



## FEMINIST EMPIRICISM AND ENLIGHTENMENT THOUGHT

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### ABSTRACT

*The history of feminist intervention into most disciplines follows a common pattern. All inquiries and investigations of feminist begin as a critique of accepted disciplinary methods, assumptions, and canons. Consequently, bias is perceptible in all disciplinary. When it matures, we observe it with strong constructive projects of its own. As it is very clear that feminist epistemology is the study of knowledge from a feminist perspective. In the field of social works women's role is very significant. With their experiences and observations we can get more and more authentic knowledge regarding their status, experiences, problems, lives, activities, feminist theories and ethics. By using a feminist understanding of gender, power and difference to analyze the research, validation of experiences and ideas can be obtained. Feminist methodologies enter the research because of feminism and post-feminism. These movements advocate the equal rights of female and demand mutual understanding. The late Seventies show a sharp shift in emphasis from 'androtexs' (Literature by men) to gynotexs (literature by women) and gynocriticism (criticism of women's writing).*

N. Krishnaswamy, John Varghese and Sunita Mishra observe it aptly:

There is a conscious and concentrated attempt towards (re) presenting biological differences and their implications, (re) valuating women's experience, (re) thinking the canons of text, discourse and language, (re) reading the (re) presentations of the conscious and unconscious, and (re) cognizing the social. The content includes various fields like the history, style, themes, genres, and the structures of writing by women, the psycho-analysis of female career and the evolution of laws of a female tradition( Contemporary Literary Theory: A Student's Companion: 77).

Purpose of my present paper is to trace the nature of feminist empiricism, one of the feminist methodologies and its contribution in the enlightenment of thoughts in various disciplinary. To furnish earlier position of women here, one quotation is more than sufficient:



Women were the chief upholders of a rich oral tradition of story-telling, through myths, legends, songs, and fables. Once literacy began to filter through society, those stories were transformed into poetry and drama. Women writers in India can no longer be claimed as the exclusive property of India. Their work and their art belong to the world. (The great Indian Traditions? Literature Alive, Vol. 1& 3)

Feminist empiricism is nothing but a view that experience provides the sole, or at least the primary, justification for all knowledge. Most regarded philosophy as a discipline that could offer a transcendent or external justification for scientific methods. Quine revolutionized empiricism by rejecting both of them ideas. For Quine's observation is thoroughly theory laden. It is cast in terms of complex concepts that cannot be immediately given in experience, all of which are potentially subject to revision in the light of further experience. Feminist empiricism emphasises on empirically investigation of running procedures of inquiries. When feminist researchers set out to produce knowledge of social works, their assumption about what knowledge is, who knows what, and what constitutes adequate social investigation start not from scratch, but from particular ways of thinking about producing knowledge and claiming truth. Nelson and Nelson say that we start all of us, always, in the middle of ongoing histories of enquiry. The aim of feminist researchers is to build new models of research based of new insight experienced by women. Hence, especially feminist social researchers have to establish that knowledge is reasonable, based on evidence and telling some truth, or they must provide some other criteria of authority, or reject established practices of authorization.

Behind the concerns of feminist methodology lie the major concerns and debates of western philosophy sin thinking about how knowledge of the world can be produced and justified. A book on methodology is not a book on philosophy, but methodology is framed by philosophical ideas, problems, traps and disputes. Discussion on methodology entails some reference to technical terms with specific meanings. It is stated that the late 1960s witnessed intensification of the feminist struggle in Europe and France. The movement acquired political dimensions and turned aggressive and polemical in nature. It is felt that women were completely subdued under the authority of men. They have been poor victims of male oppression and exploitation. Feminism soon entered the academic circles and became an important subject of literary debate and discussion. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) questioned why a woman is in a patriarchal system confined to domestically and children. She asserted: for woman, as for man, the need for self-fulfillment- autonomy, self- realization, independence, individually, self- actualization- is as important as the sexual need (*The Feminine Mystique*: 282). Simone de Beauvoir exerted bias in the works of men in the depiction and portrayal of female affairs. She expounded that most of men's representation and interpretation of women's lives and nature contained hidden male bias. She makes her statements like this:



*One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the female presents in a society, it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...which is described as feminine (The Second Sex: 16).*

Beauvoir's work proved to be one of the bibles for the later feminists. It gave feminist theory/criticism a definite methodology and a proper orientation.

With reference to feminist to feminist literary criticism, **Elain Showalter** earned a safe position. She has coined the term *gynocriticism* for analysis and criticism of women's writing. Her book *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977) established itself as an authoritative work in the field of women's studies. In "Towards a Feminist Poetics", Showalter divides feminist criticism into two major types: the first, "feminist critique" (concerned with woman as reader), and the second, *gynocritics* (concerned with woman as writer). *Gynocritics* have proved the significant participation in the disciplinary. If women have capacities to express themselves, should be given opportunities. Exquisite knowledge regarding different aspect of women cannot be expounded without their co-operation and participation.

Certain assumptions and ways of thinking that became influential during the European enlightenment which is causes of the rise to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century thought on social research which debuts on feminist methodology emerged. We take the term Enlightenment to characterize a significant period of European Science, philosophy, politics etc. Feminist empiricists are concerned with the impact on inquiry of social practices, relating to gender, race, class, and other bases of inequality. They, therefore, take sociology, science, history, social studies seriously. Enlightenment thinkers pursued critical questions about the capacities and the rights of rational men to think for themselves. We approach Enlightenment thought from the current predicament of feminist claims to knowledge and so from the need to clarify whether feminist knowledge can be authoritative and whether distinctions can be made between better and worse accounts of gendered social life. We identify particular ways of thinking about scientific knowledge, and ways of positioning the thinker, that have directly or indirectly, influenced both feminist thought and feminist claims to authoritative knowledge. This requires clarifying what it is about Enlightenment thinking that has impinged on feminist thought. Second, we consider what modern feminism has challenged in the application of scientific method to social research, as male- centered, emotional and patriarchal. Although feminists have not agreed with each other on exactly what Enlightenment thinkers meant, or on what criticism are most opposite, they have produced a considerable literature on why feminist researchers need to re- evaluate notions of reason, scientific method, authoritative knowledge and progress.

Thus, aim of feminist empiricists is to eliminate social biases. It will result in presenting a new social structure without feminists' participation. Even science cannot claim to attain objective



knowledge of gendered being or our gendered social world without actively including feminist inquiries as equals in the collective project of inquiry.

Women Writers in India are moving forward with their purposes strong and sure strong and sure strides, matching the pace of the world. We see them bursting out in full bloom spreading their own individual fragrances. They are recognized for their originality, versatility and the indigenous flavor of the soil that they bring to their work (Women in Society, 1985). For women as for men, the need for self- fulfillment, autonomy, self- realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences when it is thwarted (Friedan: 1971: 9)

Changing image of women immersed especially in Indian Literature. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self- sacrificing women toward conflicted female characters searching for identity, no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. We consider ideal woman who are self- denial, sacrifice, patience, devotion and silent suffering. Now this notion about her has changed under the influence of feminism. In nutshell it can be said that Indian women writers such as Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy etc are significant in providing a medium for self- expression, enlightenment, autonomy and, thus, re- writing the history of India.

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