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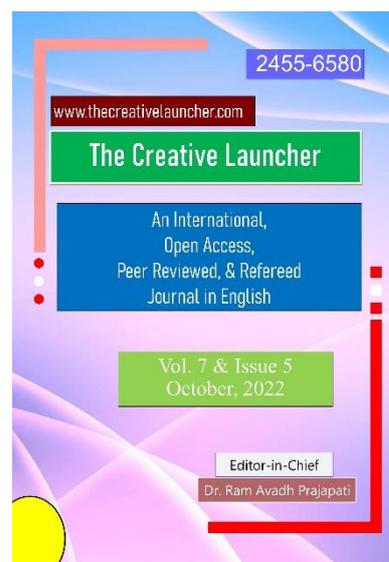
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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Problematics of the Matrix of Gender and Sexuality: Men, Women and Transgenders

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Abstract

Gender and sexuality are now too much talked about terms in our society and academics but they still have a labyrinth of complications and matrix of misunderstandings that confuse the identities of the concerned individuals— both from the individual side and from the public side. Gender and sexual identities, as critics of feminism and sexuality studies argue, are culturally constructed and are more fluid and cultures specific. Gender identities seem to

remain universal as almost every society, in all over the world, with few exceptions, is patriarchal. In such typically patriarchal societies gender norms are more rigid in terms of their performativity among the common members of the set society and are more part of the public sphere, sexual identities are more tabooed and are part of more personal and protected spheres. Speaking of the formation of such identities and naturalization of the self through the processes in which an individual goes through it has been observed that all these identities are spatial and temporal and, in many cases, they are more based on the occasions in which a child unfortunately grows up—for example sexual abuse and exploitation. The article tries to explore the ways in which these gender and sexual identities are formed not only in terms of man and woman but also of transgenders.

Keywords: Gender, Matrix, Problematics, Sexuality, Transgender, Labyrinth, Patriarchy, Disparity, Culture, Marginalisation

Discriminatory attitudes towards deprived genders (women and transgender) have existed for generations and affected their lives significantly. Although the Constitution of India grants men and women equal rights yet gender disparities remain in several ways. At the very outset, we should know what we mean by gender. In English language, there are three kinds of gender: feminine gender, masculine gender and neuter gender while in Hindi or Sanskrit languages there are three genders: masculine, feminine and common. There is difference between Neuter and Common Genders both cultural and categorical. This term Gender has been much talked about and now it has become a concept. Gender is a social and cultural construction of roles assigned to people. It is a social construction. Gender roles are socially and culturally constructed and imposed on men and women: the way a man looks, behaves and the way a woman looks and behaves. The division of labour and division of power in all patriarchal societies has been done since millennia in the following ways (Marx and Engels):

- 1- It is the society which decides how a woman should behave, walk and talk in certain manner— cooking, sewing, taking care of children and household are some of the works which are assigned to women.
- 2- Man is supposed to do the outside works and earn the bread and butter for the family— labour, manager, factory/industry owner, landlord, ruler, minister, noble, etc.

In this way, it can be said that the gender roles are assigned to both male and female. There is an assumption that only women's roles are gendered. Men are also gendered. Inequality between man and woman is one of the most important patterns in the distribution of power. Generally, it is regarded that being a woman is being powerless, silent, obedient, and accommodating. Contrary to this, a man is regarded as powerful, candid, dominating, and able to impose his will, especially in relation to women. Based on these assumptions of man being powerful and woman being powerless, they are assigned different roles to perform. A woman takes care of children and family members and remains in the four walls of the home, whereas a man, regarded as powerful, works outside to earn bread and butter for the family and does physical and intellectual activities.

The curiosity to know about gender has plagued intellectuals for millennia. The conventional perception regarding gender—the difference between male and female—has occupied us so much that we see and think almost everything through the stereotypical gendered lens in our everyday lives. In popular culture in India, even we have to sell the pressure cooker, we need women to sell it. “Jo patni se kare pyar, vo prestige se kaise kare inkar”.

Difference between Gender, Sex and Sexuality

It becomes important to draw a clear distinction among sex, sexuality, and gender to advance this argument. We are groomed with the notion that the gender of an individual is determined by his/her sex. Generally, people perceive that sex and gender are synonymous. But one should mark that gender and sex are two different identifiers/markers. Where sex is ascribed by biology: anatomy, hormones, and physiology, gender is considered to be an achieved status: that which is constructed through psychological, cultural and social means. Thus, it can be said that sex is a given thing while gender is an achieved identity.

According to Stoller, the feminine and masculine behavior of a person describe her/his gender whereas the biological features of the person describe her/his sex. For sexuality, West and Zimmerman point out that the nature and orientation of somebody’s sexual activities i.e. if a man’s sexual orientation is towards the opposite sex, his sexuality is heterosexuality and if a man’s sexual orientation is for the same sex, then his sexuality would be homosexuality.

- It is not a stable identity instead it changes with respect to place, time, and culture.
- It is also regarded that gender is more a ‘doing’ than a ‘being’.

