

UNDERSTANDING FEMINIST RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

For the purpose of analysis and assessment of the great literary and non-literary argumentations, the research methodology has always been a vital concern in today's scenario. Women's perspective has been always taken into account in the feminist research as the base of the research. The commencement of feminist research is emerges from the viewpoint that values women's experience, needs and perception of the social world. Feminist research also aims at bringing transformation and phasing out the gender asymmetry in the world. The deliberate discrimination of women at household level which results into higher level of unhappiness and morbidity among women can be easily understood and unpacked from the perspective feminist lens. This research is prerequisite and essential for achieving the goal of equitable social and economic development. The present piece of work tried to give the backdrop on understanding the meaning of feminist research and origin of feminist research methodology for conducting the research from the gender perspective. This paper also envelopes the pivotal standpoints on how feminist research is differentiated from social science research. Since, the social science research generally omit and overlooks the manifold aspects of gender relations resulting in incomplete and biased research, which in turn leads to the construction of incomplete development policies and programmes. So, this work will also try to scrutinize the approaches that feminist methodologies have been used in the development of gender sensitive indicators and measurements of change. The focus has also been given to highlight the use of feminism in indigenous Indian context for addressing Indian issues. It suggests that before the onset of feminist studies, social scientists had not engaged critically with patriarchal and andro centric structures which oppress and dominate women. Lastly, an attempt has been made to discuss various methods used for feminist research and main focus has been given on the understanding of feminist action research and its emergence.

KEY WORDS: Feminism, Feminist Research, Feminist Research Methodology, Indian Primitive Feminism, Feminist Action Research, Social Transformation, Gender Inequality

INTRODUCTION

For the purpose of analysis and assessment of the great literary and non-literary argumentations, the research methodology has always been a vital concern in today's scenario. Women's perspective has been always taken into account in the feminist research as the base of the research. The commencement of feminist research is emerges from the viewpoint that values women's experience, needs and perception of the social world. Feminist research also aims at bringing transformation and phasing out the gender asymmetry in the world. The deliberate discrimination of women at household level which results into higher level of unhappiness and morbidity among women can be easily understood and unpacked from the perspective feminist lens. This research is prerequisite and essential for achieving the goal of equitable social and economic development. From the past couple of decades, there is always a dilemma among researchers regarding the incorporation of gender concerns and perspectives in sociological research and its evolution. Although, there are appreciable and discernible documentations which are gender sensitive, but ample amount of work in this domain fails to mainstream gender perspective into its prominent agenda in a most relevant manner. The main objective of the present piece of work is to define, discuss and analyze feminist research methodology using examples of feminist research, and how it could be used in social work. The fundamental aspiration of the feminist research theory is to look into the interconnections among the controversies of heterogeneity enveloping social class, race and gender, and to bring forward the interests, health and security of women in all constituents of the world (DeVault & Gross, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2012; U Narayan, 1997). The feminist dissatisfaction and resentment with dominant (value neutral and objective) empiricist research leads to the evolvement of feminist research theory (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Feminist intellectuals were rebellious due to the reason that positivism phased out many women from conventional research and didn't acknowledge their viewpoint and lived expertise as valid data (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Phillips, 2015). Arguments amidst Feminist theory are repeatedly reflected in social work, including challenges to more traditional research methodologies, views of the family situation, and perceptions of ethics and ideas of reflexivity (Phillips, 2015). Feminist methodologies are not outside, but the significant part of the sociological enterprise. The feminist perspective has completely transformed and revolutionized the sociological understanding in the same manner as the sociological method has given analytical rigour to feminist work. Research on women's issues has gradually emerged into research that problematized gender, allowing for a more nuanced understanding

of systematic marginalisation through forces of domination, such as patriarchy, colonialism, casteism and racism. In this paper, the attempt has been made to discuss how the feminist research perspective is not only possible but also necessary in all social research.

