



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## A Theoretical Exploration Of Feminism: Emergence To The 21st Century

Reema Bhatia

Associate Professor , Sociology

Miranda House, University of Delhi. Delhi.

### Abstract

This article is a theoretical exploration of feminism. The article traces the trajectory of feminist theory from its emergence to new materialism and post humanism. I argue that the post humanist approach was an inherent part of ancient Indian philosophy. Ancient Indian philosophy followed a monist approach in which man was considered to be a part of the larger srishti i.e. creation. The human race was placed hierarchically higher to the non humans i.e. animals and nature. Some elements of the non human world like trees, rivers and animals are viewed as sacred and are revered. However these are edicts and do not automatically translate into action. These operated in a social framework that was patriarchal and hierarchical subjugating some. For the world to attain ecological harmony we need to challenge essentialist assumptions about identity and to advocate for a more fluid and diverse understanding of human experiences. As posthumanist feminists the agency of marginalised humans and non human categories needs to be recognised and acknowledged. Together, they contribute to a broader understanding of the diverse and interconnected nature of human experiences and struggles for justice and equality.

Keywords: Theory, Feminist theory, materialism, post humanism, Vedas, Puranas.

## Introduction

This article is a theoretical exploration of feminism. The word theory itself derived from the Greek verb therein means “to observe” and “to view”. Theories are a reflection of the times and cannot be divorced from their ideological and material and normative contexts. These contexts are a reflection of a total way of life. These include our interactions, speech, actions, thought, gestures, play, and so many other things. Everyday practices are an outcome of these contexts and thus by extrapolation theory has to do with our everyday lives. As the contexts change theories too change to reflect these changes. Knowledge is socially constructed and our biographies are always a reflection of the times. Feminist theory is a reflection of how women are perceived in society. Feminist theory and feminist activism were very closely intertwined when women began theorising about themselves and their lives. In later years feminist theory and activism began to separate. Feminist theory is not a linear theory it is complex and diverse and may often have multiple epicentres.

In this article I trace the trajectory of development of feminist theory. I start with the emergence of the feminist theory in the West and its progression to posthumanism. I contend that what is now the posthumanist approach, has been a part of the ancient Indian texts - the Vedas and the Puranas and mythology. I argue that the though the ancient Indian texts did have a monist approach to the world and designated the inhabitants of this world - animals, plants and all other its living and non living components as divine, the social interactions and norms in the everyday world often did not reflect this. In the modern Indian world even though we revere our trees and rivers, animals and also women yet we do not treat them with respect.

## The Emergence of Feminist Theory

Theory building in an institutional context started with the Enlightenment. Feminists contended that Sociological theory had been guilty of interpreting the world exclusively through masculine androcentric frameworks. Masculine perspectives permeated scientific investigations, where external, observable phenomena took precedence, often neglecting the realm of thought and emotions. Society was understood through typified schemes rooted in Cartesian rationale. This skewed perspective was considered rational and scientific with women being far removed from this truth and rationality.

Feminist theorists like Sandra Harding(1987) and Dorothy Smith (1987) shed light on the masculine bias present in the social sciences. They argued that the focus had been predominantly on the public aspects of life, aligning with Western notions of reason and rationality, neglecting the private sphere that included domestic interactions and work, among other things thus pointing to a masculine bias in the social sciences. The

assumption that men and women occupied different social realms made generalisations about humankind biased.

### **Feminist Empiricism**

In the decade of the 1960s- 1970s feminists argued for a need to theorise from the standpoint of women. Early attempts to incorporate gender in social sciences mainly involved adding women to existing theories, this approach came to be known as feminist empiricism. In a bid to incorporate women into theories feminist scholars in the West works by women scholars were incorporate into the curriculum. Thinkers like Cancian (1992), Dorothy Smith(1987), Linda Molm (1993), and Sandra Harding(1980) argued that such an incorporation primarily represented women from an androcentric standpoint and within masculine frameworks. This was based on the assumption that men and women were the same and thus missing crucial issues like domestic violence and abortion as they were deemed specific to women. Feminists advocated for the study of societies from a woman's perspective, avoiding male-centered categories. They focused on interpreting societal structures through the personal experiences of women, utilising qualitative methods rather than just quantitative ones. Feminist theory aimed to understand the "public" through the lens of the "private," asserting that women's everyday experiences could shed light on societal structures, including embedded power relations and institutionalised inequality. Initially, feminist theory primarily represented the perspective of white middle-class women, inadvertently overlooking the experiences of marginalised groups such as Black women or the disabled. This oversight highlighted the need for a more inclusive and adequate theory that empowered women to challenge the objectivity and truth of male-centric knowledge.

