Introduction

Knowledge is traditionally defined as justified true belief. Belief, in this definition, is characterized by the properties ‘truth’ and ‘justification’.

The feminine gender category in traditional western patriarchal culture is constructed in such a way that it lacks the potential required for arriving at true and justified beliefs. Reason is considered to form an integral constituent of justification. The female entity in patriarchy is constructed as being primarily a part of nature, and secondarily associated with reason and culture. Dominant epistemic theories consider reason to be superior to emotion. Cognitive claims, corroborated by reason, qualify as constituting knowledge. Even when emotions are recognized to play any role in the genesis of knowledge, this role is understood as being subservient to reason. In patriarchy, women are projected as being primarily emotional in their responses. They do not confront the world through reason. On the other hand, the mainstream patriarchal account of knowledge characterizes reason as being context-independent, objective and universal. According to traditional epistemology women as cognitive agents seldom distance themselves from the context of cognition, they remain especially committed to the domestic perspective. They function in this setting as related to, engulfed by, those whom they nurture. Their function is more embodied, emotional, empathetic than rational, cerebral. Patriarchal theories also try to establish that this is reflected in their
cognitive functioning too. They are identified as constituting the primitive, bodily sphere of reproduction, caring, nurturing and the like. The cognitive claims that arise in these private perspectives are personal, particular — rarely related to logical necessity and universality. By contrast it is maintained that genuinely necessary and universal knowledge-claims are capable of being voiced by an autonomous, insular agent — not touched by emotions, passions and other subjective and contextual factors. Only claims of this specified kind are considered objective.

To be justified, a belief needs to be objective. Reason and objectivity are allied to each other. Women are not autonomous cognitive agents in the strict sense of cognitive autonomy. Typical rational knowledge is expressible in the form of propositions. Such knowledge is amenable to formal logical symbolization. Their acceptability is judged in terms of truth or validity. By contrast, women’s knowledge is often dispositional — inexpressible in a formal logical structure. This implies that by nature women are not fit cognitive subjects. They will have to acquire cognitive skills. Another alternative for them could be to develop an epistemology, different from the mainstream theories. Due to the unique characteristics of these knowledge-claims, a more nuanced and more pliable criteria may be needed for their evaluation. The traditional truth/falsity binary may not suffice.

Dichotomies like male/female, rational/emotional and many others dominate the western intellectual perspective. Dualisms are
differences without the possibility of overlap. There is a tendency to
ascribe a value of being ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘better’ or ‘worse’ to each
member of a dualism. In patriarchy the male/female binary is
evaluated by ascribing greater value to the male centred characteristics
and less value to the female-centred ones. Women, on account of
being characterized by supposedly the inferior, epistemologically less
relevant set of properties like being closer to nature, being private,
embodied, reproductive beings are relegated to the margin or
periphery of epistemic activities. The margins or peripheries of human
culture are constituted by elements which are animal like, non-human,
devoid of selfhood. By periphery, reference is being made to the
outskirts of cognitive practice. It is against the backdrop of this
periphery that men construct themselves as selves, endowed with
features that ensure possession of knowledge.

The argument that women are unfit to be epistemic agents is
reinforced by essentializing women as irrational, natural, reproductive,
primitive and so on. If inferiority can be naturalized, women’s
exclusion from epistemic agency is further justified. They can be
silenced smoothly.

Construction of the feminine gender-category in the above-
mentioned way is not inevitable. Empirical evidences abound, to show
that women are not essentially emotional, passionate, un-objective and
the like. It is also not self-evident that the cluster of qualities attributed
to women like emotionality and embodiment are of no value so far as
epistemic activities are concerned. Clinching empirical evidences that
may be taken to justify that men and women can be neatly homogenized as superior and inferior respectively, are unavailable. In spite of these considerations, if women are excluded from epistemology — the exclusion in question can be construed as an act of suppression. Though not inherently incapacitated, their voices are ignored. Patriarchal culture gives a great deal of importance to science and the cognitive processes related to it. Science provides a paradigm for other disciplines. Women’s lived experience of being a caregiver or of being marginalized does not fit well with this paradigm.

