UNIT 2 SOCIAL SCIENCES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The social sciences have typically been ‘fathered’ by male scholars, and until the past few decades, social science researchers were largely male. The disciplines are often flawed at the root, due to patriarchal assumptions. The themes selected for study and research have traditionally been predominantly associated with masculine, rather than feminine, worlds. Even when the social sciences study typically feminine themes, their perspective is often loaded towards a male-oriented vision. The rapid inclusion of women in social science research and teaching has helped change the field to a certain extent. Increasingly, women’s perspectives and priorities are being included. Feminist scholars have identified all social science disciplines as being androcentric (that is, male-centered). However, feminist interventions have proved only partially influential. Most teaching of the social sciences still privileges male viewpoints. Women’s voices and ways of seeing are still frequently neglected or repressed. A more thorough-going transformation of social science disciplines is required. Usually, feminist insights are treated as relevant only in subjects or areas of research which deal with gender issues. However, gender insights need to be integrated into many more areas, including basic principles, content and methodology, in the various disciplines.
In this unit you will read about some specific ways in which the different social science disciplines are marked by gender. In order to do this, we will examine some specific gendered constructs in particular disciplines, including history, political science, economics, sociology and anthropology. Various feminist strategies have been deployed with the aim of identifying gender imbalances in social sciences disciplines. Feminist interventions have critiqued existing androcentricism. They have also devised strategies to create wholesome and balanced social science disciplines. [Such feminist interventions will be examined in more detail in Unit 4.]

2.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Identify, question and analyze some of the gender-skewed assumptions underlying social science principles, themes and priorities;
- Analyze gendered assumptions in the methods and content of sociology, anthropology, history, political science and economics;
- Learn to detect how gender biases operate, in the different domains of the social sciences; and
- Explore strategies for improving, sometimes even transforming, social science disciplines.

2.3 FEMINIST CRITIQUES OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Feminist scholars have engaged in strong critiques of the social sciences. They have especially critiqued the positivist approach in the social sciences. This approach emphasizes value-neutral observation, description and explanation. Positivists take observation as the basis for empirical generalizations, and believe that the laws of scientific inquiry apply equally to the social sciences. Typically, however, these laws have been formulated in connection with the natural sciences. The positivist approach has led to the ascendancy of behaviourism in the social sciences. Behaviorism conceives of the social sciences in terms of objective, value-free, predominantly quantitative studies.

Feminist scholars as well as some other philosophers, historians and sociologists of science have pointed out that the subject matter of the social sciences is frequently more complex than the subject matter of the natural sciences. As Mary Hawkesworth puts it, “Both the reflexivity of human beings and the cultural specificity of social practices suggest that
methods devised for the study of the natural world will fail to explicate social reality adequately” (Hawkesworth, 1999). Human beings are reflexive, that is, they can (and do) reflect on their own behaviour, actions and values. They can articulate their concerns with a self-conscious awareness of their own position as subjects, with particular conditioning and biases.

Laws developed under positivist social sciences are usually based on induction, (that is, taking observation as the basis for making generalizations). However, induction cannot guarantee the validity of universal generalizations, because even after thousands of observations of a particular phenomenon occurring in a certain way, there is still a possibility that in the next occurrence, it will happen differently. Laws explaining social behavior can never cover all possible cases. Even if a prediction happens to be correct, it does not imply that the law is necessarily correct.

Feminist as well as other critiques of positivism and behaviourism argue that the practices of social scientists are inherently theory-laden. Theoretical presuppositions set the terms of debate, and confer meaning on experience. They determine what will be accepted as ‘fact’. The presuppositions sustain different methodological techniques for research in the social sciences.

Assumptions about gender are prevalent in various domains of social science theorizing. Gender symbolism and analogies, drawn from contemporary gender relations, are often used to bolster claims about what is ‘natural’ human behavior, and what is not. Gender is a constitutive factor in social relations, but it is also constitutive of assumptions and reasoning in social science theory-making. Feminist scholars have demonstrated how observations, beliefs, theories and methods of inquiry routinely labeled ‘objective’, are often extremely gender-biased.

