricia Hill Collins and the Matrix of Domination

Patricia Hill Collins made a major contribution to intersectional theory through her work Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.

Collins developed the concept of the matrix of domination to explain how systems of power such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and nationality interact. The matrix of domination does not treat different forms of oppression as completely separate systems. Instead, it examines how they are connected and mutually influence one another.

Collins identified four interconnected domains through which power operates:

1. **Structural domain** – laws, policies, institutions, and social structures.
2. **Disciplinary domain** – organisational and bureaucratic practices that regulate individuals.
3. **Hegemonic domain** – cultural ideas, representations, and beliefs that justify inequality.
4. **Interpersonal domain** – everyday interactions between individuals.

Collins also introduced the concept of controlling images. These are stereotypes that have historically been used to justify the unequal treatment of Black women. Examples include stereotypes such as the "mammy," the "jezebel," and the "welfare queen."

Collins's work is important because it connects social structure, culture, everyday experience, and knowledge production. It also emphasises the importance of taking marginalised people's knowledge and experiences seriously.

6.2.5 Intersectionality and Postcolonial Feminism

Although intersectionality emerged primarily from Black feminist and Critical Race Theory traditions in the United States, its central questions have broader relevance. Postcolonial feminist scholars have extended intersectional analysis by examining colonialism, imperialism, global capitalism, and relations between the Global North and Global South.

6.2.5.1 Chandra Talpade Mohanty

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's influential essay "Under Western Eyes" criticised representations of the "Third World woman" in some Western feminist scholarship.

Mohanty argued that Western feminist writing sometimes represented women in the Global South as a homogeneous group characterised mainly by poverty, tradition, oppression, and lack of agency. Such representations can ignore differences among women based on class, nationality, religion, ethnicity, political history, and social context.

Her work therefore encourages feminist scholars to avoid treating women in the Global South as a single category and instead examine the specific historical and political contexts in which gender relations operate.

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6.2.5.2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" raised important questions about representation and voice.

Spivak examined how colonial and elite systems of knowledge can prevent marginalised groups from being heard on their own terms. Her work draws attention to the question: Who speaks for whom?

This question is particularly important for intersectional research. Scholars must consider whether they are representing marginalised groups accurately or speaking on their behalf without adequately recognising their own position of power.

6.2.5.3 Maria Lugones and the Coloniality of Gender

Maria Lugones developed the concept of the coloniality of gender to examine the relationship between colonialism, race, gender, and power.

Lugones argued that colonialism did not merely impose economic and political domination. It also transformed systems of gender and sexuality among colonised peoples. Her work therefore encourages scholars to examine how colonial histories continue to influence contemporary understandings of gender.

Postcolonial and decolonial feminist approaches thus expand intersectional analysis beyond the relationship between gender, race, and class to include colonial histories and global structures of power.

6.2.6 Caste, Gender, and Intersectionality in the South Asian Context

Intersectionality emerged in a different historical context in the United States, particularly around race and gender. However, its analytical approach can also be used to study caste and gender relations in South Asia, provided that the specific history and structure of caste are recognised.

Caste and gender are deeply interconnected in South Asian societies. Caste hierarchies have historically been maintained through social practices concerning marriage, family, sexuality, labour, and reproduction. Women therefore occupy important positions within the reproduction of caste relations.

B. R. Ambedkar's writings on caste and gender provide an important foundation for understanding this relationship. In his analysis of caste, Ambedkar drew attention to the regulation of marriage and women's sexuality as important mechanisms in maintaining caste boundaries.

Ambedkar's work is especially relevant to intersectional analysis because it demonstrates that caste cannot be understood separately from gender, family, sexuality, and social power.

6.2.6.1 Dalit Feminist Perspectives

Dalit feminist scholars have developed important analyses of the relationship between caste and gender.

Uma Chakravarti used the concept of Brahmanical patriarchy to analyse the relationship between caste hierarchy and gender relations. Her work highlights how control over women's sexuality, marriage, reproduction, and social mobility can contribute to the maintenance of caste structures.

Sharmila Rege developed the idea of a Dalit feminist standpoint. She argued that Dalit women's experiences provide an important perspective for understanding caste and gender oppression. At the same time, she emphasised that such a standpoint develops through political consciousness and collective struggle rather than automatically arising from identity alone.

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Intersectional analysis is therefore particularly useful in the South Asian context because it helps explain how caste, class, gender, and other forms of inequality interact.

6.2.7 Intersectionality in International Relations

The application of intersectionality to International Relations has expanded feminist approaches to international politics.

Mainstream IR has often treated the state as a unified actor. Intersectional feminist approaches question this assumption by asking how international processes affect different groups within states differently.

War, trade, migration, development, diplomacy, sanctions, humanitarian intervention, and global governance can produce different consequences for people depending on their gender, race, class, caste, nationality, religion, sexuality, age, or disability.