### **The Humanist Approach**

Feminist researchers disagreeing with feminist empiricism contended that men and women cannot be different and the category man was not a synonym for humans and further it was incorrect to assume that mankind included womankind. For the humanists women should be studied independently and further women they argued were not lacking in any way compared to men. The feminist essentialism or difference feminism believed that biologically and physically women were different from men. These differences influence the social perception of gender.

Liberal feminism and radical feminism offer distinct viewpoints on gender equality. Liberal feminism or mainstream feminism work towards equality of women. They advocate equality for women through law, politics, education and work. It is based on the assumption that men and women are essentially the same since

they are humans. They base their rights on gender neutral concepts like rationality. This includes thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft (1793) and Harriet Taylor Mill and more recently Jean Hampton and Amy Gutman. They aim to achieve equality through a human rights perspective. It has been critiqued for not challenging established societal norms and for accepting male values as universal.

In contrast, radical feminism, rooted in the 1960s and 1970s, takes a more critical stance, contending that patriarchal structures deeply underlie society, with male dominance being a global phenomenon cutting across various demographics. Radical feminists advocate societal transformations and express skepticism about the family and view it as an oppressive institution. Sharing experiences to uncover hidden structures of oppression becomes vital across cultures. The specific ways of oppression are different and varied across cultures and over time. Both of these feminist perspectives have contributed significantly to feminist discourse, sparking essential conversations about gender equality and women's rights. The choice between these approaches often hinges on one's beliefs regarding the extent of societal change necessary to attain gender equality.

While liberal feminists saw the domestic sphere as central to women's lives, for Marxist feminists women experience oppression within the patriarchal structure of family relationships. According to Marxist feminists, the patriarchal family structure extends its influence into the workplace, affecting wage structures with women in part time or low paying jobs. Women are often concentrated in caring professions as an extension other role in the domestic sphere. Men were the primary breadwinners and women secondary wage earners. In times of economic recession, women entering the job market faces opposition because they are perceived as occupying positions traditionally held by men. Marxist feminism is reductionist and subordinates gender inequality within capitalism.

### **Dual System Theory**

Since the 1980s, the dual system theory emerged proposing a two-fold analysis of feminism, combining elements of radical and Marxist feminism. For the dual system theorists women face oppression on multiple fronts- economic oppression, as highlighted by Marxist feminists, due to discrimination in the job market regarding salaries and access to employment and patriarchal oppression. Heidi Hartmann (2017) argues that Marxism tends to overlook the sexual and patriarchal oppression of women that persists even beyond capitalism. Under capitalism women had limited access to ownership of property. Further, the limiting of women to unpaid household work, resulted in the loss of skilled work opportunities. Dual system theorists

argue for a focus on the gendered division of labor both in the domestic sphere and the labor market. Reproductive labor restricts women's access to wage labor, and traditional ideologies regarding women's primary roles in marriage and motherhood perpetuate this exclusion. Sylvia Walby (1989) believes that Hartmann's perspective undermines the tension and complexity that underlies patriarchy in a capitalist framework. Walby proposes a more diverse and flexible understanding of patriarchy, including modes of production, wage labour, state, violence, sexuality and culture. For instance she examines the state's patriarchal control in legalising gendered wage differences, controlling women's lives through legislation on marriage, divorce, fertility, abortion, and sexuality. Sexuality and the compulsory nature of heterosexuality play significant roles in oppressing and controlling women. Critics contend that dual system theory lacks theoretical sophistication and tends to marginalise dimensions of power other than patriarchy and capitalism such as race and ethnicity.

Traditional humanist perspectives excluded the voices of women and it was issued that the feminine point of view was a part of the humanist perspective. Feminist like Dorothy Smith (1974) argued for the need to rethink the human/ masculine categories since these perspectives did not understand women from their standpoint and thus marginalised them and issues that were central to their lives. These included issues like domestic violence, child rearing or women's work... Feminists like Simone de Beauvoir (1972) in her iconic work *The Second Sex* while biological differences are inescapable, what matters is the way that men and women live their lives. Like Simone de Beauvoir, Anne Oakley (1972) argued that masculinity and femininity were social and cultural and thus, gender for her was not a product of biological sex but was social. Gayle Rubin (1975) related gender to reproductive sexuality and that gender was socially imposed and served to oppress women through the institution of the family. Coupled gendered beings produced the family and this for her positioned women as objects of exchange by men, family and community.

