Chapter - III

The Outline Of A Proposed Feminist Epistemology

In the previous chapter, an attempt was made to outline a model of logic that disrupts binary oppositions. In the absence of hierarchical dualism, it is possible to hypothesize theories of knowledge, tolerant to voices with a difference, like feminine voices.

The feminists favouring the incorporation of situatedness into knowledge-claims are seen to react in at least three ways to the questions raised by mainstream epistemology. The three positions are as follows:

(a) feminist empiricism
(b) feminist standpoint theory
(c) feminist postmodernism

Prefeminist empiricism trusts sensory stimuli to afford a truly objective description of a real, external world. Feminist empiricists during the nineteen seventies to eighties are found to express skepticism concerning the reliability of the empiricist postulate in question. These feminist empiricists identify sexist and androcentric admixtures in the results of scientific research. They, however, are naïve enough to suppose that science can be purified of the patriarchal, phallocentric bias by conforming more stringently to the methodological strictures of science. Science is believed by them to be intrinsically free of impurities.
This kind of optimism is gradually replaced by the insight that background assumptions, representing political power-moves, among other factors, determine knowledge claims inevitably. Rigour alone is inadequate to free science of the tendency to give rise to theories that encourage domination. A more holistic kind of feminist empiricism makes its presence felt. It emphasizes on the roles played by social interaction and constructionism in epistemology. In this revised position self-reflexivity and objectivity are given an important position. These feminists take self-reflexivity and objectivity in a revised sense, in a sense that is compatible with unoppressive knowledge claims. These feminists challenge the boundary between epistemology, ethics and politics.

In this chapter, I intend to highlight the salient features and advantages of this kind of feminist empiricism. Analytic or philosophical empiricism is presented in contra-distinction to classical and logical empiricisms, to feminist standpoint epistemology, and also to more radical forms of feminism that essentialize and glorify women’s experiences.

FEMINIST EMPIRICISM AS A THEORY OF EVIDENCE

Unless some kind of realism is involved, theories fail to be factually constrained. Realistic knowledge claims depend on empiricism for justification. Empiricism also affords a common platform, enabling dialogue between feminists and practitioners of dominant science. From the pragmatic point of view, therefore,
empiricism appears to be the theory of evidence most appropriate for feminist purposes.

The suitability of Quine’s theory as a currently endorsable version of empiricism is unquestionable. The essence of Quinean empiricism lies in the assertion that it is the entire body of theories—common sense, scientific and philosophical—that confronts the test of empirical adequacy. The advantages of such a formulation are multifarious. It is free of the difficulties encountered by classical empiricism. In classical empiricism knowledge is considered to be acquired in an atomistic manner, through a kind of building block construction. Again, the absence of fixed identity criteria for ideas renders ideas fuzzy as a class. Moreover, the privacy associated with ideas exhibits invariable links with solipsism. Quine’s formulation of the empirical principle in terms of language which is essentially public in nature, helps him counter the solipsistic hurdle. Moreover, classical and logical empiricism define justification in a categorically a priori manner. Natural capacities are believed to give rise to valid knowledge-claims automatically if not obstructed by social factors. Pre-feminist empiricists consider complete exclusion of social factors to be a necessary condition of arriving at valid knowledge.

Chapter two elaborates how the negligence of contextual factors results in the generation of defective knowledge-claims like women are naturally submissive. Social factors, background assumptions, prejudices and the like, consequently need to be acknowledged and
stringently monitored. Quine’s empiricism, unlike the empiricism of his predecessors, affords a platform which makes recognition and selection among social factors possible.

Quine’s empiricism is far more emancipatory in comparison to the versions propagated by the logical and post logical positivists. Observation sentences recognized by Hempel and Nagel are largely responsible for a mystification of science as autonomous and insulated. The cognitive authority exercised by scientists accrues to scientific enterprises largely due to the alleged independence of science of all other social and theoretical involvements. The autonomy of science and the cognitive authority wielded by scientists by virtue of this autonomy are exceedingly unpopular with feminists. Feminists hold that autonomous science engenders social and political arrangements unjust to women. This science also facilitates oppression of women by propagating women-unfriendly scientific theories. Feminists find an ally in Quine because his holism, represented by the network or single fabric metaphor, debars any extra-theoretical, privileged sentences like observation sentences or analytic ones. Observation statements need not be instituted as criteria of meaningfulness. Touchstones are irrelevant in the perspective of Quiniean holism as all sentences, in fact the entire edifice of science, is empirically underdetermined. The negation of an observation sentence is as true as the observation sentence concerned, if other background assumptions or theoretical commitments highlight contrary data as empirical evidence. Quine and a host of other philosophers like social constructionists, feminists,
advocates of naturalized epistemology and the like highlight the importance of background assumptions, biases, prejudices in accepting theories. Quine is well-known for his categorical denial of pre-theoretical observation. Observational data do not function as evidence independently of the background assumptions peculiar to an observer. The background assumptions, preferences in question determine the data to be considered as evidence for a hypothesis in question. As such, competing or contrary theories may without difficulty be construed as evidentially constrained, given that advocates of these competing theories entertain mutually incompatible background assumptions, in keeping with which they choose evidence from the mass of available empirical data. Justification is not context transcendent or mechanical. Quine instead specifies systems-of-sentences, understood in a holistic sense to include anything ever stated about the world to be units of empirical content in place of observation sentences. Quine claims that it is theories as a whole that are bearers of empirical content. His assertion is corroborated by the fact that the accepted theories in science exhibit integral connections with each other.

The stipulation that it is only systems of sentences, not single sciences, that are bearers of empirical content, is able to deconstruct the dichotomy between analytic and synthetic sentences. As each sentence within the system is saturated with empirical content, no sentence can be regarded as analytic, and consequently, incorrigible. All sentences are vehicles of making bridges over and rendering
intelligible empirical data about the world in its entirety. The possibility of any sentence being true in all possible circumstances is precluded. All sentences, being empirical in content, are subject to revision. Quine, however, makes allowances for sentences being comparatively more deeply entrenched in the network. These are less likely to be revised. The difference between these entrenched sentences and other empirical sentences is a matter of degree only. They are not allowed to enjoy the privilege accredited to analytic sentences by preceding empiricists. An analytic judgment is defined by Kant as one whose predicate belongs to or is covertly contained in the concept of the subject. The predicate “wet day” in the judgment “A rainy day is a wet day” is contained in the subject. It does not add any content to the subject “rainy day”. This definition is theoretically possible to be extended to judgments not cast in the subject-predicate form, like hypothetical statements. The predicate, in an analytic judgment, only defines or elucidates the meaning of the subject term. Determination of the meaning or truth of an analytic judgment does not presuppose any reference to an extra-linguistic reality. Attention to the meaning of the term “bachelor”, for example, is sufficient to enlighten any user of the English language that bachelors are unmarried men. It is unnecessary to relate the term “bachelor” to the external world to decipher the meaning of “all bachelors are unmarried men”.

