

## **Editorial**

### **Feminine Genius: A Philosophical Project**

A feminist philosophical project begins with a critical awareness that the philosophical tradition is characterised by the absence of women and dominance of men; feminists also come to the conclusion that the absence of women and dominance of men is the result of negation of body and gender. This erasure of body and gender from philosophical investigations resulted in the erasure of women from philosophical tradition. Leading philosophers were prejudiced against women and their capacity for philosophical investigations and did not admit them to their philosophical schools. As a result, prior to twentieth century, the history of philosophy does not have any significant women philosophers and the life and experience of women are missing in the philosophical tradition.

In the Platonic paradigm of philosophical investigations, the philosopher sets out to know the truth in perfect solitude, independent of body, world, and fellow human beings. Body, for Plato, is a prison in which the soul is kept as a punishment and is an obstacle for the philosopher's noble goal. Descartes continued this philosophical contempt for body and spoke of a self-conscious and autonomous thinking substance, independent of body and world. Descartes claimed that he can think of not having a body and identified himself as a thinking substance. It is thinking that defines the essence of a human subject; and human being is essentially a spiritual being. Wittgenstein, at the beginning of the twentieth century, discarded the study of 'human being' together with body and mind/soul to empirical sciences, declaring such studies have "nothing to do with philosophy."<sup>1</sup> The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden, London: Routledge, 1922, 6.53.

<sup>2</sup>Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.641.

Radical feminists, on the other hand wanted to develop a philosophy of women, by women and for women, because as Elaine Showalter observed, "I do not think that feminist criticism can find a usable past in the androcentric critical tradition. It must find its own subject, its own system, its own theory, and its own voice ... we must choose to have the argument out at last on our own premises."<sup>3</sup> When feminist philosophers insist that 'we must choose to have the argument out at last on our premises,' they are assuming the universalizing tone of traditional philosophy (on the premise that what is said equally applies to all human beings, irrespective of gender), about which they were critical. A feminist project irrespective of the differences of race, class, caste, age, and social status is doubtful, to say the least. Feminist projects were also critically aware of the situatedness of philosophical traditions. As the body and experiences are brought to the philosophical investigations feminists also need to accept the plurality of views.

Women's experience is so diverse and gender categories and roles are so deeply structured by other systems of social differentiation, it is untenable to treat 'gender' as a neutral category for analysis or to presume a unitary feminine humanity. Sensitivity to feminist problems and critique demands that there is no universalizing or homogeneous category of 'women'; the differences are to be taken into account. When we look and explore the landscape of 'feminist humanity', we see all sorts of distinct and indistinct movements, such as political, racial, psychological, linguistic, religious, etc. The concept makes a tangled impression. One cannot find the description of *the* feminine genius. In this issue of the *Journal of Dharma*, we focus our attention both on the distinct categories of feminist projects and on the ways in which the insights of feminine humanity, however categorized, may inform our understanding of human beings and human ways of life.

A feminist critique is good for mainstream philosophy: it is good for men and women; it is good for humanity. The critique,

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<sup>3</sup>Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in Wilderness" in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge, London, Longman, 1988, 334.

if correct, is not limited to women; traditional philosophies were neutering men as well. It is good to live in a world of men and women than to inhabit a world of sexless creatures. A philosophical project should reflect human concerns, passions, and life. The erasure of body, subjectivity, emotions, and relations from philosophical discourse is not detrimental to feminism alone but to philosophical anthropology as such. An overemphasis on mind, objectivity, reason, and individuality distort not only our quest for an authentic feminist humanity but also humanity as such. Feminist philosophies' emphasis on experience and practice is a corrective for all branches of philosophy. Instead of escaping from the body, the world, and other men and women, feminist philosophy should proceed from actual discourses, practices, and streams of life that have been excluded from traditional philosophy.

Philosophy's real concern is not with the Platonic subject, Cartesian ego, or Wittgenstein's metaphysical subject; but with the actions, passions, and situations which constitute the streams of human life. Human being is to be reduced neither to body or mind nor to reason or will. Privileging of the mind over the body was a wrong move in the philosophical tradition. The consequent privileging of man over woman was even graver a mistake. Both men and women are embodied and both need to claim back their bodies and make it an integral part of philosophical discourse. Philosophers, after all, are embodied and their significant experiences depend on body, world, and community. The philosopher in solitude contemplating truth was a philosophical chimera.

Philosophy has to be rooted in and oriented to life; only in the stream of life philosophy has meaning and significance. Feminist projects' emphasis on body, experience, practice, and life are important correctives to philosophy in general; they bring fresh life to philosophical practice. Paulachan Kochappilly, in the first article, presents "Feminine Genius as the Wisdom for the Celebration of Life." Woman is seen as symbol of wisdom and freedom and she is considered as the embodiment of care, commitment, and compassion. She is recognized as the person

mothering life, mothering love, and mothering light in the world, which makes her as the window to wisdom enabling humanity to celebrate life in its wholeness. Her inclusive, intuitive, and integrating perspectives draw a roadmap of leadership of coexistence, cooperation, and celebration.