Brooke Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True have contributed to methodological approaches that encourage feminist IR scholars to pay attention to multiple forms of power and to the position of researchers themselves.

An intersectional approach to IR therefore asks several questions:

- Who is affected by a particular international policy?
- Which groups are most vulnerable?
- Whose experiences are represented?
- Whose voices are excluded?
- Which forms of knowledge are treated as authoritative?
- How do different systems of power interact?

These questions allow international politics to be studied from the perspectives of groups that are often overlooked in traditional approaches.

6.2.7.1 War, Conflict, and Intersectional Experience

War and armed conflict demonstrate the importance of intersectional analysis.

The effects of war are not experienced equally by everyone. Gender, ethnicity, religion, class, nationality, age, disability, and sexuality can influence whether people fight, flee, remain displaced, experience violence, or receive protection.

Women in conflict situations may face sexual violence, forced displacement, loss of livelihoods, and increased care responsibilities. However, these experiences are also shaped by other forms of identity and social position.

For example, women belonging to ethnic or religious minorities may face both gender-based violence and violence directed against their wider community. The experiences of Yazidi women subjected to violence and enslavement by ISIS, women affected by the Rwandan genocide, and Rohingya women affected by violence and displacement demonstrate the importance of examining gender together with ethnicity, religion, nationality, and political conflict.

Intersectionality therefore prevents us from treating "women in war" as a single and uniform category.

6.2.7.2 Global Governance and Intersectional Exclusion

International institutions such as the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, and regional organisations influence political and economic life across the world.

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An intersectional approach asks not only whether women are represented in these institutions but which women are represented and whose interests receive attention.

Women's participation in global governance has increased, but representation alone does not guarantee that the experiences of the most marginalised women will be included in policy-making.

Women from elite, educated, urban, or economically privileged backgrounds may have greater access to international institutions than poor, rural, Indigenous, migrant, working-class, or otherwise marginalised women. This does not mean that representation by elite women is necessarily unimportant. Rather, intersectionality encourages us to examine the diversity of women's experiences and the distribution of political power within groups.

6.2.8 Strengths and Limitations of Intersectional Analysis

Intersectionality has become influential because it provides a way of understanding complex relations of power.

Its first major strength is that it challenges single-category analysis. Instead of studying gender, race, class, or caste separately, it examines their interaction.

Second, intersectionality makes marginalised experiences more visible. It encourages researchers to examine groups that may be overlooked when broad categories such as "women," "migrants," or "refugees" are treated as homogeneous.

Third, intersectionality has methodological value. It encourages researchers to ask how their own position and assumptions influence the production of knowledge.

Fourth, intersectionality has practical relevance. It can help governments and international organisations design policies that recognise differences within social groups.

However, intersectionality also faces challenges. Because it can include many dimensions of social difference, researchers may find it difficult to determine which factors are most significant in a particular context.

There is also a risk that intersectionality becomes a general language for "diversity" without addressing the underlying structures of power. Scholars have therefore warned against the depoliticisation or institutionalisation of intersectionality.

If institutions simply use the term "intersectionality" to demonstrate inclusiveness without changing unequal structures, the concept may lose some of its critical force.

Intersectionality is therefore most useful when it remains connected to concrete questions about power, inequality, representation, and social transformation.

6.2.9 Concluding Observation

Intersectionality has transformed feminist approaches to gender by demonstrating that gender cannot be understood separately from other structures of power and social difference.

The intellectual roots of intersectionality can be found in Black feminist thought and earlier struggles against racial and gender inequality. Kimberlé Crenshaw provided the concept with its name and theoretical framework, while Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, and other scholars expanded its intellectual and political significance.

Postcolonial feminists such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Maria Lugones further

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demonstrated the importance of colonial history, global inequality, and representation. In South Asia, the work of B. R. Ambedkar, Uma Chakravarti, and Sharmila Rege provides important resources for understanding the intersection of caste and gender.

In International Relations, intersectionality enables scholars to examine how war, conflict, migration, development, and global governance affect differently positioned groups. It also raises important questions about representation and voice.

At the same time, intersectionality should not become merely a fashionable term for diversity. Its central concern remains the analysis of interconnected structures of power and inequality. Used critically, intersectionality provides an important framework for understanding the complexity of contemporary international politics.

Recap

- Intersectionality examines how gender interacts with other forms of social difference and inequality.
- The concept has important roots in Black feminist thought and Critical Race Theory.
- Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper challenged the assumption that all women share the same social experience.
- Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks expanded Black feminist critiques of race, gender, and class inequality.
- Kimberlé Crenshaw formally introduced the term "intersectionality" and developed its legal and theoretical framework.
- Crenshaw identified structural, political, and representational dimensions of intersectionality.
- Patricia Hill Collins developed the concept of the matrix of domination.
- Postcolonial feminists expanded intersectional analysis by examining colonialism, imperialism, and global inequality.
- Caste and gender can be studied intersectionally in the South Asian context.
- B. R. Ambedkar's analysis of caste and gender provides an important foundation for understanding their interrelationship.
- Intersectionality helps feminist IR scholars analyse the differentiated effects of war, conflict, development, and global governance.
- Intersectionality remains most useful when it continues to address concrete relations of power and inequality rather than becoming merely a language of diversity.