If familiarity with linguistic conventions is all that is required of analytic propositions to be known to be true, they can be regarded as
non-empirical or a priori. An a priori proposition, incidentally, is one which is logically independent of any report of sensory observation. Both analytic and a priori propositions are compatible with each other in bearing no relation to the world of sensory experience. The propositions of mathematics, geometry and formal logic are analytic and a priori, like two and two make four, the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, that all fathers are fathers (A is A) respectively. Kant denies the possibility of analytic a posteriori judgments.

Both analytic and a priori kinds of judgments, as such, would be true in all possible worlds, even in worlds lacking counting procedures or countable objects, shapes and gender-differences. Negations of these propositions are inconceivable. Their negations result not merely in falsity, but in self-contradiction. This is the case because the predicates of these propositions merely repeat the subject concept. They are like tautologies. Denial of the predicate amounts to denial of the subject. Assertion and denial of the same concept in the same propositional framework is self-contradictory.

The propositions of mathematics, geometry and logic are necessarily true. A truth is necessary, if its denial involves self-contradiction. Necessary truths are considered by Kant and other mainstream epistemologists to represent ultimate epistemological virtues or foundations.
Epistemological primacy, then, is associated to those propositions which exhibit no bearing on the extra-linguistic world of sensory experience. They, consequently, lack reference to social, political, emotional and all other subjective, contextual factors. These factors are essential constituents of feminine knowledge-claims. Feminist knowledge-claims, therefore, cannot be accommodated within these analytic, a priori, necessary propositions. Moreover, as necessary propositions cannot be discovered by experience, they are held to be rooted in reason. Women have been defined by mainstream epistemology as deficient in reason, construed patriarchally.

As the opposites of these propositions are inconceivable, even the theoretical possibility of questioning them is taken away. In case mathematics or theoretical physics engage in misogynistic or sexist theorization – the latter cannot be subjected to revision, as revision or denial of necessary propositions would entail contradiction.

Feminist historians of science and epistemology however, have furnished many instances of theories of natural sciences that are tyrannical to women.

As opposed to necessary, analytic propositions, empirical or synthetic ones expand the subject-concept by adding information to it. Additional information is obtainable by the observation of the external order. Truth of empirical propositions is contingent. The denial of empirical propositions does not entail self-contradiction, but only factual falsity. As the predicate concept embodies more than a
repetition of the subject concept, denial of the predicate is not logically inconceivable. If empirical propositions comply with the external world, they are true, otherwise false.

Feminists underline the inevitability of infiltration of contextual factors into theories. Contextual factors are not a priori. They pertain to the world. Feminine knowledge-claims, if any, must be contingently true. The knowledge-claims of women are denied the prestige accorded to necessary truths.

Quine challenges the division between analytic and empirical propositions. All propositions, including the so-called analytic ones, have some role in explaining experiences concerning the world. Consequently, all propositions are characterized by empirical content. All of them are revisable. No truth is necessary. Kant himself concedes that laws of natural sciences, like there cannot be uncaused events or changes, though a priori, are not necessarily true. Though all analytic statements are a priori, the reverse is not the case. Some a priori statements are synthetic. The contingent nature of these a priori judgments is explained by their syntheticity.

Even a priority, that is, logical independence of sense-experience fails to guarantee necessity of truth. If, then, as Quine asserts, all propositions are empirical or a posteriori, the issue of necessary truth is defeated. If so, truths asserting women’s essential inferiority are not necessarily true. Women’s knowledge claims, too, cannot be condemned for association with sensuous, emotional, bodily
experiences and other non-necessary contextual factors. Feminist science criticism also cannot be denigrated for its political orientation, on the ground that there is nothing necessary in the above-mentioned sense in political negotiations.

The enthusiasm of feminism about the collapse of the boundary between analytic and synthetic propositions is easily explained. If no sentence is analytic, there can be no “pure” science, like theoretical physics. Nor are logic and mathematics irreversible. This does not entail the falsity of mathematical propositions. But it calls to question the timelessness, and the claim of immunity from change of mathematical propositions. They are liable to be ranked in the same hierarchy as the biological and social sciences. Being empirically loaded, they are as vulnerable to politics, values and the sex/gender system as the latter; Feminist-science-criticism also need not be construed as an enterprise external to science, on account of its involvement with politics and the sex/gender system. There is no privileged science. Moreover all sciences, good and bad, usual and unusual, are equally given to conscious or unconscious political conditioning and conditioning by sex/gender systems. Feminists cannot be considered to be working outside science. They also underline the necessity of weighing the evidential credential of beliefs, dogmas and ontologies embedded in mainstream science and they subject the same to critical scrutiny. Sensitive feminist intervention is likely to lead to substantially more enlightened and liberatory explanations of experiences. In the second place, if there are no
necessary truths, propositions essentializing women’s inferiority, like women are naturally necessarily non-rational, lacking in autonomy and other epistemic virtues, are reduced to contingent truths. These truths are contingent upon social and political circumstances. Scientists and philosophers, accustomed to interpret the world in terms of hierarchical dualism only, consider these truths to be necessary.

Quine’s holism and coherentism preclude observation sentences from exclusively verifying or falsifying theories in the peremptory, dominating way peculiar to observation sentences recognized by the logical and post-logical positivists. The acceptability of a theory is not left to the discretion of cold, detached, autonomous, theory-neutral observation-sentences in Quine’s network or single-fabric metaphor. Coherence with other sentences matters. Lack of fit with experience can be mended by adapting, updating portions of theories in appropriate ways. It is clear that the kind of coherence Quine advocates is different from idealist interpretation of coherence as a theory of evidence and also from a coherence theory of truth. In Quine’s theory of evidence, the world forms an integral component in determining the fate of knowledge. In addition to being constrained by one’s experience of the world, a consistent theory must cohere with the whole body of accepted theories.

Quine’s holism usurps also the custodian role of epistemology as the first science. Quinean holism leaves nothing outside commonsense and scientific theorization. Epistemology is no longer
presented as an a priori, foundational venture. The evidences required to certify cognitive states as knowledge evolve in the course of theorization itself. What makes evidence justificatory is its contribution to a better organization of experience. I however, do not support Quine’s proposal of naturalizing epistemology. I would argue for a critical evaluation and replacement of the norm of objectivity.