Interdisciplinarity of Gender and Sexuality Studies

Gender study is a field of interdisciplinary nature devoted to gender identity and gender representation as a central category of analysis. Under this field of study, we analyze women’s studies (concerning women, feminism, gender, etc.), men’s studies, and LGBT+ studies. Gender studies concern primarily with feminism but extend themselves further to various other discourses such as queer studies, which talk about the issues related to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, transsexuals, etc.

We study gender because it not only highlights the distinction between women’s and men’s gender roles within the same family circle and workplace but also because it highlights the conventions and hierarchies that establish men’s and women’s place in the family, community, and society at large wherein women are repeatedly subjugated by men.

The study of gender helps us understand how patriarchy’s structure forms the basis of power relations. It is patriarchy that assigns roles to males and females according to their biological sex. The roles get internalized through socialization and then lead to the structuring of relations of dominance and subordination. It is an approach that focuses on women and men and not on women in isolation. Most of the time, people assume that gender study implies only to women’s life, but that is not true. Gender deals with the relationship between men and women.

Gender is basically a cultural definition of men and women. It is determined by the idea of functions and roles attributed to them in society, both in public and private spheres. It affects

all parts of our life-- social, economic, political, and emotional, etc. It is also not a stable identity; rather, it changes over time with respect to place, culture, and atmosphere. J.T. Ton MSc rightly comments when he says, “What in a certain period was seen as typical for one gender, can in a different period in time be seen as a-typical for the same gender” (08). He illustrates it by stating that a few centuries ago, the colour pink was regarded as a typical colour for boys, whereas in recent times, the same pink colour is considered a typical colour for girls. Further, in the context of the culture, he argues, “We see differences between gender norms. For example, two men walking in public while holding hands is normal in Iran, while in Western Europe that is not common” (08).

Foucault notes in his *The History of sexuality Vol I* that the sexualities and sexual manifestations in British societies were quite explicit till the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century but the whole drive of industrialization and modernization brought sexuality of people under strict control and made it more gendered in order to promote capitalism, market-ism and modernization of societies. Though the English society of that time was patriarchal, the sexualities that were very personal matters became public ones and were governed by the rulers/governments than by the individual themselves. Behind all this process and production of new aesthetics and superstructure of heteronormativity was the ‘scientific’ thinking revived by the Renaissance whose ‘lust’ for power brought the personal sexual preferences of individuals into the domain of the people who negotiated ‘episteme’ and ‘power’ at that time—the monarchs, the parliaments and the philosophers. This whole notion of appropriation of gender and sexuality travelled throughout the Empire during the expansion and regulation of colonies including India through mercantilisms, capitalism, imperialism and ‘civilizing mission’. One fine example is the treatment of gender and sexuality in the Indian Penal Code which treated any form of sexuality other than heterosexual as ‘unnatural’ and did not recognize the transgenders as ‘citizens’ of India until the necessary amendments were made in IPC after the Independence of India (Delhi High Court Judgement).

Garfinkel notes that in everyday life, we live in a world of two— and only two— sexes. This arrangement has moral status, in that we include ourselves and others in it as “essentially, originally either ‘male’ or ‘female’” (122). But things are working beyond this binary of male/female. There are many people who want to make themselves fit in these sex categories but in the process of doing so, they make their lives unlivable. West and Zimmerman have quoted a case study in their article “Doing Gender”:

This issue reminds me of a visit I made to a computer shop a couple of years ago. The person who answered my questions was truly a salesperson. I could not categorize him or her as a woman or a man. What did I look for? (1) facial hair: she/ he was smooth-skinned, but some men have little or no facial hair. (this varies by race, Native Americans and Blacks often have none.) (2) Breasts: she/he was wearing a loose shirt that hung from his /her shoulders. And, as many women who suffered through a 1950s’ adolescence know to their shame, women are often flat-chested. (3) Shoulders: His/hers were small and round for a man, broad for a woman. (4) Hands: Long and slender fingers, knuckles a bit large for a woman, small for a man. (5) Voice: middle range,

unexpressive for a woman, not at all the exaggerated tones some gay males affect. (6) His/her treatment of me: Gave off no signs that would let me know if I were of the same or different sex as this person. There were not even any signs that he /she knew his/her sex would be difficult to categorize, and I wondered about that even as I did my best to hide these questions so I would not embarrass him/her while we talked of computer paper. I left still not knowing the sex of my salesperson and was disturbed by that unanswered question (child of my culture that I am). (qtd. in West and Zimmerman 138)

What we infer from this description is that the identificatory display of the sales clerk was ambiguous; she was not dressed up in either a male or female fashion. The customer then looked for other identificatory displays such as facial hair, tone of voice, breasts, shoulders, etc., to determine membership in a sex category. But the fact remains that we are so much gendered in our perspective; we are habituated of binaries so much that we want to see everything through the lens of binaries. The customer, too, bears the perspective of binaries. He wants to categorize that sales clerk within this binary of male and female. This urge to categorize people in the binaries was so intense in him that he could not forget that incident and recalled it even after two years. So, it can be said that not only do we want to know the sex category of those who are around us, but we also assume that people are displaying their sex category for us in as decisive a fashion as they can.