Epistemological oppression against women has organized itself into three major types. The most tangible oppression against women consists in nurturing disrespectful assumptions against women, making derogatory observations regarding ‘female-nature’, intimidating them verbally and also physically assaulting, raping women. Such tangible oppression is known as sexism. Sexism is an overt, empirical fact. It is a kind of discrimination, exploitation of women, in ways that benefit men. Sexist practices in epistemic pursuit lead to the silencing of woman’s voice.

Sexism receives further support from institutions that have a male bias. Institutionalized male bias is known as patriarchy. Patriarchy rates male traits positively and female traits negatively. Patriarchy has a special structure through which it controls woman’s productive and reproductive labour. It does not consist in empirically verifiable, isolated, individual acts of violence. It affords the ground, which organizes isolated sexist acts into a systematic form. It creates
an unbridgeable gap between the gender categories by positing a set of binary oppositions. The network of these binary oppositions consists of male-positive and female-negative values. Women are represented as naturally submissive, absorbed into familial bonds, passive, emotional, and the like; men are represented as naturally aggressive, free, rational. Men can think in abstract terms and so on. This helps in excluding women from significant social and epistemological positions effectively since women are projected as unable to think in abstract terms.

Patriarchy lends a unidimensional feature to sexism. It helps in organizing sexism by men against women, but the reverse course of action is never permitted. It is possible that women victimize men. The structure of victimization in these cases is however, masculine. Women are not afforded the privilege of a non-patriarchal systematic structure in the form of laws, institutions and customs to dominate men in distinctly sexist ways. Women, as a class, therefore, fail to overpower men.

The third kind of epistemological oppression may be defined as the establishment of male supremacy in discursive systems. It is generally described as phallocentrism. Phallocentrism is the masculinization of the category “human”. Subsequently, it gives masculinization an appearance of false gender-neutrality. The category “human” is made to obliterate the points of divergence between male and female representations. As just mentioned, it attributes a facade of gender-neutrality as if the term represents the traits of both men and
women. As a matter of fact, however, women are deprived of any opportunity of defining themselves independently as human. They are defined either as identical to men, or as binary opposites, or as complementaries of men; men remain the reference point. Theories and representations are so determined by phallocentrism, as to be altogether incapable of reflecting the conceptual points of view and interests of women as independent, autonomous units with an identity of their own.

Unsuitability to epistemology is not the quintessential feature of femininity. Patriarchal structures are neither universal, nor necessary. Feminist epistemologists try to restructure mainstream western epistemology in ways that do not exclude women’s lived experience. In this thesis, I choose feminist epistemologies, which seek to relocate, replace, if necessary, the norms of truth, reason and objectivity in ways that are compatible with feminist epistemological interests.

On the one hand, there is the traditional definition of knowledge as justified true belief and on the other hand there is the patriarchal construction of woman as an irrational being. Therefore by definition women are excluded from the domain of epistemology. Justification involves reason and objectivity. Women are incapable of both. Consequently, they are unable to know.

Feminist epistemologists react at least in two ways to this typical masculinist rationalization about excluding women from epistemology. Some of them object that reason, defined in mainstream epistemology, is essentially, strongly gendered. Justificatory reason is
inherently flawed. Others, like Rae Langton,\(^1\) however, are of the opinion that reason, by itself is not gendered. Reason is vulnerable to social admixture. The social factors are capable of misleading reason in a subtle manner. Reason and empirical evidence together are treated as reliable means to justification and truth. According to the norms of traditional epistemology a belief is true when it fits the world. It is important that the direction of fit should be from the world to belief. The world should cause the belief. We believe that the grass is green because independently of the believer the grass is green.

