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Feminist Public Intellectuals: Emerging Trends In Social Sciences

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Abstract: *The 21st century has brought significant transformations across various fields, including the social sciences, where feminist perspectives have become increasingly influential. Feminist approaches play a vital role in advocating for gender equality, challenging patriarchal norms, and highlighting the importance of understanding women's experiences and viewpoints. Emphasizing intersectionality, these perspectives promote diversity, inclusivity, and reflexivity. Feminist scholars draw from multiple disciplines—such as sociology, psychology, political science, economics, and philosophy—to explore how gender intersects with other forms of social inequality and to devise strategies for reshaping power dynamics and societal norms. This paper focuses on gendered experiences aiming to explore emerging trends of feminism in the social sciences, like transnational feminism, digital feminism. Additionally, the paper will critically examine the contributions of contemporary public intellectuals to feminist theory during rapid social change in global context.*

Keywords: Feminism, Public intellectuals, Intersectionality, Gender equality, Social norms.

Introduction

The 21st century has brought significant transformations across various fields, including the social sciences, where feminist perspectives have become increasingly influential. The social sciences

are concerned with the nature of societies and the relationships, activities, and affairs of individuals within them. The social sciences encompass a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, history, economics, psychology, political science, education, geography, criminology, philosophy, management, and linguistics. In addition to these core fields, several emerging and specialized areas have expanded the scope of social sciences. These include social work, social policy and development studies, public administration, correctional administration, demography, international studies, archaeology, law, media and journalism, urban studies, gender and cultural studies, as well as public health policy and studies. These disciplines undertake a scientific and systematic study of human behaviour in social contexts. Social sciences are interdisciplinary by nature and aims to understand the various aspects of life in society.

Within the field of social sciences, feminisms represent a variety of theoretical and political approaches that seek to explore and challenge gender-based inequalities and patriarchal norms, advocate for gender equality and highlight the importance of understanding women's experiences and viewpoints. These perspectives are closely linked to the social sciences, as they both aim to analyse social structures, relationships, and power dynamics, particularly in relation to gender.

The feminist view in social sciences has changed the narrative of social sciences and their way of research, bringing in a new trend. The recent trend in social sciences include recognizing the interconnected nature of social phenomena with domains like psychology, biology and economics etc, climate change concerns, environment degradation and sustainability and environment justice. It also includes issues of social justice, equity and human rights and a critical examination of identity dynamics, as well as the principles of diversity and inclusion. Social scientists investigate how identities are formed, negotiated, and challenged within various social contexts, taking into account intersecting factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and nationality.

New trends in social sciences show how human societies are changing and highlight the need for new ways to study and solve social problems. By looking into these trends, researchers help us better

understand how people behave, how societies are organized, and how changes happen in this connected world.

Social Science and Feminist Perspectives

Social sciences like sociology, psychology, political science and economics have been influenced by feminist theories and in turn have influenced the way in which feminist theory developed.

In sociology, feminist theory has significantly shaped the study of gender and gender inequality, leading to the emergence of new perspectives on gender and its role in society. It has challenged the traditional belief that gender is a fixed, biologically determined trait, instead highlighting how gender is socially and culturally constructed. Feminist theory also emphasizes how gender is influenced by power dynamics and systems of inequality.

In psychology, feminist theory has had a strong impact on how researchers study gender and the experiences of women. It has led to the development of new ideas and approaches that focus on understanding the unique psychological experiences of women. Feminist psychologists have questioned the outdated belief that women are naturally less intelligent or less capable than men. Instead, they focus on how gender stereotypes, social expectations, and discrimination affect women's mental health, behaviour, and life opportunities. This approach has helped create a more inclusive and accurate understanding of human psychology by highlighting the importance of gender and equality.

In political science, feminist theory has played a key role in shaping research on gender and politics, leading to the development of new frameworks for understanding how gender influences—and is influenced by—political systems and processes. Feminist political scholars have questioned the traditional view of politics as a male-dominated arena and have instead highlighted how gender-based discrimination and power imbalances affect women's political participation and representation.

In economics, feminist theory has impacted research on gender and economy, leading to the development of new theories and perspectives on how gender shapes and is shaped by economic processes and institutions. Feminist theorists have rejected the idea that economy is

gender neutral and instead emphasized on how gender-based discrimination and unequal power relations shape women's economic opportunities and experiences.