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Objective Questions

1. What is intersectionality?
2. Who coined the term "intersectionality"?
3. Which intellectual tradition provided important foundations for intersectionality?
4. What is structural intersectionality?
5. What is political intersectionality?
6. What is the matrix of domination?
7. Who developed the concept of the matrix of domination?
8. What is meant by the coloniality of gender?
9. What is meant by Brahmanical patriarchy?
10. Why is intersectionality important in the study of International Relations?

Answers

1. Intersectionality is an approach that examines how different forms of social identity and inequality, such as gender, race, class, caste, and sexuality, interact to shape experiences of power and disadvantage.
2. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in her 1989 work on race and gender discrimination.
3. Black feminist thought and Critical Race Theory provided important intellectual foundations for intersectionality.
4. Structural intersectionality refers to the way in which different structures of inequality interact and shape people's material and social conditions.
5. Political intersectionality refers to situations in which political movements or policies focused on one form of inequality may overlook or disadvantage people who experience multiple forms of inequality.
6. The matrix of domination is a framework for understanding how different systems of power and inequality interact across social institutions, culture, and everyday life.

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7. Patricia Hill Collins developed the concept of the matrix of domination.
8. Coloniality of gender refers to the continuing influence of colonial systems of power on gender relations, identities, and hierarchies.
9. Brahmanical patriarchy refers to a system of gender relations in which control over women's sexuality, marriage, reproduction, and social position is connected with the maintenance of caste hierarchy.
10. Intersectionality is important in International Relations because international processes such as war, migration, development, and global governance affect different groups differently according to their gender and other social positions.

Assignments

1. Define intersectionality and explain its significance for feminist theory.
2. Discuss the contribution of Kimberlé Crenshaw to the development of intersectionality.
3. Explain Patricia Hill Collins's concept of the matrix of domination.
4. Examine the contribution of Black feminist thinkers to intersectional theory.
5. Discuss the relevance of intersectionality to postcolonial feminism.
6. Explain the relationship between caste and gender from an intersectional perspective.
7. Discuss the significance of intersectionality for the study of International Relations.
8. Examine the strengths and limitations of intersectional analysis.

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UNIT 3

Masculinities and International Relations

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- understand masculinity as a social and cultural construction rather than a biological given
- explain R. W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity and distinguish it from subordinated, marginalised, and complicit masculinities
- examine the relationship between masculinity, militarism, nationalism, diplomacy, and international politics
- analyse how masculine norms influence war, violence, political authority, and foreign policy
- understand the intersection of masculinity with race, class, caste, nationality, and sexuality
- examine feminist debates on alternative masculinities, care, cooperation, and non-violent approaches to international relations

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Prerequisite

International relations is often discussed through concepts such as power, security, sovereignty, national interest, war, diplomacy, and foreign policy. At first sight, these concepts appear to be gender-neutral. However, many of the institutions and practices associated with international politics have historically been shaped by men and by particular ideas about what a "strong" or "successful" man should be.

Think about the image of a political leader during an international crisis. Such a leader is often expected to appear strong, decisive, confident, courageous, and willing to use force when necessary. Similarly, soldiers are traditionally expected to demonstrate physical courage, emotional control, toughness, and loyalty. These expectations are not simply personal characteristics. They are connected to wider social ideas about masculinity.

This raises an important question: How does the construction of masculinity influence international politics? Feminist International Relations (IR) scholars argue that masculinity is not simply about men. It is about systems of power, institutions, political practices, and social expectations that define particular forms of behaviour as masculine and desirable.

The study of masculinities therefore helps us examine familiar areas of international politics from a different perspective. It allows us to ask why military strength is often valued over negotiation, why toughness is associated with political leadership, why care work is undervalued, and why certain forms of violence are associated with honour and national defence.

Keywords

Hegemonic masculinity, subordinated masculinity, marginalised masculinity, complicit masculinity, militarism, warrior masculinity, nationalism, diplomatic culture, political economy, neoliberal masculinity, social reproduction, intersectionality, alternative masculinities, gender power

Discussion

6.3.1 Why Study Masculinities in IR?

International relations has historically been a male-dominated field. Heads of state, military commanders, diplomats, foreign ministers, and senior officials of international organisations have predominantly been men. At the same time, many central concepts of mainstream IR, including sovereignty, national interest, security, deterrence, and power, have traditionally been associated with qualities such as strength, autonomy, rationality, control, and the capacity to use force.

War provides an important example. It has historically been organised as a masculine institution. Men have generally been expected to serve as soldiers and defenders of the nation, while military courage and sacrifice have been connected with ideals of manhood. As a result, war has often been presented not only as a political activity but also as a test of masculine identity.

