

“Why bring in a women’s perspective?”: the political and ethical dimensions of feminist research

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This paper discusses the political and ethical implications of feminist and gender research in Sri Lanka. Ethics and politics are highly neglected areas in research methodology despite the assumed potential influence of research studies on the social wellbeing of the research participants and others involved in the process. The specific objectives of this paper are to identify the key political and ethical impulses driving feminist / gender research within the Sri Lankan context, to examine how they are conceptualised and how they operate in field and desk work.

I will thus highlight some of the approaches of feminist politics and ethics (such as altruism, democracy and Marxism) and discuss how they are engaged with at the levels of aspiration, strategy and method in research. This will involve focusing on the possible social and personal transformations emanating from these research / activist interventions. In doing so, I will also deal with the practical advantages, challenges and limitations of feminist ethics and politics. Thus this paper will argue that ethics / politics constitute a crucial part of the feminist research agenda in Sri Lanka and should be recognized as a vital and integral part of research methodology.

Due to the lack of local research and theorization on the topic my work has had to depend largely on interviews with 27 feminist and gender researchers. My research methods also include references to relevant texts on politics / ethics as well as to my personal experiences as a feminist researcher and activist in the field. It is expected that this paper as well as the reflexive approach adopted by me will lead to greater awareness amongst local researchers of the significance of accounting for the ethical / political aspects of researching and thereby enhance interdisciplinary research praxis.

Key words: Ethics / Politics, Feminist, Gender studies, Interdisciplinary, Research methodology

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