UNDERSTANDING FEMINIST RESEARCH

While no one definition of feminist research exists, many feminist researchers identify characteristics which distinguish it from traditional social science research; it is research that studies women, or that focuses on gender. All research triggered with a problem or a question and deciding on what method to engross, to find the solution or answer, and then gathering, organizing, and analysing data, are the next strides, followed by writing and publishing the research report. But the main megacorp of the present piece of work is to know about changing paradigm of research, particularly spotlighting on the feminist research. Now the question arises what makes research feminist? A standard answer is that it is research done by, for, and about women. Another is that "feminist researchers end up feminist research" (Robbins, 1996, p. 170). There is no single restricted definition of "feminist research", but many authors point to certain key ingredients as defining characteristics of feminist research. These characteristics facilitate distinguish feminist analysis from either ancient social sciences analysis, research that studies women, or research that attends to gender sensitive issues. Feminists may not agree how precisely to shape or define feminist research, but there is a high degree of synchronism over the epistemological grounding of the research process. Feminist analysis cannot claim to speak for all women, however will offer new data grounded within the realities of women's experiences and actively portray structural changes within the social world. Judith Cook and Mary Margaret Fonow (1986) established five basic epistemological conventions in feminist methodology. These include taking of women and gender as the focus of analysis, the importance of consciousness raising, the rejection of subject and object (this means valuing the knowledge held by the participant as being expert knowledge and acknowledging how research valued as "objective" always reflects a specific social and historical standpoint, a concern with ethics (throughout the research process and within the use of analysis results), and an intention to empower women and change power relations and inequality. Michle Ollivier and Manon Tremblay (2000) pinpointed three defining characteristics of feminist research in their recent book on feminist methodologies. First, feminist research is characterized by its twofold dimension. In contradiction to traditional research, the objectives of feminist research include both the development of new

knowledge and the production of social change. Historically, feminist research has been described by women's struggles against the multiple forms of their oppression and abuse. Secondly, the feminist research has been indoctrinated in the feminist beliefs and values. It seeks to envelope feminism within the process, to focus on the meanings women give to their world, while recognizing that research must often be conducted within institutions that are still patriarchal. Feminist principles inform all stages of the analysis, from alternative of topic to presentation of knowledge, acting because the framework guiding the choices being created by the folks concerned in the research. Thirdly, feminist research is described by its heterogeneity. It is interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary, it uses different methodologies, and it is regularly being redefined by the concerns of women coming from very different perspectives. Issues such as antiracism and diversity, democratic decision making, and the empowerment of women including traditionally marginalised women are required to be addressed in the feminist research.

ORIGINS OF FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES

The criticism of andro-centrism and patriarchy in academic work is an intrinsic part of women's movements in different parts of the world. Feminist movement proliferated in west is branched in three waves. The First Wave Feminism focussing on overturning legal inequalities of Suffragist Movement ranging from Nineteenth to early Twentieth Century; Second Wave Feminism spread over the decades of 1960's to 1980's trying to uproot the cultural inequalities, gender norms and establishing the egalitarian role of women in society; and the Third Wave Feminism of 1990's to 2000's presently referring to the diverse strains of feminist activities which, in turn, may be seen and perceived as both a continuation of the second wave and also as a response to its perceived failures. Eastern feminists seem to be projecting them in denial mode and trying to raise their voices by opening a novel and pivotal debate based on the origin and history of feminist voices. In India, historically, women's movements that protested violence against women in the form of dowry harassment or domestic violence converged with a conscious transformation of academic disciplines such as sociology. These disciplines have a history of engagement with women's studies, especially in the transformation of the sub-disciplines of family and kinship studies and work (Dube 2001).

DILEMMA WITH TRADITIONAL RESEARCH

Remembering that women constitute the other half of the population is important. So, overlooking and phasing out of women's experiences and standpoints leads to the wrong conclusions and formulation of policies, or at least an incomplete picture of the problem. For example, in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, research on the environment and development seldom considers gender as a significant variable. Environmental analysis typically pays very little attention to the human and social dimensions. The impact of the population on the environment is examined in connexion 'population activities', but rarely takes into account the gender dimension: 'population' is treated as a homogenous group. Poverty assessment conjointly bases its analysis on menage incomes and expenditures; the differential experiences of the economic condition among menage members isn't analyzed. Moreover, entirely productive paid work is taken into account and valued in economic analysis, whereas family and unpaid work – chiefly performed by girls – is unnoted, even if it makes up a large part of food security. Therefore, in ancient analysis, women's experiences and contributions remain invisible, and, consequently, important aspects of an issue remain undocumented and underestimated and, therefore, may be misunderstood. Gender has solely recently been thought-about a big variable in the analysis. However, although it is starting to be recognized in social sciences, it is seldom acknowledged and applied in natural sciences or economics. The choice of analysis topic, abstract framework and methodology, analysis framework, and language utilized in scientific articles tend to mirror male biases and patri-centric values.