For a long time, mainstream IR did not treat these gendered assumptions as subjects requiring analysis. They were often presented as neutral features of international politics. Feminist IR scholars challenged this assumption from the late twentieth century onwards. They argued that gender is not an additional topic within international politics but an important part of the structures through which international politics operates.

The study of masculinities developed alongside this feminist critique. It asks how ideas about masculinity are produced, maintained, challenged, and transformed within institutions and societies. It also examines how different forms of masculinity are related to power.

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Studying masculinities is therefore important for several reasons. First, it helps explain why certain forms of behaviour, such as military toughness and political aggression, may be valued in international politics. Second, it makes visible the gendered costs of militarism and violence. Third, it shows that masculinity is not a single or universal category. Men experience masculinity differently depending on class, race, caste, nationality, sexuality, and other social conditions. Finally, the study of masculinities creates space for thinking about alternative forms of political leadership based on cooperation, care, dialogue, and non-violence.

The field draws on sociology, cultural studies, feminist theory, psychology, and other disciplines. Among the most influential scholars is R. W. Connell, whose concept of hegemonic masculinity has become central to the study of gender and power. Feminist IR scholars such as Cynthia Enloe, Charlotte Hooper, J. Ann Tickner, Sandra Whitworth, and others have applied gender analysis to militarism, diplomacy, security, and international institutions.

6.3.2 Theorising Masculinity: From Sex Roles to Hegemonic Masculinity

6.3.2.1 Early Approaches: Sex Role Theory

Early approaches to masculinity often used the concept of "sex roles." According to this approach, men and women were expected to occupy different social roles that were learned through socialisation.

Men were commonly associated with roles such as breadwinning, protection, rational decision-making, emotional control, sexual dominance, and competition. Women were associated with care, emotional expression, domestic responsibilities, and reproduction.

Structural-functionalist sociologist Talcott Parsons developed an influential version of this argument. He distinguished between an "instrumental" role associated with men and an "expressive" role associated with women. These roles were presented as complementary and as contributing to social stability.

Sex role theory was later criticised for several reasons. It tended to treat gender roles as relatively fixed and could make historically produced inequalities appear natural or functional. It also paid insufficient attention to power. Most importantly, it often assumed that there was one universal form of masculinity, even though men's experiences differ according to class, race, caste, nationality, sexuality, and culture.

These criticisms contributed to the development of approaches that understand masculinity as multiple, relational, and historically changing.

6.3.2.2 R. W. Connell and Hegemonic Masculinity

R. W. Connell developed one of the most influential approaches to the study of masculinities. The concept of hegemonic masculinity emerged from Connell's earlier work and was developed substantially in Masculinities (1995).

Connell's approach differs from traditional sex role theory in three important ways. First, masculinity is understood structurally. It is produced through social institutions and relations of power. Second, masculinity is relational. Masculinities are constructed in relation to other masculinities and to femininities. Third, masculinity is dynamic. Dominant forms of masculinity can change over time.

Hegemonic masculinity refers to the culturally dominant form of masculinity that legitimises a gender order in which men collectively occupy positions of greater power

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than women. It does not mean that most men actually practise this form of masculinity. Rather, it represents an influential ideal against which other forms of masculinity are positioned.

The idea of hegemony is influenced by Antonio Gramsci. Hegemony involves the achievement of cultural authority and consent, rather than relying only on direct force. Hegemonic masculinity therefore works by establishing particular forms of masculine behaviour as normal, desirable, respectable, or authoritative.

Connell identified several relationships among masculinities. Complicit masculinity refers to forms of masculinity in which men benefit from the advantages associated with a patriarchal gender order without necessarily embodying its most dominant characteristics. Subordinated masculinities refer to masculinities placed lower in the gender hierarchy, such as forms of masculinity associated with homosexuality in particular historical and social contexts. Marginalised masculinities refer to forms of masculinity shaped and constrained by other structures of inequality, including race and class.

Connell's framework has also been criticised and revised. Demetrakis Demetriou argued that hegemonic masculinity can incorporate elements from subordinated masculinities. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt later revised the concept by giving greater attention to the geographical and institutional dimensions of masculinities, including local, regional, and global forms. They also emphasised the importance of social change, agency, contradiction, and gender democracy.

The concept is particularly useful for IR because international politics operates across different geographical and institutional levels. Masculine norms can therefore operate within families, militaries, states, diplomatic institutions, corporations, and global organisations.

6.3.3 Masculinity and Militarism in International Relations

One of the most extensively studied relationships in Feminist IR is the relationship between masculinity and militarism.

Militarism refers broadly to the social and political importance given to military institutions, military values, and the use or threat of force. Military institutions have historically valued characteristics such as physical strength, courage, discipline, emotional control, loyalty, and willingness to sacrifice oneself for the nation.