‘Scientific’ claims made about women/ men/ human societies often arise from the investigators’ own deep-seated presumptions. Many social scientists not only fail to question popular gender stereotypes, they in fact incorporate these stereotypes in their hypotheses about social systems and human behavior. ‘Objective’ social science inquiry displays persistent patterns of sexist error. Norms of objectivity blind researchers to the existence and role of their own ingrained values and biases. As feminist scholars point out, certain social values implicitly structure individual self-perception and perceptions of the social world. When social scientists fail to notice or acknowledge this, their perceptions and observations will be deeply flawed. They will end up making deeply flawed theories. If the majority of social scientists happen to have sexist/ casteist values, for instance, then rather
than investigate the presence of sexist or racist biases as potential sources of error, sexist/racist theories will be taken as valid. Since most researchers may share certain biases (while claiming to be value-neutral), the deeply distorted theories may continue to be accepted as correct. This situation could carry on, unnoticed and uninvestigated, for a long time. These distortions would get challenged only when the biases, values and historical location of the investigator is accepted as a legitimate field of inquiry.

According to E. A. Grosz, the social sciences are considered ‘softer’ bodies of knowledge than the ‘hard-core’ natural sciences (Grosz, 1988, p.57). Over the past decades, women have tended to gravitate towards these ‘softer’ domains of knowledge. Feminist scholars have documented how the traditional social sciences are male-biased, steeped in misconceptions, with deep flaws and inadequacies in observation and theorization. Although social science disciplines claim to contain knowledge about men and women, in fact they have traditionally represented the perspectives and interests of only one sex. Such knowledge is motivated knowledge, which does not acknowledge the interests it serves and is incapable of acknowledging its own masculinity.

Grosz has analysed three levels or types of intellectual misogyny (deep-seated hatred of the female) within mainstream Western social science knowledge: sexist, patriarchal and phallocentric (Grosz, 1988, p.95). Often, the three types occur together. Sexism here connotes specific arguments, propositions and methodologies that privilege men over women. The attitude ranges from open hostility or suspicion, to ignoring or excluding women altogether. It is a manifest, easily illustrated phenomenon. Patriarchy is a more insidious level, more difficult to detect. It implies a systematic form of oppression, with underlying structures that regulate and organize men and women in differential ways, providing a context, support and legitimation for sexism. Phallocentricism conflates men and women into a singular ‘universal’ model which, however, is congruent only with the masculine. In such a model, the female or feminine is represented in male or masculine terms. Women’s concrete specificity and potential for autonomous definition are denied. Phallocentricism is more difficult to locate than sexism or patriarchal assumptions. It renders female autonomy and self-representations impossible, and conceals alternatives. It creates a bedrock of theoretical assumptions that is so pervasive that it is no longer visible.

Women’s entry into various social science disciplines has encouraged questioning of male biases and values. It has helped to widen the scope, themes and understanding of the various social science disciplines. In the
next section, you will see how such an interrogation has helped to reveal misleading assumptions about gendered roles in the fields of anthropology and sociology.

Check Your Progress

What are the three types of ‘intellectual misogyny’ identified by Grosz? Provide one example of each that you have come across in your own life.

2.4 ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

In the social sciences, there is an underlying assumption that men are typically the makers of culture and society, while women are close to nature. Men are taken to be the quintessential producers and creators of social and cultural norms and artefacts, while women are stereotyped as being closer to nature.

Classical anthropology conflates ‘men’ and ‘culture’, ‘women’ and ‘nature’. Culture is assumed to be superior to nature, just as men are assumed to be superior to women. Influential anthropologists such as Levi-Strauss have emphasized a dichotomy between nature and culture. These ideas are the product of particular trends in Western civilization. Western science, including the social sciences, considers culture to be opposed, and superior, to nature. Yet in fact, as feminist anthropologists have pointed out, it is not even possible to clearly demarcate the boundaries between ‘culture’ and ‘nature’. Human beings create cultures which attempt to regulate the working of nature, through human action. If only men are seen to be the basic makers of culture, it seems appropriate that they should regulate and rule over women. But in fact it is not true that men are the basic creators of culture. As anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner notes, “Woman is not ‘in reality’ any closer to (or further from) nature than man - both have consciousness, both are mortal...” (Ortner, 1982).