HOW FEMINIST RESEARCH METHODOLOGY DIFFERS FROM TRADITIONAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY?

Feminist researchers have argued that, firstly, traditional social theories have often marginalised or rendered insignificant women's life-worlds. In rare cases of inclusion of women's experiences in conceptual schemes, they have been distorted. Secondly, feminist scholars argued that mainstream social science research tended to incorporate gender as only one of the many sociological variables under study. By doing that, gender becomes a mere referential point without assuming centrality. Women scholars have been absorbed by the dominant rules of sociological method and have not been exceptional in their approaches to theory and research. Moreover, some strands of feminisms, like the eco-feminists such as Vandana Shiva, can be critiqued for making important distinctions that are similar to

mainstream research, such as parallels between nature and women's bodies (Mies and Shiva 1993). Like Marxism, Feminist Methodology also primarily came to be known as a sociological movement than a literary tool for assessing a creative work of art. Social, psychological and personal knowledge are as real as the knowledge obtained through experiment and so the same cannot be denied. Knowing a thing through experiments and knowing it through experience involves altogether a different process. Thus, it would also be highly relevant here to note that primarily all the existing research methodologies applicable to social and literary spheres were male centric. Describing above mentioned limitations in her paper entitled "Feminist Research Methodology", Chandrakala Padia proclaims that: Feminist Research cannot be methodological in the sense of scientific method as presented above. It does not believe in seeking abstract generalization and in maintaining the existing disagreement between the subject and the object. It put forwards the fact that the existing science methodology is abstract, male centric, and neutral. Research which overemphasize the quantification methods, forces the researcher to concentrate only on structural question about action and totally ignore the subjective dimension of behaviour. It also overlooks the contradictions between action and consciousness. Such an approach, further phase out the fact that the women simultaneously oppose the conditions that denies their freedom. While feminist intellectuals will attempt for the perfect feminist research method, there often exists a large gap between the reality and ideal goals of doing feminist research. While the desire may be to promote equality in the research process through the validation of women's experiences and to enact social change and transformation, many barriers confront feminist researchers from achieving these aims. Doing research involves a long series of choices and decisions. While feminist beliefs and concerns will help guide and direct the decision making process, outside forces also play a key role. Diana Ralph made an influence pyramid that illustrates however power informs the choice creating process; wherever the feminist scientist is on the lowest of the structure, she has more difficulty in dominant the alternatives being created (Ralph, 1988). Methodologically, the feminist research differs from traditional research. It actively seeks to remove the power imbalance between research and subject; it is politically motivated in that it seeks to change social inequality; and it begins with the standpoints and experiences of women. A wide range of methods, both qualitative and quantitative, are available to feminist researchers. Instead of focussing on which type of research is better, it makes more sense to allow the context and purpose of the research to guide the choice of research tools and techniques. There is no methodology or strategy for feminist analysis. The particular scenario or context ought to guide the method selections,

rather than having a trust within the methodology as applicable for each context and scenario Greaves et al. (1995). The culture or society in which one conducts research, the external funding agencies, the organizations or individuals who have an investment in the outcome of the research process, publishers, and even the research team all significantly impact on the decisions being made. Marianne Weston sees all research as existing on a fluid scale between traditional research and ideal feminist research. She argues that one can evaluate to what degree a research project is feminist by looking at the choices being made by the researcher. In feminist work, it is hard to separate theory from methodology and the issues on the ground. All social science research can be feminist without compromising on the strength of the discipline. A feminist perspective accounts adequately for the complex marginalities that are the basis of sociological research, and thereby adds to the reliability and validity of the data. Sociology as a discipline has benefitted enormously from both feminist theory and research methodology. Feminist sociology insists on the central analytic category of gender without which key concerns in the discipline of sociology such as work, politics, education and religion cannot be studied satisfactorily (Marshall and Witz 2004). Clues to unravelling this relationship between feminism and sociology can be found in feminist sociology of knowledge.