Feminist theory has impacted the social sciences strongly and continues to influence research and ideas in these fields. By questioning traditional beliefs and systems of power, it has introduced fresh and important ways of looking at social, cultural, and political issues. Feminist theory has also played a key role in promoting gender equality and supporting the empowerment of women.

Fundamental Aspects of Feminist Theories in the Social Sciences

- 1. Identifying gender as a social construct-** Feminist scholars in social sciences have recognized gender as a socially constructed identity, rather than being a fixed biological identity framed by cultural and historical factors.
- 2. Feminist social science highlights intersectionality-** Feminist scholars argue that different types of oppression—like gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability—are connected and affect each other.
- 3. Criticizing patriarchy-** Feminist social science criticizes and challenges existing patriarchal power structures in the society because it creates gender inequalities.
- 4. Promoting diversity and inclusivity-** Feminist social science focuses on being inclusive and valuing different experiences, especially those of people who have been ignored in the past. It gives special attention to women and gender minorities, making sure their voices and perspectives are heard and respected in research.
- 5. Active science-** Feminist social science is driven by action. Its focus is on promoting gender equality by applying research findings to policy and social change efforts.
- 6. Focus on reflexivity-** Feminist social science emphasizes the importance of reflexivity, which means being self-aware and thoughtful throughout the research process. This includes critically examining one's own background, position in society,

and personal biases, as well as recognizing how power dynamics influence the way research is conducted and interpreted.

- 7. Integrative approach-** Feminist social science combines insights from various fields—such as sociology, anthropology, political science, and psychology—to explore and tackle gender-based inequalities in society.

21st-Century Feminist Public Intellectuals

These intellectuals shape discourse through scholarship, activism, public commentary, and media presence:

1. Angela Davis

- Continues to be a prominent figure in abolition feminism.
- Connected the ideas of gender, race, and the prison system.
- Promotes activism on intersection and solidarity politics.

2. Judith Butler

- Introduced the concept of gender performativity to challenge the idea of fixed gender norms and paved the way for dynamic identity expression.
- Advocates for nonviolence and liveable lives for oppressed identities.

3. Sara Ahmed

- Known for works, *The Feminist Killjoy* and *Complaint*.
- Writes on the concept of affective politics of feminism showing how emotions like anger or frustration are tools of politics

4. Kimberlé Crenshaw

- Popularized the concept of intersectionality, which showed how the experiences of discrimination and disadvantage are created by the interaction of various social categories such as race, gender, class and sexuality. It remains an important framework in law, policy, and activist work.
- Focuses on structural inequality, race, and legal invisibility.

5. Silvia Federici

- Marxist feminist and historian who focuses on women's labour and the history of witch-hunts.

- Emphasizes on issues of global unpaid labour, reproductive labour, and capitalist exploitation of women.

Feminist Theories Shaping 21st-Century Social Sciences

1. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, Collins).

- Perspective which is now foundational across disciplines like sociology, law, political science, and education.
- Encourages integrated analysis of power and identity.

2. Decolonial Feminism.

- Thinkers like Françoise Vergès, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Lila Abu-Lughod challenge Eurocentric feminism.
- Focus on colonial legacies, indigenous knowledge, and transnational activism.
- Urged for feminist theory rooted in local contexts and lived experience.

3. Abolitionist Feminism.

- Gained momentum through scholars like Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Mariame Kaba.
- Calls for dismantling carceral systems and emphasized on building community-based justice.
- Connected racial capitalism with gendered state violence.

4. Queer and Trans Feminisms.

- The notions of gender fluidity, embodiment, and nonbinary experiences expanded the scope of feminism.
- Trans perspectives into legal studies, history, and healthcare were brought by Thinkers like Dean Spade, Susan Stryker, and Jules Gill-Peterson.
- Expands gender justice frameworks Challenges biological essentialism.

5. Affective and Emotional Labour Theories.

- Builds on Arlie Hochschild's work and further expanded by Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant.
- Explores how emotions are politically charged and central to labour, resistance, and social norms.

6. Ecofeminism and Feminist Political Ecology.

- Feminist thoughts were merged with climate justice, sustainability, and science studies by thinkers like Vandana Shiva, Bina Agarwal, and Donna Haraway
- Points out that women, especially in poorer countries, are more severely impacted by damage to the environment.

7. Digital Feminism and Networked Activism.

- Explored by Zeynep Tufekci and others.
- Feminists now organize and theorize via digital platforms, memes, and viral activism (#MeToo, #SayHerName, #NiUnaMenos).
- Examines surveillance, digital labour, and online harassment from feminist lenses.