Feminist epistemology, like other epistemologies that are built on the debris of modern epistemology, is strong in its critique of the infirmities of modern epistemology but weak in delivering objective knowledge. Since the heart of feminist epistemology is the situatedness of the knower, it needs to attain objectivity or universality of truth without compromising on diversity and subjectivity. Although the problem is not unique to the feminists, it is more pressing for them because unlike some shades of postmodernism that do away with all universal norms, feminists are committed to the Enlightenment ideals of justice, freedom, and emancipation, all of which call for objectivity and universality beyond one's preferred group. Faced with this situation, George Karuvelil in his paper "Contextual Realism: Feminist Epistemology 'Out of the Fly Bottle?'" outlines an epistemological position, making room for objectivity, subjectivity and diversity.

"Feminine Epistemology within Academy: An Alternative Way of Pedagogical Practice" by Naznin examines critically and creatively the role of women in the field of teaching, which has been undervalued and denigrated for a long time by educational experts. Though the preponderance of women in teaching enabled them to apply their distinct ways of learning and teaching to the profession effectively, they were not recognized either in the historical texts of education or in the philosophy of education. The study analyses the traditional teaching patterns that persist and dominate contemporary pedagogical practice. Ensuing traditional patterns not only deprive women from exhibiting their inherent abilities but also impede positive changes in the quality of teaching. It is argued that the experience of mothering in the private sphere offers alternative ways of remodelling the pedagogical practices, facilitating

professional educators in developing gender sensitivity, and sensitivity to different learning abilities among students.

The feminist philosophers of religion such as Pamela Sue Anderson and Grace Jantzen have endeavoured to identify masculine bias in the concepts of God found in the scriptures of the world's religions and in other religious writings and practices in which religious beliefs are proposed and assessed, and to transform the Philosophy of Religion, and thereby the lives of women, by recommending new or expanded epistemologies and using these to re-vision a concept of the divine which will inspire both women and men to work for the promotion of a just and compassionate society. It is argued in the paper, "Feminist Philosophy of Religion: An Inclusive Perspective" by Jaya Babu Thulimelli, that the epistemologies of Jantzen and Anderson are not distinctively feminist, except by emphasising the inclusion of women. This might mean being more open to the concepts of the divine which are not, even in a metaphorical sense, masculine, and enhancing awareness of the ways in which abstract arguments about the divine could be relevant to the practical aspects of human life which have traditionally been the preserve of women. Insofar as these are increasingly also the responsibility of men, however, a feminist Philosophy of Religion might now be more appropriately characterised as an inclusive Philosophy of Religion.

Kierkegaard's contribution to feminist thinking is a much debated issue as his writings depict women both beautifully and spitefully at the same time. On the one hand, a few scholars argue that his views are blatantly misogynic, and on the other, some argue that his views are redeeming. In the view of the latter, Kierkegaardian thoughts surpass the abstract patriarchal ethics to an ethics of relation or ethics of care. In "Reclamation of the Feminine Genius beyond Misogyny: A Heuristic Reading of Kierkegaard," Joshy Pazhukkathara argues that though one may detect many lines of misogyny in his writings, they can be seen compensated through the insightful lines he writes about women. His insights on feminine qualities and her role in human and religious life can only be an outcome of one who loves and

admires them. In this paper the author examines Kierkegaard's transitions from misogyny to reclamation through a heuristic re-reading of his thinking, and contribute to women's voice for their personal identity and appropriation of feminine genius in society and religion.

The final article of this issue of the Journal of Dharma, "Early Buddhist Attitude: Female Body and *Arhatship*" by Gyan Prakash re-examines this early Buddhist attitude towards the female body and argues that, in the early Buddhist philosophy, female body is worthy of *Arhatship*. The paper begins with examining the Buddhist concept of *Self* and body to show that the body cannot be the material or contributory cause of subjective consciousness. Early Buddhist texts, however, reflect an understanding that female body is the effect of bad *kamma* of one's previous life. The concept of *indriyas* and female body is analysed then because, according to *Abhidharmakosa* of Vasubandhu, the quality of an *Arhat* can be obtained only with the help of eleven *indriyas*. The sexual nature of the body is immaterial with regard to attaining *Arhatship*.

Wishing you critical and creative thoughts on Feminine Genius from philosophical perspectives, may I submit this issue of the *Journal of Dharma* for your reading and reflection, enjoyment and enlightenment.

**Jose Nandhikkara, Editor-in-Chief**