Langton draws our attention to a problem that is created due to the presence of a top down power relation. In the context of belief-corroboration by the world an invisible shift may take place. When the believer is powerful and desires to see the world in a so and so way the world may behave in a manner that satisfies the desire of the powerful. In a top down power situation, instead of the belief adjusting to the world it may so happen that the world adjusts itself to fit the belief. If a patriarch desires to see women as timid, silent and submissive, women may act accordingly, out of various considerations. Over time this acquired behaviour becomes a general feature. Now when a second observer comes to the field he, without posing any demand on woman’s behaviour, observes that women are timid, silent and submissive. Remaining true to his observation the second investigator may believe that women are timid and submissive and his belief will be considered to be both true and justified. Langton argues that this evaluation of the second investigator’s belief is
misplaced. The belief is neither true nor justified. An antecedent step also needs to be taken into account where the direction of belief shifted and the world changed to fit the belief. In order to identify this antecedent step one needs to look beyond the traditional epistemic tools of reason and observation. One must look at sociological factors like power relations and patriarchy. When an investigator is in a position of power the subject of investigation may tailor her responses to corroborate the investigator’s hypothesis. Conversely when the subject does not feel threatened the responses are spontaneous. Reason may issue in true, justified beliefs about women, falling short of knowledge, only when power intervenes. Reason itself is not gendered. All that is required of reason to culminate into valid knowledge, not detrimental to women, is to purify reason of social influences. Langton feels that left to itself pure reason would not engender phallocentric, patriarchal or sexist accounts.

Langton’s example that there can be counter-examples to the rule that all cases of true, justified belief are cases of valid knowledge, is illuminating. But, it does not carry feminist epistemologists far in the project of liberating women from oppressions inflicted on them, like silencing and exclusion. The failure of Langton’s interpretation can be explained by the fact that reason can never be fully cleansed of social factors. This fact is empirically proved. Reason, in all cases, functions in association with biases, prejudices, background assumptions and metaphysical commitments. Some of these social factors are facilitating. Reason gives rise to reliable knowledge-claims
when it functions in unison with resourceful assumptions. In association with vicious, patriarchal, andocentric, sexist biases, it gives rise to distorted claims, not qualifying as knowledge. It is, therefore, necessary to distinguish between resourceful and pernicious social factors. The cleansing activity, mentioned by Langton, is insufficient to accomplish the differentiation between epistemic virtues and epistemic vices in question. A replacement of classical reason is called for. I agree with philosophers like Val Plumwood,\textsuperscript{2} Lynn Hankinson Nelson\textsuperscript{3} and Helen E. Longino\textsuperscript{4} who underline the role of facilitating social factors. Val Plumwood uses this insight to restructure reason.

Val Plumwood\textsuperscript{5} asserts that rational practice denigrates women. Reason’s mechanism of denigrating women is hinged on the classical definition of negation. Classical logic defines negation as radical exclusion or hyperseparation. The class negated and the product of negation, are logically debarred from coalition. Such coalition involves contradiction. The gendered woman is the negation of the gendered man. The two genders, as such, can never interact with each other. Such a definition is evidently effective in positing binary oppositions of the form of male-positive and female-negative values and predicates. Attribution of negative properties to women’s nature naturalizes inferiority and justifies the silencing of the female voice.

Val Plumwood, recommends an alternative definition of negation. It is possible to conceive of negation in less oppositional
ways. Plumwood offers insightful information on alternative renditions of negation.

The revised kind of negation, which dismantles binary oppositions, is also reflected in the epistemological points of view of Lynn Hankinson Nelson and Helen Longino, though this is not acknowledged by them. They recommend the replacement of the autonomous individual by the community as subject of knowledge. The community comprises heterogeneous knowers — men, women and multiple contrary agents. This would not be allowed by the traditional definition of negation, preponderating traditional logic and epistemology.