FEMINIST RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: INDIAN PRIMITIVE CONCERNS AND CRUCIAL AMAGAMATIONS

Describing the gender based discrimination and violence against woman a feminist author Urvasi Butalia, Director, 'Zubaan Books, An Imprints of Kali for Woman' observes that: The moment the doctor says, it is a girl, a struggle begins for the survival and for equal opportunities. In a male sociological order where she is meant to play a peripheral role she is trying to change the matrix. Hundred years back, the largest revolution for women's liberation began which took the road to woman's independence. Considering the issues of female foeticide Ms Urvasi Butalia further remarks critically that "there is no other country in the world where female foetuses are killed in the womb in such large numbers as in India". Very recently another alarming concern of notability in the form of acid attacks is projecting a different panorama of Indian society that otherwise had tall towering claims of having equality and liberal democratic social set-up. Indian woman is still distant away and far behind from becoming an independent decision making authority. For diffusing the decision making power and other psychological, sociological, cultural and spiritual empowerment of women the single mandatory thing to be incorporated in the holistic feminine persona of

women is 'Focus on Consciousness-Raising' and thus, the consciousness-raising technique is stressed upon by Catharine A. Mackinnon. In her *Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State*, Catharine remarks that: Consciousness-raising is the major technique of analysis, structure of organization, method of practice, and theory of social change of the women's movement. It would also be appropriate here to assimilate the views of Maria Mies to make the life of women more visible and successful. Considering the up-gradation, improvisation and integration of the 'repressed unconscious female subjectivity', Maria Mies feels that it is mandatory for every feminist for having a holistic feminine consciousness. Feminist women must deliberately and courageously integrate their repressed, unconscious female subjectivity, i.e. their own experience of oppression and other discrimination, into the research process. If women and exploited groups are forced to know the motives of their oppressors as well as how oppression and exploitation feel to the victims, they are better equipped to comprehend and interpret women's experience.

FEMINIST RESEARCH IN PRIMITIVE INDIAN CONTEXT, MARXISM AND BEYOND: A LONG WAY TO ENVELOPE, DISCOVER AND MAINTAIN METHODOLOGIES

Marxist thought gave rise to the emergence of trade unions and working-class political parties in late nineteenth century Europe. Subsequently, growth of trade unionism, the consciousness of workers as a class, and mass movements of workers and peasants are due to the spread of communist ideology in the world which rose to liberate the poor from the inhuman conditions leading to a life free from want and invested with human dignity. Twentieth-century world history saw the rise of communist ideology as political power and force which dominated the countries for the liberation of a great number of people from economic and social oppression. It won't be an exaggeration to assert that most of the feminist thinkers and modern propagators and prescribers look at the Marxist theories as to the guiding dictators for them. In a nutshell, the journey of an Indian woman from twentieth to the twenty-first century has been a long journey from innocence to experience, from ignorance to professional realism, from weakness towards empowerment in life and literature, advancing towards meeting and leaving various milestones behind, scaling new heights and going on a long way ahead.