Anthropologist Sally Slocum points out that the discipline of anthropology has been developed primarily by white Western males, during a specific period in history (Slocum, 1982). Their assumptions and questions are shaped by particular historical situations, and by unconscious cultural biases. Given the cultural and ethnic background of the majority of anthropologists, it is not surprising that the discipline has been biased. There is a strong male bias in the major questions asked, underlying beliefs and interpretations.
Slocum demonstrates this bias by examining the overwhelming role assigned (by mainstream anthropology) to men in the matter of evolution of the human species. She claims that undue importance has been attached to ‘Man the Hunter’, while the role of ‘Woman the Gatherer’ has been systematically devalued. She cites influential anthropologists such as Washburn and Lancaster who have spoken of hunting as a whole pattern of activity and way of life, which separates human beings from apes. They have theorized that hunting is a cornerstone or foundation of human culture. However, since typically only males hunt, this theoretical presupposition makes it seem that women have been precluded from the most significant acts of creation of human culture. Female activities are perceived, in this perspective, as typically devoid of any human creativity or significance in terms of evolution of the species.

Slocum points out flaws in the above perspective. She notes that any theory that leaves out half the human species is unbalanced. The theory of Man the Hunter is not only unbalanced, but it gives undue importance to aggression, and derives culture from killing. Many human traits such as cooperation are theorized as arising out of big-game hunting. However, a more balanced reading of the evidence would lead to very different conclusions. In fact, hunting was not the only important adaptation of the human species, from which culture flowed. Women’s food-gathering activities provided the basic nutrition for human groups (this continues to be the case in contemporary hunting-gathering societies, as recorded by various anthropological studies).

Alternative interpretations of the evidence give rise to different theories. Slocum suggests, for instance, that the earliest human families may have been composed of women, infants and young children. Mothers with dependent children would have tried to expand the scope of their gathering activities, in order to feed the family. The notion of paternity, and of monogamous pairing or marriage, developed much later.

The most significant early human inventions were not necessarily hunting tools, as posited by conventional (mainstream) anthropology. In fact, tools used for digging up roots or tubers, or grinding/crushing vegetable matter for eating, were at least equally significant. Slocum suggests that two of the earliest and most important cultural inventions (which anthropologists have traditionally neglected) were: a sling to carry babies in, and a container to hold the products of gathering. Once a technique for carrying babies was developed, and another for carrying food, female gatherers could wander further afield, gathering greater quantities of food, contributing critically to the survival and evolution of the human species.
Anthropological studies of non-western societies have typically brought masculine prejudices with them. Thus, Caroline Ralston notes that studies of Polynesian islands have been gender-blind, referring to women in misinformed, judgmental and stereotypical ways (Ralston, 1988, p. 71-80). Until feminist anthropologists like Ralston entered the field, the discipline had not even begun to examine or understood the lives and experiences of Polynesian women. Anthropology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provided material for supporting colonialism: pre-conceived notions coloured the study of non-western people and cultures. Women in particular were presented with distorted, loaded and negative judgments. In the Polynesian context, women were described through the liberal use of terms like ‘prostitution’, ‘promiscuity’ and ‘debauchery’. The anthropologists’ deep-seated beliefs about ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ sexuality, marriage and family relationships were revealed in this kind of terminology. We learn more about the prejudices of the anthropologists, in fact, and less about the lives of those they claim to describe! For instance, the anthropologist considered the existence of polyandry in Polynesian society as so problematic, that a sizable academic literature was created, with totally imaginary explanations (such as the unsubstantiated notion that men must earlier have greatly outnumbered women, leading to polyandry). The real reasons for polyandry (the system of one woman having more than one husband) were later discovered to be completely different. Thus, social scientists have displayed inherent prejudices not only in making observations and collecting primary material, but also while making secondary analyses and interpretations.

Many anthropologists and sociologists have commented upon the instability of marriage bonds in Polynesian society, characterizing it as pathological and in need of reform. Anthropologists provided much material for colonial rulers and missionaries to build up a case for making ‘reformist’ interventions in non-western societies.

Male biases in anthropology are supported by sexist language. Thus ‘man’ is often identified with ‘human’. Anthropology is often described as ‘the science of man’. The inherent prejudice is usually overlooked. Conveniently, ‘man’ is sometimes identified with male human, at other times with the species as such. The story of human evolution and culture has been built up from such a biased standpoint. The conflation of ‘man’, with the human species, is problematic in other disciplines as well.

Sociologists have typically studied domains of life that include women, men and children. Yet classical sociologists were typically male, with a masculine viewpoint. Often a ‘single society’ was assumed, with narrow ideals projected
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upon the data. In fact, all societies are complex, with many different sub-
groups co-existing, rather than one single society. Different persons have
widely differing experiences even if they live within the same unit. For
instance, a marriage can constitute very divergent realities for the
constituents (husband and wife). A social institution needs to be understood
from the perspectives of its various constituents. Until the advent of feminism
in the social sciences, sociologists tended to study even an institution like
marriage from exclusively male viewpoints.