Though deprived of the traditional foundations, Quine’s empiricism is not indifferent to the distinction between warranted and unwarranted theories. The dual control of empiricism and coherence takes care of the goodness or badness of theories. They also dispel the faintest anticipation of skepticism. Quine’s interpretation renders global skepticism inconceivable. The hypothesis of a global skepticism can be entertained only in the presence of a pre-theoretical or extra-theoretical foundation, compliance or non-compliance with which makes a theory true or false respectively. In the absence of any foundation, the notion of truth is undermined. Coherence with experience and with other accepted theories certify a theory to be warranted. In the traditional interpretation, the notion of truth is associated with that of justification. As epistemology does not justify, in the Quinean perspective at hand, but merely explains how objects are posited and experiences rendered cogent by theories, there remains no reason to be apprehensive of any deficit of truth. Mainstream epistemology considers justified true belief to constitute knowledge. Truth and justification are normative concepts. Traditional norms are likely to be vitiated by androcentric biases, a point to be discussed in
detail in Chapter five. Quine’s substitution of the foundational concept of truth by a non-foundational concept of warrant, as such, may be more compatible to the goals of a feminist epistemology. It has to be understood, however, that though Quine undermines foundations in the conventional sense, he is starkly against letting anything go. He subjects all knowledge claims to empirical constraint. He also considers coherence with contemporary theories to be another condition of warrant or acceptability, as previously mentioned. Quine here appears to be inclined towards a coherence theory of truth.

More restricted kinds of skepticisms, like those focusing on under-determination of theories by evidence, is considered as baseless by Quine. A narrow interpretation of science, which views science as segregated from commonsense theorization, is responsible for this kind of skepticism. Quine conceives of science holistically. It is inclusive of the web of common sense beliefs and assumptions. If so, a skepticism concerning paradigmatic scientific theories, as visualized by Kuhn, renders the entire edifice of one’s understanding of the world weak and dubious. In Quine’s holistic interpretation, science cannot be doubted piecemeal. Doubting science entails a total skepticism.

THE ROLE OF VALUES AND POLITICS IN SCIENCE

Feminism’s most basic disagreement with Quine is based on his complete disavowal and banishment of social values from the threshold of science. Since values cannot be subjected to empirical
evaluation, they cannot be constituents of science, either social or 
natural. Values are not grounded in how things are. As such, they 
refuse to be adjudged to be good or bad by evidence. They are not 
objective. Quine asserts, “scientific theory stands proudly and 
notoriously aloof from value judgments”.  

Feminist science research during the last three or more decades 
discloses that the claim that science does not incorporate values is 
absolutely false. Science absorbs values universally. Feminist science 
critics draw our attention to how the methods, the questions pursued in 
science and other dimensions of science are suffused with social and 
political values. Feminist epistemologists fear that if values are 
unchecked, justice is overpowered. If, as Quine anticipates, values are 
lacking in objectivity on account of not being ingrained into the nature 
of things, the scrutiny of values calls for rigour more urgently. It is, 
therefore, of prime importance to dismantle the myth that science is 
independent of values. There is in fact, nothing in Quine that 
intrinsically prevents him from acknowledging values. His denial of 
any natural boundary between common-sense, scientific and 
philosophical theorization of the world commits him to a value-loaded 
science, inasmuch as common sense and philosophical views of the 
world are not stringently exclusive of values. Moreover, Quine agrees 
to the use of science to explain and justify values in terms of natural 
selection.  

If the category of science is possible to be applied to 
explain values, values cannot be as strictly excluded from science as 
Quine holds them to be. Again, Quine considers values to be good, if 
they are instituted by natural selection.  

When values are cross cultural,
they help in survival and cater to the needs of man and society. This kind of judgement on values is expressed by Quine within science itself. Hence, science and values need not be considered to be essentially inconsistent with each other.

In the course of this research. I shall attempt at reconstructing Quine’s empiricism. I feel that Quine’s position can be partly appropriated by feminists. In spite of his silence on value questions, he seems otherwise friendly to feminist theory.

I proceed by showing that the commitments, assumptions, models and methodology of science are loaded with value and politics. I argue that by treating the community, in place of the individual, as the subject of knowledge, it is possible to be vigilant and make sure that values do not substitute ideology. I feel this course of contemplation to be one of the ways of achieving realistic, liberatory, justified knowledge-claims, in opposition to the starkly idealized, gender-discriminatory claims of traditional science, endorsed by mainstream epistemology.

SCIENTIFIC METHODS AND VALUES

Epistemologists consider observation and reasoning to be the methodological tools of scientific enquiry. Theories are brought to bear upon the actual material world of experience by being logically connected to basic observation sentences through intermediate laws, chains of logical reasons.

The processes of observation and reasoning need not be idealized. In the first place, idealization is not practically achievable.
In the second place the social does not adversely affect the justificatory value of observation and reasoning. I mean by idealizing methodological tools that they are segregated entirely from social, political, historical, geographical and all other conceivable contextual factors. Mainstream epistemology has long viewed these factors as contaminating epistemological purity. A view from nowhere has been recommended as an ideal. Quine, among others, has contributed in nullifying the claim that observation and reasoning can be carried out in complete isolation from these social, subjective factors. He, however, nurtures a strong apathy towards a discussion of values. Feminist knowledge claims cannot be split or isolated from values, particularly from political value. It is possible to reinforce the point at issue by focusing on observation and reasoning separately at some length.

Observation is not determined simply by sensory input. It shows a community bound orientation. The organization of pure sensations into meaningful perceptions is secured through socially generated purposes. Observation sentences, too, are not mechanical or autonomous, as construed by the positivists. The relevance and acceptability of an observation sentence is relative to the community. The assent and dissent of the members of the community concerned function as criteria of how observation sentences relate to stimuli. Any change in criteria proposed by the community entails a change in the class of observation sentences relevant to a community. In the case of an experiment, intersubjective verifiability and cross-subject regularity or stability functions as determinants of its credibility. This is indicative of the social character of experiments. Repeatability is
indispensable for the acceptance of an experiment. Experimenters cannot but consult among themselves to reinforce their findings and ensure their repeatability. Negotiation and dialogue among scientists are more important than mechanical reception of inputs from the external world in determining the acceptability of data and hypotheses obtained through observation and confirmed through experiment. An individual certainly is capable of having sensations isolatedly. To achieve the privilege of “observation”, however, the sensation in question has to be socially corroborated. The scientist’s willingness to relate to the others of his community, his readiness in revising his data if failing to conform to the socially selected criteria and similar discursive factors decide whether the data are merely subjective impressions, or observations proper. As being social rarely escapes being influenced by values, it is unlikely that observation is totally value-neutral.