FEMINIST RESEARCH METHODS

Quantity versus quality: The study of feminist research methods is an inspiring and revolutionary academic sub-discipline. More and more feminist researchers have slowly gained interest in the relationship between gender perspectives and research practices. There are various feminist research methods that exist in today scenario which are used for data gathering and analysis. The feminist analysis will undertake research on mistreatment 2 basic approaches. Firstly, by mistreatment, the standard analysis method said as quantitative methodology or by mistreatment the "qualitative" ethnographical method. Quantitative methods include in-depth research into the motivation, attitudes, and behavior of respondents or into a given situation. Qualitative methods refer to research procedures which produce descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behavior. In the past several years, the feminist community has increasingly debated the merits of traditional research, specifically the quantitative methodologies used in that research. According to several feminists, both those in the social sciences and in other disciplines as well, argue that traditional research in the social sciences is used as a tool for promoting sexist ideology and ignores issues of concern to women and feminists. Feminists indicate that until recently, social knowledge domain was supported men's experiences of the globe and women's experiences were notably missing. Males square measure establishing the norms; a lot of specifically they're enjoying the dominant roles. As a result of this, some feminists have suggested the increased use of qualitative research in order to better reflect the nature of human experience. Both on the quantitative and on the interpretive fronts, feminist insights have had little impact. Quantitative research consists of experimental, correlational and survey research methodologies. Qualitative research consists of ethnographic methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, group interviews, and content analysis. There is a need to move beyond the easily quantifiable and easy to measure methodology. Statistics appear more concrete and may be privileged by mainstream practitioners without due recognition that statistical data along with qualitative data is often based on opinions. We need both quantitative and qualitative indicators and methods of research (data collection) to measure gender inequality and build a more accurate picture. Furthermore, we should ensure that quantitative and qualitative data complement each other. So it is necessary to field more diverse data that better represent the experiences of women and more relevant methods are needed to be developed for acknowledging the gender perspective that is contextually

appropriate, in order to take into consideration the complex and differing experiences that compose women's lives.

FEMINIST ACTION RESEARCH FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Emergence of feminist action research: Despite the ideas advanced by participatory researchers, gender and women's diversity were made invisible by early assumptions that women could be automatically included in terms such as people, community, or the oppressed (Hall, 1993). In ancient analysis additionally as in participatory analysis, ladies are for the most part excluded from manufacturing dominant styles of information. Maguire (1987) has pointed out the distinct silence around gender and women in participatory research as discourse referring it as an andro-centric filter. Participatory research is built on a critique of positivism that often ignores and repeats many of the andro-centric aspects of dominant social science research. Freire (1996) maintained that domination was the foremost theme of our epoch, but his conscientization tools ignored men's domination over women. Freire, like others, doesn't depart from taking andro-centricity because the norm, and consequently, feminists need to do the work for women that he did for men (Klein, 1983). Women's ways of seeing were not mentioned until 1981 and the general discourse of women has been excluded (Maguire, 1987). Without recognition and attention, participatory research is male-biased and cannot be truly emancipatory for all people (Hall, 1992). Feminist analyzers have tried to deal with the andro-centric biases inherent in ancient and democratic research, yet have not articulated distinct methods or methodologies. Within feminism there is no single or monolithic method, methodology, or theoretical base of feminist scholarship; in fact, there are competing theoretical foundations and varied methodologies. As well, feminists have not agreed on one definition of research. There has been resistance to a rigid, dogmatic "correct" feminist methodology as a result of it's going to reinforce domination and limit information. However, there is a great danger in feminism becoming co-opted by mainline methods that reinforce unequal power relations unless we commit ourselves to a distinctive methodology (Cancian, 1992). Some common features of the feminist methodology include focusing on gender and inequality and using qualitative methods to analyze women's experience. However, very few studies adopt the more radical methods of including an action component, using strong participatory methods that give participants substantial control over involvement in the study, and critiquing the power relations in academia (Cancian, 1992). Despite embracing a call for transformational structural and personal action feminists have not

outlined a clear strategy for eliminating andro-centricism from research, nor have they given adequate attention to the envisioning of truly emancipatory knowledge-seeking.

Feminist theories, epistemologies, and methodologies have inspired and grounded many action researchers work, yet there are only a handful of systematic attempts to link feminism and action research. Feminist action research is defined as a conceptual and methodological framework that enables a critical understanding of women's multiple perspectives and works toward inclusion, participation, action, and social change while confronting the underlying assumptions the researcher brings into the research process. It facilitates building knowledge to change the conditions of women's lives, both individually and collectively, while reconstructing conceptions of power so that power can be used in a responsible manner. Feminist action research is a tool, not a panacea that involves a particular way of looking at the world and thinking about research and research participants. Since many poor women are excluded from social processes and their communities, open and flexible theory-building grounded in a body of empirical work ceaselessly confronted with, and respectful of, women's day to day experiences is needed.