Global and Grassroots Perspectives

- 21st-century feminist thought gives due importance to local activism, indigenous feminisms, and non-Western epistemologies.
- Following Movements emerged globally, like:
 - Dalit feminism in India
 - Latin American feminist anti-violence campaigns
 - African feminisms focused on economic and reproductive justice
 These are not just regional variations but critical interventions in global feminist thought.
- 21st-century feminist public intellectuals challenge not only patriarchy but also racism, capitalism, colonialism, and heteronormativity.
- Their ideas are shaping the methodologies, ethics, and frameworks of the social sciences.
- Feminism today is intersectional, inclusive, interdisciplinary, and increasingly global.

Critical Analysis Of Feminist Perspectives In Social Sciences

Feminist perspectives and theories have significantly shaped the social sciences over the past several decades by challenging dominant paradigms, reshaping methodologies, and expanding the scope of inquiry. Below is a critical analysis of their influence and usefulness:

1. Challenging Established Paradigms.

Before Feminist Interventions:

Social sciences—like sociology, political science, anthropology, and economics—were earlier largely shaped by male scholars and reflected male-centred views. Many theories were built based on male experiences and often treated men's experiences as universal.

Feminist Challenge:

Feminist theorists questioned the objectivity and neutrality of traditional social science and argued that knowledge production was deeply gendered. They disclosed the biases in supposedly "universal" theories and advocated for a re-evaluation of what counts as knowledge and whose experiences are valued.

Impact:

- Made it clear that gender plays a key role in shaping how society is structured and works.
- Led to the re-examination of foundational theories (e.g., critiques of Marxism, functionalism, positivism).

2. Methodological Contributions.

Traditional Methods:

Quantitative methods were dominated. They often emphasized objectivity, generalizability, and detachment of the researcher.

Feminist Methodologies:

- Emphasis laid on qualitative methods, reflexivity, and the role of emotion and subjectivity in research.
- Valued lived experiences of marginalized groups.
- Introduced standpoint theory (e.g., Sandra Harding), arguing that knowledge is socially situated, and perspectives from marginalized positions can reveal deeper insights.

Impact:

- Extended the methodological scope of social science research.
- Promoted ethical considerations in research, especially around power dynamics between researcher and subject.

3. Theoretical Innovations.

Feminist scholars introduced new concepts and reworked on existing ones:

- Intersectionality (Kimberlé Crenshaw): Highlighted the intersection of gender with race, class, sexuality, and other identities, complicating simplistic understandings of oppression.
- Gender as Social Construct: Challenged the inherent notions of sex and gender and influenced queer theory and post-structuralist thought.
- The Personal is Political: Connected private experiences, such as domestic violence, reproductive rights to broader social structures.

Impact:

- Broadened the focus of social science to encompass areas such as care work, reproductive labour, and emotional labour.
- Influenced critical race theory, postcolonial studies, and disability studies.

4. Transforming Disciplinary Boundaries

Feminism not only influenced existing disciplines but also led to the creation of new interdisciplinary fields such as:

- Women's Studies / Gender Studies
- Queer Studies
- Masculinity Studies.

Impact:

- These fields challenge the boundaries and assumptions of traditional disciplines, fostering more inclusive, intersectional, and critical approaches.

5. Critiques and Limitations

Internal Critiques:

- Early feminist theory faced criticism for centring on the experiences of white, middle-class women from the West, while overlooking the perspectives of women of colour, Indigenous women, and those from the Global South.
- Debates exist between different feminist traditions: liberal, radical, socialist, postcolonial, queer, etc.

External Critiques:

- Feminist perspectives have been critiqued for introducing ideological and relativistic frameworks that, according to some, weaken the foundation of objective inquiry.
- Feminist contributions have been challenged by some for potentially politicizing academic spaces and promoting a more fragmented view of knowledge.

Conclusion

Feminism has been deeply important for the development of social science. It has made the field more thoughtful, inclusive, and ethical by encouraging scholars to reflect on power structures not just in society, but within academia itself. Feminist perspectives have led to important changes in how research is done and have helped bring attention to the voices and experiences of those who were often overlooked. These contributions have given us a richer understanding of the social world. However, feminist ideas are not fully accepted in all areas of social science, and in some cases, their impact has been weakened by being absorbed into more mainstream or market-driven academic settings. Still, feminism didn't just add gender to social science—it challenged and reshaped how we ask questions and seek knowledge. Whether accepted or debated, feminist theory has become essential for anyone who wants to truly understand society.

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