Reasoning is as much social and value/purpose oriented as observation is. The characterization of reasoning or justification as mere valid argumentation or rational reconstruction is inadequate. A reconstruction is requisite for the purpose of arousal of conviction in the layman, but is of meager use to the scientist in his enterprise of justification. Helen Longino states, “scientists don’t just reason; they interpret observations and experiments, they support or critique conjectures or hypotheses. They have multiple reasons for the particular choices and decisions they make in the course of all these activities, reasons that include feasibility, potential for application, aesthetic values, interest from other colleagues, resonance with metaphysical or ideological commitments”5
In its justificatory capacity, reason is highly social and value-oriented. It consists in answering to challenges thrown at beliefs by adducing reasons for a given belief. Proposing defeaters to a belief held and adducing reasons to sustain the belief in question are a matter of social interaction, not a relation of an insulated individual to her object of research. The fact that justificatory reason is possible only in a social context is borne out by the fact that observational and experimental data are reasoned to be evidentially relevant to a hypothesis or theory only through the veil of methodological and other background assumptions. Background assumptions are notorious for their association with values. They are peculiar to specific science communities and are imbibed by scientists in course of their induction into and practices within the community. They are absorbed so naturally that they persist invisibly in the reasoning practices of the scientists. It is imperative that these assumptions are in principle public, so that a critical examination through empirical devices are possible. Besides, the norms of justification are also social in nature. Norms are emergent. They evolve in the course of the presentation of theories, challenges faced by these theories and in responding to these challenges. Theories should be completely open to social scrutiny. Reason’s normative import is retained by its openness to critical, discursive negotiations.

Along with a justificatory approach, reason exhibits a creative character as well. It facilitates expansion of knowledge and generation of new knowledge-producing tools. The acceptability of new forms of knowledge and cognitive tools depends on social dialogue and criticism.
THE PREPONDERANCE OF POLITICAL VALUES

Social, political values and the western experiences relating to sex/gender penetrate into the content of European science. As a result of such infiltration, its content is vitiated. The content of science becomes androcentric, sexist. Androcentrism is rampant in the language used by scientists to describe phenomena, in the questions pursued, and so on. It also affects the methodology of science extensively. The practice of treating the experiences and behaviour of male members as co-extensive with that of human beings in general is androcentric. The tendency to treat male experience as normative and the practice of forcefully assimilating the experiences of women into the male paradigm results in distorted theories of human behaviour, characterizing women’s behaviour as deviant. No question is raised about the cogency of the methodology that encourages such forceful assimilation. The continuation of conformity to a methodology in the presence of recalcitrant data is political in nature. Science cannot, therefore, claim indifference to political values. This methodological predicament is abundantly revealed in philosophy, history, anthropology, biology, economics, political science, sociology and literary theory. In developmental psychology, for example, till the contributions of Nancy Chodrow, Carol Gilligan and other feminist psychologists, the traditional interpretation of developmental stages represented by Freud, Erikson, Kohlberg is seen to establish the view that women fail to reach the higher stages of maturity. The possibility that the norm of maturity pertaining to men may not be applicable to
that of women went unnoticed by psychologists, till feminists drew attention to this point.

Political values are conspicuous in the questions pursued by scientific research also. In various fields, unnecessary importance is attached to questions relating to sex differences in skills, in areas dominated by men like cognitive and cultural excellence, in spite of the fact that sexual dimorphism is rare in the human species. History indicates that research on sex differences is intensified proportionately to the arousal of women’s consciousness concerning their economic, social and political roles and positions. Whenever women seem to gain ground on these accounts, their gains are diluted by scientific findings that are degrading for women. There seems to be an identifiable ratio between woman’s empowerment and her devaluations through the means of scientific research aimed at establishing dimorphism and women’s consequent incapacity. Moreover, the determinants of sex differences are chosen to be biological in nature, as opposed to environmental ones, like hormones, genes, brain morphology. In essentializing sex-differences biologically, counter-examples are ignored. 6

Unchecked infiltration of political values distorts scientific views. This is particularly noticeable in models used for explanation of biological phenomena. The models are predominantly hierarchical and linear. These models represent the fact that male dominance is a universal feature of human and animal social groups. This assumption
is flawed. It reflects western social and political arrangements, excluding cross-cultural variations. Lynn Hankinson Nelson\(^7\) refers to Keller, Bleier and Hubbard, who problematize the “Master Molecule” or “Executive DNA” model of cellular development. Such a model is made use of in sociobiology and other determinist arguments accentuating sex differences. The essence of these feminist science critics’ grievance against such models consists in the fact that by anthropomorphizing the DNA, the discrete, executive controller as the autonomous, patriarchal male, the patronizers of these models naturalize and normalize dominance relationships. The DNA is centralized as the male tyrant. It functions autonomously, resembling the rational, insulated knower of dominant epistemology. It is specifically this epistemological agent, who is the precipitator of oppressive science and philosophy. Mainstream, androcentric western scientific theories glorify models which reflect hierarchical dualism predominant in western society. As pointed out previously, hierarchical dualism posits a structure that divides society into a core or centre and a periphery or margin. It ensures that there is no interaction between these two realms, so that the subjugation of the periphery by the core is complete, unconditional. This top-down power structure is nurtured by the indoctrination that male scientists and philosophers are superior epistemic agents, whose observation and reasoning-power function in complete absence of emotion, passion, political values and factors of the context. Women are not capable of acquiring freedom from emotion, passion, embodiment passivity and values. They cannot be
allowed to advocate theories since scientific and philosophical
cognitive authority is vested in the superior male epistemic agent
exclusively. The cognitive authority he enjoys by virtue of his
professed rationality and insularity enables him to posit binary
oppositions unrestrictedly. By an analogical argument the master
molecule, by virtue of its unconnectedness to all other physiological
processes, may be allowed by scientists to explain all kinds of human
behaviour unilaterally and deterministically. Determinism in the
biological sciences is designed to inferiorize and instrumentalize
women, slaves, the racially marginalized and the colonized
populations. These populations are presented as determined to possess
qualities like embodiment, emotionality, passivity which naturalizes
their inferiorization and justifies their exploitation. If the centralized
subject of dominant epistemology were replaced by one, characterized
by an amicable relation to members he marginalizes, binary
oppositions could have been dealt with. Similarly, if the DNA is
represented as exhibiting relations of interaction with specific
physiological phenomena, genetic reduction would no longer enjoy
the central position in explaining cellular development in sexually
manipulative ways. Genetic reduction is not fully acceptable.
Alternative theories focusing on interaction among other factors and
on order and complexity are abundantly available and more competent
at explaining biological phenomena. It is empirically verified that
genes or DNA cannot impart specificity isolatedly, but only against
the background of the activity of other molecules like RNA, and of proteins, carbohydrates, lipids and other processes.