Nelson and Longino argue persuasively that reason, both male and female — cannot function in isolation from social, contextual factors. Yet, it is only women, whose faculties are represented as defective, on account of failing to be acontextual, atemporal, ahistorical and so on. If the intellectual faculties of both men and women are tempered by social conditioning then the a-temporal stand taken by mainstream epistemology should be considered as a fault. Not acknowledging this and accusing women of being deficient is a political act. This politicization is carried out by mainstream epistemologists. Their reasoning and arguments, cannot, therefore, claim political neutrality. Nelson adds innumerable examples, demonstrating the political nature of the questions pursued, answers selected as adequate, data chosen as evidences by mainstream epistemology. Longino argues that both observation and reason are
socially conditioned. She highlights the urgency of dismantling the rational/social dichotomy. If reason is saturated with social, political implications, a close scrutiny is required to hold vicious social conditions in control. Longino reminds us that all social control is not vicious. Mainstream epistemology seeks to conceal its social and political affiliations under the guise of objectivity, understood as complete neutrality. Allegiance to such an ideal of objectivity is harmful. It would not allow vicious androcentric political moves to be detected. It is epistemologically sound to acknowledge the social construction of reason. It is also better that theories be evaluated by the community comprising alterities in order that political interests of masculinist or other hegemonic types be detected and dealt with.

I have tried to point out that rational theory may also be highly political. Truth, as a dimension of fit or alignment is not particularly suitable for political negotiations. Apoliticality and context-transcendence are built into the traditional definition of truth. I conclude the thesis by stating my preference for “conformation” rather than truth as a direction of fit. It is more pragmatically oriented than truth in dealing with social and political dialogue involved in theory formation.

PLAN OF PRESENTATION

I begin the thesis by delineating the problem countenanced by women in epistemology. As mentioned, the problem consists primarily in exclusion of women — determined not by natural sex, but by gender constructed in a manner that sanctions exclusion.
I try to substantiate the claim of exclusion through concrete examples. Propounders of the theory that knowledge is justified true belief, like Plato and Aristotle, resort to unlimited misogynistic comments and practices. This is indicative of the fact that though the definition of knowledge is apparently, theoretically totally untouched by gender politics, as a matter of fact, however, it is potentially saturated by gender politics.

The classical definition of negation is utilized as an argument in ensuring effective exclusion of women from knowledge. The definition in question establishes hierarchical dualism. Such dualisms are binary oppositions of an insuperable type. The dualisms are effected between male/female, nature/reason, active/passive and the like. These are projected not as cases of simple difference, but as cases of difference of kind, preventing any possibility of overlap. In addition, the dualism in question is hierarchical or value-loaded. The centre or self is defined in terms of positive or superior qualities and the margin or not-self, in terms of negative or inferior ones. This inferiority is naturalized. As pointed out previously, if the marginalized are assumed to be essentially inferior, it makes no epistemological sense to consider them seriously.

My aim is to suggest modifications of the basic tenets of dominant epistemology. I also intend to conform to the analytic tradition. I expect such conformation to add to the credibility of my arguments and also to ensure a better hearing of the proposed feminist point of view. Though I utilize the argumentative tool of analytic
philosophy — the conclusions I arrive at are not peculiar to analytic philosophy alone. In reframing the basic tenets of traditional epistemology from a feminist perspective, I draw heavily on the opinions expressed by Val Plumwood, Helen Longino and Lynn Hankinson Nelson. Their points of view are revolutionary in comparison to traditional epistemology and analytic philosophy.

The inevitability of the interpretation of negation of classical logic is not intuitively obvious. This issue of the acceptability of the definition in question is carried over to the next chapter. In chapter two, I consider the reactions of the feminist scholars to this definition, and also to the logical system the said definition underlies. Andrea Nye\(^8\) appears to exaggerate the discriminatory potentials of logic. I record her radical views, couched in emotional terminology in some detail in chapter two. She recommends the total rejection of logic.

