

EXPANDING THE "MALESTREAM" OF ECONOMICS

Like all other social sciences, the discipline of economics is a historical social construct. But learning about history or sociology of economics is generally dismissed by the adopted dogma of the local "malestream" of economists, men and women. A field of social science that was studied more as political economy during the rise of industrial capitalism in Europe is fragmented today to include a wide range of sub-disciplines within the broad label of economics. While it reflects the complexity of capital and labor relations, this has also allowed so called scholars and intellectuals to be motivated by propaganda rather than by learning. Broadly the study of economics looks at the material process of societies and its interaction with nature, and in Sri Lanka, this material context is increasingly linked with the global economy, and reproduction of the nation amidst internal and external constraints.

The knowledge production of economics is related to the understanding and the alleviation of constraints on the material production process. In this economic knowledge production, the mainstream economics have been influenced since the mid-seventies by the inclusion of gender into economic analysis. However, the Sri Lankan mainstream economic discourse is still "playing with only a half a deck". Most of the economic literature, in academia to popular media, neglect the social reality of women as active agents in society. To fill this gap among local practitioners of economics, students, teachers, and policy makers, the journal *Feminist Economics* is a feisty, pioneering, and timely resource.

Feminist Economics was launched in 1995 by a diverse group of feminist scholars of the International Association for Feminist Economics. As the regularly featured editorial comment explains: Feminist Economics was founded to provide an open forum for dialogue and debate about feminist economic perspectives. By opening new areas of economic inquiry, welcoming diverse voices, and encouraging critical exchanges, the editors aim to enlarge and enrich the field of economic discourse. This journal was recently named as the "Best New Journal" for 1997 by the Council of Editors of Learned Journals.

Feminist Economics devotes its pages to theoretical essays, research papers as well as debates covering a wide expanse of issues. The latest issue (Volume 4, Number 1, Spring 1998) includes articles on gender and social security policy, rational choice and the price of marriage, a series of articles on equal opportunities and employment in West European Economies, and eleven book reviews. The journal also includes a "dialogue" section of brief, less formal essays commenting on and responding to essays appeared in previous issues. In addition, the journal has regularly featured "information and announcements" about conferences, grants, projects and various queries. Most of the announcements include e-mail addresses and web sites that makes this journal a glimmer of hope to redescribe the knowledge production and practice in an otherwise "dismal science".

Titles of some of the articles in the past issues have included : "The Discovery of Unpaid Work: The Social Consequences of the Expansion of "Work"; "Women's Education and Economic Well-Being"; "Teen Pregnancy: Government Programs Are Not the Cause" (Vol 1,2) ; "Women's Well Being, Poverty, and Work Intensity"; "Economist, Social Reformers and Prophets: A Feminist Critique of Economic Efficiency"; "Race, Class, and Occupational Mobility: Black and White Women in Service Work in the United States"; "A gender Analysis of U.S. Labour Market Policies for the Working Poor; Gender Earnings Inequality in the Service and Manufacturing Industries in the U.S." (Vol 1,3); "Gender and Cooperative Behavior: Economic Man Rides Alone"; "Why Marxists, Feminists and Anti-Racists Economist Should Be Marxist-Feminist-Anti-Racist Economists"; "Household Services and Economic Growth in the US 1870-1930" (Vol 2,1); "Sex Discrimination in Indian Labor Markets"; "Gender Analysis of Family Planning: Beyond Feminist vs Population Control Debate"; "You are Not Excused From Cooking": Peasant and the Gender Division of Labour in Pakistan"; "The Prevalence of Gender Topics in U.S. Economic Journals" (Vol 2, 2).

In the context of the Sri Lankan economy, rather than developing market-philes or market-phobes, economists must devise ways to understand and explain the particular social dynamics of the "market" process. Scientific activity is never quite "certain" and economic narratives of cause and effect are rife with falsities, anomalies, ambiguities, and multiple escape clauses of TINA [There is no Alternative] formulations. Generally even the mentioning of gender issue immediately exposes all the defence mechanisms to cover the theoretical and practical violations of axiological necessities of science, i.e., less false accounts of the world. For the Sri Lankan practitioners of economics, who are interested in going beyond their insular fiefdoms intolerant of dissent, the journal *Feminist Economics* is a useful starting point. And for those who develop an instant rash when the word "feminist" is uttered, there is no need for alarm; the journal is more concerned with gender and economics rather than "feminisms" per se. As the editors of the journal claim, "the journal's goal is not just to develop more illuminating theories, but to improve the conditions of living for all children, women and men".

The International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) maintains an electronic mail network to provide quick and low-cost communication among subscribers interested in advancing feminist inquiry of economic issues. The IAFFE web site is at <http://www.bucknell.edu/~jshackel/iaffe/>. Information about current IAFFE projects, membership and information about Feminist Economics is available from the web.

For sample copies e-mail: sample.journals@routledge.com

The journal is edited by Diana Strassmann of Rice University. Copies of the journal are available for reference at the Social Scientists' Associations' Gender library, at 425/15, Thimbirigasyaya Rd, Colombo 05. (Te: 501339).

The Buddha
does not smile on
South Asia any more.



Stop Nuclearization of South Asia!

With recently conducted nuclear tests in India and Pakistan, South Asia has become vulnerable to the shocking absurdity and the horror of a nuclear holocaust.

In order to prevent a devastating destruction of humanity, and loss of the future for generations to come, it's time to break our silence and speak out.

In order to organize various advocacy events such as public seminars, poster campaigns, cultural events, photograph exhibitions, we need your help.

Forum for Nuclear Disarmament - South Asia

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Mailing address in order receive announcements of events

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