Feminist science-criticism establishes not only that science, like philosophy, is not free of political values, but also that science and politics are mutually reinforcing. Examples of western political experience shaping scientific theories have been referred to by feminists, they also refer to instances which show how such theories ensue in social and political arrangements that naturalize domination. Sociobiology, for example, acknowledges ontological categories like ‘bluebird adultery’, ‘chimpanzee prostitution’ flowers being raped by bees. Though these functions/activities lack fixed identity criteria, yet they are presented as evidences of genetically derived behaviour and are extended to the realm of human behaviour. Bluebird, chimpanzee and bees, in these examples, represent the male order. The faith that males are genetically aggressive and women genetically submissive has had a long history. The faith at hand has rarely been put to question until feminist philosophers and scholars detected the ingenious political manipulations lurking behind androcentric scientific theories. They are interpreted as hypotheses explaining the causes of the dominance relations rampant in contemporary western society. They also justify such relations as augmenting the purpose of evolution. They present male aggression, racial discrimination and divisions of power with reference to sex/gender as natural and universal. The political implication of these theories succeeds in eliciting greater prestige for them. Again, Shefali Moitra points out
that between two theories offering a hierarchical and a nonhierarchical explanation of a phenomenon the former kind of explanation wins wider acceptability, as a Top-Down relationship is involved in the explanation. As examples, she cites the cases of the Master Molecule Concept and the Steady State Concept. The Master Molecule theory explains genetic phenomena in terms of a master molecule which establishes a centralized, totalitarian governance on all other molecules. The Steady-State Concept, on the contrary, advocates a participatory relation among molecules. Though both theories are equally fortified by evidences and exhibit comparable explanatory capacity — The master Molecule theory enjoys much higher credibility. This can be explained by its glorification of hierarchical, Top-Down relationships in place of interactive, participatory ones. The background assumptions that help in highlighting evidences in conformity with the Master Molecular theory in place of the alternative theory are androcentric ones. Feminists prefer nonhierarchical, participatory, interactive relations. It has been explained in chapter two that mainstream logic is not suitable to relations of mutuality. A logic with a substituted definition of negation was stipulated to enable the fusion of contrary (gender) categories, and to empower women cognitively.  

THE NEED FOR AN EMPIRICIST-PRAGMATIC THEORY OF EVIDENCE

I expect the points raised in the preceding sections to establish that the concept of value free science is a theoretical construct. The
promotion of such a concept is not desirable. The problem with Quinean empiricism is that though Quine realizes the importance of the underdetermination problem, his insistence on segregating values, politics, experiences relating to sex/gender and biases from science proper deprives him of the potentiality to visualize the underdetermination problem in its proper perspective. As previously mentioned, Quine’s theory needs to be reformulated to make arrangements to adjudge the role of values, experiences relating to the sex/gender system and similar other discriminations in the composition of mainstream science. The gendered interests, emotions, values and cognitive style of women result in different background webs of beliefs from those of men, leading to different world views. The underdetermination problem itself does not indicate ways of choosing between error-generating values and biases on the one hand and resourceful values on the other. Quine’s appeal to holism and the coherentist theory of truth is not an adequate solution to the problem at hand. His thesis is based on the assumption that biases, social and political values, exercise an essentially corruptive influence on logic, evidence and other constitutive requirements of science. The feminist suggestions about organizing the social practices of science as conducive to the utilization of background assumptions as resources, rather than as obstacles to inquiry need to be seriously considered. The pragmatic feminists believe that the pragmatic tradition should be invoked to blur the sharpness of the boundary between facts and values. Enquiry certainly aspires towards truth, fact or in whatever
terminology empirically adequate representations may be designated. Truth, however should be selected on the strength of the practical, social needs they answer to. In responsible theorization, evidence helps in tracing empirically vindicated truth and social values enhance the treatment of truth in useful ways. Care need be taken so that social interests and pragmatic values do not interfere with evidential assessment of representations. A moral realist approach upholds that moral, social and political values are objective. Prepositions referring to these values are characterized by truth values. Feminist values are true. Far from defying evidential scrutiny, they are vindicated by evidence itself.

Though not a moral realist, the feminist empiricist Lynn Hankinson Nelson\(^\text{10}\) confirms that values are subject to empirical control. She exemplifies subjection of culturally determined values to empirical control copiously. She illustrates that evidence determines the truth of the fact that women’s activities are crucial to the functioning of human social groups. Evidence also ascertains that androcentrism distorts cross-cultural studies, animal sociology and evolutionary theory. The fact that the naturalization of male dominance is a cunning contrivance of male dominated mainstream science is evidentially established by the unnaturality and non-universality of male dominance. The fact also that research into sex-difference is controlled by biased motivations, as pointed out in the previous section of this chapter, is reinforced through empirical evidence. Empirical evidence also discounts that division of power by
sex/gender is justified essentialistically by biology. Evidence is sharp and competent enough to distinguish between justifiable and indefensible values and politics. Feminist pragmatists point out that the underdetermination problem illuminates the point that facts are partially constituted by values and values by facts. In the absence of any categorical demarcation between facts and values, theories guided by feminist values cannot be taken to be intrinsically false. The truth or falsity of any feminist or androcentric theory is liable to be determined with reference to empirical norms. Norms are not a priori, but corrigible or revisable in relation to the cognitive and pragmatic quality they facilitate or retard. Feminist epistemologists advocating the procedural approach, also contribute valuably in restricting error-generating biases and encouraging resourceful ones. The procedural approach is primarily methodological – focused on strategy and procedures of research undertaking. It construes epistemological research as an established procedure, involving a series of techniques to acquire evidences for production of new knowledge. The approach in question repudiates the individuality and autonomy of the rational knower. It puts forward the vision of an ideal social organization, which rules out the possibility of the idiosyncracies of individual knowers contaminating the contents of a theory by making each knower accountable to another. Such a social organization of knowers, characterized by different biases, helps keeping vicious biases in control. This approach is particularly useful in neutralizing gender differences in background assumptions and in knowledge in general. If
men and women participate in enquiry together, they can be said to acquire verbal or testimonial knowledge of what the other gender knows through his or her direct experience. This participation enables also the imaginative adoption and appreciation of the perspective peculiar to one gender by the other. The need for reallocation of epistemic norms is keenly felt in the context of shared participation. Women are traditionally silenced by these norms. Their points of view are ignored or presented in a distorted form by these norms.

I have tried to highlight the necessity of according due place to values, biases and experiences relating to sex/gender in scientific theories. Accommodation of these factors into science or knowledge is not simple. Caution needs to be exercised so that evidence is not undermined. A robust and acceptable feminist empiricism should have the potential for realizing this goal. I shall now attempt to elaborate the features of feminist empiricism.