I find the wholesale rejection of logic to be counter-intuitive. Logic has enormous constructive potentials in all disciplines. Moreover, Nye’s arguments are directed mostly towards the operation of abstraction, resorted to by classical logicians to achieve formalization. It appears to be more necessary to problematize the colonial, instrumental form of rationality — which has a greater potential to instrumentalize and exclude the ‘other’. Formalism excludes the particular and the mundane. It does not necessarily involve essentialization of assumed inferiority. The latter’s power in marginalizing and excluding is infinite.
For the vision of a logic which delivers the benefits expected from a logical system, without marginalizing and excluding I turn to Val Plumwood. She offers suggestions about the outlines of a logical system, which does not dualize, nor posit hierarchies. If logic is divested of these powers, marginalizing and excluding women and other alterities is rendered difficult, if not impossible.

In chapter two, I also seek to analyse the nature of reason, guiding logic and epistemology. Unless one’s position concerning reason is settled, it is difficult to embark on the project of scrutinizing epistemological enterprises. Some form of rationality constitutes a necessary condition of any epistemology.

In contrast to Nye’s interpretation of logic and reason as essentially, overbearingly gendered and oppressive, Rae Langton analyses and explains reason to be inherently innocuous. This analysis appears to be more appropriate for the construction of theories and discursive systems. If reason is accused of being essentially gendered at the outset, theories of rationality lose all credibility. Though essentially pure, reason exhibits the propensity of associating with social factors. The association in question is undesirable. Under the influence of social factors, reason gives rise to true, justified beliefs, not amounting to knowledge.

Langton’s treatment of reason is valuable for two basic considerations. In the first place, it exposes a lacuna in the traditional definition of knowledge. The definition in question is vulnerable to counter-examples under specific conditions. In the second place,
Langton repudiates the charge of reason’s being essentially gendered. Having absolved the charge of the essential genderedness of reason following Langton, I engage in revolutionizing rational practice after Plumwood. Subsequently I try to ascertain which feminist epistemological theory exhibits the best form of rationality and objectivity, while also serving feminist interests. I would refrain from demarcating reason starkly from objectivity. The concepts or norms are interrelated. Both presuppose neutrality and aperspectivity. The other features of classical reason, namely, rigorous deductivity, formalism, mathematical precision and the like depend on, presuppose, context-transcendence. Objectivity, in classical epistemology, is defined as aperspectivity and context transcendence. In my thesis, I concentrate more on this specific feature of reason. Unless aperspectivity is ensured, reason fails to be formalistic, mathematical and all else that is required from it by mainstream epistemology. As such, reason’s overlap with objectivity is unavoidable.

I am indebted to Langton for taking care of the apprehension that reason is essentially gendered. Yet, I deviate from her point that reason, when uninterrupted by social impurities, gives rise to reliable knowledge claims. It is not possible to cleanse or purify reason of social content. As such, it is obligatory to determine how reason, in concomitance with social factors, can be best employed for the generation of admissible knowledge-claims that do not exclude women. I occupy myself in finding out how contemporary feminist epistemologists answer this question in chapters three, four and five.
As previously mentioned, I attach more importance to the question of objectivity implied by reason than its other features.

In chapter three, I expound the feminist epistemology that I find to be the most tenable. This is feminist empiricism, advocated by Lynn Hankinson Nelson. In chapters four and five, I represent the points of view of feminist standpoint epistemologists and feminist post-modern epistemologists respectively, who find fault with feminist empiricism. Both these positions attack the version of objectivity which finds acceptance in feminist empiricism. I do not find these positions to be as convincing as feminist empiricism. I argue against them in the concerned chapters. Since, however, the question of objectivity assumes such enormous proportions, I devote the final chapter to a more acceptable model of objectivity, immune from possible attacks.