Even in sociology, the categories of gender or sex were not taken into
account as relevant conceptual categories, until fairly recently. Women’s
experiences and lives were simply considered irrelevant and uninteresting.
Under cover of objectivity, male points of view were justified and validated.
Female points of views were denied or rendered invisible. A feminist
scholar notes, “Often the `founding fathers’ of a discipline (and their
illustrious `sons’) have tended to block any inquiry into their own social
position, or their own particular prejudices” (Mehrotra, 1998, p.106).
Consider the situation of Durkheim, often described as the `father’ of
sociology, as described by a biographer: “the domestic ideal that is evident
in his writings was most clearly represented by his own home life.... His wife
created for him the respectable and quiet familial existence which he
considered the best guarantee of morality and of life. She removed him
from all material care and frivolity, and for his sake took charge of the
education of Marie and Andre Durkheim.”

Concrete sources of the (male or masculinist) sociologists’ limitations in
understanding, as well as their personal stakes in maintaining and reinforcing
a male-oriented world, are apparent from the above illustration. Their
world may be typically based on a distinct division of social roles, assumptions
of heterosexual monogamous marriages, gendered labour and male-centred
daily life. In such an ‘ideal’ world, men are intellectual, professional and
highly regarded in the public world; while women’s identities are limited
to the roles of housewife, wife and mother.

It comes as no surprise, then, that typically sociologists tend to underplay
and neglect giving any serious attention to the world of emotions, childcare,
domestic labour or sexuality. In conventional sociology, ‘normality’ has been
identified with male-dominated family structures and gendered roles. Any
societies, groups or individuals who do not fit into such limited norms are
labeled ‘abnormal’ or ‘unnatural’, and stigmatized. Thus for instance, women
who are not comfortable or happy in their socially designated roles, as
housewives, are frequently described in negative terms not only by their
families, but also by the ‘experts’ on family and society.
Check Your Progress

How have feminists contributed in exposing and dismantling sexist perspectives in Anthropology? Give examples.

2.5 POLITICAL SCIENCE AND HISTORY

2.5.1 Political Science

Just as in the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, we also find male-centered viewpoints and biases operating in other social science disciplines. The fact that the discipline of political science has been dominated by men, steeped in certain gendered notions, biases and experiences, has led to systematic misconceptions woven into the subject matter, research and theories developed within this discipline. For instance, male political scientists frequently continue to ‘verify’ the claim that women are disinterested and uninvolved in politics, although the claim has been systematically refuted by feminist scholars. Feminists have drawn attention to structural barriers to women’s full political participation, rather than simplistically attributing women’s under-representation in political office to lack of interest (Hawkesworth, 1999, p.207). They have gone far beyond the study of national elections etc, to investigate women’s interest in many other sites of political activity.

Underlying the misrepresentation of women in political science is the fact that this discipline has traditionally considered political action to be confined to public spaces. Private spaces such as the household were not perceived to have any political dimension at all. Feminist political scientists such as Susan Moller Okin have pointed out that the discipline has been concerned largely with issues related to the public realm, such as government, elections, military affairs and international disputes. However, the central subject matter of political science is power relationships. The fact is that power operates in the private sphere as well - not just in public life. Feminist scholars have brought this insight into the field of political science, demanding that the discipline open its boundaries, such that private realms can also be brought within its scope.

Typically in the mainstream Western academic tradition, the private realm has been seen as apolitical and ahistorical. That is, the private domain has
been seen as standing outside both politics and history. Nothing happens here (it was assumed) that has any great significance - since the realm is preoccupied with subjective emotions and family bonds. These emotions and kinship ties have been perceived to be ‘natural’ rather than cultural. People’s experiences in domestic and other private spaces are typically denied legitimacy. They are perceived as uninteresting, insignificant and trivial. At the same time, women are typically seen as ‘naturally’ embedded in family roles. Thus, women are defined as mothers/ wives, situated within private realms, and excluded from public life. An extreme dichotomy is postulated between ‘rational’ behavior in the public realm (typically by men) and ‘emotional’ or ‘subjective’ behavior within the private, feminine realm (typically by women).