TOWARDS A FEMINIST EMPIRICISM-THE PROPOSED THEORY OF EVIDENCE

Feminist empiricists, like classical and logical empiricists, profess that cognitive claims must be grounded in experience. They deviate from the latter kind of empiricism in substituting the individual by the community as the subject of knowledge. Feminist scholarship in general, and feminist empiricism in particular, completely abrogate the autonomous knower of conventional empiricism by highlighting the historical, geographical, social and
other kinds of locatedness of the epistemological agent. If the knower is constructed by his race, class, gender, intellectual heritage, dependence on funding agencies, as verified by experience, the individual in isolation from the social location is a mythical abstraction. An individual, determined by context-neutral, value neutral, methodological rules and algorithms alone does not qualify as a knower. All knowers, including philosophers are dependent on each other for the acquisition and validation of observational and inferential representations. Experiences of sex and gender and of politics can be explained to be related to the content of knowledge only if the community is taken to be the cognitive agent. Validations of scientific theories also centre around the critical reception of cognitive communities. This applies to thinkers of the acumen of Newton, Einstein, Freud and all else. Helen Longino attributes the lack of appreciation for Freud’s work during his lifetime to the critical reception of his ideas by his community.¹¹

Emphasis on the individual as the subject of knowledge fails to take the social location of the knower into account as it trivializes causal, contextual explanations. This same factor prevents classical and logical empiricists from dealing with the underdetermination problem successfully. Social interaction is a necessary condition of knowledge formation. Even if an individual, without essential links with the social context, is logically conceivable, such an individual cannot logically be ascertained as the subject of knowledge or even as a subject of belief, falling short of knowledge proper. Beliefs and
knowledge depend on public language and public conceptual schemes. The role of logic and observation obviously needs to be safeguarded. They function as methodological norms. The institution of norms of social interaction forms an integral dimension of feminist empiricism. In the absence of conformity to norms, social dialogue may overdetermine a thesis. Observation, reason and social dialogue together constitute an explanation and justification for cognitive claims.

I accept Lynn Hankinson Nelson’s argument that unless the social context is taken into consideration and community be taken seriously, no difference can is explained between the feminist and the androcentric perspectives. Feminist and androcentric perspectives presuppose differential social causes, historically, politically and culturally specific experiences and community-bound standards, practices and background assumptions. The distinction between these perspectives is robustly borne out by experience. This can be explained only if the community, in place of the individual, is acknowledged as the subject of knowledge. The classical empiricists might argue that the determination of such perspectives are instances of bad science. It is ensured by compromising the natural abilities of scientists by allowing an appeal to social causes. I would like to invoke Sandra Harding’s rejoinder in the context of this objection. She argues that the classical philosophers’ conviction that social causes need to be identified only in cases of errors in knowledge, as natural abilities are by themselves error-resistant is untenable. This
above-mentioned conviction found in classical philosophers stands in
the way of understanding why feminists alone express awareness of
androcentric problems, not non-feminist scientists. It is obvious that
feminists sense these phenomena due to their lived-experience as
members of the community of women, not in the capacity of isolated,
trans-historical aspirants of truth.

In the community-centered interpretation of cognitive agency,
philosophical methodology is identified with norms or criteria of
critical interactions. These criteria govern methodological procedures,
tolerable error limits, background assumptions to be preserved and the
like. The community may be guided by the aim of knowledge-
production, or by that of utilization of knowledge produced for the
realization of pragmatic ends. The communities admit of
subcommunities within themselves. Every kind of community is
characterized by firm loyalty to public standards. I am indebted to
Helen Longino\textsuperscript{14} for understanding the kind of criteria, that can be
stipulated for holding a cognitive community together in the
stabilization of their representations as representations of knowledge.
In the first place, criticism should be considered as seriously as
original research. The close association of scientific research with
commerce, heightening the exercise of instrumental reason, calls for
exclusive propriety of information. This discourages critical
interaction. Criticisms should be publicly expressed in journals,
conferences and the like. The members of a community should be
allowed to participate in critical discourse, to ensure amendments in
beliefs held and develop new arguments and data in keeping with criticism. Dissidents should also take stock of how the community responds to their deviant points of view. The norm of public standards should also be invoked in this context. Members of the concerned community need to share technical terms, rules of inferences, values and interests. These shared elements bring criticism to bear upon the concerns of the community in question. The acceptance of public standards ensures that the aims of the community are not determined and realized arbitrarily or individually. Finally, the norm of tempered equality of intellectual authority is particularly relevant to alterities like women, racial minorities and the like. Ascription of intellectual authority needs to be considered and tempered, as all adult members of a community are not equal in respect to intellectual endowment, with opportunities enjoyed, like schooling and overall educational background. The fact that marginalized groups have systematically been silenced also needs attention. Care need be taken that social and economic privileges do not stand in the way of women’s and other excluded groups’ enjoyment of intellectual right of participating constructively in and criticizing the reasons, arguments and logical principles appealed to in endorsing cognitive claims. Feminist scholars effectively show how suppression of women’s voices constitutes a cognitive deficiency. Mainstream science protects biased assumptions relating to sex/gender difference from critical scrutiny. The absence of dissenting voices is responsible for the lack of critical resources. The norm of tempered equality is important in considerations both for justice and development and for criticism of alternative viewpoints.
Feminist empiricism requires social interaction to be guided by these norms as far as possible.

Another distinguishing feature of the proposed feminist empiricism being propounded consists in replacing the traditional concept of truth characterizing content of knowledge by some other kind of relation of fit, more malleable than truth. A classification of representations into two mutually exclusive categories, true and false, may be suitable to explain trivial cases, like the proposition “the cat is on the mat.” But a strictly binary relation rules out intermediaries—as in the cases of the classical concept of negation discussed in the preceding chapter. Such a limiting concept of a relation of approximation between representations and reality is useless both to scientists and to women. A relation of fit needs to be stipulated, that has reference to purposes, interests and success of users. Maps, Longino asserts, are calling for a different kind of relation of fit from truth.\textsuperscript{15} She holds that the best map in the world is one, which enhances the pursuit of the interests of its users most successfully. The purpose at hand may be distribution of aids, planning irrigation systems, or crossing a mountain range. The requirements of a map helping the user to cross a mountain may be specialized. It may be intended to represent the shortest route, or to highlight the route that is aesthetically richer. The map’s superiority consists in realizing the purposes of the user. Without reference to goal, interests and success, a mere duplication of the terrain featured, as required by the truth-criterion, renders a map uninteresting and useless. Unlike truth, the
speculated category of evaluation needs to admit degrees, concomitant to the respects of fit with reality of the representations. Scientific laws, similarly, are adequate, not in consideration that they correspond to a feature of reality, but because they refer to common characteristics of a situation, which are of interest to the users of the law in question. The proposed criterion does not bifurcate laws into strict binaries, true and false, but concentrates also on the success of laws. Keeping this criterion of alignment in mind, it may be fruitful to consider whether theories in science can be presented in the form of models, functioning like maps. However, the feminist empiricist must be cautious that success is not reduced to a matter of choice or negotiations. The realistic aspect of success must never be compromised. The research on cancer, for example, must not be restricted to genetic factors at the expense of exclusion of environmental factors, genetic factors being easier to focus on for current industrial interests. Backgrounding the need of fit or alignment is self-defeating. Reality is likely to retaliate and falsify a theory, if social interaction reduces itself to fabrication.