Feminist empiricism is obviously a view that justifies the tenability of possible knowledge-claims by appeal to experience and reasoning based on observational data. I do not offer a detailed exposition or refutation of classical, logical and post-logical empiricisms. Instead, I concentrate on the usefulness of a Quinean kind of empiricism. Quine justifies knowledge-claims by the dual control of empirical evidence and coherence with a holistic body of accepted theories explaining the world at large. His denial of pre-theoretic observation, his admission that theories are saturated with ontic commitments, his disruption of the analytic/synthetic division of propositions, unknown to him, facilitate the realisation of the aims of
feminist epistemologies. I discuss how these features reinforce feminist epistemological contentions. Of these, the rupture of the analytic/ synthetic division of propositions is of immense help to feminist epistemology. Quine maintains that there are no analytic propositions. All propositions are characterized by empirical content. In that case, all propositions are based on observation. Observation is conditioned by theories, background assumptions, peculiar to the observer. If all propositions are derived from observation, all of them are loaded with social factors entrenched in observation. The implication for feminists is that there can be nothing called purely rational truths, in the sense of being fully acontextual, apolitical and objective. If there are no purely rational truths, women cannot be condemned as unfit to engage in epistemology on the ground of being unable to apprehend pure rational truths.

Quine’s empirical insights help to take forward the feminist epistemic goals. But it is unfortunate that Quine excludes values from epistemology. Quine’s holistic empiricism includes everything containing empirical content, except values. His argument in favour of elimination of values is that they defy empirical control. But values, specially political values, are of utmost significance to feminist epistemologists. The project of feminist empiricism consists in politicizing knowledge-claims. The traditional norm of objectivity disguises the political nature of the knowledge-claims of mainstream science and philosophy. The aim of feminist epistemology is to detect these political infiltrations, scrutinize them and exclude detrimental, oppressive politics. As already mentioned, I find Nelson’s empiricism
convincing. She adduces innumerable instances of the association of science and politics. She also refutes Quine’s view that values cannot be subject to empirical control. She holds that the community is fit to judge the epistemological worth of knowledge-claims. The community is sensitive enough to perceive the individual scientist’s, bias, which vitiates theory. By subjecting theories to evaluation by the community, objectionable social factors can be located and taken care of. A vigil can be imposed on the extent of cognitive authority exercised by mainstream scientists and philosophers on the pretext of freedom from social and political values.

It is possible to broaden the scope of experience to include emotions, particular lived experiences of women and other factors left out by the mainstream definition of experience, yet necessary to reflect women’s points of view.

Nelson carries knowledge farther away from justified true belief than Langton. Langton concedes that if a true belief is genuinely justified by pure reason, it amounts to knowledge proper. Pure reason is reason which functions in isolation from social factors. Nelson denies the possibility of pure reason altogether. She construes justification as community-oriented scrutiny of social factors. The historical originators of the definition of knowledge as justified true belief could not conceive of such a concept of justification.

Chapter four of the thesis puts forward the basic tenets of feminist standpoint epistemology. Standpoint epistemology questions the acceptability of feminist empiricism, expounded in chapter three. I
consider feminist empiricism to be the most tenable theory or interpretation of evidence, justifying knowledge-claims. I have, therefore, considered possible objections to the theory at some length.

Feminist standpoint epistemology raises questions about the acceptability of the notion of objectivity implied in feminist empiricism. I had occasion to point out previously that I do not maintain any categorical division between reason and objectivity. Objectivity is a necessary condition of any traditional theory of rationality, except perhaps in cases where epistemology subserves the purpose of a subjectivist ontology. As such, my preoccupation with objectivity does not form a departure from any previous chapter, focused on reason.

Rae Langton demonstrated that reason can be related to social factors, and yield justified true beliefs, falling short of knowledge. If reason is purified, this possibility can be countered and justified true belief leading to knowledge can be gained. Feminist empiricists like Nelson demonstrate that the traditional definition of knowledge cannot be amended so easily. Social factors are enmeshed in reason. Nelson recommended that reason be put to rigorous scrutiny to cleanse it only of undesirable political implications. Knowledge-claims based on properly scrutinized reason may qualify as objective. Otherwise, these claims may cater to the interests of the privileged centre, to the detriment of women and other marginalized people.