Feminist scholars argue that militarism and particular forms of masculinity can reinforce each other. Military institutions provide an important space in which particular forms of masculinity are produced and celebrated. At the same time, masculine ideals of toughness, aggression, and protection can make military power appear natural or necessary.

Cynthia Enloe has demonstrated how military institutions depend on gendered ideas about soldiers, families, sexuality, and national security. Military systems do not operate independently of gender relations. They are supported by social arrangements that involve soldiers, military families, domestic labour, and ideas about masculinity and femininity.

Charlotte Hooper, in Manly States: Masculinities, International Relations and Gender Politics (2001), examined how masculine identities and practices shape the culture of international relations. She argued that IR has traditionally privileged qualities such as abstraction, rational calculation, autonomy, competition, and hard power. Feminist approaches have questioned this hierarchy by drawing attention to relational,

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contextual, and care-oriented forms of knowledge.

6.3.3.1 War, Heroism, and Masculine Identity

War has historically been an important site for the construction and performance of masculine identity. The figure of the heroic warrior is found in many cultures. Courage, physical strength, sacrifice, loyalty, and willingness to risk one's life have frequently been associated with ideal forms of manhood.

National cultures often use military heroes, soldiers, independence fighters, and martyrs in the construction of national identity. These figures may become symbols of courage and national sacrifice.

Joshua Goldstein, in War and Gender (2001), examined the relationship between gender and war across different societies. He showed that although the meaning of warrior masculinity varies across cultures, combat has frequently been organised as a predominantly masculine activity. Gender socialisation, military training, and national mobilisation can all contribute to this process.

However, it is important not to assume that masculinity automatically produces war or violence. War has complex political, economic, historical, and institutional causes. A gender perspective instead asks how particular ideas about masculinity can influence the ways in which societies understand military service, courage, national defence, and the use of force.

6.3.3.2 Peacekeeping, Masculinity, and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

The relationship between military masculinity and peacekeeping presents important contradictions. Peacekeepers are deployed to assist in maintaining peace and protecting civilian populations, yet there have been documented allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving UN personnel in different missions.

Feminist scholars such as Sandra Whitworth and Paul Higate have examined how military cultures can shape the behaviour and identities of peacekeepers. Such research highlights the importance of examining power relations between peacekeepers and local communities, particularly where peacekeepers have authority and local populations may be economically or socially vulnerable.

The United Nations has established standards and a zero-tolerance policy concerning sexual exploitation and abuse involving UN personnel. The UN continues to report allegations and disciplinary or investigative measures related to such conduct.

A gender perspective therefore asks how military institutions can be transformed so that peacekeeping is based not on domination and control but on protection, accountability, respect, and relations with local communities.

6.3.4 Nationalism, Statehood, and Masculine Identity

Nationalism and statehood are also gendered processes. Feminist scholars and gender historians have shown how national identities often represent the nation through gendered images.

The nation is frequently represented as a woman who requires protection, while men are presented as defenders of the nation. Examples include symbolic figures such as Mother Russia, Britannia, and Bharat Mata. Such representations can reinforce the idea that men are active protectors and women are symbolic representatives of the nation.

The relationship between masculinity, nationalism, and statehood operates at several levels. National myths often celebrate male

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political leaders, soldiers, revolutionaries, and martyrs. Their courage, sacrifice, strength, and loyalty may become important elements of national identity.

Political leaders may also be expected to demonstrate particular forms of masculine authority. During international crises, leaders can be pressured to appear strong, decisive, and unwilling to compromise. Diplomatic caution or negotiation may sometimes be presented as weakness, while military action may be associated with strength and resolve.

Feminist IR does not suggest that all male leaders behave in the same way or that men are naturally aggressive. Instead, it examines how political institutions and cultures create expectations about appropriate forms of leadership.

6.3.4.1 Honour, Reputation, and Foreign Policy

Honour and reputation have historically been important elements of masculine identity. In international politics, states and political leaders may be concerned with maintaining credibility, reputation, and the appearance of resolve.

Traditional IR approaches often analyse these concerns in terms of strategic interests. Feminist approaches add another question: how are ideas about strength, weakness, courage, humiliation, and honour gendered? A leader who refuses to compromise may be represented as strong, while a leader who chooses negotiation may sometimes be portrayed as weak. Such expectations can influence the political costs associated with diplomatic compromise.

Carol Cohn's work on the language and culture of defence institutions is particularly useful for understanding how masculine assumptions become embedded in strategic thinking. Her analysis shows how military and strategic language can privilege particular understandings of rationality, strength, technology, and violence.

A gender analysis does not claim that foreign policy decisions are caused only by masculinity. Instead, it identifies masculinity as one of several social and political factors that can shape the meaning attached to foreign policy choices.

6.3.5 Masculinity in Diplomatic Culture and Global Governance

Diplomacy has historically been a male-dominated institution. For much of modern history, diplomatic work was associated with male political elites and professional networks.

