Q) Critically discuss the feminist perspective of international relations.

Ans: Feminist approach to International Relations have introduced gender as an essential tool for analysing interactions between states in the international framework. It involves looking at how international politics affects and is affected by both men and women.It also examines how the core concepts e.g war,security etc are employed within the discipline of International Relations are themselves gendered. It is concerned not only with the traditional focus of the discipline on states,war,diplomacy and security,but also emphasized the importance of looking at how gender shapes the current political economy.

Feminist International Relations emerged largely from the late 1980’s onwards. The end of the Cold War and the re-evaluation of traditional International Relations theory during the 1990s opened up a space for gendering International Relations.

**Main principles of Feminist perspectives**:

Feminist perspective is an expansion of feminism into theoretical or philosophical arenas. It aims to understand gender inequality and focuses on gender politics,power relations and sexuality. It focuses on the promotion of women’s rights and interests. Patriarchy is a system of social and power relations where men dominate and control women.It is present in different institutions and structures from family to state and international relations.Feminism incorporates many strands from the liberal,Marxist,radical,socialist and post-modernist feminists.

1. **Feminists on power:**

Feminist scholars show that power relations are organised on the basis of gender.In fact,the concept of power is given masculine traits. Those without power,especially during conflict are termed as ‘’impotent’’ or ‘’wimps’’ and their weakness is associated with feminity. Political theory and International Relations give a central role to men and place women as secondary actors within state systems. Throughout history, the very concept of the male is linked to the notion of power. Feminists challenged this notion in order to overcome it.

1. **Gender and war:**

Most of the feminist scholars emphasize the ways in which men are seen as the sole actors in war.The reality is that women play various roles in war and for different reasons,depending on the conflict. It is noted that women have actively participated in war since the mid-nineteenth century.This process of eliminating women from war is a tool used to discredit women as agents in the international arena.

1. **Feminist anti-militarism:**

Feminist anti-militarism is a tradition within International Relations that opposes weapons of mass destruction,such as nuclear weapons,and holds gender accountable in part for propagation of militarism.Gender becomes embedded in relations of power as that which is seen to be stronger having masculine identity. The military strength and capability of a state is associated with masculinity.On the other hand,concepts such as emotions are regarded as indicators of weakness and is associated with feminity.

1. **Feminist view of the State**:

States according to feminists are patriarchal in structure and support patriarchy. Thus the feudal state ,the capitalist state,the socialist state all have features of patriarchy. Gender relations of the society were backed by the power of the state. This ultimately led to public/private dichotomy in gender relations.Women’s role was confined to private spheres and men to public sphere.

The state ensured the organization of power relations on a gender basis.It has formalised gender power relations by retaining male domination at the top personnel within states. Men were born eligible for better jobs and higher pay while women had to struggle to get their priviledges. But the state has changed with time due to pressures from social movements like the women’s movement.

1. **War and peace**:

Wars are seen as the activity of men and women are positioned as secondary during war.Since wars are seen as ‘’nation building’’ exercises,it is men who appears to be most involved in this task. Feminists see war as a gendering activity.

Women are victims of war and conflict and the relationship between conflicts and the violence against women in a variety of ways has been repeatedly established in all wars and conflicts. Wartime sexual violence against women,rape,loss of family members which includes husbands,brothers and children,has long-term psychological effects on women.

1. **Human Rights:**

The women’s movement has struggled for long to get women’s rights recognised as human rights.While human rights violations can take place on any individual,women are subject to human rights violations in a gendered way.In 1979,the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women(CEDAW).It is described as an international bill of rights and it addressed the systematic discrimination against women of the world.

1. **Feminist analysis of nationalism:**

Feminist writers like Yuval-Davis,Anthias,Jayawardane and Cynthia Enloe show the links between gender and ethnic/national identity.They show that women are involved in ethnic and national processes through various ways. During wars and conflicts, women equally participate with men in national task when called upon and uphold the ideologies and needs of the nation like men. They are considered important for the nation and nationalism as transmitters of national culture and for socialising children.

1. **The security debate**:

Feminists want a change in the theory of Realism and argue for broadening the concept of security. Feminist international relation scholars generally agree on the need to provide more holistic definitions of security,applicable to all humanity. The UNDP’s concept of ‘’Human Security’’, is based on such idea.

**Criticisms:**

There has been a controversy over the application of a feminist perspective in international relations.The criticisms of feminist perspectives are as follows:

1. It is clear,that western experiences cannot be used to explain the problems of non-western states. So it will not be easy to apply a feminist approach across states or globally,because gender relations are not the same everywhere.
2. Another criticism is the confusion between sex and gender.Gender is often used as a synonym of women. Some scholars in international relations have contended that the introduction of gender is just a code word of women.
3. This leads to a generalized idea about the problem of women,understanding them as an indifferent group. Women are denied equality and there is always the chance of stereotyped treatment for them.
4. Gender is not the key concept that could explain everything in international relations.It is also not the main aspect of international relations phenomenon.
5. Brown University political scientist Rose Mc Dermott has criticised feminist international relation literature as being too exclusively focused on narrative,experimental and qualitative analysis.

Inspite of its criticisms, the feminist perspective on international relations offers new insights on the behaviour of the states and added new dimensions to understand the world politics system.They focus on the aspect that both men and women are essential actors in the real world.Its value is that it will introduce a humanitarian and more sensitive vision that would help to understand how the world actually works.