Discuss the relevance of the Feminist approach to 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.

**Relevance of Feminist approach:**

1. **Makes women visible:** The feminist approach makes women visible – an early contribution of feminist theorists is revealing that women were and are routinely exposed to gendered violence. In making violence against women visible, an international system that accepted a large amount of violence against women as a normal state of affairs was also exposed. For example, former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon’s ‘UNITE’ campaign to end violence against women estimated that up to seven out of ten women will experience violence at some point in their lives – and that approximately 600 million women live in countries where domestic violence is not yet considered a crime. Violence against women is prevalent globally and is not specific to any particular political or economic system. In short, nowhere do women share the same economic, political or social rights as men and everywhere there are prevalent forms of gendered violence, whether this be domestic violence in the home or sexual violence in conflict. 2**) Women’s absence in decision-making:** In making women visible, feminism has also highlighted women’s absence from decision-making and institutional structures. For example, in 2015 the World Bank estimated that globally women made up just 22.9% of national parliaments. One of the core assumptions of traditional perspectives that feminism has challenged is the exclusionary focus on areas that are considered ‘high’ politics – for example, sovereignty, the state and military security. The traditional focus on states and relations between them overlooks the fact that men are predominantly in charge of state institutions, dominating power and decision-making structures. It also ignores other areas that both impact global politics and are impacted by it. This is a gendered exclusion as women contribute in essential ways to global politics. Feminist theorists have worked to demonstrate that this distinction between private and public is false.
2. **Exposes and deconstructs socially constructed gender norms:** This approach exposes and deconstructs socially constructed gender norms. In making sense of international relations in a way that takes both women and gender seriously, feminism has demonstrated the construction of gendered identities that perpetuate normative ideas of what men and women should do. In this regard, it is important to understand the distinction between ‘sex’ as biological and ‘gender’ as socially constructed. Not all gender considerations rest on the analysis of women, nor should they, and gender relates to expectations and identities attached to both men and women. Gender is understood as the socially constructed assumptions that are assigned to either male or female bodies – that is, behaviour that is assumed to be appropriate ‘masculine’ (male) or ‘feminine’ (female) behaviour. Masculinity is often associated with rationality, power, independence and the public sphere. Femininity is often associated with irrationality, in need of protection, domesticity and the private sphere. These socially and politically produced gender identities shape and influence global interactions, and international relations as theory – and global politics as practice – also produces such gendered identities in perpetuating assumptions about who should do what and why. These gender identities are also associated with power, in particular patriarchal power, which subordinates women and feminine gender identities to men and masculine gender identities. What this means is that socially constructed gender identities also determine distributions of power, which impact where women are in global politics. Whereas men can be feminine and women masculine, masculinity is expected for men and femininity of women.
3. **Transformed the theory and practice of international relations:**

By focussing on the gender bias embedded in the way international relations theorists consider concepts like the state, power and security, feminist thought has the potential to transform the theory and practice of international relations. In practical terms, liberal feminists have been particularly successful in disseminating their arguments in favour of including women in politics, using popular advocacy to get gender on the agenda. ‘Gender mainstreaming’ has become a well-known concept within the United Nations. For example,the Security Council in Resolution 1325 (2000) on Gender, Peace and Security, and Resolution 1820 (2008) on the recognition of rape as a weapon of war. Liberal feminist figureheads, like US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, have been instrumental in situating women in policy in the US, and the UK government has identified the prevention of sexual violence in conflict as a main foreign policy objective.

1. **Gender Inequality:**

The feminist approach highlights the **need to address gender disparities** and challenges traditional power structures**that perpetuate inequality.**It sheds light on how **gender shapes global politics,** including issues related to security, development, and human rights.

1. **Peace and Security:**

Feminist scholars and activists have **challenged traditional notions of security and broadened the concept to include human security,** which encompasses the well-being and rights of individuals and communities.They have highlighted the disproportionate impact of conflicts on women, **advocated for women's inclusion in peace processes,** and emphasized the importance of addressing **gender-based violence** as a security issue.

1. **Global Governance:**

The feminist approach to IR challenges the **male-centric nature of global governance** and institutions.It calls for greater **gender equality in decision-making bodies** and promotes the inclusion of women's perspectives and voices in shaping global policies and agendas.It also pushes for the recognition of care work and the redistribution of resources and power in more equitable ways.

1. **Transnational Feminism:**

The feminist approach to IR recognizes the importance of transnational feminist networks and movements. It acknowledges the**interconnectedness of women's struggles globally and the need for collective action** to address common challenges.It highlights the significance of**cross-border solidarity and cooperation** in promoting gender equality and social justice.