The increasing participation of women in diplomacy has changed this situation, but significant gender inequalities remain. UN Women has noted that women continue to be underrepresented in senior diplomatic positions, including ambassadorships.

Feminist IR scholars argue that simply increasing the number of women in diplomatic institutions does not automatically transform diplomatic culture. Institutions can continue to reproduce masculine expectations even when women participate in them. Diplomatic culture has traditionally valued characteristics such as emotional control, strategic calculation, discretion, competitiveness, and the ability to project authority. Informal networks and social practices can also influence diplomatic careers.

Cynthia Enloe's discussion of diplomatic wives is particularly important. Diplomatic careers have historically depended on unpaid and often invisible forms of domestic and social labour performed by spouses. Organising receptions, maintaining social networks, caring for children, and supporting the diplomat's public role are examples of such work.

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A feminist analysis therefore asks not only who participates in diplomacy, but also what forms of behaviour and knowledge are valued within diplomatic institutions.

6.3.6 Masculinity and International Political Economy

Gender analysis of the international political economy is not limited to women's economic disadvantage. It also examines how particular forms of masculinity are constructed within global economic institutions. Contemporary global capitalism often celebrates an image of the successful entrepreneur as competitive, independent, ambitious, risk-taking, and self-reliant. This image can be understood as a form of neoliberal or entrepreneurial masculinity.

Examples include the global corporate executive, financial trader, technology entrepreneur, and business leader. Success is often presented as the result of individual effort, competition, risk-taking, and economic achievement.

Feminist political economy challenges this narrow understanding of economic success. V. Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan have examined how productive, reproductive, and other forms of economic activity are interconnected.

The formal economy depends on forms of labour that are often undervalued. Household work, childcare, elder care, domestic labour, and other forms of social reproduction provide the conditions necessary for participation in formal markets. Much of this labour has historically been feminised and, in many contexts, racialised and poorly paid.

This perspective demonstrates that dominant forms of economic masculinity do not exist independently. They are connected to wider gender, class, and racial structures.

6.3.6.1 Scholar Spotlight: V. Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan

V. Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan have made important contributions to feminist approaches to international political economy.

Their work draws attention to the relationship between the formal productive economy and the reproductive work that sustains it. Their analysis encourages students to look beyond markets and states and examine households, care work, informal labour, and other economic activities that are frequently overlooked.

Their approach is useful for understanding how gender, class, race, and global economic structures intersect. It also demonstrates why the study of international political economy must include both paid and unpaid forms of labour.

6.3.7 Alternative Masculinities and Feminist Futures in IR

The study of masculinities is not simply a critique of men or masculinity. It also explores possibilities for transforming gender relations.

If certain forms of masculinity have historically emphasised domination, competition, aggression, and emotional control, alternative forms of masculinity can challenge these expectations. Such alternatives may give greater importance to care, cooperation, emotional expression, dialogue, and non-violence.

Sara Ruddick's concept of "maternal thinking" is relevant to this discussion. Ruddick argued that practices of caring for children can generate forms of practical reasoning based on attentiveness, preservation of life, and responsiveness to particular needs. Her argument has influenced discussions of feminist ethics and peace.

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The concept of post-heroic masculinity similarly challenges the idea that ideal manhood must be demonstrated through physical strength, military courage, domination, or willingness to use violence. Alternative masculinities can include emotional openness, care, cooperation, and non-violent conflict resolution.

These approaches do not suggest that women are naturally peaceful or that men are naturally violent. Rather, they question the social structures that associate authority and political effectiveness with aggression and domination.

The transformation of masculinity in international politics therefore involves changes in institutions as well as individual behaviour. Military organisations, diplomatic institutions, political parties, corporations, and international organisations can all contribute to either reproducing or challenging gendered expectations.

6.3.8 Concluding Observation

The study of masculinities provides an important extension of Feminist International Relations. It shows that gender analysis must examine not only women's experiences but also the construction of masculinity and its relationship to power.

R. W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity helps explain how particular forms of masculinity acquire cultural authority and become connected with systems of gender inequality. In international relations, such forms of masculinity can be associated with military strength, political authority, nationalism, diplomacy, and economic power.

The study of militarism demonstrates how ideals of courage, toughness, sacrifice, and protection can become connected to military institutions and national identity. The study of nationalism and diplomacy shows how political leadership and international authority can also be shaped by gendered expectations. Feminist political economy further demonstrates how dominant forms of economic masculinity depend upon undervalued forms of reproductive and care labour.

At the same time, masculinities are multiple and changing. They are shaped by race, class, caste, nationality, sexuality, and other social relations. This makes it possible to imagine forms of masculinity that are less dependent on domination and violence and more open to care, cooperation, equality, and non-violence.

The study of masculinities therefore does not seek to replace one dominant framework with another. It seeks to make the gendered foundations of international politics visible and to encourage more inclusive ways of understanding power, security, peace, and global governance.