Feminists argued for a more feminised and reflexive theory with the inclusion of a more situated analysis. The experiences of women should be taken into account to bridge the gap between absolute truth and objectivity which were the hallmarks of androcentric theory. Theory they argued should include the everyday experiences of women too. Feminists like Dorothy Smith (1987), N.D. Speer (2002), C. Ramazanoglu (2002) and Gorelick (1991) believe that sharing experiences helps highlight hidden structures of oppression and contributes towards a richer theory and also highlights new areas for theoretical exploration and theory building in newer directions.

## Standpoint Theorists

The standpoint theorists argued that all experiences matter and are equally important and not just those of the privileged. For instance, black and postcolonial feminists emphasised the need to address class, gender, racism, ethnicity, and colonialism. Black feminists pointed out that the focus of radical feminists lacked cultural and historical specificity, ignoring the impact of these factors on women's experiences. For them "woman" is not a monolithic and overarching and it should include subaltern women too. Nancy Hartsock (1983) contend that the situatedness of women gives them a unique perspective and thus a feminist perspective is essential to understand this situatedness. Dorothy Smith (1987) proposes a Sociology **for** Women that takes into account situatedness and is not impersonal and anonymous. However for others like Stanley and Wise (1990) a theorisation of personal experiences is problematic since objective reality overarches and subsumes individual reality. Harding (1991) believes that standpoint epistemology that starts from the margins and is based in the everyday makes theorising problematic since the researcher and the subject are often in the same plane. For Harding reflexivity in theory will lead to theory that is in women's own voices thus creating a Sociology **of** Women instead of a Sociology **for** Women.

bell hooks (2017), Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and Hartsock (2017) criticise white feminism for being racist and lacking reflexivity. They highlight the division between white and Black women's experiences, with Black women narrating from their hearts and white women writing from their heads, often about Black women's experiences. They advocate for solidarity based on shared interests and beliefs, acknowledging diversity and fighting against sexist oppression in all its forms. Thus a feminist standpoint theory is about theorising from the standpoint of those being researched since women are diverse and trying to knit all the experience together is not desirable. There is no absolute truth. But creating theories that reflect multiple truths from multiple standpoints is also problematic. Thus there has to be an intermediate position between absolute truth and truth based on women's experiences.

## Post modernism

Postmodern<sup>1</sup> thought, critiqued feminist theory since the 1980s. Postmodernists assert that women cannot be analysed separately from their bodies, emotions, or locations. French feminists such as Helene Cixous (1976), Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray reject Simone de Beauvoir's idea of women overcoming femininity. They argue that knowledge, shaped by a patriarchal society, is itself patriarchal, and women are always viewed as "other" compared to men. They advocate for a female linguistic practice that challenges masculine oppression

and calls for a reformation of language and thought. The postfeminist perspective questions the essentialism of the category of woman. Some postfeminists argue against the need for a specific feminist theory, as it would become a metanarrative replacing male-centric ones. Instead, they emphasise focusing on knowledge, recognising its constructed nature, and deconstructing it to reveal power structures.

Postfeminism intersects with other "post" philosophies like postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism. The postcolonial perspective also questions the hegemony of Western feminism and its claims to universalism, as they argue these are ethnocentric and biased. This perspective challenges the notion that feminism's waves represent universal struggles and emphasises considering specific contexts of various feminist movements worldwide. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) emphasised the need to understand the postcolonial woman's experience in her voice, not through the perspectives of colonial or native men. Spivak also highlighted the intersections of gender, class, and power relations that conventional accounts of patriarchy often fail to address. Overall, these diverse stand of theorising have added to the richness of feminist theory. There is no single overarching linear conception of feminism. Some argue that we now live in a postfeminist era characterised by an emphasis on differences and diversity of experiences, challenging earlier assumptions of homogeneity within the category of "woman."