Standpoint feminist epistemologists like Sandra Harding demand a greater contextualization of reason and knowledge-claims
based on reason, so as to secure maximal objectivity. Her recommendation is to take the standpoints of the deprived and the oppressed seriously. Such standpoints make facts about social, epistemological deprivation prominently manifest. The privileged pursuants of knowledge are brought up in a culture dominated by hierarchical dualism. They are so accustomed to think in terms of binary oppositions that the phenomenon appears absolutely normal and natural to them. The unfairness of oppression and exclusion manifests itself better to the marginalized section of the population. Scientific theory is insufficiently objective without the insights provided by the standpoints of oppressed classes like women, slaves, the racially underprivileged and so on. Harding introduces the concept of strong objectivity — which can be achieved by hearing the voices of alterities.

I fail to see how the collection of information from different standpoints enhances epistemology. Whether the claims originate in privileged or deprived standpoints, their worth is assessible only with the help of epistemological justification. Attendance to context and politics is not sufficient to ensure the justification of any theory. In determining the suitability of policies for the upliftment of the oppressed classes, it is not enough to consider the privilegedness or oppressiveness of the sites where knowledge claims arise. A critical empirical, rational evaluation of these policies by a community comprising multiple, heterogeneous experts is more dependable. Epistemology involves politics. The acceptability of reduction of epistemology to the political, however, is questionable. Moreover,
determination of the superiority of standpoints depends upon social theorization and argumentation. Standpoint theory lacks both.

Post-modern feminist epistemology, the point of view that I elaborate in chapter five, absolutely jeopardizes the traditional definition of knowledge. Post modernism condemns fixed foundations like objectivity. I take Judith Butler\textsuperscript{14} to be the representative of the post-modern feminist epistemological point of view. Butler repudiates the universal subject position. She believes that it forecloses less privileged positions. This kind of antifoundationalism is expressed in her interpretation of the constitution of knowledge-claims by interminable significations and resignifications by the author, as well as by the reader, of the text. Knowledge-claims can never be finally endorsed to be fully objective.

Chapter five records the arguments and counter-arguments among different post-modern scholars. Nancy Fraser\textsuperscript{15} criticizes Butler’s definition of subjecthood. Her destruction of metaphysics as an objective principle is not acceptable to Seyla Benhabib.\textsuperscript{16}

Butler’s style of exposition is persuasive and impressive. Her critical, deconstructive acumen knows no bound. Her antifoundationalist stance problematizes epistemology, and consequently, metaphysics and ethics. She, however, refrains from answering the problems or questions she raises. The fluid position she arrives at is not a particularly suitable epistemological stance, viewed from the non-relativistic, normative traditions in philosophy. I would
not substitute feminist empiricism by Butler’s redeploymentative strategy.

The various kinds of feminist epistemologies reviewed so far, particularly, feminist standpoint epistemology and feminist postmodern epistemology emphasize difficulties in the notion of objectivity inherent in feminist empiricism. I would try to define in more precise terms the conditions of what appears to me to be an acceptable account of objectivity in chapter six.