The feminist enterprise to ease off the stringent demands of the classical notion of truth is promising for women’s knowledge on account of two reasons. In the first place, it is able to accommodate non-propositional content into the purview of knowledge. Audre Lorde refers to the skills of mothers. Mothers had the skill to choose a paradise plum or to prepare oil to prepare oil for bruises and rashes. With the rise of academic institutionalized epistemic culture these skills were no longer valued. Similarly, the non-propositional
knowledge of midwifery, exhibited by non-professional traditional women, knowledge or skill of cooking, rearing children and caring generally and the like are not likely to be entertained as forms of knowledge by the demand of propositional formulation and other dominant norms of knowledge. A more relaxed type of empiricism, though demanding agreement with the external order, may be sensitive to these kinds of typically feminine skills or dispositions.

In the second place, the relaxed kind of empiricism accords acceptability to a plurality of perspectives by calling to question the strictly binary definition of truth. Success of content makes alternative interpretations of reality possible. The plurality in question helps in utilizing the lived experiences of women as resources of knowledge. Varieties of lived-experiences of women situated variously in the social grid expose the multiple dimensions of oppression, relating to class, caste, race, poverty, education and so on. Recounting her own experience as a black lesbian, Audre Lorde emphasizes that every woman possesses multiple knowledge of different aspects of oppression, like race, caste, sexuality and status. The personal and political aspect of experience ought not to be separated from epistemology. Categorization and social homogenization create great lapses in theories, as exemplified by traditional, objective forms of knowledge. An epistemological community needs to respect pluralism not only to combat exclusionary practices, but also to ensure a democratic sharing of epistemic power. Power ought to be shared with marginalized others, some of whom, like children, may be inferior in
capabilities. But inferiority in capability does not justify discrimination and domination. Forming a power structure akin to a rainbow coalition, that is, exercising power with a respect for difference does not necessarily imply some form of anarchy. Pluralism is quite different from anarchism.

As discussed in Chapter two, and referred to on several other occasions, formation of a coalition or enjoying power simultaneously with heterogeneous kinds of people does not amount to violation of logical principles per se. It is specifically the hegemonic, classical, dominant logic, which rules out pluralism by positing an exclusively rational subject as the centre of the epistemological enterprise. Such logic defines negation in a way that disallows different types of knowers to function as subjects of epistemology. It backgrounds, objectifies and homogenizes all kinds of differences. It degrades differences as aberrations or symptoms of freakishness.

Val Plumwood 17 proposes looking at systems of logic that are tolerant to differences. Relevance logic is stipulated by her to define negation in ways in which a coalition or combination of different kinds of entities would not initiate system collapse. Such a scheme of logic would enable social and political arrangements in which the boundary between the centralized and the marginalized would break down. Men alone would not need to be placed as the subject of epistemology. Women and other alterities, in spite of manifesting characteristic features different from men, may be allowed to spin theories, contents of which resist precipitation of hegemonic social,
political and cognitive arrangements that discriminate and persecute. Such a logical system would ensure audibility of voices silenced so long in a way that does not necessitate silencing dominant voices by encouraging gynocentrism. Respect for differences deconstructs all kinds of partiality or centrism. It helps in making possible the simultaneous exercise of power by largely different kinds of people. It had been mentioned in Chapter two that it is possible to visualize otherness as difference, in place of visualizing it as hierarchically dualized. This requires an alternative definition of negation, different from the definition used in classical logic. The definition of negation proposed by relevance logic may be taken to be an example of the required kind of negation to posit non-hierarchical difference. In this logical system, the centre and the periphery are not stipulated to constitute different universes. Their opposition is much more restricted, nuanced. As such, there is no fear of contradiction if they come together. This takes care of the problem of radical exclusion. The elimination of radical exclusion, however, is not to be understood as erasing all differences between self/other, male/female, because differences between these categories are real. In this kind of negation again, \( \sim p \) need not be defined in terms of \( p \). The other need not be downgraded as a lack or perversion of the self, but may be viewed as having an independent, disparate identity. The other need not be homogenized also. Chapter two clarified how homogenization facilitates subjugation. Relevance logic defines equivalence in a more sensitive manner, so that subtler strands of difference characterizing equivalent members of the peripheral group are not obliterated. The
trivialization and lack of veneration associated with radical exclusion being discouraged, the other need no longer be instrumentalized or objectified as cursorily as in the case of traditional negation. For identical reasons, dependency on the other may not be denied. It has been pointed out that backgrounding or denial of dependency is a symptom of anxiety suffered by the self on account of its material dependence on an abject order. This order may be established as co-ordinate with the self by the premises of relevance logic. The anxiety of the self is expected to be tempered by this move. The self would not be obliged to silence the other so urgently in these modified circumstances. The marginalized, woman in this context, can function as a subject of knowledge as smoothly and authoritatively as the privileged male subject. Thus the masculinization of science can be resisted effectively. In Chapter five I try to relate the contention of post-modern feminists. I refer to their analysis of establishing alterities as subjects of knowledge. I, however, do not subscribe to the post modern interpretation of subjecthood. My intention here is to underline the importance of allowing women and other alterities to speak as subjects.

Taking women’s lived experiences into account enables theorists to resist sexism, hierarchical dualism and phallocentrism. Attention to women’s lived experiences also counters androcentrism, which is sustained by neutring gender. As mentioned previously, it establishes male experience to be paradigmatic and condemns non-conforming behaviour on the part of women as eccentric.
Scientific culture has established the monopoly of reason as the parameter of intellectual achievement. Emotions and sensuousness are co-ordinate tools of investigation. Along with perception and reason, sensibility needs to be highlighted as a constitutive norm of epistemology. The aim of a logic of difference, outlined after Val Pumwood in the preceding chapter, specifically makes room for a multitude of voices with difference. A proposed feminist empiricism, as such, needs to recognize plurality, in order to prepare itself to listen to multiple voices, silenced so long by the hegemony of reason and objectivity.

Emotions play a significant role in achieving cross cultural and heterological consciousness. Conventional epistemology, however, is averse to emotions. Emotion is construed as a binary opposite of reason. Reason is associated with objectivity, emotions with subjectivity. It may be pointed out in this context that opposition need not be viewed unidimensionally, as a lack or a perversion. A multidimensional interpretation of opposition allows opposition to be treated as complementarity. Complementarity, in the framework of hierarchical dualism, is taken to be asymmetrical. A woman exhibiting masculine qualities like autonomy, assertiveness, competence may be commendable, as they complement feminine qualities. Feminine qualities are understood necessarily in a pejorative sense. They cannot complement masculine qualities. The prospect of a man characterized by qualities like softness, connection to family and society and the like is outlandish. In the perspective of hierarchial dualism, therefore,
emotions, associated with femininity cannot be taken as complementary of reason. Thinking in terms of hierarchical dualism is not inevitable. Feminist scholars have contributed significantly in disrupting hierarchical dualism. Freedom from this perspective enables one to view complementarity differently, that is, symmetrically and gender neutrally. Emotions, in such circumstances, can be seen to supplement reason in a positive, constructive manner. Julie A Nelson refers to Martha Nussbaum, who points out that the goodness of a rational judgement in a world dominated by insecurities like mortality, ill health, deprivations of all kinds, depends on emotional acknowledgement of needs and support. Rationality, a positive masculine value presupposes individuality and aperspectivity in order to achieve objectivity understood in a traditional sense. It is exposed to the risk of degeneration into separativeness, a negative masculine value, unless safeguarded by emotions. Care, however, needs to be taken so that emotion does not degenerate into solubility, a negative feminine value. Emotions, per se, are not bad or undesirable. Taking emotions and intuitions seriously enriches feminist empiricism. Emotions form constituents of lived experiences of women. Dismantling the prejudice relating to emotions helps feminist empiricists to hear women speaking in emotional voices. These voices had been ignored on account of their emotionality. As pointed out previously, listening to such voices ensures empathy, sharing of power, justice and democracy. Emotions, however, should maintain distance from illogic.
GLOBAL VERSUS LOCAL EPISTEMOLOGIES