Feminist Action Research- Aims: Overall aims of the action research are to develop shared ownership of the research, enable other participants to direct the research process, have a say on what to do, and how create opportunities for collective data-gathering and analysis, create space for participants to reflect on the research and provide critical feedback, build trust and non-threatening environment, allow research to progress toward action and doing if desired by alternative participants. The feminist action research also challenges the unequal power relations. Such attempts as these are made in feminist action research so that the hierarchical relationships associated with research between the researcher and those being researched can be broken down. Women's empowerment could be a central aim of feminist action analysis. Close relationships between researchers and participants engaged in an exceedingly feminist democratic action scientific research have brought joy and insight, but also challenges. With the help of feminist action research, the researchers collaborate to enhance participant's quality of life/careers and among some, develop feminist practical and strategic needs. The practical feminist needs are those that women identify in their socially accepted roles in society which means the research for social transformation. The wise gender needs do not challenge the gender divisions of labour or women's subordinate position in society, although rising out of them and they respond to an immediate perceived necessity, identified within a specific context. While on the other hand, strategic gender needs are the needs women identify because of their subordinate position to men in their society. They

relate to gender divisions of labour, power, and management and should embrace such problems as legal rights, violence, equal wages and women's management over their bodies. Meeting strategic gender desires helps ladies to attain larger equality.

BENEFITS OF FEMINIST RESEARCH

- **A better understanding of the problem**

The feminist analysis doesn't amend the scope of the research; it provides new views, raises new queries, and uses new analysis tools to form an additional complete image of the matter. As men and ladies have totally different|completely different} roles and different power, their views on a haul may be quite totally different. By combining their totally different experiences and viewpoints, researchers will enhance the comprehension of a haul. Therefore, integrating a feminist perspective into research can improve its relevance, coverage, and quality (ADEA Working Group on Higher Education 2006). For example, research to identify the impacts of global climate change in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas would be more precise if it integrates with its analysis framework the impacts on human activities, livelihoods, and vulnerability to natural hazards. As men and women have different roles, and as their respective social status and the power relations could impact on their capacity to adapt to climate change, the feminist dimension is sort of relevant and can enhance the results of the analysis and increase its utility to policymakers. A study on the worth chain of medicative plants that features a gender perspective would contribute not solely to distinguishing United Nations agency is doing what and what has to be done to extend the producers' edges, it may additionally contribute to distinguishing measures to make sure equitable edges for producers and processors for each male and female, increasing its impact to reduce poverty.

- **Methodologies that empower**

A feminist research methodology is usually more participatory and can contribute greatly to empowering women. It helps both men and women concerned by a problem to analyze an issue, understand its causes, and find solutions. In the analysis which is going to establish the vulnerabilities of mountain individuals to natural disasters, a gender-sensitive participatory approach helps men and women to understand the natural and social factors – beliefs, practices, behaviours – that put them at risk when a natural disaster occurs. It can even facilitate them to grasp that some social practices

could increase girls and children's vulnerabilities which so as to cut back these risks they'll have to be compelled to modify their behavior. A gender-sensitive methodology can even contribute to creating visible and giving price to women's contribution to diversity and natural resources management. Eventually, this can contribute to raising awareness about women's capacities and boosting their self-confidence.

CONCLUSION

One of the central contributions of feminist researchers has been to make research more accessible to people and bridge the distance between the researched and the researcher. Feminist analysis cares with learning the problems facing girls at its place to begin. It seeks to search and explore the social dynamics and relationships in patriarchal society from women's perspective. The feminist analysis isn't simply adding girls to the analysis equation or partaking girls as researchers. The feminist analysis takes into consideration women's viewpoint because of the base of the analysis. Such research proceeds from a standpoint that values women's experience, needs, and ideas of the social world. Feminist analysis conjointly aims at transferral changes and eliminating gender imbalances within the world. The feminist lens helps us understand and unpack the deliberate discrimination at the household level which results in a higher level of morbidity among women. This research is essential for furthering the goal of equitable social and economic development. Measuring change on the basis of feminist frameworks is essential to monitoring the process of development for gender equality and gender equitable results - at all levels and in all contexts. Mainstream and gender-focused development researchers, policymakers, and practitioners alike are responsible for ensuring that they use feminist sensitive methods and methodologies, to ensure reliable research results and subsequent positive action. Furthermore, without a combination of feminist research frameworks with social science research setting, women will continue to be left out of the development process.

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