Political scientist Jane Jacquette notes that the issues which have traditionally absorbed the discipline of political science - questions of individual freedom and political obligation, international conflict, nationalism, laws and constitutions, and public administration - appear to transcend sex, but on further reflection it is clear that the basic concerns invariably arise out of male social behaviors and interests. Several eminent political scientists like Lionel Tiger have even defined politics as a form of ‘male bonding’. They have argued that there is a close relationship between maleness, politics and territory. Such political scientists define politics exclusively on the basis of male behavior. They do not perceive women as political agents at all.

Although the issues taken up by classical political science broadly concern all human beings, the way they are treated is often far more relevant to the situation of men, than of women. Women are at the margins of this discourse. This may be so even when the themes are actually of great interest to women. For instance John Stuart Mill, the influential liberal political scientist, wrote that women should be encouraged to have careers outside the home, but if a woman chooses to marry, she should then concentrate her attention on home and children. He failed to ask why men should not also be encouraged to pay attention to domestic tasks and childcare.

Feminist scholars have pointed out the overwhelming presence of ‘patriarchy’ in families and in public institutions. Relations of power prevail at every site, including families and personal relationships. Political science has typically concerned itself with ‘political’ actors, defining these as belonging exclusively to the public realm, and failing to take into account the existence of power relations in the private realm. Most political science has been
written in a way that reinforces the power of dominant groups: be it in terms of class, gender or race. It is often said that “The political scientist writes as if at the Prince’s elbow.” In classical political science, women are perceived as part of the social structure and not as part of the structure of power. Being denied access to power, they are deemed unworthy of attention even when power relations are the focus of academic attention!

### 2.5.2 History

Historians too have tended to focus exclusively on the history of men - that too, elite men. Until the fairly recent advent of feminism in historical scholarship, the lives of women were by and large regarded as unworthy of serious attention. Women’s lives - particularly the lives of millions of ordinary women - were not considered worthy of serious historical study, or even plain documentation. Women’s activities, experiences and perspectives were systematically ignored, thus rendered invisible in the annals of recorded history. The discipline focused on important and powerful men, and failed to ask how particular societies were gendered, or how women lived their lives. When different historical epochs were studied, the focus has been on the rule of various kings, their models of governance, expansion of kingdoms, waging of wars and so on. Historical epochs have been defined not by how the majority of people lived, rather by how the elite minority ruled.

Historians have by and large ignored everyday lives of people, and concentrated exclusively on large ‘happenings’. Historians have been interested in the ‘great men’ who strode across the public stage, and blind to the infinite variety and forms of expression of human tendencies, behavior and actions. Thus they have typically provided us with accounts of the past that have the women blotted out. Women’s contributions have barely made it to the pages of recorded history. What we have had, typically, is a biased history: which is only ‘his-story’, completely leaving out ‘her-story’.

**Gerda Lerner, Uma Chakravarty** and many other feminist historians have been working to correct the biases, and create a history that includes all characters - women and men, young and old, poor and rich, black and white and coloured. Feminist histories have uncovered some of the most interesting facts about our human past, by asking different questions, using a much wider variety of sources, and making far more balanced interpretations of historical evidence and data. This is true not only in the traditional social science disciplines that we have looked at in the above sections, but equally in the privileged discipline of economics, as you will see below.
2.6 ECONOMICS

Economics is a discipline that enjoys a rather high status within the social sciences. It is concerned with economic forces, which again are perceived as prevailing basically in the public sphere.

‘Labour’ and ‘work’ are typically defined, by economists, as existing in the public sphere. Domestic labour is included in the definition of economic labour if and only if it is paid. Thus, the housework performed by a housewife within her own home is not defined as labour or work. The same job, say cooking food for a family, is defined as ‘work’ if it is performed by a paid servant, but is not defined as work if it is performed by an (unpaid) housewife! Such anomalies have continued over the decades. Even today, they will be found in the economics textbooks, and in the realm of public policy and national statistics.

The basic concern within economics has been with the market: with production and consumption, mediated by the market. The work performed by millions of women within their homes is rendered invisible and denied the status of ‘work’. In fact, it is women’s work within the home that typically nurtures and sustains the (male or female) workers who go out daily to perform various jobs. Women’s household work (cooking, caring) enables the ‘reproduction of labour’ on a daily basis, by nourishing and supporting those who ‘work’ outside. Yet economists have consistently refused to pay serious attention to the economic implications of this situation. They have preferred to turn a blind idea to the economic evaluation or measurement of women’s unpaid domestic work.