### **Poststructuralist Theory and Queer Theory**

In the 1990s, feminist theorists began to deconstruct the category of "woman" as a homogenous monolith. Thus leading to new directions in feminist theory influenced by poststructuralism and queer theory. These approaches challenged existing feminist theories in various ways, particularly in their conceptualisation of sex and gender. Judith Butler (1990, 2015) questioning the sex-gender distinction, stated that sex is biological as well as socially and culturally constructed. She emphasised that society establishes the sexed body as a natural fact, assuming it as given. This binary division assumes that sex and gender are congruent categories, which overlooks diverse gender identities such as transgender and queer. Butler advocated for the deconstruction of the category "women" and emphasised the influence of power in shaping gendered identities. Butler also introduced the concept that gender is performative, reinforced through repetition and societal sanctions. This idea expanded the understanding of differently embodied gender identities, including queer, transgender, and homosexual identities. Gayle Rubin (1975) highlighted how women's biological sexuality is gendered by men for exchange, resulting in the exclusion of women. She criticised existing gender theories for failing to account for this structured oppression.

Queer theory challenged the notion of heterosexuality as normal or natural highlighting the performative aspects of gender and sexual identities in everyday life. This approach emphasised localised, microanalysis based on intersections of race, ethnicity, culture, and gender variance amongst other dimensions with gender and sexuality. Queer feminists also engaged with transgender issues, aligning with Butler's concept of performativity. However, Toril Moi (2001) critiqued poststructuralists like Judith Butler, arguing that they divorced the mind from the physical-biological self. Moi emphasised the need to seek alternative terms other than sex and gender to capture the complexities of human identity. She contended that reducing an individual to just sex and gender is reductionist, and being a hermaphrodite, transvestite, or transsexual reveals the fuzzy boundaries of the categories "man" and "woman." Moi proposed Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "situatedness" as a way to understand women's identities, recognising that biology plays a role in a woman's situatedness but doesn't limit it to fixed identities. The body can go beyond traditional categories and encompass multiple sexualities.

### **Feminist Critical Theory**

Feminist critical theorists like Seyla Benhabib, (1999) Nancy Hartsock (1983), Sandra Harding (1991), and Iris Marion Young argue against the postmodernist critique of metanarratives, as they believe the project of women's emancipation is not complete, and stress the importance of understanding the gendered aspects of material reality, such as poverty and class. Others, like Julie MacLeavy and Imogen Tylor, adopt an intersectional approach that considers gender, class, nationality, and age when analysing material conditions. Regarding the Marxist theory of oppression, feminist critical theorists like Nancy Hartsock (2017) argue that it's essential to recognise that female labor includes both paid and unpaid work, extending the understanding of oppression beyond economics. They emphasise that oppression is not solely economic but also social and historical and spatial. Feminist critical theorists propose a dialectical social world, emphasising the epistemology and ontology of knowledge construction. For them modernism's ideas of progress and emancipation can potentially help overcome women's oppression. However these ideas should extend to include the self in terms of gendered subjectivity, the physical body, language, and culture since lived experiences in understanding gendered differences..Feminist critical theory acknowledges that men, too, are gendered and challenges hegemonic constructs of femininity and masculinity. Some critics argue that deconstructing identity in queer theory and poststructuralist theories may undermine differences and hinder



theory building. However, others, like Sally Hines (2015), Rachel Seidman, and Sasha Roseneil, advocate for a queer sociology going beyond the binary that can help understand the impact of sexuality on social relations.

### **New materialism**

Feminist theorists like Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (2010) critiquing the post structuralists argue for the need to refocus on material reality. S. Alamos and Susan Herman (2008) add on that it is important to understand the role of language in constituting bodies in this material world. They contend that the outright rejection of Cartesian dualism has led to feminists overlooking the embodied nature of our existence, Our emotions and whatever we experience is embodied i.e. the materiality of the body cannot be overlooked. “The more the feminist theories distance themselves from “nature” the more that very “nature” is implicitly or explicitly reconfirmed as the treacherous quicksand of misogyny” (Alaimo and Hekman 2008:4)

New materialism thus emerged in the twenty-first century. It is a theoretical framework that emphasises the need to bring back matter or the body into discussion. They argue that though undoubtedly language, culture and politics play a role in shaping experiences but the role of matter cannot be overlooked. Matter they argue is independent of human agency and has its own peculiarity (Frost 2011; Barad, 2010). They challenge the Anthropocene based on the assumption that humans shape the world. The new materialists argue that matter is not passive and unthinking. Humans they argue are a part of this world. materiality of the world including the role of non humans in shaping human experiences. In feminist theory it offers a fresh perspective on issues related to gender, power and identity. It shifts the focus from exclusively human agency of material entities including objects, environments and non human beings. This perspective suggests that the material world plays an active role in shaping human behaviour and social structures.