I would like to point out that I attach so much importance to the question of objectivity, because it is in formulating the notion of objectivity that the intricate and astute politics of dominant knowledge-makers is most active. The notion of objectivity has the greatest potency to exclude and silence women. The avowed objectivity is pretentious. It conceals clusters of background assumptions, metaphysical commitments, biases, prejudices, political interests of a patriarchal, phallocentric nature — though not always openly sexist and detectable. As previously mentioned, this kind of avowed neutrality is used by dominant epistemologists as an excuse for enjoying cognitive authority exclusively — without sharing authority with women. Being thoroughly conditioned by social and political conditions itself — mainstream epistemologists silence women by accusing them to be less than objective. The ingenuity of feminist epistemology lies in exposing this covert politics, so that women can no longer be deprived of exercising cognitive authority on the ground of lacking objectivity. The other demands of reason, like
precision, rigour, formalism, deductive competence are easier to deal with. The construction of women as incapable of mathematical rigour or of formalism can be repudiated with the help of empirical evidences. (Feminist) empiricism can be trusted to deconstruct the myth of women lacking in mathematical acumen. Moreover, rigour, deductive ability have their utility, unless exaggerated beyond limit. Politicization of the male situation as completely aperspective, however, has nothing positive to contribute to science or philosophy. As such, I devote chapter six to formulating objectivity in a way that resists infinite negotiability with the world in the tradition of standpoint and post-modern feminist epistemologies. Yet, adequate flexibility is retained, so that regulated feminist and other kinds of political and pragmatic interventions are possible. It should, at the same time, be transparent enough, so as not to allow detrimental, gendered posits. This can be secured by taking social criticism seriously — as suggested by Nelson and Longino.

The social, pragmatic dimension acknowledged in the formulation of objectivity fails to be characterized by mere truth/falsity. Truth is understood in the sense of correspondence by the traditional definition of knowledge. Truth, in the sense of correspondence, is rigid, immutable. It does not relate to purposes. It also does not admit of degrees. Being logically, timelessly opposed to falsity, it encourages binary opposition. Truth as a direction of fit is not particularly appropriate for feminist application. I locate an alternative rendition of a direction of fit in Longino. She calls it
There is no contradiction involved in a partial acceptance of Quinean empiricism, which endorses a coherence theory of truth and Longino’s theory of conformation. Both Quine and Longino are pragmatically oriented. In Quine’s holistic network, all empirical sentences, taken together, explain the world. Such propositions must cohere with each other. The coherence in question is not antagonistic in essence to conformation. In a feminist restructuring of empiricism, a theory that does not conform to facts (that is, fails to be compatible with the external world in relation to requisite purposes), loses acceptance. Incorporation of such a theory is no longer called for. On the other hand, if the entire body of theories conforming to the world exhibit coherence internally, theories are additionally reinforced.

I begin the thesis by trying to locate elements in the traditional definition of knowledge that facilitate socially constructed gender discrimination. The traditional definition of knowledge requires that beliefs be true and justified, if they aspire to be knowledge. Protagonists of the traditional definition like Plato, Aristotle understand correspondence with facts to constitute truth. Correspondence is not a suitable theory of truth. I replace it by conformation. The notion of justification also undergoes significant alteration. Justification includes the allied norms of reason and objectivity. Plumwood’s 20 redefinition of reason and negation divests it of the hegemonic potency of positing binary oppositions and
hierarchical dualism. In the absence of this prerogative, reason fails to construct gender in judgmental terms. Moreover, the rational/social dichotomy is dismantled. The new kind of logic does not accept a hyper-separation between the class of $P$ and class of not $\neg P$. A considerable amount of overlap between a class and its negation is allowed. By implication there is considerable overlap between the rational and the non-rational. It could therefore be argued that there is an overlap between reason and emotion as well as other forms of non-cognition. Complete neutrality or aperspectivity is no longer possible. Objectivity can be fabricated in alternative terminology. I make my stand on a renewed kind of objectivity explicit in chapter six.

The traditional interpretations of reason and objectivity are pivotal in constructing gender and excluding women from epistemology. Empirical investigation brings to light that women are not naturally what they are constructed to be, that is, irrational or emotional, passive, lacking in autonomy and so on. Empirical facts already weaken the tenability of construction of gender in male positive/female negative parlance. If reason and objectivity are modified, so as not to posit hierarchical dualism, women’s exclusion from epistemology can be effectively countered. I argue for reconfiguration of reason and objectivity in a manner that women’s voices are heeded to and their points of view are substantially reflected in natural and social sciences as well as in philosophy.
Notes and References


10. Rae Langton, “Beyond a Pragmatic Critique of Reason”.


12. Ibid.