Not only have economists typically refused to attend to the economic significance of women’s unpaid work, they have also helped reinforce the notion of particular family structures as ideal social units. In these units, women perform a great deal of labour, without being paid any monetary recompense for the work. Yet this is not deemed an issue worthy of economists’ attention: in fact it is hardly considered an issue at all. For other work, there is monetary compensation as a basic economic fact. But for women’s work in the family, economists do not question the non-existence of due recompense. Women are defined as ‘naturally’ caring and cooking, etc., within their families. Even if the work takes up all their energy and time, monetary recompense is not considered essential. So the ‘housewife’ is typically not considered to be an economic entity at all. Such women are not ‘producers’, according to the economists’ logic. So, they fall outside the realm of economics.
Women typically enter the economics textbooks only as consumers: for they do buy goods for their homes, their children, their husbands and themselves!

Feminist economists like Devaki Jain have shown the dangers of treating families as homogenous entities, headed by men, as economists typically tend to do. She argues that such logic ignores the actual situation of different people, and creates enormous confusion and misunderstanding. The material conditions of different persons can vary a great deal, even if they belong to the same family unit and live within the same home. Economists have neglected this obvious and basic fact. Thus a husband may earn millions, yet his wife may not be able to access even a few thousands because her husband does not place his wealth at her disposal. In fact, the economic position of a wife is, very often, overwhelmingly dependent on the husband. This fact is simply accepted by economists, without questioning the gross inequalities inherent in the situation.

It has been said that women by and large do not have a class identity of their own: their class position is mediated by their husbands. A woman who marries a wealthy upper class man is defined as upper class; if she marries into the middle class, she herself is defined as middle class. When a man dies, his widow may be immediately disinherited by her in-laws. Thus she may become a pauper, even if she lived a comfortable life until yesterday.

Economists have typically failed to ask some of the really interesting and highly relevant economic questions. For instance: what would be the economic implications of ensuring payment for domestic work (even if performed within one’s own household)? Who controls the budget within households? What are the priorities of women/ men as economic consumers? - and so on.

Economist Amartya Sen has shown that ‘economic development’ is vitally affected by the attention paid to areas like women’s empowerment, education and health. Global growth has been neglecting social welfare and focusing on macro-economic indicators like economic ‘growth’, indicated by statistical averages (GNP or Gross National Product for instance indicates overall production of goods and services, ignoring distribution and equity implications). Women’s lives and labour do not receive sufficient well-informed attention from planners and policymakers. This is particularly true for the lives and labour of women who belong to poorer sections of the world. Those women who work in the unorganized sector, as informal workers, are at the margins of the economy. They earn a pittance, even though they work for very long hours. As feminists point out, mainstream
economists must learn to focus on such major and significant concerns. Otherwise, their knowledge is so biased that it works against the basic survival and livelihood concerns - of women, the poor and the disadvantaged. In fact, it militates against the economic welfare of the majority of human beings.

**Check Your Progress**

*What are some obvious links between gender and economics that have typically been ignored by economists? Try to describe these with examples of your own.*

### 2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have seen how various branches of the social sciences are seriously flawed, distorted and biased in their perceptions, categories and theoretical constructs. Gender bias is implicit and explicit in social science theories and research. This has been shown through various disciplines, including history, economics, political science, sociology and anthropology. Feminist scholars have demonstrated some of the systematic prejudices which have become woven into the fabric of social science disciplines. These disciplines have typically been ‘fathered’ and developed by elite white males, with direct or indirect interest in maintaining colonial, imperialistic, racist and gendered social, political and economic structures. Within a nation, such theories help maintain unequal power relationships, based on class, caste and gender. Feminist critiques of such knowledge are important, because once we realize the existing problems, we can set about the task of developing knowledge that is free of such distortions.

### 2.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) Explain some of the problems with positivist social sciences, as pointed out by feminist scholars.

2) Describe ways in which mainstream anthropology has constructed a biased picture of human societies (past and present).

3) Do you think it is justified for political scientists to be concerned mainly with the public, and not the private, sphere? Explain why?
4) Has conventional history been ‘his-story’ more than ‘her-story’? Substantiate your answer.

5) Do you think the work done by women who function as homemakers within their own homes, has any value in economic terms? Why or why not? Explain.

2.9 REFERENCES


Hawkesworth, Mary (1999). ‘Social Sciences’. In Alison M. Jaggar & Iris MarionYoung (Eds.), A Companion to Feminist Philosophy. (pp.204-212). Basil Blackwell.


2.10 SUGGESTED READINGS