New materialist feminist often engage with most humanist ideas challenging the notion of a fixed normative human subject. They explore how boundaries between humans and non humans are blurred. They analyse how the non human i.e. technology, animals and nature interact with humans. The dualistic distinctions between mind and body are questioned highlighting the materiality of all lived experiences. New materialist feminism encourages a more ecological perspective, recognising the interconnectedness of humans and nature. It critiques the exploitation of the environment and advocates for a more responsible and ethical relationship with the natural world. New materialism intersects with intersectional feminism, acknowledging that material experiences are shaped by the intersection of various factors, including gender, race, class, and

more. It seeks to understand how these intersections influence lived realities. New materialism often incorporates ethics of care, emphasising the importance of empathy, responsibility, and care for the well-being of humans and non-humans alike. It challenges hierarchical ethics that prioritise certain lives over others. New materialist feminism challenges anthropocentrism, the belief that humans are at the centre of all ethical and philosophical considerations. It advocates for a more inclusive ethics that considers the needs and rights of non-human entities. New materialism explores the role of affect and sensation in shaping human experiences and relationships with the material world. It considers how emotions and sensory experiences influence our interactions with the environment. In summary, new materialism in feminist theory offers a fresh perspective that challenges traditional dualisms, embraces materiality, and recognises the entangled relationships between humans and the non-human world. It encourages a more inclusive an

Haraway in *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) introduced the cyborg as a metaphor for rethinking boundaries between humans and machines. She argued that the cyborg represents a hybrid and fluid identity that transcends traditional categories of gender, race and species. She also proposed a framework of material semiotics that examine how meaning is produced through interactions of material entities including the humans and non humans and technologies. The traditional separation of nature and culture has facilitated traditional forms of oppression. She advocates a more integrated perspective recognising the interconnectedness of the non human and human social species. Haraway writes about 'companion species' emphasising the close relationship between humans and animals. She highlights the agency that animals exercise as active participants in shaping human lives and identities. She calls for an 'ethic of care and responsibility advocating a more compassionate and attentive approach to human and non human others. Donna Haraway's writings have been influential in reshaping feminist theory and posthumanist thought. Post humanist thought has also questioned the superiority of the human race and have argued for ecological justice. They question the place of humans in this world.

### **Post Humanist Feminism**

The post humanist thought is not just anti humanist and anti Anthropocene<sup>ii</sup> but is much more dynamic and complex. Rossi Braidotti (2013) contend that we as feminists need to understand that we belong to the human race. 'Humans' are associated with power and inclusion and exclusion. So as posthumanists we need to go beyond humanism and look at life or Zoe as Braidotti terms it. Zoe "is a dynamic self organising structure of life itself". It includes human and non human- technology, nature and animals existing in a symbiotic system of co dependence and co relation. Our functioning in this global world has to include the impact of technology

and capitalism on our lives. Animal studies post 1990s and studies on environmental degradation too exemplifies the post human world. The world is also characterised by increased consumption, commodification, data and digitisation and the increasing spread of the web of capitalism and soft capitalism.. Braidotti advocates a 'Zoe centred egalitarianism'. The only way this is possible is a gradual step by step assemblage of affirmative action by all. However the posthumanist approach towards a world that is interconnected is not new and is something that has been a part of the ancient Indian philosophical tradition. In the next section I briefly examine this.

### **“New Materialism” in Indian Philosophical Tradition**

The post humanist approach within new materialism can be found in ancient Indian philosophical traditions. Just as post humanism is a theoretical approach that proposes a way of living in this world the Hindu scriptures -the Vedas, The Upanishad, the dharamashastras and the Puranas<sup>iii</sup> should also be viewed as theoretical propositions about a way of living. There are a lot of debates and viewpoints about these philosophical traditions but despite these they promote a certain way of living.

In Indian philosophy man and nature exist along a continuum and all lives have the same right to existence. Thus peaceful and harmonious coexistence is advisable. Srishti i.e. the divine creation includes humans and non humans and the belief in monistic ontology, respects the rights of all. The concept of srishti encompasses the living that includes manushya (man), pashu (animals), pakshi (birds) and vanaspati (vegetation).