Epistemic virtues however differ from community to community. If epistemic norms are not universal, different communities supervised by different norms or values are likely to precipitate different local epistemologies. Holism, or the assumption that the same set of basic principles explain the world at large conceived to be essentially simple, seems to be questionable under such circumstances. The actions and beliefs of men and women, for example, are not likely to be explained with reference to identical sets of basic premises. Scientific communities also centre around different kinds of ontological and methodological assumptions — giving rise to different epistemologies. Difference in goals, purposes and research traditions bring about differences in epistemic standards.

Apparently, the requirement of epistemic adequacy is not disturbed by local epistemologies. The beliefs, norms and goals regulating any local epistemology are given to critical scrutiny. These are dynamic enough to be replaced or rejected if the community fails to defend them against significant criticism. It may reasonably be believed that if the methodological, substantive assumptions, goals, norms guiding any local epistemology are rigorously scrutinized, these epistemologies should exhibit empirical adequacy.

It is difficult to decide whether a global holism is compatible with the acknowledgement of a plurality of feminist communities, identified by variegated political interests and commitments. In a holistic interpretation, the whole determines the meaning and the
justification of particulars. The particulars enjoy no identity or existence independently of the whole.

The oppression of women is a worldwide phenomenon. As such, comprehensive, holistic interpretations should pose no problem. Yet, in practice, theories and practices having their origin in Europe and America dominate post-colonial, Indian and other third world feminisms. The political context of the west and of the third world, particularly, of India, are widely divergent. Alka Kurian points out that in post-independence India, middle-class, educated women are found to be more engaged in social projects like refugee rehabilitation, Bhoodan movement and the like. The number of women participating actively in politics has been on the decline in post-independence India. The need to usurp political authority is felt more acutely by Indian women, in comparison to western women.

Other kinds of post-colonial feminism, black feminism, postmodern feminism and postfeminism are inspired by further different goals and political agenda. Postfeminism, for example, finds the characterization of women as victims unacceptable. Its ideology is flexible and individualistic. Its political goals are different from those of feminism.

Diverse brands of feminism, supported by widely divergent political goals & purposes, appear to defy classification within a global, holistic fabric. Fixation of universal, uniform empirical norms of knowledge for such a multifarious cluster is extremely difficult.
An attempted solution of the problem referred to may be profitably expressed in terms of Fodor’s and Lepore’s\textsuperscript{21} suggestions about anatomic properties of constituents of a holistic system. Though they extend the proposal in the context of holism about meaning, it is not totally irrelevant to the kind of epistemological holism at issue. An individual element may be considered to belong to a holistic system in case it is characterized by holistic properties, like being anatomic. It may be the case that the property in question is shared by at least one other individual. In such case, the property exhibited by the individual element concerned qualifies as “anatomic”\textsuperscript{22}. Again, the holistic property qualifying the members of a system may be “very anatomic”\textsuperscript{23}, provided that many other items share the property in question. The properties of the feminine communities constituting a whole may be anatomic, or even very anatomic depending on whether the characteristics displayed are shared by a small or a large number of individuals.

The possibility of a holistic system comprising very few members may also be considered. The important point is that those few members exhibit relations with the whole. The feminist communities, sharing common political ideology and programmes may constitute smaller wholes. The postulation of this kind of local holism diminishes the distance between local epistemologies and global ones. Entertaining this hypothesis would assure that feminism enjoys the privileges peculiar to holism without being completely determined by the whole. Third world and other kinds of feminism
may escape being dominated, engulfed by western feminism — which has currently organized itself as a metanarrative of feminisms for all practical purposes.

It may also be questioned whether the existence of community, postulated as the subject of knowledge in this thesis may be known empirically. The macro features of global holistic community cannot be observed. In answer to this kind of a hardheaded empiricistic anticipation, it may be proposed that phenomena about individuals like a piece of individual cognition are also not given to direct observation. What an individual knows is inferrable on the strength of the actions, intentions, motives of the individual knower concerned. Natural sciences like chemistry and astronomy construct explanations to make sense of unobservable posits or speculations. A holistic community is likewise necessarily inferred to explain the fundamental premise of a feminist empiricism that an individual fails to know, unless the community knows. The explanation of the origin and validation of individual acts of cognition is to be constructed with reference to societal, communitarian goals and criteria.

The nature of philosophy as well as the requirements of dynamic, democratic theorization defy timeless solutions. As such, though I try to offer modifications of the norms of mainstream epistemology — apprehensions are unlikely to be answered with finality.

I find feminist empiricism to be the most acceptable epistemological theory for the reasons outlined in this chapter.
Feminist standpoint epistemologist and feminist post modernists, however, would not agree. Feminist standpoint epistemologists accuse feminist empiricism of being insufficiently objective. Feminist empiricists fail to centralize politics as a causal factor in the generation of knowledge claims, though they refer to the importance of the association of knowledge with politics. Feminist empiricism also lacks the infrastructure that addresses problems arising in disadvantaged, marginalized locations. It also suppresses the critical voices of the oppressed class. Objectivity may be enhanced by paying greater attention to the logic of discovery or contextual factors than is done in feminist empiricism. Historical insight may be utilized as a resource in identifying epistemically and scientifically privileged locations.

Feminist post modernism is skeptical about norms, foundations and universal knowledge-claims. Their skepticism concerning norms is elaborated in Chapter five. Feminist empiricism, on the other hand, champions norms, like empirical adequacy, factual constraint, social scrutiny and the like. Feminist postmodernism is also incompatible with feminist empiricism.

In the following chapters, I try to highlight and evaluate the basic tenets of feminist standpoint epistemology and of feminist postmodernism as they deserve consideration in any research on feminist epistemology.
Notes and References


2. Ibid. p. 131.

3. Ibid. p. 132.

4. Ibid. p. 132.


15. Ibid. p. 116.


18. Ibid.


23. Ibid.