Garfinkel has presented a case study of Agnes, who was a transsexual. She was brought up as a boy from the very beginning. At the age of seventeen, she adopted the identity of a female and went through a sex reassignment operation after so many years. She tried her best to pass the procedures which can prove her 'normal, natural female' both before and after her operation. She faces the challenge that she has male genitals, but she had to perform like a girl before her surgery. In short, she had to display herself as a female. Since she was brought up like a boy from the beginning, she had her past experiences and memories of a boy. What a girl can easily and unconsciously do, she had to do it consciously and with a lot of care. She was not faking the act which a real woman does naturally. The conceptions regarding femininity that a woman born with appropriate female attributes takes for granted, Agnes used to feel obliged to know how to perform within the structured society. (118 & 140)

What we infer from this case study is that Agnes could not find herself fit under this sex category of male and female. Earlier she was a transsexual and was brought up as a boy, but later on, she tried to fit herself under this traditionally accepted sex category of male and female and then decided to go through a surgery of her body so that she can have a body of a woman. To do so, she made her failed attempts to display her gender as a female. She could not adapt herself completely as a woman. What other women, who are born with appropriate biological attributes, could do easily and unconsciously, she used to do with a lot of care and with consciousness.

It is quite obvious to know that gender and sexuality of a person are cultural constructed and controlled by the notions of 'episteme' and 'power'. The sex of a person can be 'a given' but the gender of a person is culturally constructed (Beauvoir), at the same time, the sexuality

of people is also culturally constructed and codified. In many cases, the gender of certain group of people is realised after a certain period of time, for example, in case of transgender people, while all categories of gender— male, female and transgender— are appropriated naturalised and socialized from the very childhood to fit into a gender, either masculine or feminine, and those who unfit into these two broader categories become criminalised and stigmatized.

Sexuality, on the other hand, is explored much later in the life of an individual especially after the age of adolescence when the person is able to understand the sexual drives that govern his or her sexual choices and preferences. The fact that psychoanalysis reveals, that is, a child's sexuality is active from its childhood cannot be ignored. But the fact remains intact that individuals recognise their sexuality only after their exposure to the physical sex that they perform with the partner (or see or hear someone performing it with someone in visual or oral representations of sex) which society thinks that is the right one in terms of heterosexuality, or that society thinks it to be a deviant in terms of homosexuality. Therefore, the sexuality is of people in 'a given' society or constructed and defined in terms of their exposure to forms of sex prevalent into their society and culture. As all societies are patriarchal and they impose heterosexuality as the only fit norm, most of the people in general identify themselves as heterosexuals because the society accepts them as one and reject all other modes of sexual intercourse. Only heterosexual modes of relationships are treated as 'natural' while the rest are branded as 'unnatural'. In some instances, it has also been observed that a child's sexuality is appropriated when a child is abused in the teen or adolescent age by someone. The mode in which the child was abused brings a kind of confusion and trauma to decide what sexuality one is naturally born in as when the child finds that other people perform the same sexual intercourse in different ways with different gender partners, the child finds itself different and feels guilty (Pinki Virani).

The gender and sexuality of transgender people has a mixed kind of evolution in which they find themselves growing into a very 'natural' environment where they are treated either as male or female depending on their biological construction (of sex). But as soon as they grow into the teenage, they start experiencing that they are born into a wrong body— male sex transgenders find that their soul is female and their body and spirit are unmatched therefore their gender is under trouble, while female sex transgender, though their examples are very limited, find that they are male by spirit but their body is female so they again feel alienation between their body and soul. The construction of their gender and sexuality becomes quite different, though in beginning, quite similar, from normal that of a man or a woman. The sexual abuse happened with them in their growth from childhood to adolescent and their behaviour as women or girls do, specially in case of male transgenders, they realise that they need to fix their 'sex'— the anatomical identifier. They find the sex through sex re assignment surgery suitable for it, but they have to resist and negotiate their cultural identity as 'female' or 'male' throughout their life struggling, fighting being abused and stigmatized (A Revathi and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi).

Gender identities all over the world are subject to how an individual is gazed at by the other individuals of a said society. In many cases, a gender identity of an individual which is

an accepted norm in the western countries and cultures is quite different in Asian or African countries and vice versa. Similarly, the sexual identities of individuals are also very culture specific and spatial and temporal at the same time. A way of touching someone in one country may refer to one kind sexual orientation while the same way of touching someone in another country may depict another kind of sexual orientation of individuals. Further, an individual in order to be identified as a gender-- male, female or transgender-- or of a sexual identity-- heterosexual or homosexual-- has to keep on performing the same adopted gender and sexual or identities in order to be accepted as a 'normal' or a 'type' of individual by the concerned community. A deviation in the performance of a given gender and sexual identity may result in confusing other people in the same community and treat that person as a 'deviant' or a criminal (as many countries still criminalize homosexuality) and that person's behaviour and gender as 'abnormal' and 'troubled'. On the other hands the formation of one's identity in case of gender is roughly almost the same all over the world while one's sexual identities have many differences across the world and they are more culture, space and time specific.

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