Mountains, rivers, trees all elements of the environment have been considered a sacred. As per the Brahmanical approach to the ecosystem several texts from the vedic period and the dharamashastras designate nature as an integral part of human life. For example in the Vedas, there is reverence for elements like Agni (fire), Vayu (wind), Varuna (water), and Prithvi (earth), acknowledging their vital roles in rituals and as representations of divine forces. The Rig Veda for example considers the universe as being made up of five divine elements - earth, fire, water, space and air. The Yajur Veda propitiates peace for all in this srishti. The Atharva veda too speaks about the close organic relationship between man and nature illustrated by the phrase “Vasudeva Kutumbaka” meaning that all on this earth belong to one family. The Vedas contain hymns that express a deep understanding of ecological balance. They recognise the interdependence of maintaining an ecological balance.

The Puranas also describe the divine origin of rivers, mountains, and forests, highlighting their spiritual significance. Many Puranic rituals are performed in sacred natural settings, like riversides or temples within

forests, reinforcing the connection between spirituality and the environment. The Puranas like the Narsingh Puran personifies trees as Gods. The Padma puran and Karna puran advocate that some trees are divine and should be venerated. The Manusmriti condemns cruelty to animals and advocates sustainable living.

The Puranas, contain moral and ethical teachings that emphasise the need to respect the elements of srishti. They emphasise the consequences of human actions on the natural world and the importance of preserving the environment for future generations. The Puranas often use animals as symbols and metaphors in their narratives where animals are used to convey moral, philosophical, or religious lessons. Some rituals and practices prescribed in these texts involve conservation efforts like the protection of certain trees or groves is a common theme, reflecting the importance of preservation of biodiversity.

By designating certain land sites, rivers, trees and animals as sacred the Vedas and Puranas have edicts that are directed towards maintaining an ecological balance in the srishti. These texts also describe specific pilgrimage sites, often located in natural settings, as places of spiritual significance. Pilgrims visit these sites to connect with the divine in a natural context, reinforcing the idea that nature itself can be a portal to the sacred. While both the Vedas and the Puranas celebrate the sacredness of the environment and emphasise the continuum of humans and nature, the interpretations and practices are spatially varied across different regions of India.

In the Indian philosophical tradition some elements of nature like rivers are gendered and sacred. There are mythological stories in which rivers for example are depicted as masculine or feminine. Almost all Indian rivers like the Yamuna, Ganga, Godavari, Gomti, Krishna are feminine and sacred. Some like the Brahmaputra, the Sona and Damodar are masculine and also sacred. Some deities are also female such as Usha (the dawn) and Saraswati (the goddess of knowledge). Goddesses like Parvati, Lakshmi, and Durga hold central positions in Hindu religious practices. In India there are over 1 million sacred forests and groves (Wadhwa, 2023). Apart from these texts we also find similar views in Buddhism and Jainism. The tribal way of life too is organised around such belief systems. However I shall not be discussing these here.

Although the views on nature man interaction as discussed in the Vedas, the dharamashastras point to a monistic way of life that is an ideal and utopian way to live. In practice there is a lack of equality between men and women. Humans also consider themselves superior to animals and also nature. The interpretations of these texts were mired in a casteist, patriarchal and humanist framework. These texts in the hands of the upper castes were interpreted in a way that promoted rituals, casteism and also animal sacrifices. While these texts contain references to women as goddesses, scholars, and moral exemplars, they functioned in a patriarchal society.

As a result, there are instances of gender inequality, restrictions on women's roles and practices that were oppressive. The religious laws and social norms are operative in an androcentric perspective. In terms of animals we find that the Rig Veda for instance stressed on yajna (sacrifice) of animals. In the vedas ritual sacrifice of animals is prescribed. Rituals like the Ashvamedha involved horse sacrifice. The Kalika Puran prescribes sacrifice of goats, fowls, elephants, cattle and sheep (Dalal, 2014, Bose, 2009). Animal sacrifices in modern day Hinduism are to be found across different parts of India like Assam, Odisha, Jharkhand, Kerala and West Bengal (Fuller, 2004). The popular perception is that cows are sacred and are often referred to as mother in Hinduism. Harris (N.D.) points out the contradictions in Vedic literature regarding the sacredness of the cow. The earliest Vedas prescribed cow sacrifice and the eating of beef was a part of rituals. The vedas have a contradictory approach to the cow with some prescribing cow slaughter and others prohibiting it (Harris, ND). Cow slaughter is legally banned in some states of India but is allowed in other states of India. It's common to see emaciated, dirty cows roaming the streets and collecting around garbage dumps looking for food. Despite they being 'scared mothers' they are in a pitiable condition.