Recap

- Masculinity is socially and culturally constructed rather than simply determined by biology.
- Early sex role theories treated masculinity and femininity as relatively fixed social roles.

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- R. W. Connell developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity to explain the relationship between masculinity and gendered power.
- Hegemonic masculinity refers to a culturally dominant form of masculinity that legitimises a gender order.
- Masculinities are multiple, relational, historically changing, and shaped by social structures.
- Militarism and particular forms of masculinity can reinforce one another.
- War has historically been associated with masculine ideals such as courage, sacrifice, strength, and heroism.
- Nationalism often represents the nation through gendered images and constructs men as defenders of the nation.
- Diplomatic institutions have historically reproduced masculine cultures and networks.
- Feminist political economy examines how dominant economic practices depend on undervalued reproductive and care labour.
- Intersectional analysis shows that masculinities differ according to race, class, caste, nationality, and sexuality.
- Alternative masculinities challenge the association of manhood with domination, violence, and emotional suppression and create possibilities for more cooperative forms of international politics.

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Objective Questions

1. What is meant by masculinity as a social construction?
2. Who developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity?
3. What is hegemonic masculinity?
4. What is meant by subordinated masculinity?
5. What is militarism?
6. How is war connected with the construction of masculine identity?
7. What is meant by warrior masculinity?
8. How are nationalism and masculinity connected?
9. What is meant by neoliberal or entrepreneurial masculinity?
10. What are alternative masculinities?

Answers

1. Masculinity as a social construction means that ideas about appropriate behaviour, qualities, and roles associated with men are shaped by society, culture, institutions, and historical conditions rather than being determined entirely by biology.
2. R. W. Connell developed the influential concept of hegemonic masculinity.
3. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the culturally dominant form of masculinity that legitimises men's collective dominance within a gender order.
4. Subordinated masculinity refers to forms of masculinity that are placed lower in a gender hierarchy and are subject to social marginalisation or discrimination.
5. Militarism refers to the importance given to military institutions, military values, and the use or threat of force in political and social life.
6. War is connected with masculine identity because military service, courage, sacrifice, physical strength, and willingness to use force have historically been associated with particular ideals of manhood.
7. Warrior masculinity refers to forms of masculine identity associated with military courage, strength, discipline, sacrifice, and readiness to fight.
8. Nationalism and masculinity are connected because national ideologies often represent men as defenders of the nation and associate political authority with qualities such as strength, courage, and protection.
9. Neoliberal or entrepreneurial masculinity refers to an ideal of manhood associated with individual achievement, competition, independence, risk-taking, economic success, and self-reliance.
10. Alternative masculinities are forms of masculinity that challenge dominant expectations of aggression, domination, and emotional suppression and give greater importance to care, cooperation, emotional expression, equality, and non-violence.

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Assignments

1. Explain masculinity as a social construction. How does this understanding differ from traditional sex role theory?
2. Discuss R. W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity and its relevance to International Relations.
3. Examine the relationship between masculinity and militarism.
4. Analyse the role of masculine identities in nationalism and foreign policy.
5. Discuss how feminist scholars have challenged the masculine culture of diplomacy and global governance.
6. Explain how feminist political economy contributes to the study of masculinities.

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Model Question Paper Sets

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SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

MODEL QUESTION PAPER SET - I

QP CODE: …… Reg. No: …….....

Name: …….....

FIFTH SEMESTER - BA POLITICAL SCIENCE EXAMINATION

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE

COURSE CODE: **B23PS03DE**

COURSE NAME: **GENDER AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

(CBCS - UG)

2024 - 25 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours Max Marks: 70

Section A

Objective Type Questions

Answer any ten of the following, Each Question carries one mark

(10x1=10)

1. Define gender as used in International Relations.
2. Name one major feminist approach to International Relations.
3. What is meant by "gender mainstreaming"?
4. What does the acronym "WPS" stand for in the UN context?
5. Define militarization in one sentence.
6. What is meant by the "Gender and Development" (GAD) approach?
7. Name one indicator of human development relevant to gender.
8. "Women's rights are human rights" is a central theme of which UN conference?
9. Define gender-based violence in one sentence.
10. What is meant by reproductive rights?
11. Name one international organization working on gender issues.
12. What is meant by "global environmental governance"?
13. Define intersectionality in one sentence.

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14. What is meant by the "feminization of migration"?

