

# Understanding Gender Politics: Certain Initial Thoughts on Gender and Sexuality

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**Abstract – In general terms, sex refers to the biological constructs which differentiates the male and female. The term 'gender' is more difficult to define. Gender is a social construct which represents the differences in power relation on account of sex difference. In a patriarchal society men are increasingly taking on the main rules when compared to women. This study will look at certain aspects on gender and sexuality. It will give us a notion of gender politics also. Every politics has evolved a set of strategies to perpetuate and strengthen itself. Here in this context patriarchy is the politics of male domination.**

**Keywords: Sex, Gender, Sexuality, Subject, Identity**

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender is a product of socialization. By gender we mean the difference in social relation on account of sex difference. This was the concept of gender until the beginning of post modernism. This is the structuralist concept of gender. In post modernism and post structuralism, gender is a cultural construct which constitutes cultural identity. Post structuralists think that gender relations are generally power relations in society so they consider gender as a position by which one is connected to power. According to Foucault, gender can be defined as a set of power relations between the male and female. Foucault treats gender as an index of power. In 1970, Kale Millet in her well known book *Sexual Politics*, treats gender as a set of economic relation.

In this context, gender studies as an interdisciplinary academic field is devoted to analyse gender identity and gendered representation. There are several approaches to gender studies. Gender studies is a critique of patriarchy. Patriarchy is the politics of male dominance. Patriarchy has evolved methods for its continuation and affirmation. One of its methods is stereotyped misrepresentation of woman. In patriarchy, women are represented by a dichotomy of angel in the house or the mad woman in the attic. These are the two extreme stereotypes. But the fact is that, ordinary women are neither angel nor mad.

These are stereotyped images created by patriarchy. These stereotyped images of women are created in male constructed literary text. Woman realized from their collective experiences that these are stereotypes. Feminist critique is a critical approach to analyse the misrepresentation of woman in male constructed text, whereas Gynocritique is a critical

approach to analyse images of woman represented in female constructed literary text.

Thus gender studies deals with the problematic aspects in the construction of female identity. It is possible to retrieve female identity in any cultural material. In all literary text there is a female identity. But it may be hidden or distorted. Hence it is possible to reimage or recover a distorted female identity. Gender studies is an attempt to rediscover submerged female identity in cultural materials like art, literature, film etc.

Gender studies become a multi perspective heterogeneous discourse after post modernism. In any cultural community, some of the problems are general while some other problems are identical. That is called heterogeneity of discourses in a cultural community which promotes multi perspective thinking. The question arises in this context is that "Are all the problems of woman are general?" Contemporary mainstream gender theories are modelled with upper class white woman as the model. So these theories cannot be applied to woman of colour or working class or ethnic woman. Thus gender studies are a heterogeneous, poly vocal multi perspective discourse. It is an amalgam of discourses.

Structuralisms try to define woman as the other. For them, self has a bipolar structure. But post modernism and post structuralism try to define self and culture without the structuralist mode of bipolar thinking.

Another aspect of gender studies is that it tries to construct an identity for women either by rewriting the main stream history. History narrated from the

perspective of rulers is known as mainstream history. Only dominant cultures get represented in it. It is a fallacy that history is objective. History depends on the politics of people who make the historian narrate the history.

In a patriarchal society woman form a subculture. History narrated from the perspective of women is known as feminist genealogy. Women are unrepresented in the histories of patriarchal society. Women remain represented by silence and absence in the histories of male centered societies. That is why feminists say that there are at least three versions of histories : a) history (history written from the perspectives of the dominant main cultures b) their story (history accepted by public domain). Feminists conclude that the first two versions are identical or converging in nature and in a patriarchal society there is not the third version. Feminists try to construct her version of history that is the female version of history. Thus gender studies are an attempt to find an identity for women within history. It aims to erase gender stereotypes and makes truthful, realistic representation of woman.

Scholars generally regard gender as a social construct and gender identity is a person's sense of self as a member of a particular gender. Now sexuality means the normal expected sexual behaviour of a person. Sexuality is always connected to desire. Judith Butler in her work *Gender Trouble* analyse sexuality as a performance based on desire. She has another book called *Bodies That Matter*. In this book also, she considers sexuality as one of the performances of human body.

Foucault analyse the development of sexuality in his book named *The History of Sexuality*. In the first volume he connects sexuality to Lacan's *Theory of Unconscious*. According to Lacan there are three stages in the development of human psyche-omelet stage, mirror stage and symbolic stage. In the omelet stage the child has no maturity. In this stage the child has no boundaries since it has no self. In the mirror stage the child develops a concept of the self and the other. Irrespective of sex, the child comes to realise that they are different from mother. This is one of the phases in the mirror stage. Lacan thinks that the development of sexed self is the beginning of sexuality. According to Lacan for all children sexuality is same. They do not know the development of sexual difference while they developed sexed self.

In the symbolic stage acquisition of language takes place. It takes place at the oedipal phase of symbolic stage. Subject is a position acquired by the child through the exercise of language after the oedipal stage. Male subjectivity is stronger and earlier than female subjectivity. According to Lacan, difference in boys and girls is subjectivity. Thus difference in sexuality can be connected to difference in subjectivity. This gradually develops into two main

streams of sexuality, i.e. male and female sexuality through socialization.

Societies are patriarchal. For the continuance of a patriarchal society there must be a control of female sexuality. In order to control female sexuality, patriarchy puts certain norms called heterosexuality. It is a form of sexuality in which the partners are unequal. There is a male oppression in heterosexuality. Patriarchy propagated the idea that other forms of sexuality are deviant forms. So, society is made to believe that other forms of sexuality were abnormal.

In our society there are other forms of sexuality like Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transsexuals. They can't find an identity either in male sex or female sex. They are termed as minor sexualities. All these categories are together called Queer. In this alternate form of sexuality both the partners are equal. This is the contemporary view of homosexuality. Unfortunately heterosexuality is based on male dominance. It is essential for perpetuation of human race. It is prescribed for reproductive purpose and continuance of human race.

## CONCLUSION

Gender and sexuality cannot be thought of as distinct and separate categories but as intimately related. The societies we live in construct the right and wrong way to behave as men and women. Sexuality is influenced by gender norms. There are certain ideologies around sexuality which works to control woman. Sexuality is often used to control women who are seen to step outside of the femininity.

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