The perceived superiority of the human race can be for instance seen in the context of the Green Revolution. Environmentalists have documented the impact of technology in agriculture during the Green Revolution. On the one hand it did lead to increase in food production but it upset the ecological balance and led to depletion of ground resources and pollution of rivers etc. The ill effects of technology have led to an increase in the incidence of cancer in the Green Revolution belt in Punjab.

Following the posthumanist feminists, women and other subjugated categories intersect in various ways. Even in terms of nature just designating them as scared does not do away with the issues of violation of nature. For instance, as I have argued elsewhere in a study on the river Yamuna in Delhi, India (Bhatia and Kumar 2006) we treat our rivers as we treat our women. Even though the rivers and women are both objects of veneration they are often subject to violations of their rights. Rivers are dirtied and women too are violated and subject to social injustices. Other 'sacred' non humans like cows and the banyan tree are often violated. Cows in the urban space are often seen eating garbage and are emaciated and neglected. The banyan tree is often a spot where 'religious' debris like broken idols, wilting flowers etc. are deposited.

This subjugation and traditional power structures, oppressive hierarchies, and normative narratives needs to be deconstructed. Intersecting sites of oppression add to the subjugation and injustices. For the world to attain ecological harmony the human essentialist assumptions about identity needs rearticulation in a more fluid

and diverse framework. As posthumanist feminists the agency of marginalised humans and non human categories like rivers, cows and trees needs to be recognised and acknowledged. Posthumanist feminism and other subjugated categories in the universe share common themes of deconstruction, intersectionality, agency, and the critique of traditional hierarchies and essentialist narratives. Together, they contribute to a posthumanist understanding of the diverse and interconnected nature of human experiences and struggles for justice and equality.

## References

- Allaimo, S. (2010). *Bodily Natures*. In *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self*. Indiana University Press.
- Alaimo, S., and Hekman, S. (2008). *Introduction: Emerging models of materiality in feminist theory* in Alaimo, S. And Hekman, S. Eds. *Material Feminism*. Indiana University Press.
- Beauvoir, S. d. (1972). *The Second Sex*. (H. Parshley, Trans.) Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Benhabib, S. (1999). *Sexual Difference and Collective Identities: The New Global Constellation*. *Signs*, 24 (No. 2 (Winter, 1999)), 335-361.
- Barad, K. (2003). *Posthumanist Performativity: Towards and Understanding of How Matter Comes to matter* *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(3). 801-831
- Bhatia, R., and M. Kumar. (2016). *The Social Ecology of the Yamuna*, in Berfu Ahyar (ed.), *International Sociology and Critical Perspectives Conference on Social Movements*. Istanbul, SOCIOCRI '16 DAKAM
- Bose, P.N. (2009) *A History of Hindu Civilization During British Rule, Volume 1*. BiblioBazaar.
- Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. Cambridge, MA: Polity.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2015). *Judith Butler on gender and the trans experience: "One should be free to determine the course of one's gendered life*. May 26 .Verso. Books. Available at <https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/blogs/news/2009-judith-butler-on-gender-and-the-trans-experience-one-should-be-free-to-determine-the-course-of-one-s-gendered-life>. Accessed 8 October 2023.
- Cancian, F. (1992). *Feminist Science: Methodologies That Challenge Inequality*. *Gender and Society*, 6(4), 623-642.

- Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland. (2002). *Feminist Methodology. Challenges and Choices*. London: Sage Publications.
- Coleman, R. 2014. *Inventive Feminist Theory:Representation, Materiality and Intensive Time*. *Women:A Cultural Review*, 25(1) 27-45.
- Coole, D., & Frost, S. (Eds.). (2010). *New materialisms: Ontology, agency, and politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822392996>
- Dalal, Roshen (2014). *Hinduism: An Alphabetical Guide*. Penguin UK.
- Frost,S. 2011 *The implications of the new materialisms for feminist epistemology in* Grasswick, H. Eds. *Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science*. Springer, Dordrecht.
- Fuller, Christopher John (2004). *The camphor flame: popular Hinduism and society in India*. Princeton, N.J. Princeton University Press.
- Gorelick, S. (1991). *Contradictions of feminist methodology*. *Gender and Society*. Vol. 5( No. 4 ) December, 459-477 .
- Harding, S. (1987). *Introduction: Is there a feminist method?*. In S. H. (ed.), *Feminism & Methodology: (Vols. Social Science Issues,, pp. 1 -14)*, Bloomington:Indiana University Press,.
- Harding, S. (1991). *Whose science? Whose knowledge?: Thinking from women's lives*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Harris, M. (ND). *India's sacred cow*. Available at <http://people.uncw.edu/ricej/Intro/indiasacredcow.pdf>. Accessed on 15 October 2023.
- Hartsock, N. (1983). *The Feminist standpoint:Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism*. In S. a. Harding, *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology and Philosophy of Science* (pp. 283-310). London: Reidel.
- Hartmann, H. (2017). *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union*. In C. R.-K. ed., *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (Vol. 8, pp. 214-228). New York: Routledge.
- Hekman, S. (1997). *Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited*. *Signs*, Winter 22, 341-365.
- Hélène Cixous, K. C. (1976). *The Laugh of the Medusa*. *Signs*, 1, Number 4 (Summer), 875-893.

- Hill-Collins, P. (2013). Learning From the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought. In S. J. Scott, *Gender: A Sociological Reader* (pp. 69-78). New York: Routledge.
- Hines, S. (2015). Feminist Theories. In V. R. Richardson, *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies* (4 ed., pp. 23-39). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- hooks, b. (2017). Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women. In D. T. ed., *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader* (pp. 484-500). New York: Routledge.
- Mies Maria. (1983). Towards a Methodology of Feminist Research. In G. B. edited, *Theories of Women's Studies*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Molm, L. (1993). Toward integrating micro and macro, structure and agency, science, and feminism. In P. E. edited, *Theory on Gender, Feminism on Theory*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter
- Oakley, A. (1972). *Sex, Gender and Society*. London: Temple Smith.
- Rubin, G. (1975). The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex. In R. R. ed, *Towards An Anthropology of Women*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Smith, D. E. (1974). Women's Perspective As a Radical Critique of Sociology. *Sociological Enquiry*, 44 (1), 7-13.
- Speer, S. (2002). What can conversation analysis contribute to feminist methodology? Putting reflexivity into practice. *Discourse & Society*, Vol. 13, No. 6, Special Issue: Gender, Language, Conversation Analysis and Feminism, November, 783-803.
- Stanley and Wise, L. (1990). Method, Methodology and Epistemology in Feminist Research Process. In L. S. ed, *Feminist praxis: research, theory and epistemology in feminist sociology* (pp. 21-45), London: Routledge.
- Wadhwa, A. (2023). Sacred Groves, the secret wizards of conservation. Available at [https://www.iucn.org/blog/202308/sacred-groves-secret-wizards-conservation#International Union for Conservation of Nature](https://www.iucn.org/blog/202308/sacred-groves-secret-wizards-conservation#International%20Union%20for%20Conservation%20of%20Nature). Accessed 9 October 2023.
- Walby, S. (1989). Theorising patriarchy. *Sociology*, 23 (2), , 213-234.
- Wallby, S. (1997). *Gender transformations*. London: Routledge.
- Wollstonecraft, M. (1793). *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*. Dublin: J. Stockdale.



<sup>i</sup> Postmodernism, associated with thinkers like Jean Baudrillard, J. F. Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, challenges the notion that metanarratives, which are grand, overarching explanations of history and society can explain society. What's considered true is contingent on the social and cultural context. Postmodern feminists, like their postmodernist counterparts, reject unified structural explanations of reality provided by Marxists, liberal feminists, and radical feminists. They argue that reality is always constructed and that metanarratives overlook the fact that reality is partial and constructed. They emphasise the importance of recognising multiple contexts and realities due to diversity in identities based on race, sex, age, and sexuality.

<sup>ii</sup> The Anthropocene is a proposed geological epoch that signifies the significant and lasting impact of human activities on Earth's geology and ecosystems. It believes that human beings are the dominant force in shaping the Earth's future. It acknowledges the impact of human activities like industrialisation, deforestation on Earth's ecosystem.

<sup>iii</sup> The Vedas are the religious texts in Sanskrit and are considered to be the oldest Hindu scriptures. They are transmitted orally. The Puranas are stories of traditional folklore and legends. Purans literally mean old. It is a vast genre of Indian literature about legends and traditional lores.