15. Define masculinity as used in gender studies.

Section B

Very Short Answers

Answer any ten of the following, Each Question carries two Marks

(10x2=20)

16. Explain the concept of gender as a social construct in International Relations.

17. Briefly explain liberal feminism in International Relations.

18. Explain the meaning of gender mainstreaming in global governance.

19. Explain the gendered nature of armed conflict.

20. Briefly explain UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

21. Explain the relationship between gender and economic development.

22. Briefly explain the concept of women's empowerment.

23. Explain the concept of "women's rights as human rights."

24. Briefly explain the meaning of human trafficking from a gender perspective.

25. Explain the meaning of reproductive health.

26. Explain the role of international organizations in promoting gender equality.

27. Briefly explain gender concerns in global labour governance.

28. Explain the concept of intersectionality with an example.

29. Briefly explain the gendered dimensions of migration.

30. Explain the concept of masculinities in International Relations.

Section C

Short Answers

Answer any five of the following, Each Question carries four Marks

(5x4=20)

31. Analyse the contribution of feminist theories to the study of International Relations.

32. Discuss the significance of gender mainstreaming in global governance institutions.

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33. Discuss the impact of armed conflict on women and girls.

34. Analyse the significance of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

35. Discuss the gendered dimensions of economic development.

36. Analyse the role of women's empowerment in global governance.

37. Discuss the major forms of gender-based violence and their consequences.

38. Analyse the importance of reproductive rights as a human rights concern.

39. Discuss the role of international organizations in advancing gender equality.

40. Discuss the gendered dimensions of international migration.

Section D

Long Answer/Essay

Answer any two of the following, Each Question carries ten marks

(2x10=20)

41. Critically analyse the contribution of feminist approaches to the theory and practice of International Relations.

42. Examine the relevance of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in addressing the gendered impact of conflict and militarization.

43. Critically discuss the relationship between gender, human rights, and development, with reference to gender-based violence and reproductive rights.

44. Analyse the significance of intersectionality and masculinities in understanding contemporary gender relations in world politics.

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SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

MODEL QUESTION PAPER SET - II

QP CODE: …… Reg. No: …….....

Name: …….....

FIFTH SEMESTER - BA POLITICAL SCIENCE EXAMINATION

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE

COURSE CODE: **B23PS03DE**

COURSE NAME: **GENDER AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

(CBCS - UG)

2024 - 25 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours Max Marks: 70

Section A

Objective Type Questions

Answer any ten of the following, Each Question carries one mark

(10x1=10)

1. Name one key figure associated with feminist International Relations theory.
2. What is meant by "gendered global governance"?
3. Define postcolonial feminism in one sentence.
4. Define "gender and conflict" in one sentence.
5. What is meant by militarized masculinity?
6. What is meant by "gender and human development"?
7. Name one global index that measures gender inequality.
8. Define "trafficking in persons" in one sentence.
9. What is meant by "reproductive health"?
10. Name one international convention concerned with women's rights.
11. What is meant by "gender and global labour governance"?
12. Name one UN agency working on gender and the environment.
13. Define the "feminization of migration" in one sentence.

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14. What is meant by “hegemonic masculinity”?

15. Define intersectionality in the context of gender studies.

Section B

Very Short Answers

Answer any ten of the following, Each Question carries two Marks

(10x2=20)

16. Briefly explain radical feminist approaches to International Relations.

17. Explain the meaning of gender mainstreaming with an example.

18. Explain the significance of gender as a category of analysis in International Relations.

19. Explain the concept of militarization and its gendered implications.

20. Briefly explain the role of women in peacebuilding processes.

21. Explain the concept of “gender and human development.”

22. Briefly explain the significance of women’s empowerment for global governance.

23. Explain the meaning of gender-based violence, with examples.

24. Briefly explain the international response to human trafficking.

25. Explain the significance of reproductive rights for women’s autonomy.

26. Explain the gendered dimensions of global environmental governance.

27. Briefly explain the role of international organizations in labour governance from a gender perspective.

28. Explain the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

29. Briefly explain the relevance of intersectionality to the study of International Relations.

30. Explain the gendered challenges faced by migrant women.

Section C

Short Answers

Answer any five of the following, Each Question carries four Marks

(5x4=20)

31. Analyse the contribution of postcolonial feminism to International Relations theory.

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32. Discuss the challenges in mainstreaming gender within global governance institutions.

33. Discuss the relevance of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 to contemporary conflicts.

34. Analyse the concept of militarized masculinity and its impact on security discourse.

35. Discuss the relationship between gender and human development.

36. Analyse the challenges to women's economic empowerment in the global economy.

37. Discuss the international legal framework addressing human trafficking.

38. Analyse the challenges to ensuring reproductive rights and health for women globally.

39. Discuss the gendered dimensions of global environmental governance.

40. Analyse the concept of masculinities and its relevance to International Relations.

Section D

Long Answer/Essay

Answer any two of the following, Each Question carries ten marks

(2x10=20)

41. Critically examine the evolution of feminist theories in International Relations and their contribution to understanding global politics.

42. Analyse the gendered dimensions of conflict, militarization, and peacebuilding with reference to the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

43. Critically discuss the challenges to women's rights and reproductive health in the context of global human rights frameworks.

44. Examine the significance of intersectionality and masculinities in understanding gender and migration in contemporary International Relations.

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വിദ്യയാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

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ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

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